

Brussels, 6th March 2014

Joint Statement

Commerce and SMEs do not support an EU-wide target to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic bags

Ahead of the vote in the Environment Committee of the European Parliament, UEAPME – representing the crafts, trades and SMEs in Europe, and EuroCommerce – representing the European retail, wholesale and international trade sectors – fear that the proposal put forward to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, does not sufficiently address the concerns of SMEs nor of the commerce sector.

First and foremost, EuroCommerce and UEAPME consider that the current proposal will not efficiently tackle the issue of waste prevention, minimisation, and management. Plastic bags are only part of the problem, and represent an extremely small portion of the plastic waste generated in the EU. A holistic approach is needed to appropriately impact plastic waste streams. We consider that the EU institutions should tackle the issue in a more inclusive manner, and the focus placed on plastic waste in general. The best approach would therefore be to address the issue in the upcoming review of the packaging and packaging waste legislation.

We would also ask MEPs to recognise the importance of the already existing voluntary initiatives that have been taken in numerous Member States. These Member States have already reached considerable reduction levels and should not be confronted with additional obligations.

We cannot support the introduction of an EU-wide reduction target on the use of lightweight plastic bags, as we believe it would impose too strong a phase down of these bags with negative consequences for retailers and SMEs producers.

We call for a comprehensive approach which can ensure that waste management schemes across the EU are improved, and the overall environmental impact of plastic bags and other plastic materials is minimised. We favour a non-legislative and non-binding approach, which in our opinion, has already proven successful. In this line, awareness raising campaigns as well as efficient waste management schemes (with proper collection and recycling systems) should play an important role across the EU.

Against this background, we hereby call on the Members of the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament to take into consideration the opinion of the majority of retail companies and SMEs manufacturing lightweight plastic bags in the EU and hence, vote in line with the above-mentioned points.

About EuroCommerce :

EuroCommerce represents the retail, wholesale and international trade sectors in Europe.

Its membership includes commerce federations and companies in 31 European countries.

Commerce plays a unique role in the European economy, acting as the link between manufacturers and the nearly 500 million consumers across Europe over a billion times a day. It is a dynamic and labour-intensive sector, generating 11% of the EU's GDP. One company out of three in Europe is active in the commerce sector. Over 95% of the 6 million companies in commerce are small and medium-sized enterprises. It also includes some of Europe's most successful companies. The sector is a major source of employment creation: 31 million Europeans work in commerce, which is one of the few remaining job-creating activities in Europe. It also supports millions of dependent jobs throughout the supply chain from small local suppliers to international businesses.

About UEAPME:

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME incorporates around 80 member organisations from 34 countries consisting of national cross-sectorial SME federations, European branch federations and other associate members, which support the SME family. UEAPME represents more than 12 million enterprises, which employ around 55 million people across Europe. UEAPME is a recognised European Social Partner. It is a non-profit seeking and non-partisan organisation.