



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 4 December 2015
(OR. en)

15008/15

ENV 779
MI 785
IND 204
CONSOM 215

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Reducing pollution caused by consumption on the move: the case for a
European deposit scheme
- Information from the Belgian delegation

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Belgian delegation on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Environment Council meeting on 16 December 2015.

Reducing pollution caused by consumption on the move: the case for a European deposit scheme

- Information from the Belgian delegation -

On-the-go consumption is on the rise, encouraged by changing lifestyles, food technology and packaging innovations. The unfortunate consequence of this phenomenon is the generation of waste which is not always disposed of in a responsible manner.

Every year thousands of tonnes of waste are collected along motorways and roads in Belgium, resulting in millions of euros in operational costs.

Tourist attractions are also being polluted by waste generated by on-the-go consumption. Most of the waste consists of cans or plastic bottles of soft drinks, energy drinks or beer.

Waste management is a regional competence in Belgium. Regions have responded by adopting a number of measures, ranging from awareness-raising campaigns and clean-up days to a dedicated policy to protect public regional roads.

While these measures have succeeded in stabilising the creation of waste, they have proven ineffective at significantly *reducing* the amount of waste generated by on-the-go consumption, one of the reasons being that repressive action is difficult if you cannot identify the culprit.

Wallonia, in a bid to supplement these tools and ensure the effectiveness of its policy, has considered creating a system of returnable cans and bottles which would both reduce the amount of pollution and allow the recovery of material for recycling.

The urban specificities of Brussels, its reduced size and its international character all point to the conclusion that such a system only makes sense at European level.

In Flanders an impact analysis and legal study were carried out to examine the possibilities of a refund system for cans and plastic bottles.

The mechanism is simple: a consumer buys a drink, pays for the bottle or can, and the money is refunded when the empty container is returned. Such a system is already successfully implemented in large countries such as Germany, Denmark, Canada and the United States to the point that it seems to have generated a new informal economy.

The results of the studies indicate that at a purely regional level – or even at the level of a relatively small member state - waste reduction is proving difficult to implement efficiently. At such a restricted territorial level it is impossible, for example, to avoid the pull created by supermarkets situated just on the other side of the regional or national border. This factor not only creates a distortion in market conditions, but also puts the whole objective of the system at risk.

It is our conclusion, therefore, that action at Union level is both justified and indeed more effective given the limited possibilities afforded by the national, regional and local levels. In this context, we invite the Commission to examine the possibility of a deposit-refund system for both reusable and recyclable packaging and eventually to develop a proposal for a regulation on returnable packaging.
