



Commissioner Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS
Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

**Beyond Growth Conference: Plenary 3 - Addressing the limits
of resource consumption: towards a resilient economy**

European Parliament, hemicycle
16 May 2023, from 09:00 – to 10:30
BRIEFING NOTE

Steering brief and Scene setter:

*You have been invited to give a **keynote speech (6-7 minutes) at the Day 2 opening Plenary (plenary session 3) of the Beyond Growth Conference. The title of the session is: Addressing the limits of resource consumption: towards a resilient economy. The topic of the plenary session is unsustainable interdependencies between resource consumption, GHG emissions and GDP growth. The purpose is to discuss the resilient mix necessary to integrate limits of natural resources, energy provision and geopolitical stability.***

Martin Hojsik (MEP-Renew Europe) will be chairing the session. The other speakers are: Yamina Saheb (Lead author, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), Timothée Parrique (Researcher, Lund University), Stientje van Veldhoven (Vice President & Regional Director for Europe, World Resource Institute) and Olivia Lazard (Fellow, Carnegie Europe)

*You will welcome the Beyond Growth Conference and the **importance of finding solutions to the overconsumption of natural resources while delivering wellbeing, living within planetary boundaries and ensuring EU resilience and competitiveness.***

You will emphasise circular policies as tools to achieve the green transition and present the key features of the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan.

You will remind that the Commission has been fully committed to the Beyond GDP approach since its Communication in 2009 which foresees among others to go beyond indicators of economic performance and rely also on environmental indicators. In this context, you will announce as one further step to measure progress beyond GDP, the timely adoption (on 15 May) of the revised Circular Economy Monitoring Framework with new indicators to measure progress in circularity.

Name of DG main contact person:

Name of the contributing person:



Speech

Honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, this conference is extremely timely, because it raises key questions that will determine our future.

How to tackle the triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

How to change our patterns of production and consumption, to live well within the planetary boundaries.

And how we can measure our progress towards those goals.

(pause)

Right now, those goals seem quite far away.

May 2 was EU Overshoot Day. The same day as last year in fact. Overshoot Day is a concrete reminder of the moment when we have already consumed the ecological resources that Earth can regenerate in the space of a single year. A reminder that the current patterns cannot continue.

I often talk about the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, but **actually, there is only one crisis. Our overconsumption of natural resources.**

Our relentless refuelling of the consumption machine.

As the temperature rises and nature disappears, we're driving down a road to disaster. We need to get off this unsustainable track. We need to start repairing the world that surrounds us.

Healthy ecosystems create resilience. They help societies cope with shocks. Water security is a great example. When supplies are short, the risk of conflict rises. Climate change

is already the first cause of population displacements. But when water supplies are secure, geopolitical stability begins to prevail.

(pause)

If we want to stay on the right side of the planetary boundaries, we need a more circular approach. An approach that takes account of resource limitations. An approach that sees the green transition as an inclusive opportunity.

The Green Deal takes us down that path. The path of the 8th Environmental Action Programme, which sets out politically agreed priority objectives to 2030 and a long-term vision to 2050 of living well, within planetary boundaries. This gives us the mandate and framework to move towards a resilient wellbeing economy where nothing is wasted, and since last year we have also politically agreed headline indicators to measure progress in this direction. With the European Climate Law and the Fit for 55-package, we have measures to ensure climate neutrality by 2050. The EU biodiversity strategy, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, sets the nature targets we need.

The recent Commission strategy for long-term competitiveness, and the Green Deal Industry Plan, plan out a future Union, the home of clean tech and green jobs.

This is the path we've been treading since 2020, since the adoption of the Circular Economy Action Plan. It came with ambitious goals to reduce our consumption footprint and resource dependency, to improve resource efficiency and to double the EU circular material use rate in the coming decade.

The big question is – how is it working in practice? What are we really doing to promote sustainability and circularity?

There are many examples I could give, especially as regards climate and energy. Batteries are great example. But I'd like to focus on two. They're still in the process of finalisation, but have tremendous potential.

The first is a new approach to Ecodesign. Last year we proposed the revamped Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, extending the previous legislation far beyond energy use, and including new criteria directly related to circularity.

The goal is to ensure that by 2030, all products placed on the EU market are durable, repairable, reusable, and safely and efficiently recyclable. They'll come with Digital Product Passports with detailed information about the materials they contain, their reparability, and how they can be recycled.

