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European Parliament endorses new packaging regulation to reduce plastic waste

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The European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) has taken a significant step towards environmental sustainability by endorsing a new packaging regulation to reduce plastic waste, a major pollutant within the EU. The European Commission initiated this regulation, which targets a reduction in packaging materials, with a particular focus on plastics that have surged in recent years. Despite criticisms from the packaging industry and concerns over food safety and increased costs, the regulation has moved forward, although Italian MEPs have voiced strong objections over its potential adverse effects on Italy's leading packaging sector.

To mitigate food waste, the ENVI committee's resolution includes a ban on ultra-light plastic bags under 15 microns, except where necessary for hygiene or as primary packaging for loose foods. Furthermore, it establishes ambitious waste reduction targets for plastic packaging, aiming for a 10 per cent reduction by 2030, escalating to 20 per cent by 2040. The regulation also advocates for the inclusion of recycled content in plastic packaging and explores the potential of biologically sourced plastics in the EU's decarbonisation efforts. Additionally, it proposes restrictions on hazardous chemicals in packaging, including PFAS and bisphenol A, due to their environmental and health risks.

The packaging sector's significant economic footprint in the EU, generating a â?¬355 billion turnover in 2018 and an increasing waste problem, underscores the urgency of these regulations. Despite resistance from various industry lobbies and the call for a more ambitious initial proposal, the ENVI committee's compromise reflects a crucial step towards addressing packaging waste and its environmental impact.