

To: Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
CC: Maroš Šefčovič, Executive Vice-President for European Green deal, Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, European Commission

Re: Action on Chemical Pollution is Critical for EU citizens' and Future Generations' Survival

Brussels, 18 September 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

On behalf of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the largest network of environmental organisations in Europe, I want to extend our appreciation for your personal commitment to the European Green Deal. Its launch marked a historic milestone, illustrating your dedication to tackling the critical environmental and health challenges of our time, your vision of a future where humans thrive with nature and your goal to protect our future generations. **We commend your efforts in mobilising political will and instigating the transformative changes that are imperative for the European prosperity.**

Nonetheless, **we find ourselves deeply concerned about the prolonged delay in delivering the zero pollution and toxic-free pillars of the European Green Deal, in particular the REACH Regulation and the commitment to ban the export of very toxic chemicals not authorised in the EU.**

In your recent [State of the European Union](#) speech, you highlighted that *"a fair and just transition... means a fair outcome for future generations – to live on a healthy planet."* Yet, we must confront the reality that we are falling short on the commitment of leaving a healthier planet to our future generations. Each day we are faced with more worrying news. As you can see in a recent [article](#), **the Earth is alarmingly far from the safe operating space for humanity because of human-caused pollution and destruction of the natural world.** This unsettling revelation underscores the urgency of our environmental commitments. However, we are concerned that chemical pollution, one of the three major planetary threats of our times that exacerbates climate change and biodiversity loss was absent in your speech.

The EU's failure to properly regulate industrial chemicals is written in the blood and urine of all Europeans. Researchers found that the **population is exposed to "alarmingly high" levels of hazardous chemicals, especially for teenagers, children and newborns.** Very toxic industrial chemicals have been found not only in blood, but also in breast milk and placentas, meaning that babies are born pre-polluted. **This chemical pollution is linked to severe health damage, including contributions to cancer, infertility, obesity, asthma, neurological diseases as well as developmental disorders, genital deformities and lower IQ in children.**

We cannot turn a blind eye to pollution and continue this self-destruction. As Europe, we need to take a step forward and set the example for the rest of the world. **We must stop exporting**

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chemicals that are banned in the EU due to their unacceptable risks to people and the environment.

The planet needs to be respected, and businesses need to adapt to make the green transition happen. The REACH revision holds immense significance in safeguarding not only human health and the environment but also our economy from the costly effects of toxic chemicals. Strengthening REACH will empower EU businesses to enhance chemical safety, promote transparency, while promoting future-proof, resilient and competitive European businesses [as many claim](#).

The EU has found to its detriment how China and the US have taken leadership in areas which should have been European areas of brilliance – solar and wind power were European leads, but now dominated by China, and the US and China are ahead on electric vehicles that could have been a European success story had industrial efforts been spent less on the then status quo and more spent on preparing for the future we are living now. The same option stands before us for chemicals – Europe can embrace regulation that catalyses innovation and competitiveness, or listen to laggard lobbyists wanting to remain in today's reality, while forgetting that we need to really focus now on preparing for the future. **A progressive regulation agenda is a competitiveness agenda. REACH is essential for the future of the sustainability and resilience of the EU chemicals industry.**

In our [previous communication](#) with you in May 2023, we underscored the importance of delivering the toxic-free pillar as an indispensable element of the Green Deal. Unfortunately, we are disheartened by the fact that the **REACH proposal has yet to see the light of day, despite having been on the European Commission's agenda for nearly three years.**

Chemical pollution is an intangible problem with devastating long-term consequences as you well know. That is why we appeal to your responsibility and leadership towards all Europeans to tackle it with the necessary measures. President von der Leyen, this moment offers a compelling opportunity to demonstrate resolute your Green Deal commitments supporting the transition to a sustainable future that we all share. **We therefore request that, in the moment of the negotiations of the next Commission's planning of proposals, you give priority to an ambitious reform of the REACH Regulation.**

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We eagerly await your continued support and action towards addressing the pollution problem as threat to our survival that should not be forgotten and would like to request for a meeting with your relevant cabinet members.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick ten Brink,
Secretary General, EEB

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