



Interview with Antonello Ciotti, President of PETCORE EUROPE

Leading the way on standards, quality, and collaboration

by Heike Fischer

Sustainability has many faces. We already experienced its comprehensive significance and impact on the economy during our Editour and shared this with you in our tour reports. Communication and information are particularly important aspects of this. And where better to learn about the current status of sustainability goals and initiatives than in Brussels itself? Here, I met Antonello Ciotti, President of PETCORE EUROPE.



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PETCORE EUROPE represents the complete PET value chain in Europe – from PET manufacturing to conversion into packaging and recycling, as well as other related activities. The association is at the forefront of efforts with all stakeholders to ensure the sustainable growth of PET as a packaging material of choice and to further increase post-consumer PET collection and recycling.

PETplanet: How is PETCORE supporting its members to work sustainably?

Ciotti: Maybe I can first give you an introduction. PETCORE represents the entire PET value chain: PET manufacturers, recyclers, brand owners, and machine producers. We have around 160 members – major

companies such as Dow Chemical, BASF, and Indorama Ventures, as well as leading brand owners including Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Danone, and Pepsi. Also, all the main recyclers and machine builders like Previero, Starlinger, and Erema are part of our network. The value chain is there!

But our role has changed. In the past, we were more like an Agora – the Hellenic central place where issues were discussed and reviewed. Today, we operate through several Working Groups focusing on technical matters that concern the entire value chain.

Despite the fact that PET is by far the largest collected and recycled polymer – official statistics from ICIS show that in 2022, an average of 75% of PET bottles in Europe were collected – PET is also the material that EU institutions are watching most closely. We have the SUP (Single-

Use Plastics) Directive, which is still to be fully implemented, and now the PPWD (Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive), which is changing the SUP targets that have not yet been achieved – and also redefining some of them.

For example, the average per EU member state should be 25% recycled PET in each bottle – but under the PPWD, the target has been increased to 30%. We are now talking to each brand individually; for instance, Coca-Cola has different sites, and each site must reach the 30% target. Even by bottle size – eg. in any given Coca-Cola location, the 500 ml bottle has to contain 30% recycled content.

At the moment, many members are a little confused. PETCORE's role is to "translate" and clarify the regulations coming from the institutions.

We also represent the voice of the value chain in Brussels, as we are recognised as a reliable partner – including worldwide: for example, by UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), where global targets are being defined to reduce plastic pollution. We meet with the INC (Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee) roughly every six months. This is important because some states claim that reducing plastic pollution is only possible by reducing plastic production – and we disagree with that.

We support EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) schemes in every country and promote global design-for-recycling guidelines. Our knowledge is based on the work of our specialised Working Groups, and their results are communicated and used for advocacy.

PETplanet: You mentioned the targets for the use of recycled material in each bottle – 30% by 2030. Where

should this recycled material come from, especially when major countries such as Spain, France, and Italy are still without a DRS?

Ciotti: Spain is implementing DRS much sooner than expected. France and Italy already have high collection rates. The introduction of a DRS would certainly increase the collection rate but they entail high costs – and the question is, who would pay for the extra cost? When you already have 75–77% collection and want to reach 90%, an investment of €2 billion sounds excessive. That's the debate.

Italy took the decision, long ago to have few (32) sorting centres with high capacity. We have an index to track their investment in sorting – if they improve and implement new streams, they stay in; if they fail to reach certain targets, they get limited access to material to be sorted. So, they are somehow forced to invest; otherwise, they are removed from the list of active sorting centres.

The problem is that every country is going its own way. In my opinion, Europe should act more uniformly and coordinate its efforts. Romania, for example, is struggling because there is not just one DRS – there are several competing systems which reduces the overall efficiency.

PETplanet: Another pressing topic is the quality of recycled material. There is a new Working Group focusing on NIAS (Non-Intentionally Added Substances), and there is the KOR Labs platform. Can you tell us more about these new developments?

