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European transformation in chemicals policy draws closer

Chemicals Strategy

Today, the European Commission has just presented its Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability. The Strategy is a step in the right direction towards an European chemicals revolution and can provide the framework for a more sustainable, clean and competitive chemicals industry. The strategy proposes an ecological innovation offensive for the chemical industry in order to remain economically strong in the future. Despite the progress made in recent decades, many hazardous chemicals are still present in everyday products such as toys, cosmetics, textiles, leather and food packaging such as endocrine disrupters, which are suspected of being carcinogenic and causing infertility. Studies on endocrine disrupters such as bisphenol-A suggest that they harm children.

Sven Giegold MEP, shadow rapporteur for the resolution in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, the committee responsible, comments:

"The EU Commission has put forward a good strategy for the necessary transition of the chemical industry. The European Union is heralding a chemical turnaround that combines the protection of health and the environment with a future-oriented industrial policy in line with the Green Deal. It opens the door for more protection against toxic chemicals in everyday life and for a sustainable, competitive and pollution-free European chemical industry.

"With cleaner chemicals made in Europe we can protect consumers and safeguard around 1.2 million jobs in the European chemical industry. The Commission has achieved a major success in consumer protection. The strategy marks the beginning of the phase-out of toxic chemicals in our everyday lives. Dangerous substances will be banned more quickly, more efficiently and more widely in products. Endocrine disruptors such as bisphenol-A will soon be phased out of many applications.

"Today's strategy is also a success for us Greens/EFA; for a long time the sustainable restructuring of the chemical industry was not a priority of the Commission. It is high time to take toxic chemicals out of circulation. The chemical industry must not repeat the mistakes of other key technologies and must now invest in future-proof, sustainable technologies."

Bas Eickhout MEP, Greens/EFA Vice Chair of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, comments:

"European chemicals legislation has so far lacked enforcement. It is good that the EU Commission is meeting our demand to set uniform minimum standards for controls by national authorities and direct control by the Commission to ensure greater consumer protection. It is essential to withdraw the marketing right if manufacturers or importers submit grossly incorrect or incomplete data. Otherwise, those companies that have submitted proper registration dossiers will be at a disadvantage.

"We welcome the fact that the European Commission's proposal finally intends to include sustainability criteria such as energy and resource consumption in the parameters to be reported under REACH. However, reporting alone does not go far enough. The chemical industry can only achieve its climate targets if it embarks on a genuine circular economy and massively expands its use of renewable energies.

"The industry's enormous consumption of energy and resources is incompatible with economic activity within our planetary boundaries. Unfortunately, chemicals strategy lacks a clear commitment to climate protection and the abandonment of fossil fuels and raw materials in favour of renewable, sustainably produced raw materials. The next step must be a European supply chain law."

Background
The European Commission includes in its strategy fundamental demands of the European Parliament such as harmonised criteria for the authorisation of chemicals on the European market instead of case-by-case assessment, a revision of the chemicals regulation REACH ("Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals") to improve the authorisation, evaluation and restriction of chemicals and a broad ban on endocrine disrupters in consumer products. The chemicals strategy is part of the Zero Pollutant Action Plan of the European Green Deal. The European Parliament has long been calling for the Chemicals Strategy and the EU Commission has repeatedly postponed its publication.

The Chemicals Strategy can be found online here.

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