

CIRCULARITY IN CONSTRUCTION



CAN EU FIX IT?

ECOS conference · #canEUfixit



Summary of Discussions

The ECOS conference, held online on 29 September 2020, brought together a wide range of stakeholders. Civil society and industry representatives, as well as policy makers and national authorities, gathered to discuss how policies, laws and standards can transform the construction sector from an environmental problem to part of the solution.

What was discussed?

- Current strategic commitments for a sustainable built environment
- Future policy framework for a sustainable built environment and key sectoral changes needed to meet EU and global climate commitments
- The Construction Products Regulation review process and how it can foster greater circularity
- Regulatory requirements and standardisation needs crucial in the context of the EU sustainable product policy framework

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Marius Vaščega

Head of Cabinet of the European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
European Commission

Marius Vaščega, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Sinkevičius, welcomed the initiative to hold an event dedicated to the important topic of construction and acknowledged ECOS' ongoing efforts in defending environmental interests in standardisation.

The opening remarks focused on the “gamechangers for the EU following the COVID crisis”, highlighting flagship initiatives such as the foreseen EU Renovation Wave and the ambition of making the Union a leader in the circular economy.

Mr Vaščega stressed that buildings and construction were responsible for 5 to 12% of national GHG emissions, an issue that can be tackled by introducing greater circularity. This is a key area for investments, to which the EU intends to dedicate a considerable budget, including through national investment plans as part of the recovery package, the MFF and other financing instruments.

The EU will also seek to ensure policy coherence across climate, energy and resource efficiency policies, to tackle the important environmental impacts of the construction sector. As a result, a number of initiatives are to be expected, such as the introduction of new policies (for instance recycled content targets or measures on durability and adaptability of built assets), as well as a special focus on construction and demolition waste, particularly with regards to insulation.

Panel 1

Stéphane Arditi, Policy Manager for Circular Economy, Products & Waste, EEB •
Emmanuelle Maire, Head of Unit, Sustainable Production, Products & Consumption,
DG Environment, European Commission • **Estelle Réveillard**, Director, L'Alliance HQE – GBC

The discussion revolved around the building blocks for a Sustainable Built Environment. **Estelle Réveillard** from Alliance HQE-GBC highlighted that it is important to consider a building and its performance in its context and specific environment, using robust tools such as an agreed LCA framework. However, the necessary data often remains unavailable.

Stéphane Arditi from the European Environmental Bureau stressed that the buildings and renovation wave are major opportunities for the EU's recovery plan, but that we now need to make sure the ambitious objectives are realised. To do so, we need not only to aim at tackling energy efficiency in buildings, but circularity in general. Demolition and disposal of construction products is still cheaper than the repair and reuse of built assets and maintenance of the existing building stock. Therefore, all instruments, including financial and regulatory, should be targeted at serving sustainability in the built environment.

Emmanuelle Maire from the European Commission stressed the importance to consider whole lifecycle impacts linked to renovation and construction, stating that the EU does not want to solve an energy issue by creating a waste issue. To ensure an environment that is 'built for people', we need to consider the possible scenarios for reconstruction and repair, the overall lifecycle cost, as well as many other relevant aspects such as indoor air quality improvements, and presence of hazardous substances.

What are the building blocks for a Sustainable Built Environment?

- **Regulation of the construction sector at both product and building level** to drive systemic change to how resources are managed in line with the waste hierarchy and supported by circular economy practices;
- **Better understanding of the built environment** through resource mapping of the existing building stock and background information that is both reliable and accessible;
- **Financial support for environmentally sustainable business models** by mobilising public and private finance in support and reduced transaction costs for more sustainable investments.



Panel 2

Michael Neaves, Programme Manager – Construction, ECOS • **Fulvia Raffaelli**, Head of Unit, Circular Economy and Construction, DG GROW, European Commission • **Carolyn Spirinckx**, Project Manager Sustainable Built Environment, VITO Institute • **Christophe Sykes**, Director General, Construction Products Europe

The second panel focused on the necessary improvements to the current EU Construction Products Regulation, so that it can serve the circular economy and climate neutrality objectives.

ECOS Programme Manager **Michael Neaves** highlighted the complexity of the current framework and stressed that in its current form it is not fit for purpose when it comes to environmental sustainability.

Christophe Sykes from Construction Products Europe countered stating that a range of Environmental Product Declarations are publicly available and show the sector's willingness to provide sustainability information. It was agreed that life cycle assessment along the entire value chain, including all upstream and downstream processes, is a necessary and positive step but it will not be a sufficient measure on its own.

Carolyn Spirinckx from VITO Institute stressed that burden shifting should be avoided as part of construction products policy, and that harmonised rules should exist to drive design for circularity, reverbability and modularity.

DG GROW's **Fulvia Raffaelli** added that the inherent characteristics relating to sustainability for construction products are at manufacturing stage, but that the overall sustainability performance should be assessed when the products are integrated into a building. The need for digital construction product passports was highlighted to provide the necessary information to regulators, contractors, architects, and construction stakeholders across the value chain.

Finally, the revision of how standards are considered as part of rules for construction products in the EU should improve how a variety of aspects, including environmental sustainability, are considered within construction product policy.

How can we reinvent the CPR?

- **The EU should develop a range of product performance requirements** focusing on resource efficiency and circularity, which will ensure construction products in the EU Single Market are reliable, safe and environmentally sustainable
- **Sectoral support is needed for more harmonised rules** to drive design-based improvements for construction products that are more performant, resource efficient, circular and modular;
- **Robust implementation and methodologies** should support development of technical requirements and a reliable EU system of information on construction products that is harmonised, accessible and intelligible to allow businesses and consumers to fully trust in EU products and enable fair competition.



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