Ciotti: KOR, the laboratory platform, monitors NIAS along the entire value chain by connecting accredited laboratories on a digital platform. It digitises the ordering process to simplify administrative tasks and improve traceability, presenting results in standardised formats that allow for further statistical analysis without reprocessing the raw data provided by the labs.

Material from India, China, and Indonesia is increasingly entering Europe – and it is often very competitive in price but not matching EU standards. We are asking the institutions for a level playing field so that non-European producers have to comply with the same rules as European ones. If the cost of collection is high, the cost of recycling is high – and this must be reflected in fair competition.

PETplanet: How do you assess the situation with the USA?

Ciotti: We are connected with several equivalent associations such as NAPCOR and ABI PET, and we are also in contact with partners in Japan. There isn't much material crossing the ocean, so in the case of tariffs, the impact on our business would be limited. In the US, only a few states – such as California, Florida, and New York City – have targets for using recycled content.

PETplanet: PETCORE organises a major conference for the entire PET value chain at the beginning of each year. The next conference will take place on February 5 and 6, 2026 in Rome. What can participants expect?

Ciotti: Well firstly of course we have branched out from our usual Brussels location and are holding the conference in Rome. This means we will attract local players and hear from industry partners working on the ground in the markets.

The core theme of the conference is the need to restore the competitiveness of the European PET industry, and we have a line-up of compelling speakers from across the value chain. They will be going into detail on some of the challenges they are facing and what they require of the Institutions to address them.

I am pleased to share that the conference is being sponsored by ICIS who are an invaluable knowledge partner. They will be making a number of presentations over the course of the two days and sharing global data and insights on trends. We will also hold our innovation summit where participants will get a glimpse of what the future will look like for our sector.

Developments at EU level will continue to be an important part of the discussions, and our experts will look to explain what industry players can expect on the regulatory horizon and what it will mean for them. We will be joined by several representatives from the EU institutions - including DG GROW, DG TRADE, DG ENV, EFSA who are based in Italy, the OLAF (investigation office) and several other institutions.

PETplanet: What do you like most about your work at PETCORE?

Ciotti: What I like most is being an interface between our members (the business side) and the institutions (the political side). Sometimes I struggle more with the members than with the institutions, because it's not always easy to present a unified position. But that's also what makes the work so interesting.

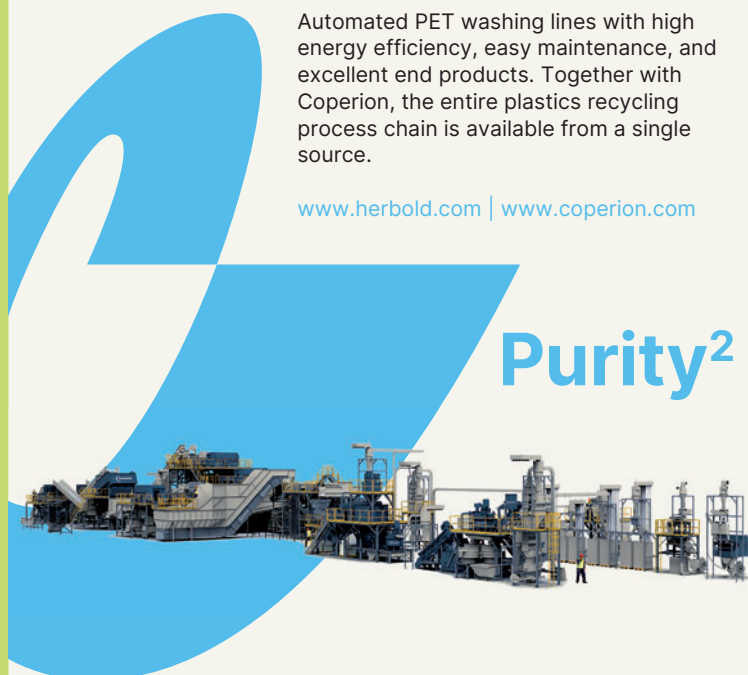
Arrivederci a Roma!

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