Press statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on the new Circular Economy Action Plan

Brussels, 11 March 2020

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

Today is an important day for environment and industrial policy. Today we are taking a big step to the low-carbon and resource-efficient economy of the future. Being an economic heart of the Green Deal, circular economy is in fact our guarantee for sustainable growth of our economies.

The linear growth model of “take-make-use-discard” has reached its limits. With the growth of the world population and consumption, this linear model pushes us closer and closer to a resource crisis. The only way ahead is decoupling economic growth from extraction of primary resources and their environmental impacts. This is very much in line with both the industrial strategy we adopted yesterday, and the biodiversity strategy that's just around the corner.

The circular economy is the path towards more sustainable use of resources, because it is about more sustainable production, more sustainable consumption, and better waste management.

We have witnessed how progressive businesses, consumers and public authorities in Europe have endorsed and supported this sustainable model.

The new Circular Economy Action Plan is about taking all of this to mainstream.

We designed this new Action Plan with three goals in mind. We want to strengthen competitiveness of European industry, empower consumers and protect the environment at the same time.

The plan is rich in actions and various work strands that aim at improving many aspects of our daily life. At the heart of the plan is the sustainable product policy framework.

We want to make sure that products placed on EU market are designed to last longer, to be easier to repair and upgrade, easier to recycle and easier to reuse.

Consumers will be better protected, with a genuine right to repair. This will be a game changer for consumers that currently have no other real option but to throw away dysfunctional products.

We will be giving more power to consumers through better information about products and services. When you have information that is trustworthy and reliable, you can avoid green-washing much more easily.

Green products should become the norm among citizens, but we have to start from ourselves, the public authorities. Green public procurement requirements will be essential to boost demand for more sustainable products and services.

The new Circular Economy Action Plan focuses on the sectors that use most resources, the areas where circularity will have maximum effect. It includes electronics and ICT, plastics, textiles, packaging, batteries and vehicles, construction and buildings, food, water and nutrients.

We want to transform these sectors into circular systems where waste is reduced to the minimum. If waste cannot be avoided, it has to be turned into a valuable resource. As Europe is not rich in natural resources, the circular economy would strengthen the immunity of our economy from geopolitical challenges. It will provide new business opportunities in the EU and beyond, to the benefit of citizens.

For example, electronics and ICT are products for which each consumer would want to have the right to repair, including to upgrade. We will also explore options for an EU-wide take back scheme to return or sell back old phones, tablets and chargers. In addition, we will also address non-rechargable batteries, where alternatives exist.

Another item which we hold daily is our hands, often without noticing, is packaging. Packaging waste generation reached a record level – each one of use generates more than 170 kilograms per capita. The only way is down. We will work on design for re-use and recyclability of packaging, mandatory recycled plastic content and waste reduction targets.
We will also address the sectors that create a lot of pressure on our environment – construction, transport and food. For these sectors you can expect dedicated strategies that will again look at the whole lifecycle of products.

This second Action Plan is very wide ranging, with many ground-breaking, legislative initiatives to be rolled out over the course of this mandate. I am confident that those actions will improve many aspects of our lives, create numerous business opportunities and have a positive impact on the environment.

And now I am ready to answer your questions.