

## The Green Deal and Plastics

*By Dr. Holger Berg, Wuppertal Institute (holger.berg@wupperinst.org)*

### What the Green Deal says

The Green Deal issued by the new European Commission<sup>1</sup> extensively addresses plastics as an important focus of its environmental and circular economy strategy. At the heart of these plans are reductions of pollution from micro-plastic, reusable or recyclable packaging, regulations for bio-plastics and further measures on single-use plastics. Moreover, value chains shall be closed and the use of secondary materials shall be strengthened.

### Why it is important

The Green Deal is an important step towards an environmentally friendly and sustainable European Union. The focus on plastics as one major issue in this scheme is justified, as plastics clearly are one of the materials that still spur many challenges towards a creation of the Circular Economy. These challenges range from waste prevention, to improvement of reparability, reuse and recycling – mechanical and potentially chemical. Closing the value chain and thus keeping plastics within the circle, indeed is mandatory to achieve a meaningful Circular Economy within the EU. In other words: Given the amounts of plastics used yearly within the EU and its myriad applications, any attempt to a Circular Economy that does not conquer the plastics challenge is utterly incomplete at best. Still, the Green Deal will need substantiation over the next months. A revised Circular Economy Action Plan has been announced as part of this effort. What does it need to consider for plastics?

### Circular Economy is the right strategy for plastics...

It is no wonder plastics are used everywhere and in high amounts. They are a light, easy to form, durable material. Moreover, there is no such thing as one plastic. From PE to PVC to Polyurethane plastics come as different materials with all sorts of additives, coloring, etc., making this group of matter so adaptable to so many applications, and also so challenging for the Circular Economy and so difficult within the waste streams.

A fully developed strategy thus needs to consider both sides: Plastics are the right materials for many application – also from an ecological perspective! Yet, the plastics industry needs ambitious goals to convert towards more circularity.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf)

### **... and it needs to face the facts**

We thus need plans and measures that respect the complexity of the issue. They need to be fact-based and evidence-based, tackling problems created by plastics such as those mentioned above. At the same time, they need to respect and endorse the use of plastics where they are beneficial for sustainability e.g. in packaging, medical appliances and so on. This latter side of the story seems to have gotten out of view both a bit in national and international policies over the last years. Some measures were taken that sometimes seem to be likely to create more stress on sustainability by banning plastics than they might do good.

The issue must be to use and reuse plastics sustainably and circularly. It is thus resource efficiency, waste prevention, reuse and recycling that need to be considered. Efforts in this vein will need a changing of mind-sets on all sides: Companies, consumers and politics. They will also require close-cooperation of these parties together with researchers and designers to get the measures right from the very start. We are very much looking forward to supporting the Green Deal on plastics! It will be exciting and meaningful!