



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Office of the First Vice-President Mr Frans Timmermans

Member of Cabinet

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Ares (2019) 566484

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your letter of 29 January 2019, concerning the transition towards a circular economy for plastics, and many apologies for getting back to you with a delay. First Vice-President Timmermans has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Commission is highly grateful for Unilever's continued commitment to the transition towards a circular economy, including its commitment to ensuring that all Unilever's plastic packaging is made recyclable and that the amount of recycled plastic content in Unilever's packaging is increased. Leading companies like Unilever can have considerable influence on boosting the recycled plastics market and giving the right signal to businesses, citizens and regulators in Europe and beyond.

Regarding your remarks on the regulatory context pertaining to the quality of recycled plastic, it is clear that more remains to be done. I would like to highlight below some of the recent developments and ongoing initiatives, which we believe will contribute to creating an environment conducive to delivery of the pledges made and, in particular, to improving the economics and quality of plastics recycling.

The revised Directive 2008/98/EC on waste foresees stricter separate collection obligations and improved producer responsibility systems. The amended Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive introduces targets for the recycling of plastic packaging of 50% by 2025 and 55% by 2030.

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The evolution of demand for recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) will be greatly influenced by the Single-Use Plastics Directive¹, which was recently agreed by the co-legislators.

This agreement includes a binding target of 25% of recycled plastic content for PET beverage bottles by 2025 and 30% by 2030 on average in each Member State. It further provides that Member States will have to collect 77% of single-use plastic beverage bottles separately by 2025 and 90% by 2029. These measures are expected to make an important contribution to boosting the market of recycled PET.

New guidelines on separate collection and sorting of waste are to be developed by the Commission by the end of 2019.

As of the end of 2024, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) will be obligatory for packaging across the EU. The new Waste Package reinforces EPR through general minimum requirements. The new rules will also promote “eco-modulation” of producers’ fees paid to the schemes to better reflect products’ end-of-life performance. EPR will be a relevant instrument to push reusability and recyclability of packaging. The Commission will provide guidance by the end of 2019 on several important aspects of the new requirements, including specific guidance on fee modulation.

Regarding recycled plastic material suitable for food contact, due to the large number of technically complex decisions that must be adopted simultaneously, the preparation of these decisions is proceeding more slowly than was foreseen in Regulation (EU) No 282/2008². The Commission expects to adopt the decisions in the course of 2019. With respect to rules on the use of chemical recycling for food contact materials, the Commission services are assessing whether the current approach should be maintained. Regarding the applicable rules and any potential future approaches it is therefore advisable to contact our technical services in DG SANTE.³

The development of criteria on recyclability and recycled content for Green Public Procurement and Ecolabel are additional examples of measures meant to support industry's efforts to use more recycled plastics.

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¹ Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment.

² Commission Regulation (EC) No 282/2008 of 27 March 2008 on recycled plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foods and amending Regulation (EC) No 2023/2006, OJ L 86, 28.3.2008, p. 9–18.

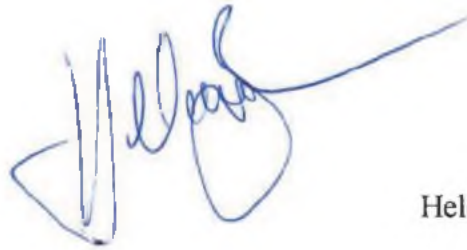
³ ec.europa.eu

The future revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive will define the regulatory context of recyclability of plastic packaging in greater detail. One key element of this revision will be how to reinforce the “essential requirements” in line with the principles of the circular economy and the waste hierarchy by the end of 2020.

Finally, the Circular Plastics Alliance, which brings together key industry stakeholders covering the full plastics value chain, will further discuss some of the above issues until September 2019.

Our team and I would be happy to organise a meeting to further discuss the topics you have raised. We would be very grateful if you could let us know whether there are any dates in May, which would be suitable for you.

Yours sincerely,



Helena BRAUN