

For the attention of Prime Minister Alexander de Croo
cc European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

20 February 2024

Dear Prime Minister De Croo,

We are appalled that today the Belgian Presidency of the EU is organising, alongside the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) and its Belgian industry member Essenscia, a closed event for chemical and other intensive industrial energy users and high-level political leaders at BASF's chemicals plant in Antwerp.

By overseeing and participating in this event you have failed to recognise the culpability of the corporate interests attending in contributing to the climate, toxic pollution, and biodiversity crises which pose a tremendous risk to planetary boundaries and a death threat to communities around the world. These crises are a result of decades of irresponsible corporate decision-making that has insisted on producing and using hazardous substances and burning fossil fuels for profit.

In the past five years, BASF, other chemical corporations and intensive energy users, and their lobby groups, have waged a huge lobby campaign in Brussels and across Europe to undermine and destroy ambitious regulations promised by the von der Leyen Commission. The goals of the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability and the Farm to Fork strategy to restrict hazardous chemicals in consumer and agricultural uses in the EU, as well as to prevent the export of banned substances, including chemicals and pesticides, have faded away. Meanwhile industry has also secured massive support for new fossil fuel infrastructure and for [false solutions](#) to the climate crisis such as hydrogen, carbon capture, and offsets.

Industry has a long history of [crying wolf](#) and exaggerating the consequences of progressive green policies. And, in a big year for elections in Belgium and across the EU, too many politicians are falling for the rhetoric that there should be a "pause" in new environmental rules and that net zero is somehow as good as real zero. Politicians have a responsibility to show genuine leadership rather than following the latest greed-driven, populist, scaremongering.

But rather than spearheading an approach to stand up to these lobbies and reverse these trends, instead today you are rewarding big polluting industries with privileged access to high-level decision-makers and the expectation of even more political and policy support.

This event is an insult to [communities](#) in Flanders, not least those living with PFAS 'forever chemicals' pollution from the 3M plant in Antwerp; in Wallonia; and across the rest of the EU and beyond; who are currently confronting the reality of the industry-generated toxic pollution crisis in terms of their personal health and that of their local biodiversity, air, water, and soils.

This event with its emphasis on industry's "business case" and even a "European Industrial Deal" is entirely wrong-headed, and sits at odds with your Presidency's [promise](#) of "decisive

and holistic action” to tackle the climate, biodiversity, and pollution crises. It puts big business in the driving seat to promote its agenda of avoiding legislation, demanding public subsidy, and pushing a corporate greenwashed, deeply-flawed 'net zero' approach.

This event, and the political agenda it represents, should not be going ahead.

- We urge you and all other political leaders attending to stop providing such privileged access to industries that are known for their harmful products and practices, as well as for their lobbying against action for healthier communities, resilient ecosystems, and genuine carbon reduction.
- We implore you to prioritise the protection of citizens and environments suffering from chemical, pesticide, and fossil fuel pollution, and to fight for an ambitious implementation of the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the Farm to Fork strategy, and action to ensure that big polluters can no longer evade responsibility for the climate crisis.

Signed by

ARCHE NOAH

Arnika - Toxics and Waste Programme

Association For Promotion Sustainable Development ,

Association of Ethical Shareholders Germany

Aurelia Stiftung

Bond Beter Leefmilieu

Break Free From Plastic Europe

Broederlijk Delen

Canopea

Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

CIEL

ClientEarth

Climate Express

Climaxi

Corporate Europe Observatory

Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V.

Eco Hvar

ECOCITY

Ecologistas en Acción

Ecology without borders foundation

EEB European Environmental Bureau

Entraide et Fraternité

EnvMed Network - European Network for Environmental Medicine

Euro Coop

Exit Plastik Alliance

Foodwatch International

Foundation for the protection of Biodiversity in Bulgaria

Friends of the Earth Europe

Générations Futures

GLOBAL 2000 Austria

GMWatch

Greenpeace Belgique
Grondrecht
Grootouders voor het Klimaat
Hamraah Foundation
Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL)
Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport)
Hogar sin Tóxicos
Humundi
IndyAct
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy Europe
Isde, International Society of Doctors for Environment
Klimaatcoalitie Coalition Climat
La Grande Puissance de Dieu
Les Amis de la Terre – Belgique
LobbyControl
Muchi Children's Home
Natagora
Nature & Progrès
Navdanya International
Observatoire du principe pollueur-payeur
Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe
Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany
Pesticide Action Network in Mexico (RAPAM)
Pesticide Action Network Netherlands
Plastic Change
Plastic Soup Foundation
Plough Back The Fruits
Polish Zero Waste Association
POLLINIS
Race for Water
Recycling Network Benelux
Société Scientifique de Médecine Générale (SSMG)
SOS Faim
Stichting Mission Lanka
The Good Lobby
TROCA - Plataforma por um Comércio Internacional Justo
Via Pontica Foundation
WeMove Europe
Women Engage for a Common Future – WECF
Women on Farms Project, South Africa
ZERO - Association for the Sustainability of the Earth System
11 march movement

Please send any replies to Vicky Cann, Corporate Europe Observatory
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