



## European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



### **Opening remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans at the press conference on the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability**

Brussels, 14 October 2020

Thank you all for staying or for joining in right now. I am really happy to be here together with Virginijus to present the Chemicals Strategy and the 8<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Plan, two documents we adopted today in College.

Chemicals are part and parcel of our daily life, and they play a crucial role in many of the innovations that help green our economy. But chemicals should also not hurt our health or the environment. Today, sadly too many chemicals still do.

We use a huge variety of products every day. Whether it's the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the toys of our kids. And they all should be safe beyond doubt.

So, one of the first actions we will take is to ensure that the most harmful chemicals no longer find their way into consumer products. In most cases we now assess these chemicals one by one – and remove them when we find out that they are unsafe.

We will just flip this logic on its head. Instead of reacting, we want to prevent. As a rule, the use of the most harmful substances will be prohibited in consumer products.

This will apply for example to chemicals that cause cancers or gene mutations, chemicals that affect the reproductive or the hormonal system, or chemicals that slowly build up in your body.

We also need to better protect our natural environment from chemical pollution. As a priority, we will ban PFAS. This is a so-called forever chemical: highly persistent, causing enormous health and environmental damage. We will only allow it where it is absolutely essential for society.

As we increase the level of protection, we will also support the green transition of the chemical sector and its value chain. It is of vital importance for our economy. We want European industry to lead in producing and using chemicals that are safe and sustainable by design. This is really the essence of the Green Deal: we protect the planet, and deliver a new model for sustainable economic growth. Also in the chemicals sector.

This Strategy also aims to diversify where we get the critical chemicals used in the EU. For several chemicals, including chemicals needed for medicines, we rely heavily on a limited number of suppliers – and we have seen what the consequences of that is during the pandemic.

Across the globe, we wish to help all our partners to step up their sustainability efforts on chemicals. This requires that for us to be consistent. With legislation, we will ensure that chemicals banned in the EU cannot be produced here for exports either.

In all, with the Chemicals Strategy, we protect ourselves and the planet, and allow European industry to thrive. We have the most advanced chemicals legislation in the world, but as science keeps evolving, our legislation must adapt accordingly. The Green Deal carries a promise of zero pollution; not just zero emissions, also zero pollution. Today we take the first step to deliver it.

On the Environmental Action Plan, a few words, before handing it over to Virginijus. Because the European Green Deal already sets the main focus, our eighth program is a lot more compact and focused than the previous ones.

It aims to accelerate our transition to a climate-neutral, clean, and circular economy. And I think it will create a very important monitoring system.

And finally, let me just say also a few words about Aarhus. We also propose today to amend the regulation on the Aarhus Convention. This convention gives the public the right to receive information on the environment, the right to participate in environmental decision-making, and the right to challenge public decisions.

This amendment will give environmental NGOs more possibilities to seek review of decisions by EU

institutions, if they are of the opinion that these decisions undermine EU environmental law.

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