



## **THE FLIP SIDE OF THE PLASTIC REJECTION**

Threats the contemplated move away from plastics poses to the economy and environment.

The European Parliament's decision to ban selected plastic items in the EU and the announced plans of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to fully eliminate plastic tableware by 2025 received positive reaction from the community and were welcomed by most people as long-awaited steps towards better environment. However, the side effects of these measures are not discussed as widely.

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**LACK OF CRITICAL THINKING GIVES RISE TO ANTI-SCIENTIFIC MYTHS, WHICH MAY BE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE INITIAL PROBLEM.**

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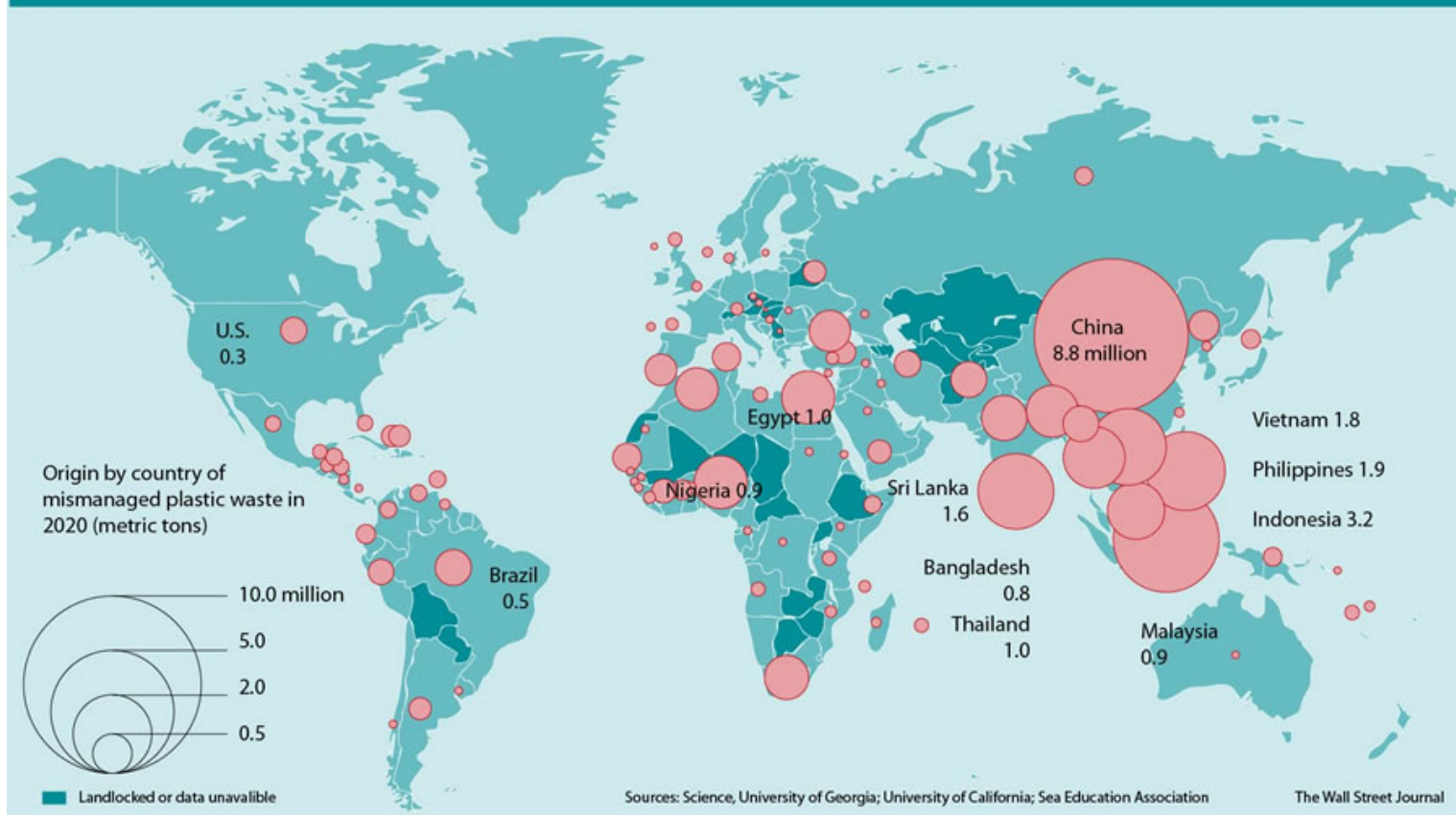
### **Myths and reality**

The issue of the Great Pacific garbage patch the size of Texas has come up in the media since 1997. Though environmentalists fail to produce documented evidence of the collection of plastic debris floating in the ocean, and marine researcher Charles Moore who first discovered the patch admits having somewhat exaggerated his findings, the trash island remains a key argument in the debates around the tragedy of ocean pollution and a sore point for the society.

Lack of critical thinking gives rise to anti-scientific myths, which may be even more dangerous than the initial problem. According to the latest sociological surveys, 74% of Russians are willing to give up plastic tableware, while in England and the US those in favour of total plastic elimination make up over 50% of the population.

# SOURCES OF PLASTIC MARINE DEBRIS

Ocean detritus | Much of the world's mismanaged plastic waste ends up fouling global waters



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THE POPULIST INITIATIVES CAN BE COUNTERED BY SYSTEMIC EFFORTS TO IMPROVE PACKAGING QUALITY ACROSS THE BOARD AND, HENCE, REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT.