That proposal is progressing through the co-legislation process, and I hope to see a general approach in Council in a matter of weeks.

The second example is our proposal to substantiate green claims. This is a milestone, empowering citizens to make more sustainable choices. It will also support frontrunning companies, ensuring that their products stand out.

That too is being examined by Council and Parliament. It's been warmly greeted on all sides.

When you look at them together, you see powerful instruments that really can reshape our patterns of consumption. A world where green isn't special. A world where green is normal, where green is the status quo.

That's the path we need to travel.

(pause)

As we advance towards that future, we need to map our progress. We need reliable indicators, in a language we can all understand.

We're all here today because we recognise the shortcomings of GDP. It's a very basic map. It tells us nothing about the cost of growth – about environmental degradation, GHG emissions, biodiversity loss, or impacts on wellbeing and happiness.

The Commission has been arguing for a better tool for the best part of fifteen years. The Beyond GDP Communication in 2009 recognised those shortcomings, and made the case for a different approach. And we have made good progress since then. We've developed environmental and circular economy indicators to measure progress on a broad range of policies, all of which are important for sustainability and resilience.

To mention just a few, we have an indicator to measure decoupling of economic growth from resource use. The consumption footprint indicator measures the overall impact of EU consumption, including from imports. And we work on natural capital accounting, helping governments and businesses recognise their dependence on nature, and ecosystems that are healthy.

With the Circular Material Use rate, we see the share of material that gets recycled back into the economy.

Our own rate has risen since 2004, and in 2021 it reached 11.7 %. That means that almost 12% of material resources used in the EU are coming from recycled waste. The figure is low, the trend is going in the right direction. It's a trend we can build on, as we keep to the path of green transition.

And to keep you right up to date, we do continue to advance.

Yesterday, the Commission adopted a revised Circular Economy Monitoring Framework, with new indicators to measure our progress in circularity. It's one further step to measure progress beyond GDP. I invite you all to examine the figures, and to reflect on what remains to be done, to improve our collective environmental performance.

(pause)

We have knowledge, we have solutions, we have political will. Now have new indicators as well.

We have also a strong mandate from the citizens of Europe. At the Conference on the Future of Europe, they were extremely insistent about their desire to live, consume, and travel on the right side of the planetary boundaries.

For that to happen, we need what we always need – determined action on the ground. Let's make sure that we're part of that movement.

Thank you.

[1,000 words]

Background information of the Conference

The Beyond Growth 2023 conference

The Beyond Growth 2023 conference is an initiative of 20 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from five different political groups and non-attached, with the support of the President of the European Parliament. They are supported by about 60 partner organisations. In addition, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, Executive Vice-Presidents, Vice-President and Commissioners of the European Commission have also agreed to participate.

The main discussion formats of the conference will be plenary discussion, focus panels and interactive policy labs (for selected participants only). Conference reports will also be available for the audience.

Plenaries present the frame of the conference. In plenary discussions, high-level speakers from academia and EU institutions will publicly shed light on cross-cutting topics. The opening plenary marks the start of the conference and defines the overarching questions and narrative of the conference in relation to the topics. In following keynote sessions, experts provide their innovative and systemic approaches for a European post-growth economy coupling environmental transition and societal prosperity. The closing plenary gives a round-up of the conference and includes review of the content that has been created. All participants will be invited to attend these sessions. Plenary sessions will take place in the hemicycle of the Parliament.

Programme of the conference

The conference is held from 14 to 16 May 2023 at the European Parliament building.

You will start the Day 2 with your keynote speech in the plenary session 3: Addressing the limits of resource consumption – towards a resilient economy.

		DAY 2				
From	To	Duration				
08:30	09:00	00:30	<i>Arrival</i>			
09:00	10:30	01:30	Plenary 3 - Addressing the limits of resource consumption: towards a resilient economy			
10:30	11:00	00:30	<i>Break</i>			
11:00	13:00	02:00	Focus panel 9 Energy	Focus panel 10 Digital transition	Focus panel 11 Role of businesses	Focus panel 12 Well-being ocean economy
13:00	14:30	01:30	<i>Lunchbreak</i>			
14:30	16:30	02:00	Focus panel 13 Price on nature	Focus panel 14 Circular economy	Focus panel 15 Trade	Focus panel 16 Food policy
16:30	17:00	00:30	<i>Break</i>			
17:00	18:30	01:30	Plenary 4 - Understanding the biophysical limits to growth to build an economy that respects planetary boundaries			

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