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Council sets ambitious targets for recycling at scale of flexible packaging but fails ensuring enabling conditions

Today, the Environment Council voted on a General Approach on the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) proposal. "After the vote in the European Parliament, we are glad to see the file making concrete progress also in the Council" states Guido Aufdemkamp, Executive Director of Flexible Packaging Europe.

Flexible Packaging Europe (FPE), representing flexible packaging suppliers across materials, welcomes the improvements on deadlines for recyclability requirements, which broadly align with the European Parliament's proposed amendments. It is also encouraging that the Council recognizes that packaging complying with Design for Recycling must be collected for recycling by Member States and that incineration and landfill of such packaging shall not be allowed. Industry can recycle only if packaging is collected.

Despite good progress was made in some parts of the text, the Council sends concerning mixed messages on how economic operators together with Member States would achieve recyclability at scale – a market access condition in 2035.

Setting ambitious 2035 targets for recyclability at scale at the level of packaging categories, for example flexible packaging, will require strong enabling conditions which are currently missing in the Council text. Mandatory separate collection is a very appreciated first step, but Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes also need to be tasked to accept recyclable packaging. Furthermore, EPR fees need to be earmarked to direct funds in order to build up much needed infrastructures for specific packaging categories, if they are to achieve the new and more granular recycling goals.

Member States even seek the possibility to postpone achievement of the existing 2030 recycling targets. This sends a signal to investors that governments are not fully committed neither to the EU's transformation to a circular economy, nor to ensuring recycling at scale of all packaging that is Designed for Recycling.

The EU Single Market for packaging and packaged products is at risk as Member States would be allowed to maintain or introduce their own sustainability requirements. More than 50% of food in the EU is packaged in flexible packaging and the flow of such food relies on clear, coherent, and homogeneous EU legislation to function.

It is also regrettable to see that while the Commission recognised the importance of minimizing packaging, the Council discourages a shift to lighter packaging materials to meet the packaging waste prevention targets. Shifting towards lighter packaging is actually an important measure of waste prevention, demonstrated by a study by IFEU. This scenario analysis shows that switching to flexible packaging would help reducing by 21 million tonnes per year the total weight of primary packaging used for non-beverage FMCGs in Europe, with an overall reduction of 44%.

FPE is now looking forward to the interinstitutional negotiations hoping that legislators will aim at reaching a final PPWR which is ambitious by addressing the remaining concerns.

Further information:

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About Flexible Packaging Europe

Flexible Packaging Europe (FPE) is the industry association representing the interests of more than 80 small, medium-sized companies, and multinational manufacturers. Those operate with workforce of 57,000+ people at more than 350 sites all over Europe. The member companies account for more than 85% of European sales of flexible packaging made of different materials, mainly plastics, aluminium, and paper. More than half of all food products sold on the European retail markets are packed with flexible packaging.

More info at www.flexpack-europe.org