

Tomaso Andreatta - Chairman of GGSC – HCMC 5/6/2019

Launching the “Alliance for ending plastic waste”

Dear Mr. Nguyễn Thành Phương, Deputy Director of the South Environmental Protection Agency

Dear leaders and representatives of Ho Chi Minh City Department of Natural Resources and Environment

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Do you want to die of plastics or learn how to live with it?

The image of the gigantic plastic islands floating in the Pacific Ocean and of Vietnamese beaches and water littered with plastics have become familiar, but do not have to be in the future. A global consciousness seems to be gradually awakening and gaining share of mind in companies, governments, consumers, the media. It is an awakening to the fact that resources are not infinite and the earth, while being able to cope with many of the man-made disasters, takes time to digest some of them. Traditional plastics is one of them.

Today we are here to hear how some companies whose business revolves around plastics are starting to work towards changing the situation in basically two ways:

Producing single use plastics that is fully and completely biodegradable, not the type used today in Vietnam that breaks into smaller particles and becomes an invisible and even more dangerous pollutant on the one hand;

Joining the Circular Economy with the other plastic, so that its useful life is multiplied many times, by being reused again and again, sometimes in the same form, sometimes in different ones, until it is finally broken down into its components in producing energy. The company I work for, the largest bank in Italy, fully believes in it and has budgeted Euro 5bn in loans and equity participations until 2021 exclusively dedicated to starting the Circular Economy.

Given the scale of the problem, it does take a change of mentality of the whole of society and all parts of it have a share of the work to do. Companies, who have money but especially power, since it is them bringing plastics to the world and using in so many products and packaging that if we refused to use any plastics, we would be almost unable to eat, drink, use most products, and probably, live.

Today some of those who are most involved in plastics are here to discuss how they will work together to transform this gigantic problem into smaller ones, each of them less acute. Seldom we can fully resolve problems, for example, in the other area where GGSC of EuroCham is very active, renewable energy, solar and eolic production are not without drawbacks and they seem to need the support of batteries, that with today technology are not environmentally friendly, but we know that once these solutions become adopted widely enough, the money for improving their qualities and reducing their shortcomings will becomes available. One has to understand that while it is not out the wok into the fire, as it would be if we chose atomic energy whose waste kills after centuries, but we cannot promise our morning glory to bring it back into the safety of the field it came from, that is modern society cannot go back to living into the caves.

In the circular economy, the consumers, and here I mean families but also any organization of people that uses resources, and the companies serving them, have to

fundamentally change the way they look at disposing of things they do not need any more, be it packaging removed from something to be used or the object itself.

The aim should be “zero waste”, in the sense that all we discard is not thrown back into the environment as is but it is reused as much as possible, transformed into something else including eventually energy, treated to have the least impact on the sustainable environment. VCCI through the VBCSD of which GGSC is member already has a permanent group of companies working on Zero Waste to Landfill. It is fundamental here to fully involve local companies as well as the international and multinationals, and this is precisely what VCCI and EuroCham do together.

In Europe we have already moved a long way into this direction: in the cities most waste is separated before being sent away, so as to avoid contamination and – mostly manual – sorting out of the various recyclable materials. It is a pain to break down boxes, folding paper, squeezing cans to make them fit into the small container provided by the garbage collection company and collected only once a week, but it makes it possible for recycling factories to receive high quality sorted material in volumes. Meanwhile in Vietnam we still throw everything away in the same bag and the sorting out is made manually and with no safety by many people and families who make a bare living on it. Soon this month GGSC will introduce another group of companies, mostly those selling drinking water, juices and milk, whose aim is to support this informal sector until it becomes more professional, safe and especially more efficient and powerful. Today the volumes of plastic to be recycled are small and not sorted by type of plastics, so they can only be used by shoe sole manufacturers at minimal value.

The role of the government, national and local, is to coordinate the effort, identify the priorities and use its influence both moral and legal to change people and companies’ mind and behaviors.

Europe has long been at the forefront of action to connect the various phases of the value chain of packaging to recycling since its individual members started well before the adoption in 1994 first Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste (PPWD).

The focus of the Directive, which was revised in 2008, is to coordinate national regulations so that packaging could be recycled and recovered throughout the whole EU market, with no national distortions.

The policy tool chosen was Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), that ensured financial and operating involvement of the companies producing the packaging in the management of the recycling and recovery phases, downstream of the packaging being used and discarded. As is usual in the EU, the Directive set the goals and obligations on the individual states, which then in turn involved the actual companies.

We intend to open a dialogue with the Vietnamese government, starting from MONRE, as to what are the best tools for this country to achieve results.

This afternoon the participating companies will gather to agree concrete goals and the way to achieve them, and the GGSC is available to support their effort.

I wish today does become one of the steps on the road to resolving the issue of plastic waste and that all participants enjoy happiness, health and success