

## INTERVIEW

## Energy costs, cheap imports strain Italy's plastics reclaim sector / Mandatory recycled-content quotas for packaging, anti-dumping duties needed / Interview with Walter Regis, Assorimap president

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– By *Vladislav Vorotnikov* –



Assorimap president Walter Regis (Photo: Assorimap)

Italy's plastics recycling industry is under mounting pressure from high energy costs, weak demand for recycled materials, and competition from low-cost imports. In a recent letter to the Italian Ministry for the Environment, the country's recycling association **Assorimap** (Rome; [www.assorimap.it](http://www.assorimap.it)), warned of an imminent risk of sector-wide collapse. In this interview, association president *Walter Regis* outlines the challenges facing the industry and calls for urgent political action at both national and European levels.

### **PIE: How is the Italian plastics recycling sector doing?**

**Walter Regis:** Despite recycled polymer production reaching 883,000 t in 2024 – up 3.2% compared with 2023 – Italy's mechanical plastics recycling sector is struggling to take off. Turnover has declined slightly, down 0.8% to EUR 690 mn, and prices for secondary raw materials are at their lowest since 2020. The Italian supply chain is fragile and has been merely surviving for years.

That said, the first closures occurred between 2024 and 2025, with two companies.

### **In a September letter to the environmental ministry, you warned that the industry is at risk of collapse. What are the key reasons for this?**

**Regis:** For months now, the market has been unable to absorb recycled plastics. These materials have lost competitiveness both in Europe and [in Italy], especially against low-cost Asian competitors. The primary factor is energy costs, which in Italy are far higher than in Europe, especially compared with Spain, and even more so with countries such as China and Vietnam.

While low-cost Asian production certainly affects all of Europe, Italian operators face several additional disadvantages. These include high energy and labour costs, administrative burdens related to plant and waste management, inefficiencies in infrastructure – especially in central and southern Italy – and higher costs for the supply of materials (packaging waste).

**In your opinion, what steps need to be taken at the national or European level to address the existing difficulties?**

**Regis:** Mandatory recycled-content quotas for packaging should be introduced, anticipating the requirements set out in the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR). Subsequently, similar obligations should also apply for goods.

**What do you believe is going to happen to the Italian plastics recycling industry if European or Italian legislators refuse to take those steps?**

**Regis:** The Italian recycling industry, a symbol of Made in Italy excellence, will be destined for a progressive recession, condemning Italy to sanctions for failing to meet European targets and for the European plastics tax. The separate waste collection system will therefore be in complete chaos, and a question will arise about the value of separating waste if we can't recycle and thus recover the material.

**The problem of virgin plastic (often imported) sold under the guise of secondary seems to be one of the most pressing issues. How can it be addressed?**

**Regis:** I hope that, in line with European legislation, anti-dumping actions will be taken, with a request for "safeguard measures" involving a ban on all imports of recycled plastics.

**What is happening with investment activity in the industry amid these challenges?**

**Regis:** Investments that have already taken place, albeit minimally, in Italy, will develop outside the national and perhaps European borders, "giving away" our technology and production capacity. Others will create the circular economy.

**What is your outlook for the Italian plastics recycling industry? What changes do you expect through 2030?**

**Regis:** There are no prospects, only short-term planning. At the moment, this specific activity isn't generating profits. We need to restore economic margins, particularly by recognising the environmental value of plastics recycling at a financial level.

*Walter Regis* has been president of **Assorimaps** since 2016, having previously served as director of the organisation from 2009 to 2016. He also holds the position of vice-president for environmental affairs at **Confindustria**, representing Assorimap within the employers' federation. Regis has spent more than three decades in industrial and trade association roles, with a particular focus on environmental regulation, technical services, and waste management. He holds a degree in law from **Sapienza University of Rome**.

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