

'Resource efficiency and waste management go hand in hand'



The acute shortage of raw materials provided by Mother Nature has prompted a wake-up call in Europe in the form of the EU Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe. Dutch politicians are ready to take up this European initiative.

BY PIETER VAN DEN BRAND

Among often heard concepts such as 'cradle to cradle', 'the circular economy' and the 'materials roundabout', the next container term for the sustainable use of resources and materials recovery has made its entry: resource efficiency. The term was officially served up by the Brussels policy kitchen at the end of September, when *Janez Potočnik* published his *Roadmap to a Resource Efficient*

Europe. The environment commissioner wants to tackle the urgent problem of raw materials scarcity. He argues that the idea that more economic growth will automatically countenance greater consumption of natural resources is no longer tenable. The transition to a low carbon, 'green' economy necessitates a sparing use of resources.

In mid October the multimedia savvy Europolitician twittered avidly about the start of the campaign: 'Generation Awake.

Your choices make a world of difference!' wrote Potočnik to get his message over to European citizens. The 'Generation Awake' video clip, with its guitar-strumming, singing shopping bags, was available not only on the multilingual site, but also on YouTube. '...Think of the planet when you buy. Make sure the impact is not too high. Stay awake when you buy buy baby.' MEP *Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy* (ALDE Group) has seen the newly launched video. 'A fun video. Great for making people aware of their ability to make a difference in their daily choices. It also makes a good contribution to a less wasteful society. But the campaign is not enough to make the major steps forward that are needed. It is industrial production more than anything that has to be more efficient and sustainable,' he says from Strasburg, where the European Parliament is sitting this week. He is full of praise for Potočnik Roadmap: 'It is an excellent document with a solid evidence base. Potočnik has had to put in a lot of work to get the Roadmap approved by the College of Commissioners. His colleagues anticipate all sorts of problems, and many battles will have to be fought along the way. Moreover, many European politicians remain unconvinced of the economic necessity, although this is clearly evident. The prices of raw materials are rising, which is reason enough to use our natural resources sparingly.'

NO TIME TO LOSE

Gerbrandy is the European Parliament rapporteur for the Roadmap, which puts him



GERBEN-JAN GERBRANDY
(EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
ALDE GROUP):
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in a position to steer the legislative process through Parliament. 'What I really want to do is speed up the process. There is no time to lose.' In the Roadmap, Potočník proposes developing indicators the EU member states can use to measure the quality of their resource efficiency. 'This is an essential requirement for setting quantifiable targets,' says Gerbrandy. 'It is a tricky aspect, because the Roadmap is not only about materials, but also about food, water, clean air, soil and biodiversity. Luckily, good indicators have already been drawn up in other guidance documents.'

The new European policy vision will eventually be translated into legislation, which will then have to be transposed into national legislation and regulations. The critics predict that implementing the Roadmap will not be easy and point to the experience so far with the three-year-old Waste Framework Directive. A survey by the European Federation of Waste Management and Environmental Services (FEAD) shows that this directive has been fully implemented in just one member state in Eastern Europe. Local authorities in those member states disregard the waste hierarchy prescribed by the Waste Framework Directive. Too often landfill is preferred to incineration and recycling. The EU will have to steer with a firm hand to reduce the landfilling of recyclable and reusable materials in favour of materials recycling and energy recovery, concluded FEAD. The implementation of the Roadmap faces a similar challenge, acknowledges Gerbrandy, but he is not pessimistic. 'Recycling raw materials will become increasingly economic. These countries will also realise that they will soon have to establish a well-equipped recycling infrastructure. The rising raw materials prices will definitely spur this development on. Europe would do well to make haste because other countries, such as Japan and Brazil, have already made considerable progress. As a major importer of raw materials, Europe cannot afford to lag behind.'

WASTE POLICY

Resource efficiency is something that Dutch MP *Marieke van der Werf* (CDA) wants to see incorporated into Dutch policy as soon as possible. 'Resource efficiency means making judicious use of raw materials and not depleting the stocks of natural resources, which currently continues



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unabated. Economy is not the right response to scarcity. Buying time is not a structural solution. We need to pursue other options, such as using alternative, biobased materials – although we must be mindful that these alternatives do not displace food production.' Van der Werf thinks the Roadmap largely neglects the reuse of materials and smart product design. 'We must ensure that products are easy to dismantle at the end of their useful lives and that materials can be used again more easily. This will bring us closer to the circular economy.' She also makes the case for investigating how much of the eighty per cent of waste that is now recycled is put to high grade uses. 'We need to know this if we are to recycle materials for higher grade uses and recover materials more efficiently.' Imposing a levy on primary plastics to make them more expensive and encourage recycling is not a good idea, she says. 'Neither is it necessary. The prices of recovered materials will rise anyway. Moreover, you cannot stimulate recycling with a sustainable procurement policy.' She

feels the Netherlands can play a key role in putting the Roadmap's ambitions into practice. 'Ecodesign has strong roots in the Netherlands. We have much expertise in this area as well as a well-developed waste sector with considerable flair for export. As far as I am concerned, the waste industry should be one of our top industrial sectors.'

Gerbrandy also sees the connections with waste policy. 'Resource efficiency and waste management go hand in hand. Waste is no longer a problematic material we have to get rid of. The new way of looking at waste is to see it as something we badly need, which is reason enough not to immediately define it as waste, but to clearly label it as a raw material. Of course, we must also not lose sight of the fact that some waste is fundamentally hazardous. However, how we value waste will certainly undergo an about turn. For example, local authorities now have to pay to have their waste removed. In future, this situation could be reversed. A day will come when the waste industry will pay local authorities for the raw materials they have collected. That day is sooner than we think.'

