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Standing Committee on Sustainable
Development, Finance and Trade

12 September 2019

Debate on Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production

*Monday, 14 October 2019 (9 - 11.30 a.m.)
Hall 3/0 (ground floor), Building A, Sava Centre*

Concept note

This preparatory debate is organized around the theme of the resolution to be adopted by the Committee at the 142nd Assembly in April 2020. It will provide Members with the opportunity to share their views on ways to mainstream digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Members can also make suggestions for parliamentary actions to be included in the resolution.

The past decades have been defined by an increased demand for natural resources and the associated degradation of the environment. Worldwide material consumption continues to increase rapidly, jeopardizing the achievement of the SDGs as a whole, in particular Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns. In 2017, worldwide material consumption reached 92.1 billion tons compared to 87 billion in 2015. Without urgent political action, global resource extraction is projected to increase seven-fold, amounting to 190 billion tons by 2060 compared to 27 billion tons in 1970.

Consequently, transformative concepts that improve resource efficiency, reduce waste and mainstream sustainability practices across all sectors of the economy are urgently needed. The circular economy concept represents such a departure from the dominant "take, make, use and dispose" linear model of production and consumption. It instead encourages the reuse of materials, thus decreasing the demand for new resource and energy inputs and promoting efficient and sustainable management of natural resources throughout their life cycle. In doing so, economic growth is uncoupled from unsustainable resource use and stresses on the environment in terms of extraction, and carbon emissions and waste production are minimized. Initially propagated in urban and industrial waste systems, circular processes have now spread into sectors as diverse as mining and food production.

At the same time, digitalization is progressing rapidly. Digital technologies have the potential to contribute to the reduction of resource consumption by enabling more resource-efficient production methods. They also play a key role in accelerating access to knowledge, services and skills by offering new communication channels and innovative business models which, in turn, enable producers and consumers to make more responsible and sustainable choices and assist them in their sustainability transition from a linear to a circular economic system.

In an effort to address the digital divide between developed and developing countries, the concept of "Digital4Development"(D4D) aims to utilize information and communication technologies (ICT) as an enabler for sustainable development. It also seeks to promote access to affordable and secure broadband connectivity, digital literacy and digital entrepreneurship.

The debate will address the following questions:

- Where are we today with the adoption of circular economy approaches?
- In terms of scaling up, what constitutes an enabling regulatory and legal environment and what are the barriers to it? How can parliaments help create that enabling environment and overcome those barriers?
- How can digitalization accelerate the circular economy's potential? What are the challenges and potential solutions and what role can parliaments play in addressing them?
- What is the potential of the D4D concept in enabling a shift away from linear to circular economic models?
- What can parliaments do to ensure that people's needs, with regards to technological capacity development and access to digital information services, as well as people's rights regarding data ownership and privacy, are addressed as part of digitalization?
- How can the business sector be incentivized to use, and invest in, digitalization and the circular economy? How can a successful shift from product-oriented business towards service models be achieved?

Speakers:

- Mr. Peder Jensen, Head of Secretariat, International Resource Panel
- Mr. Jovan Kurbalija, Founding Director of DiploFoundation
- Ms. Kirsten Van Camp, Digital for Development Officer, Enabel (tbc)

Co-Rapporteurs:

- Mr. Andries Gryffroy, Senator, Belgium
- Ms. Silvia Diniča, Senator, Romania
- Mr. Patrick Mariru, Member of Parliament, Kenya