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Sustainable Products Initiative: towards a future-proof policy landscape driving circular appliances

The European Commission published today the long awaited Sustainable Products Initiative, ultimately aimed at making all products on the EU market more durable, reusable, repairable, recyclable and energy efficient - in a nutshell, more sustainable. The Initiative also extends the scope of circularity requirements to a broader range of goods, in the attempt of addressing the challenges related to environmental impacts and resource-use while renewing the overall European approach to product policy.

The Ecodesign Directive has been effective in delivering on environmental, energy efficiency and decarbonisation objectives for energy-related products and is widely considered a 'success story', among the EU Green Policies. "Expanding it to a great variety of goods with no direct correlation, might risk hampering the proven efficacy of the legislation," commented Paolo Falcioni, APPLiA Director General. Instead, the sector has been advocating for the adoption of a parallel legislation, with appropriate methodologies, that takes inspiration from the good practices of the existing Ecodesign. The application of measurable and verifiable parameters on products, combined with a transparent methodology, have been key in the success of its implementation.

Whilst there are already a number of product legislations in place, "any overlapping or duplication must be avoided," clarified Falcioni, in order to ensure legal-certainty and secure the ability of industry players to innovate while also bringing about environmental benefits. The advent of multiple EU's proposed burdensome regulations, often establishing double or cascade requirements on a single product category, is in fact "detrimental to a smooth legislative process," he added.

As an industry deeply committed to enhancing circularity, "we would like to see that the future policy landscape for sustainable products continues to drive circular appliances," explained Korrina Hegarty, APPLiA Policy Director for Environment. For this to happen, it is key that "policy objectives, choices and incentives across all policy areas are clear and consistently implemented to create the market for sustainable circular business models and opportunities from a product lifecycle perspective," said Hegarty.

The introduction of a Digital Product Passport disclosing information on components and recyclability potential of products is also one of the latest additions to the package. While the tool could be useful in providing greater transparency in the supply chain, "it is crucial to ensure that information collected will ultimately represent an added value to all involved actors and consumers," detailed Falcioni. In this sense, information criteria must be fully assessed on a sector by sector and then product by product level. In the same way, it is of utmost importance to preserve the current standard making process as a key asset to gather collective knowledge about assessing product performance. This, by securing the continuation of the current assessment procedure as rooted in the development of harmonised standards, self declaration and presumption of conformity with EU rules.

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While the Initiative is a promising solution towards a policy landscape where sustainable products are the norm, it is key to “move towards a more coherent EU policy framework for a circular economy that preserves the EU Single Market, competition, and innovation, at all levels,” concluded Falcioni.

APPLiA - Home Appliance Europe represents home appliance manufacturers from across Europe. By promoting innovative, sustainable policies and solutions for EU homes, APPLiA has helped build the sector into an economic powerhouse, with an annual turnover of EUR 53 billion, investing over EUR 1.6 billion in R&D activities and creating nearly 1 million jobs.

