Message on a new circular economy in Europe

Dear Mr. Commissioner Sinkevičius,

On behalf of Region Västra Götaland, we would like to congratulate you on the appointment as Commissioner of Environment, Oceans and Fisheries. We welcome the ambitions already expressed by the incoming Commission on circular economy and the transition towards a fossil neutral economy. We also want to take the opportunity to put forward how the regional level can successfully work for a transition to a circular economy and contribute to Europe’s objectives, as well as our view on necessary measures on the European level. In us you find a partner close to the citizens, where EU policy becomes reality.

Regional authorities have a long tradition and experience of thinking globally while acting locally, close to its citizens. Region Västra Götaland is a forerunner when it comes to the circular economy, especially in sectors like the furniture and textile industries. However, more work is needed in order to enable the full systemic change from a linear to a circular economy.

We strongly support high ambitions on the European level. A new Circular Economy Action Plan is needed in order to accelerate the transition from a linear to a circular economy. The circular economy will serve as an enabler of the vision of a resource efficient and climate neutral European Union and hence help in achieving its commitments with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. The transition is needed on an EU-level as well as within each member state – and here regions are key players.

Circular economy in Västra Götaland

What characterizes our region’s work in this field, is a transition to circular business models and changes in behavior and consumption patterns. With the program for circular economics, Västra Götaland aims to become an innovative circular arena for the textile and furniture industry. Here, the design methodology of the future is created and a new industry is emerging that offers professional services that give products a longer lifespan in a circular value cycle. We also have a comprehensive program with goals for our own operations, including the county’s health care.

Working together with businesses, academia and civil society, regions have a unique role in the realisation of a circular economic system. Västra Götaland is a forerunner in the circular economy. We would like to emphasise and share with you some of our best practices, which we hope can work as inspiration and catalyzer for further progress in these fields in the EU. Since we are especially eminent in the furniture and textile sector, we would like to put forward a number of examples within these sectors, together with a few examples from our health care sector:

- **Re:Textile**: A project with the aim to develop circular design, products and business models within the textile sector. The project is located at the national innovation centre for textile and fashion in the city of Borås. By creating new garments developed to last for a long time by being able to be repaired, reworked or otherwise updated, opportunities open for completely new business areas in
repair, redesign and other types of services that extend the life of the garment and create economic growth.

- **Test bed recycled textiles**: Region Västra Götaland supports the Research Institute of Sweden (RISE) test bed where textile waste is transformed into a new product, the so-called nonwoven. The nonwoven is used in the car industry, as silencer and composite material, etc.

- **Nontoxtex**: A project where Region Västra Götaland, Region Borås and **Smart Textiles** cooperated in the mapping of chemicals and hazardous substances in textiles in the preschool environment. The project raised the knowledge and consciousness about chemicals in textiles and hence help in making more sustainable choices in the future.

- **Möbelbruket** (Eng: the Furniture Factory): A project for refurbishment of quality furniture that otherwise would be discarded. Local corporations in the city of Skaraborg – where operates a cluster of businesses producing quality furniture for the public sector – are engaged in the project. Möbelbruket provides public support to municipalities and other public actors who want to convert to circular furniture flows. The project examines smart public furniture management, and is a support where the public sector can find and disseminate information about circular furniture management.

- **Tage** (Eng: Take give): Region Västra Götaland’s internal exchange site makes it easy for all businesses to put out furniture and equipment that is left over, which can be used by other units within the region.

- **Gröna Listan** (Eng: The Green List): Region Västra Götaland’s internal site for procurement of furniture and textiles with high environmental standards. Furniture and textiles on Gröna Listan need to meet following requirements: EU Ecolabel, Nordic Swan Ecolabel or the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation’s (SSNC) ecolabel Good Environmental Choice.

- **Design med Omtanke 2.0** (Eng: Considerate design): A methodology developed by Region Västra Götaland together with municipal associations. It aims at raising the competence of public buyers in creating socially, environmentally and economically sustainable environments when purchasing furniture.

- **100 % renewable medicine cups**: Through requirements in public procurement, Region Västra Götaland has negotiated to receive medicine cups made of 100 % renewable material.

- **Bio-based garbage bags**: Through requirements in public procurement, Region Västra Götaland has replaced plastic garbage bags with bio-based garbage bags. 15,4 million out of 15,7 million garbage bags per year are bio-based.

## A new Circular Economy Action Plan

Below we list our expectations for the new Commission in the field of circular economy. We would like to accelerate the transition to a circular economy in our region as well as in the whole of EU. Therefore, in the new Circular Economy Action Plan, Region Västra Götaland would like to see an increase of ambitions in general and emphasises on the following five priorities listed below. In addition, we would also like to highlight circular and green public procurement as a mean and as a tool for the realisation of the transition.

1. **Circularity in all EU-policies**: Reducing the overall consumption of materials, improving resource efficiency, promoting green and sustainable chemistry approaches and non-chemical alternatives, and increasing the lifetime of products are common goals that all require commitment as well as actions. We recommend they be reflected in all EU-policies.
2. Textiles: Region Västra Götaland welcomes the ambition of the new commission for targeted strategies in resource-intensive and high-impact sectors, such as textile. In a potential new strategy for circular textiles, we would prefer to see efforts on how to change consumers’ behaviour, suggestively building on the results from the behavioural study on consumer engagement, conducted within the framework of the previous Circular Economy Action Plan.

3. Plastics: Region Västra Götaland welcomed the Plastic Strategy and the Single-Use Plastics legislation as results of the previous Circular Economy Action Plan. We would like to continue with this and raise the ambition further. With the Single-Use Plastics legislation, targets were set for requirements on minimum recycled content in plastic bottles. We would like to see such targets for other plastic products, and even other products made of other materials. Furthermore, we would like plastics to be replaced by bio-based material, through investments in R&I and with the help of incentives. Regarding pollution from plastic, but also pollution in general, we request a strategy for a non-toxic environment which was included in the actions of the previous Circular Economy Plan.

4. Traceability, transparency and information: Uncertainty about materials and supply chains is an obstacle to a sustainable circular economy. European standards play an important role in traceability, transparency and information throughout all phases of the value chain. Improved legislation would greatly facilitate the transition, as well as make public procurement a more powerful tool. This includes creating a well-functioning single market for high-quality, non-toxic secondary raw materials that are safe for human health and the environment.

5. Move up in the waste hierarchy: For all sectors, we encourage that we lift the gaze from the lower steps in the EU waste hierarchy to the higher steps. With other words, we encourage that the EU focus on design, production and consumption and circular business models rather than recycling, recovery and disposal, allowing for the EU to do it right from the beginning. By focusing on waste prevention, EU can lead the way into the future, circular economic system.

To give full effect to the benefits of a circular economy, we need everyone on board in a joint effort. By accelerating the transition to a circular economy, opportunities for new, innovative and green jobs are created as well as new market opportunities for the EU to grasp. A new, ambitious Circular Economy Action Plan is the first step in order to accelerate the transition. Region Västra Götaland looks forward to participating and contributing to that transition.

Best regards,

Johnny Magnusson
President of the Regional Executive Board
Region Västra Götaland

Magnus Berntsson
President of the Environment Committee
Region Västra Götaland
President of Assembly of European Regions (AER)