

– An Industrial Ambition for the Circular Economy – Speech by Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska at the 2018 Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference

Introduction

Thank you, Jacki [Davis, moderator].

Thank you, Frans [Timmermans].

And thank you also Mr President [of the Economic and Social Committee] for your inspiring words.

I am happy to be here.

I would like to warmly thank you all for being here.

I hope you will stay in Brussels for the Industry Day taking place on Thursday and Friday.

That will give you even more chances to discuss how to promote resource efficiency and green industrial processes.

The industrial case for the circular economy

The circular economy is about producing and consuming differently.

It is about innovation: inventing or re-inventing new ways of doing business.

Doing more with less.

There is indeed a very powerful business case behind the circular economy.

More precisely, there is a specific industrial case for the circular economy.

It is one of the drivers that can help Europe to rebuild and renew its industrial base.

This new industrial base will be very different from that of the 20th century.

It is the one we depict in the Renewed European Industrial Policy Strategy that we published in September last year.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome the opinion the Economic and Social Committee adopted last week on our Industrial Policy Strategy and

thank you for the constructive comments.

Our renewed industrial strategy not only reconciles the economy and the environment.

It also integrates all the megatrends affecting the economy: digitalisation; the skills revolution; the innovation challenge; globalisation and energy security.

Above all, it fully integrates the low-carbon and circular transition.

Roughly two thirds of the world's greenhouse gas emissions are connected to material management and flows.

So the contribution of the circular economy to decarbonisation will be especially important.

It is also an industrial approach in which all kinds of businesses have a role to play, including traditional enterprises and social ones.

The contribution of the recent Circular Economy Package

Our economy has started to make this transition.

But, according to Eurostat, only roughly 10% of our raw material use is circular.

This leaves us with huge room for improvement.

Industry must take the lead.

There is no other way.

But the public sector has a role in creating incentives, instruments and a supportive regulatory framework.

At European level, since we have been engaged in very intense legislative work on waste management.

And in January, we set out a 3rd Circular Economy Package.

Obviously, the Plastics Strategy is an important part of this new package.

It is going to be widely discussed in a moment.

Here again, there is a huge business case.

Only 14% of all plastic packaging is recycled globally. It endangers our environment and results in a loss of 80 to 120 billion dollars a year globally.

What we have proposed is to address the systemic failures in the plastics value chain.

I mean all these plastic wastes that some Member States even export abroad.

All plastics packaging are set to be reused or easily recycled by 2030.

This will require transformation of the industry and call for more innovation. The Chinese import ban on plastic waste has put even more pressure to transform.

We will support this by developing a Strategic Research Innovation Agenda for Plastics, which will be released later this year.

I cannot say exactly what will be in it, but it is clear that we will need more standardisation and awareness raising campaigns.

We need to review and revise existing regulatory frameworks.

And maybe to think about setting up new legal initiatives.

We need to think about developing alternative feedstocks for plastic production and boosting the market for recycled plastics.

The ideas of fiscal measures on plastics at EU level and specific funds for innovation in the plastics sector have raised a lot of attention.

These are interesting ideas.

We are looking into them: pros, cons and uncertainties.

I would also like to mention here the analysis of the interface between chemicals, products, and the waste legislation.

It especially helps clarify the conditions for a safe, competitive and credible secondary raw material market.

And such a market is a core element of a well-functioning circular economy.

All this supports the Industrial Strategy as much as the Industrial Strategy supports the Circular Economy Action Plan.

Stakeholder engagement for the circular economy

This is the third time you gather here.

This conference is one of the pillars of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform.

This is what makes the Circular Economy Action Plan special: its capacity to involve, engage and debate with open minds and in full transparency.

Most importantly: YOU are the Stakeholder Platform.

You can contribute here, today and tomorrow, and during the Industry Day.

You can contribute by putting forward voluntary commitments.

Your success stories, your strategic plans can all be disseminated through the website of the Stakeholder Platform.

So, be active!

Conclusion

The industry of tomorrow will not only be connected, more innovative, and more user-driven.

It will also be a circular, low carbon industry.

These two parts are not separate: they complement each other.

Our plans are ambitious.

And that means us as individuals and stakeholders, but also the institutions, working together.

We rely on you to make this transition a reality.