



## Joining forces to address the EU's waste implementation gap

On 4 February, EuRIC, FEAD, MWE, CEWEP, CEMR, Eurocities, and the EESC united for an all-day event at the European Economic and Social Committee to address the gap in EU waste legislation implementation. The event gathered EU Commission representatives, waste management and recycling leaders, Environment Attachés, and regional counsellors to tackle challenges at both local and European levels.

Opening the event, **Paulina Dejmek Hack**, Head of Cabinet for Circular Economy Commissioner Jessika Roswall, emphasised the **shift in societal attitudes towards waste but pointed out persistent barriers**. Virgin materials remain cheaper than recycled ones, the EU single market for circularity is ineffective, and cheap plastic imports undermine EU recycling efforts. Financing remains a hurdle, and stronger enforcement of existing and future legislation (ESPR, Batteries, WSR, SUPD, PPWR, Landfill Directive) is critical.

The first panel delved into local waste management successes and challenges, featuring insights from **Marek Kabacinski** (Krakow Public Waste Management), **Benedita Chaves** (LIPOR), **Åsa Ågren Wikström**, (County Council, Västerbotten Region, Sweden), **Rait Pihelgas** (Järva Rural Municipality Council & Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities), and **Herwart Wilms** (REMONDIS). They discussed the barriers public entities face in implementing EU waste legislation, including **pressure from new EU obligations on separate collection of biowaste and textiles, lengthy decision-making, permitting procedures, funding issues for high-tech infrastructure, and regulatory uncertainty**. The panel also highlighted the need to raise citizens' awareness and encourage waste prevention, as well as the necessity of stronger public-private waste management collaboration.

The afternoon session on circular policies for energy and material autonomy began with a keynote by **Matthias Back Kirkegaard** (Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU). He acknowledged the challenges in Europe's circular economy market, highlighting stakeholders' calls for greater competitiveness and regulatory simplifications, including at the Member State level.

**Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea**, the EU Commission's Circular Economy Director, led the second panel, stressing the need to adjust messaging to uphold Green Deal objectives, support decarbonisation, and restore European industry competitiveness. He highlighted that the upcoming **Clean Industrial Deal would include measures to tackle** one of the main barriers to achieving these goals - **high energy prices - which widen the cost gap between secondary and primary materials**. According



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to the EC Circular Economy director, introducing end-of-waste (EoW) criteria, reducing landfilling, improving separate collection, and making recyclates more accessible are key steps before advancing circularity provisions in other legislation.

The second panel, featuring **Olivier François** (EuRIC), **Claudia Mensi** (FEAD), **Paul de Bruycker** (CEWEP), and **Matthias Back Kirkegaard** (Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU), called for increasing the circular material use rate (CMUR) in the EU, currently at only around 12%, and for greater recognition of the waste management and recycling industry's role in achieving EU sustainability. Panelists emphasised that **EU legislation should reward material and energy recovery, energy savings, and emissions reductions to encourage innovation and support a circular, competitive economy**. They also highlighted that as Europe pursues raw material autonomy, it must recognise it cannot produce all CRMs on its own - no country can - and therefore needs third markets and allies. **The WSR should be a strategic tool, not a blanket ban**, enabling Europe to negotiate for materials it cannot produce domestically.

The day concluded with a presentation on the Revision of the EU Waste Framework Directive from **Zsolt Kükedi**, Rapporteur of the EESC. He noted that this event reaffirmed the vital role of collaborating across all sectors and highlighted the importance of regaining our competitiveness while keeping in mind the environment as every citizen deserves clean air, clean soil and clean water.

We would like to thank all speakers for their valuable contributions and all participants for joining us in Brussels and enriching the discussions with their insightful contributions.

**You can find the event's material (presentations, photos) here.**

For more information about the event and the work of the hosting organisations, please visit their respective websites. Contact us at:

EuRIC: [info@euric.org](mailto:info@euric.org)

FEAD: [info@fead.be](mailto:info@fead.be)

MWE: [info@municipalwasteeurope.eu](mailto:info@municipalwasteeurope.eu)

CEWEP: [info@cewep.eu](mailto:info@cewep.eu)

CEMR: [info@ccre-cemr.org](mailto:info@ccre-cemr.org)

Eurocities: [info@eurocities.eu](mailto:info@eurocities.eu)