1. Introduction

The adverse effects on the environment caused by plastic pollution is a well-known fact, and therefore many institutions, like the European Union for example, are trying to reduce plastic consumption and promote plastic recycling.

To this end, some supermarkets charge their customers for plastic bags, and in some places more efficient reusable or biodegradable materials are being used to replace plastics. Furthermore, some communities and businesses have put a ban on some commonly used plastic items, such as bottled water and plastic bags.

The issue of plastic pollution is especially clear from the well-known custom of on-the-go consumption that has led to transporting food and beverages with plastic containers, plastic carrier bags, disposable coffee cups and single-use plastic bottles. Specifically, as we will see in the following pages, plastic pollution is even more problematic in the case of disposable coffee cups. Even though they are made largely of paper, disposable coffee cups are coated with plastic polyethylene that is tightly bonded to the paper to make them waterproof for holding liquid. In addition, recycling coffee cups is made harder because the beverage contaminates them. This means coffee cups cannot be recycled at standard recycling infrastructures and have to be taken to special facilities.

To deal with the problem presented by disposable coffee cups, at the end of 2017 the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC), a select committee of the House of Commons in the Parliament of the United Kingdom², proposed that the British government apply a minimum 25p levy on disposable cups, to be paid by the consumer on top of the price of the coffee. This proposal has yet to be put into practice due to its rejection by the government.

In this context, the following pages will touch on how the the European Union is fighting plastic pollution (and, specifically, pollution from plastic carrier bags)³, through Directive (EU)

---

1 Madrid Open University (MOU) – UDIMA.
2 The remit of the EAC is to consider the extent to which the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as to audit their performance against sustainable development and environmental protection targets.
3 At the time of writing of this report, on 27 March 2019, the European Parliament agreed on the ambitious measures proposed by the Commission to tackle marine litter coming from the 10 single-use