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European Commission, European Parliament

Europaforum welcomes a cohesive package of measures for a circular economy

Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes a cohesive European package of measures aimed to achieve a circular economy. To secure the supply of resources for future generations, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, to protect people and the environment from harmful substances, and not least to create jobs and growth in Europe, there is need of a European policy based on developing a circular economy.

1. Northern Sweden's forest resources are an asset in a circular economy

Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to emphasise the importance of forests and the forest industry in a circular economy. Sweden is the world's second largest exporter of paper, pulp and sawnwood products. These are climate-neutral products manufactured with the help of renewable energy and renewable forest raw materials. Forest biomass is also an important source of raw materials for emerging bio-based industries, and products from the forest can replace many of the products today derived from fossil sources.

Sweden is by area the third largest country in Europe, and the country is almost 70% forested. The quantity of biomass in the form of forest has been increasing in Sweden ever since the 1920s, and it is still increasing. Approximately 70% of the annual growth is harvested, and 30% remains, which means that Swedish forestry contributes to bind carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and that we see a constant growth in forests in Sweden. Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to emphasise that an active and a sustainable forestry is a crucial component in a circular economy.

In Northern Sweden there is ample know-how in forest related issues. There are companies possessing advanced skills and three universities with renowned research into bio-energy, cleantech and efficient energy use in a cold climate. In Northern Sweden there are also a number of demonstration and research plants connected to bio-refineries. This knowledge is of vital importance in developing innovations concerning bio-based products in new industries which can create growth in Northern Sweden and which can contribute knowledge to benefit the whole of the EU.

Europaforum welcomes the ideas of the Commission to promote efficient use of bio-based resources, but we feel that mandatory cascading use of biomass would considerably impair conditions for efficient use of biomass. In principle all bio-energy in Sweden comprises waste from another operation. The harvesting of growing trees to obtain bio-energy takes place on only an extremely small scale, and then mainly by small individual forest owners, and involves tree species of limited value to the forest industry. Already today, market forces steer the effective use of biomass to the fraction which has the highest value added.

2. Combustion of waste and biogas production are part of the solution

It is an important challenge in the work for a circular economy to reduce the quantity of waste that becomes landfill. Every year, 140 million tonnes of waste are deposited as landfill in Europe. Depositing landfill is above all an enormous waste of resources. In many cases, landfill also brings serious environmental problems, among other things through leaching of the greenhouse gas methane, and the emission of contaminated



leachate into groundwater and lakes. Europaforum therefore welcomes the ambitious objectives of the Commission regarding reduced landfill.

Energy recovery from waste covers approximately 15% of the heating needs for housing and premises in Sweden overall. In Northern Sweden there are several large plants for waste combustion and a considerable need of district heating. Energy recovery has an important role to play in the foreseeable future, both as waste treatment and for energy production. Swedish district heating plants are world leaders as regards both environmental factors and energy efficiency. Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the statement from the Commission that energy recovery from waste is better than landfill. We would also like to emphasise that energy recovery through biogas production from waste material is highly resource-efficient.

Energy recovery however is just one piece in the jigsaw of waste management. To create a circular economy the most important thing is to create good conditions for reaching the upper levels of the waste hierarchy – to minimise the quantity of waste, to reuse and recycle materials. Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that EU funds and programmes should also continue to support efforts for technological development leading to better use of material resources where higher levels in the waste hierarchy are reached.

3. Environmentally adapted public procurement

Public procurement is a significant part of the economy which can influence production and consumption in a more sustainable direction. By setting environmental, social and ethical demands in procurement we have an opportunity to reduce the environmental impact of the public sector itself and to send signals to the market to steer towards more sustainable production and trade.

Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the Commission proposal on taking measures to stimulate environmentally adapted public procurement. The public sector also needs to work with innovation procurement to promote new sustainable services and products. Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that changes are needed in EU legislation for public procurement to facilitate environmentally adapted procurement and to achieve necessary developments. Europaforum Northern Sweden also considers that skills development in the field is needed in both the public sector and private sector, which should be supported by EU funds and programmes.

4. Research, innovation and competitiveness

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that innovation is a central factor in promoting the transition to a circular economy, and urges EU bodies through EU programmes and funds to support innovation development in order to promote the development of a circular economy. Europaforum Northern Sweden considers it important that there shall be financing within the EU structural funds to support regional projects reducing waste and encouraging cooperation and the dissemination of good practices in the field, with the purpose of helping regions to develop.



5. Regional participation and consideration to peripheral and sparsely populated areas

For a circular economy to develop there is a need for an ambitious effort from players at all levels. The regional and local levels have an important role to play in implementing a circular community system, where for example municipalities have a far-reaching responsibility to collect household waste. It is therefore important that the local and regional levels are participatory in designing EU strategies and programmes for a circular economy.

Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to emphasise the importance that measures and priorities for a circular economy should be meaningful, not only for densely populated areas and cities, they must also function for peripheral and sparsely populated areas like Northern Sweden, where it can be difficult to achieve sufficient scale in the system where distances are considerable and transport costs are high.

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Erik Bergkvist (S) Chair Europaforum Northern Sweden

Ewa-May Karlsson (C) Region Västerbotten

Harriet Classon (S) Region Västerbotten

Robert Uitto (S) Region Jämtland Härjedalen

Gunnar Hjelm (M) Region Jämtland Härjedalen

Thomas Andersson (C) Region Jämtland Härjedalen

Ellinor Söderlund (S) Norrbotten Association of Local Authorities

Anders Josefsson (M) Norrbotten Association of Local Authorities

Maria Stenberg (S) Norrbotten County Council

Hans Stenberg (S) Västernorrland County Council

Peder Björk (S) Västernorrland Association of Local Authorities

Anders Gäfvert (M) Västernorrland Association of Local Authorities



