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## „We are the solution, not the problem“

**Frankfurt, 12 June 2019 – Interview with Dr. Christoph Schumacher, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications, ARBURG GmbH & Co. KG.**

### Arburg as a machine manufacturer supports circular economy. Why?

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** We want to contribute, as far as it is in our power, to the solution of this serious and possibly most important problem of our industry in the next decades. We are convinced that this challenge cannot be faced by individual members of the value-added chain alone.

### What can you at Arburg do for the cycle?

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** We as machine manufacturers can help develop new processing techniques and procedures. A classical historic issue is multi-component processing. It shows how new challenges create new techniques, and sometimes new techniques trigger the development of new products. In my view, Arburg is deeply involved in Design for Recycling. We firmly believe that in the next 20 to 30 years the production of plastics will also be oriented towards aspects of recycling, and this is where machine manufacturers are an important factor. We must ensure the production of these parts. And all the time we must bear in mind the common goal of production efficiency for our customers. I.e. to manufacture resource-efficient products with as little material and as little energy as possible.

### Will circular economy help improve the image of plastics?

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** We hope so. In our opinion, plastics as a reusable material are still the material of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But we also see the external framework parameters. I think a major problem is the idea that plastics are waste products. Plastics materials do not belong in the oceans or the ditches but in a recycling chain. Mechanical engineering is an enabler, it enables recycling of plastics. You can argue over

the need of packaging a cucumber. But you cannot argue about the necessity of plastics in medical technology and in everything affecting people. In this application everyone demands the highest quality product, for instance, when it comes to infusions or stents.

### **Is circular economy a business opportunity?**

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** The whole issue must make sense from an economic point of view. The public would refuse to believe us if we pretended to have missionary aspirations. We are an industry. We actually see a business opportunity in circular economy. We could sell the value-added cycle all over the world. There are still so many regions where circular economy does not play any role at all, in many Asian countries, for example, but also in parts of the US. If we could export the European or the German standard to all these markets, we would have an incredible amount of work from this field alone in the next decades. Arburg has customers who already make money as part of circular economies in countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Brazil and also in the US. They collect PET bottles, process them into PET flakes to manufacture PET bottles again.

### **Whose task will it be to export entire value-added chains to the world?**

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** That's difficult. Circular economy only works if everyone is involved in the value-added chain. But at present, there are no such consortiums to serve as export model. As a rule, such an idea can be successful only if you approach it systematically. All those involved must be convinced, there must be market incentives and legal regulation to define the framework.

### **What if the EU introduces circular economy and products become more expensive, but competitors from overseas offer them cheaper because they can produce more economically with virgin material?**

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** That would be inadmissible distortion of competition. If the EU stipulated certain practices by law that other manufacturers in the global market did not adopt, and if as a consequence our markets were not regulated correspondingly, legislators would have to ensure that other competitors operate under the same conditions in these markets. Of course, this would aggravate market chances for European products in countries that do not have the same environmental standards if consumer behaviour does not change in those countries.

### **Which role does the consumer play?**

**Dr. Christoph Schumacher:** Consumers are an essential lever, but I feel, that they cannot really understand the issue at present. This is reflected in the discussion on biodegradable products, for example. Consumers erroneously believe that they are absolutely good and can replace oil-based plastics. They also see pictures of whales with plastic bags in their stomachs or sea turtles in fishing nets. That's why in a discussion you don't stand a chance. What I hope for is that the plastics sector, from material manufacturing to the consumers,

finds a common definition. That we recognise circular economy as a common goal and that we then position ourselves correspondingly.

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In our world, plastics are indispensable. The downside is the littering. Carelessly discarded plastics products condense to form thick carpets, not just on rivers and seas, but also on land. A complete circular economy could prevent this evil and put the focus back on the benefits of plastics. In order for this to be a success, we all need to work together: processors, raw material manufacturers, mechanical engineers and recyclers, but also brand owners, end consumers and politicians.

VDMA will shine the spotlight on circular economy at the leading K 2019 trade fair in Düsseldorf in October and show how closed loops can work effectively. Throughout the process, stakeholders will be having their say in a series of interviews in the run-up to this international industry event.

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**About VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery**

More than 230 companies are members of the association, covering more than 90 percent of the industry's production activities in Germany. Ten percent of our member companies come from Austria, Switzerland and France. The German member companies represent sales of EUR 7 billion in core machinery and EUR 10 billion including peripheral technology. Every fourth plastics machine produced in the world comes from Germany; the export rate is 70 percent. Ulrich Reifenhäuser, Member of the Management Board of the Reifenhäuser Group, is the chairman of the association.