

Joint letter

**Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain
and Sweden**

**To: Mr Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the
European Commission;
Mr Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for the Environment,
Oceans and Fisheries;
Mr Thierry Breton, Commissioner for Internal Market**

Dear Executive Vice-President Timmermans, Commissioner Sinkevičius and
Commissioner Breton,

We, the ministers of environment of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland,
Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Sweden reiterate our strong support for
the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, including in view of greening the
chemicals sector following the Green Deal, and we have now come to a
point in time where implementing the Chemicals Strategy in relevant
legislation is vital.

It is crucial to maintain the high level of ambition of the strategy throughout
its implementation. This is a prerequisite to achieve the ambitions of the
European Green Deal and related initiatives, and to maintain global
leadership in sound and sustainable chemicals management.

The presence of harmful chemical substances in our bodies and our
environment is not unavoidable. On the contrary, the Chemicals Strategy for
Sustainability contains a robust action plan for a transition to a toxic-free
environment. **We call on you to live up to the Chemicals Strategy's
ambitions and make them a reality.**

In reforming the EU horizontal chemicals regulation, REACH, we must
introduce more automation, efficiency and simplicity to speed up the phase-
out of the most harmful substances. We must protect consumers better and
live up to our citizens' legitimate expectation that products in their everyday
life are safe and free from the most harmful substances. Therefore, we need
to rapidly phase out the most harmful substances from all consumer

products using the new default regime of the Chemicals Strategy, the ‘extended generic risk management approach’. This regime will cover substances that, for example, disrupt our hormonal systems, cause cancer and adversely affect and persistently accumulate in our environment. It should cover articles as well as chemical products. **Inserting a target year in the regulation itself, by which time consumer products must be free from the most harmful substances, should be a political priority.**

Furthermore, it would be appropriate to consider linking the regulation to the harmonised hazard classification system, to ensure any newly identified ‘most harmful substances’ are automatically covered by a restriction.

In this regard, derogations from the generic approach should be allowed only if their use is deemed ‘essential’, i.e. necessary for health or safety, or critical for the functioning of society, and no alternatives are acceptable from the standpoint of the environment and health. **We caution against any combination of essential use with existing concepts -such as ‘safe use’ or ‘minimal exposure’- which could undermine the core idea of essential use.** Only if applied coherently, and underpinned by clear criteria, will the essential use concept have the potential to facilitate phase-out of the most harmful substances.

Significant progress has been made in the field of chemicals legislation in recent decades, which has demonstrated the valuable role of legislation in moving towards a toxic-free environment. However, it is still a fact that babies are born with a cocktail of harmful chemicals in their blood, resulting from foetal exposure during pregnancy. As children grow up, the risk of long-term effects from this chemical cocktail will remain or worsen, due to the additional exposure to harmful substances in everyday life, including in childcare articles, toys, food contact materials, cosmetic products, furniture, textiles, drinking water and food. Scientific evidence indicates that this continuous life-long exposure leads to an increase in a variety of human health problems, such as cancer, infertility, a weakened immune system, diabetes and obesity. **The introduction of one or several mixture assessment factors in risk assessment will be a cornerstone to ensure the protection of citizens and future generations.**

We, the signing ministers, stand ready to reallocate our resources to the new default regime based on the generic risk management approach. We find it fundamental – in order to ensure the necessary speed and maintain shared

ownership – that **such a regime allows Member States to take initiatives for new measures and to share the work** with the European Commission and the European Chemicals Agency.

Finally, we underscore the importance of the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability as a stepping-stone for establishing and maintaining non-toxic material cycles, which is essential to achieve a clean circular economy for future generations.

Leonore Gewessler

*Minister of Climate Action, Environment, Energy,
Mobility, Innovation and Technology,*

Austria

Zakia Khattabi

*Minister of the Climate, the Environment,
Sustainable Development and Green Deal,*

Belgium

Lea Wermelin

Minister for Environment,

Denmark

Maria Ohisalo

Minister of the Environment and Climate Change,

Finland

Joëlle Welfring

*Minister for the Environment, Climate and
Sustainable Development*

Luxembourg

Espen Barth Eide

Minister of Climate and Environment,

Norway

Teresa Ribera

*Minister for the Ecological Transition and the
Demographic Challenge,*

Spain

Annika Strandhäll

Minister for Climate and the Environment,

Sweden

