



Mercredi 2 octobre 2013 à 10h30



Janez POTOČNIK  
Commissaire européen  
de l'environnement

Mesdames, Messieurs,

Je vous remercie de m'offrir l'opportunité de m'adresser à vous ce matin. Je suis réellement désolé de ne pas pouvoir être avec vous en personne à Nantes... capitale européenne verte de l'année 2013. Et avant tout, permettez-moi de féliciter les autorités et les organisateurs de cet événement à Nantes. Le programme de cette année verte est vraiment impressionnant et mérite tout notre respect et attention. Permettez-moi de continuer en anglais.

When we ask people in Europe today about their attitudes towards the environment, waste is clearly an issue where public concern is high and fast-growing. In one sense, that is not surprising: looking at the overall figures, to keep our economy operating today, we use 16 tonnes of materials per person per year. And out of that, 6 tonnes per person becomes waste. What is shocking is that almost half of those 6 tonnes is going to landfill.

But the encouraging fact is that when we ask people to name things that they can do for the environment, one of the top answers is 'recycling'.

This reflects public interest and engagement. But it also reflects the fact that one person's waste is another person's business opportunity. That is why the European waste management and recycling sector is so competitive, innovative and fast growing.

The fact that we have a strong recycling sector shows that European waste policy has been a success story. Already now, 6 Member States have cut landfill to less than 5 % of the waste they generate. And 4 Member States are already recycling more than 60 % of their municipal waste. Even 10 years ago, this would have been thought of as quite unrealistic.

How has this been achieved? ... Because we agreed together to set targets, which have helped create the opportunity for investment and innovation in waste management and recycling. And Member States have responded with a range of policies which are producing results: economic incentives such as pay-as-you-throw schemes; landfill and incineration taxes; extended producer responsibility and take-back schemes; encouraging composting; the banning of certain waste streams going to landfill.

This success story has reinforced our view that we can go further. In the Resource Efficiency Roadmap, the Commission set out objectives to cut the total amount of waste generated by 2020, to maximise recycling and re-use; to limit incineration to non-recyclable materials; and to – in effect – phase out landfilling. These objectives were recently confirmed in the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme that Member States and the European Parliament recently agreed upon.

Looking at France in particular, it is increasingly clear that opportunities in the waste and recycling sector have expanded a lot in recent years. Recycling and composting is increasing. A landfill tax is producing results even though the overall landfill rates in France – at around 30 % – remain much higher than in other, similarly developed Member States.

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There are big opportunities here – if France were to achieve the objectives set out in the Resource Efficiency Roadmap, we estimate this could create 70,000 jobs and increase the annual turnover of the waste management sector by € 7 billion. At this time, when we are searching for new sources of growth and jobs, here is a clear example, and one which would also help make progress on environment and climate goals at the same time.

Some countries in the EU over-invested in incineration in previous decades, and now find themselves with surplus capacity. These are expensive plants which risk becoming 'stranded assets' dragging down the financial performance of the companies who own them. We can learn a useful lesson from this experience and invest primarily in waste prevention and recycling.

Our objective is to move to a more circular economy where waste becomes a resource within the system, and where residual waste is gradually eliminated. Does the waste industry have a future in such a scenario? Well, given the size of our current challenge, it certainly has a bright future. And in the longer-term, companies who are innovating and turning themselves into real service providers across the whole of the waste hierarchy have the brightest future in the move to a more circular economy.

You may be aware that the European Commission is in the process of reviewing the targets in EU waste legislation. We are asking the important questions:

- How can we simplify and monitor targets

better?

- How can we encourage a move up the value chain in the waste hierarchy?
- What have countries, cities and regions learned about the instruments and incentives that really work?
- How can we encourage and support them?

You can expect our proposal during spring time next year. It will be my political priority for the last year of my mandate.

Several regions and municipalities have already shown us what can be done. And that demonstrates to us all very clearly that it is absolutely possible to meet our objectives if we mobilise all relevant actors... of course, the national and local authorities,... but also citizens, industries and NGOs.

In less than one year from now, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2014, we hope to bring many of these actors together in a very practical way for Let's Clean Up Europe Day. I would of course be very pleased if the City of Nantes – as well as all stakeholders present – would join me and many other European cities, regions and Member States in putting on our gloves and boots and cleaning up our beaches, forests and landscapes. But, even more importantly, to raise awareness of the need to manage our waste and our environment responsibly.

Please work with towns and cities, your national government, the waste management industry and the Commission to help improve the implementation of waste policy to improve our environment and also help deliver growth and jobs.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a fruitful Forum.

Enjoy the Green Capital of Europe!

Janez POTOČNIK