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Environment: Commission and retail sector launch Retail Forum to promote more sustainable consumption

The European Commission and the European retail sector will tomorrow launch a Retail Forum as part of their drive to promote more environmentally sustainable consumption patterns. The Forum will be launched by Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas, Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva, EuroCommerce President, Senator Feargal Quinn and Pierre-Olivier Beckers, President and CEO of the Delhaize Group, representing the European Retail Round Table (ERRT). The event in Brussels will also involve producers, consumers and environment groups. The creation of the Retail Forum represents a significant contribution in the implementation of the EU Action Plan on sustainable consumption and production and sustainable industrial policy presented by the Commission in July 2008. The Forum aims to reduce the environmental impact of the retail sector and its supply chain, promote more sustainable products and better inform consumers about 'green' purchasing opportunities.

Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: "Retailers can make a major contribution to the achievement of more sustainable consumption and production patterns through the products they choose to stock and promote. By bringing the retail sector together with other relevant stakeholders, the Retail Forum can help to accelerate this process. I very much welcome the environmental commitments already made by a number of retailers who have joined the Forum, and urge others to follow their example."

Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva added: "If we really want consumers to buy green, the sustainable choice must be an easy choice. Product information must be clear, and sustainable products must not be a luxury option. European retailers are in a unique position to help us get there. They are a part of consumers' everyday life and can have an immediate impact on the choices they make. That is why I am truly happy to launch the Forum today, alongside Commissioner Dimas. And I believe this is a good starting point for a concerted approach among retailers and stakeholders who can jointly influence consumer behaviour for reducing our carbon footprint."

EuroCommerce President, Senator Feargal Quinn said: "In these times of economic recession the launch of REAP and of its Forum signals the commitment of retailers to preserve the environment for our future generations. This Forum should encourage the sharing of information and demonstrate the best practices of commerce, consumers and all players with a view to stimulate competition and the commitments of individual retail companies."

Pierre-Olivier Beckers, President and CEO, Delhaize Group, representing the European Retail Round Table (ERRT), said: "We are delighted to launch this REAP initiative today. Retailers are focusing more and more on sustainability not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because our customers – and our

stakeholders - demand it. There is no alternative. Despite the very difficult economic climate, the move towards sustainable consumption will only deepen and accelerate. It is part of our strategy. Indeed, the younger generation of consumers and of our staff associates are even more demanding in terms of what they want us to do. They will keep the pressure on us into the future, a pressure we accept and welcome."

Dr Susanne Zänker, Director General of A.I.S.E. (the International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance products), said: "In the cleaning and maintenance products industry, we recognise that all actors in the value chain have an equally important role to play in improving sustainable consumption and production, with manufacturers providing innovative and sustainable products as well as information about best and safe use, retailers helping to convey this information to their consumers, and consumers using the products responsibly"

Goals of the Retail Forum

The Forum aims to generate a better understanding of the practical measures needed to promote sustainable consumption and production. Over time the result should be greater availability of environment-friendly and energy-efficient products in the shops and better information to consumers on how to use products in the most ecological way (for example, washing clothes at low temperature).

Participants will share best practice, discuss how to promote sustainable consumption and tackle barriers that hinder it, and obtain scientific information from relevant bodies to help evaluate environmentally sound products.

The rationale behind the Forum is that retailers are in a position to promote more sustainable consumption through their own actions, through their partnerships with suppliers, and through their daily contact with European consumers. Working with these stakeholders through a single, cross-cutting forum will make it possible to cover a wider range of products – for example from food to white goods, and from furniture to textiles – than a sectoral initiative.

Membership and participation

Membership of the Forum is voluntary and open to all retailers who join the Retailers' Environmental Action Plan (REAP) which includes many company-specific environmental commitments. To date 24 retailers¹ have done so. The Commission's DG Environment will monitor the retailers' achievements.

Participation in the Forum is open to all relevant stakeholders wishing to contribute to its work, such as producers, suppliers and consumer and environmental organisations. The Forum will be co-chaired by DG Environment and the two EU-level organisations representing the retail sector, EuroCommerce and the European Retail Round Table (ERRT).

To ensure transparency, all documents and other material related to the Forum will be posted on DG Environment's Sustainable Consumption and Production page at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/escp_en.htm

¹ Asda/Wal-Mart, Auchan, C&A, Carrefour Group, CEC (Confederación Española de Comercio), Delhaize Group, El Corte Inglés, EuroCommerce, European Retail Round Table (ERRT), FCD (Fédération des Entreprises du Commerce et de la Distribution, IKEA, Inditex, Kaufland, Kingfisher plc, Leroy Merlin, Spain, Lidl, Marks & Spencer Group, Mercadona, Mercator, Metro Group, Quelle, REWE Group, Royal Ahold, Tesco.

Launch event

The launch event will take place on 3 March from 1100 to 1300 at the Committee of the Regions, Room 53, Bâtiment Jacques Delors, Rue Belliard 99-101, Brussels. Commissioner Dimas will give the opening speech and Commissioner Kuneva will close the event. Senator Quinn, Mr Beckers and producer and consumer representatives will also speak.

Next steps

The Forum will meet every quarter. Its first working meeting is scheduled for 1 April.

Background

The creation of the Forum is one of the initiatives envisaged in the Action Plan on sustainable consumption and production and sustainable industrial policy (see [IP/08/1154](#)). Recognising that current patterns of consumption and production are unsustainable in the long term, the Action Plan sets out a series of mandatory and voluntary measures to improve the environmental performance of products and stimulate the uptake of those with reduced environmental impact.