

Ahead of negotiations to finalise the revision of EU packaging waste legislation, the European packaging industry is calling for the free movement of packaged goods to be safeguarded.

Technical meetings between EU policymakers are expected to take place in the upcoming weeks to discuss amendments to the Package and Package Waste Directive, as part of the EU's Circular Economy plans.

Member state representatives in the EU Council of Ministers are considering changing the entire legal basis of the Directive, which would risk the end of the internal market for packaging and packaged goods.

A body of 127 industry associations have expressed deep concern that erosion of the single market could end the freedom of movement of packaged goods and risk opening a "Pandora's Box" of divergent national environmental requirements among member states. In a letter to EU policymakers, the European Organization for Packaging and the Environment calls for the internal market to be retained as the sole legal base of the PPWD. "We fully support high environmental protection standards and welcome the revision of the PPWD as an important milestone for raising the bar in terms of packaging and packaging waste management," said Hans van Bochove, EUROOPEN chairman and Coca-Cola European Partners vice president of public affairs and government relations.

"But EU industries cannot achieve the objectives of the EU Circular Economy Package without the internal market. More - and not less - EU wide harmonising measures will be needed for a circular economy in Europe."

'Clear answer'

Circular Economy Package negotiations have been underway since May, with triologue meetings taking place between the EU Council, Commission and Parliament.

EUROOPEN understands that discussions are taking more time than expected, with the three institutions at loggerheads over a number of key issues surrounding proposals to reduce waste generation, control waste management, boost recycling and cut resource use.

A draft compromise text reveals that a full legal review of the packaging Directive is being considered by the Council. EUROOPEN insists that this is not merely a technical issue, suggesting that the potential for "significant harm" is real.

Internal market protections prevent the need for national reduction quotas or national bans for certain packaging types, actions which EUROOPEN says would create trade barriers in the EU.

"We shouldn't fool ourselves that this is just a technical, legal question with no consequences," said EUROOPEN board member Martin Reynolds. "It is a political choice

about whether we want a proper internal market or not.

“Our answer is clear: we absolutely need a strong EU internal market, unhampered by regulatory trade barriers, to provide the necessary scale to supply chains, operations, investment and innovation for successful circular economy solutions.”

Brexit concerns

The UK’s decision to leave the EU could impact on costs for UK packaging producers, especially if the country resolves to opt out of the single market. But while the post-Brexit relationship the UK forges with Europe is currently unknown, commentators can only speculate on what impact this will have on UK companies’ compliance with single market or national laws.

The PPWD requires products from third countries (i.e. non-EU countries) to comply with single market harmonising rules when imported and traded in the EEA.

Resource efficiency specialist Ecosurety has said previously that the UK “must absolutely” be a part of any discussions on design, material and fiscal parameters if it wants to avoid facing fragmented compliance requirements for exported products post-Brexit.

Source: euractiv