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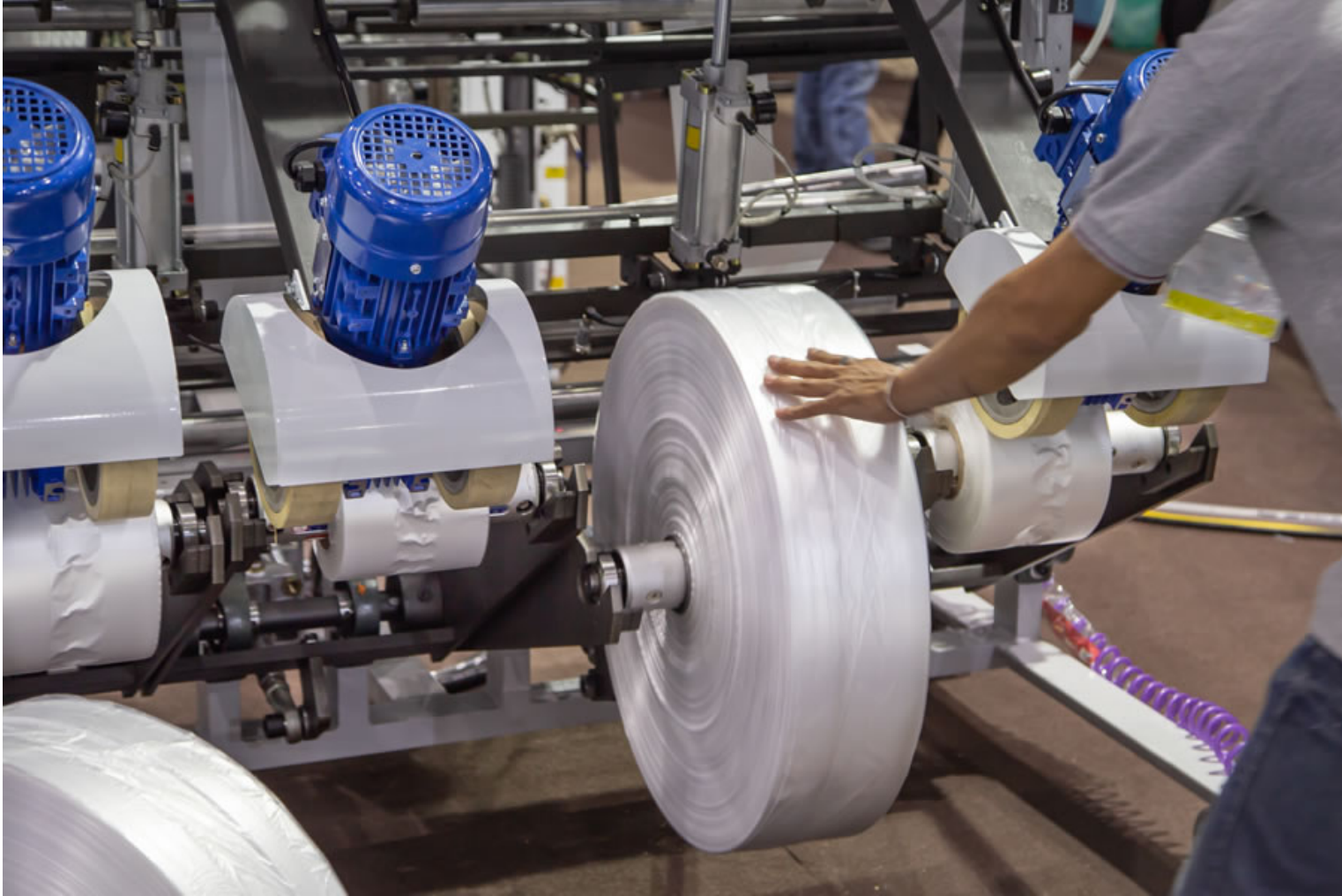
What makes the situation absurd is that main pollution sources are based in the Asia Pacific, as seen from the map. With the European Union accounting for less than a tenth of waste generated by China, Indonesia and Philippines, the measures it takes seem insignificant given the overall scale of the problem. Meanwhile, their wide coverage by the media shapes the public view of plastics as a harmful material and undermines the trust for its manufacturers.

## A blow for the economy

Reduced manufacturing of plastic items cannot but lead to job cuts across the globe. According to the Plastics Industry Association, nearly 31,000 Americans are employed in plastic bag production only, while in India, the plastic industry engages at least 4 million people.

However, job cuts may not present such a challenge compared to what is forecast by IHS Markit's leading researchers. According to them, even if secondary product suppliers half meet polyolefin demand growing at 4% a year, the petrochemical industry balance may still be under threat.

Lower demand for the most wanted materials creates uncertainty for the future of massive capacities that are currently under construction, but will soon be ready for the launch. With stagnating global economy, a blow to the petrochemical industry, its key driving force, will come at a high price for all market players.



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The participants of the 2019 IHS World Petrochemical Conference see systemic efforts to improve packaging quality across the board and, hence, reduce environmental footprint as an alternative to today's populist initiatives. We need to steer clear of anti-scientific projects, investing instead in promising petrochemical themes, such as molecular recycling.