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VOTE IN STRASBOURG ON WASTE: TOWARDS A MORE CONSISTENT BUT TOO PRESCRIPTIVE FRAMEWORK

The vote of the European Parliament on Tuesday 13 February on the Waste Framework Directive increases the consistency of the proposal, particularly by improving several concepts that are key to EU waste policy. However, the vote goes far beyond the scope of a framework legislation, notably by setting a strict waste hierarchy with rigid and burdensome conditions of implementation.

The European steel industry, represented by EUROFER and APEAL, welcomes the definition of “recycling” and the article on “by-products” proposed by the Parliament. Both improvements will strengthen the legal certainty and prevent further litigation. Furthermore, the adoption of a definition of “recycling” based on the concept of a “material to material” loop will ensure that primary resources are saved in a sustainable way by incorporating the material into new products. Such a definition will also prevent those recovery processes leading to the destruction of the material being wrongly classified as recycling.

Concerning by-products, the introduction of an article to better distinguish between by-products and waste is welcomed. It will guarantee the legal certainty needed for these valuable resources. The amendment provides the appropriate framework to designate those materials and substances qualifying as “by-products”. Placed on the market, by-products will automatically become subject to registration under the REACH regulation and therefore a high level of protection for human health and the environment will be ensured.

While it is in the very nature of a framework to provide clear definitions and objectives, several amendments seem to be going beyond the role of such legislation. This is notably in the case of amendment n°14 which not only sets a rigid waste management hierarchy but most regrettably subjects the deviation from this hierarchy to a heavy and costly procedure. Jean-Pierre Debruxelles, Technical Director of EUROFER, considers that “*the waste hierarchy should serve as a guidance to waste management policy but cannot be conceived as a strict rule directly applicable to all waste streams and all national contexts*”. The same applies to the suggestions that Member States shall adopt separate collection schemes (amendment n° 141) and achieve by 2020 recycling and reuse targets of 50% for municipal solid waste and 70% for construction, demolition, industrial and manufacturing waste (amendment n° 140).

Consequently, the steel industry calls on the European institutions to ensure that this directive will remain a framework directive, providing an optimum foundation for cost-effective and sustainable waste management policies. This can be achieved by setting a clear waste hierarchy but with a broader margin of interpretation when applied to concrete situations.



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