

Brussels, 03 February 2026

Urgent call for concrete short-term action to address the crisis in the European chemical sector

Honourable President von der Leyen,
Honourable Executive Vice-President Séjourné,
Honourable Commissioner Hoekstra,

We are writing to you, as Belgian Members of the European Parliament from the EPP Group, to express our deep concern about the rapid and accelerating deterioration of Europe's chemical industry, and to call for concrete short-term measures with tangible impact by 2026 or early 2027.

9% of total EU capacity lost

Europe's chemical sector is experiencing a downturn of unprecedented speed and depth. Between early 2022 and end-2025, companies announced the closure of 160 chemical production installations across Europe of which 126 account for roughly 37 million tonnes of capacity, close to 9% of total EU capacity. This translates into a profound social impact, with around 20,000 direct jobs and an estimated 90,000 indirect jobs affected.

Equally alarming is the collapse in forward-looking investment. Confirmed investments into new capacity have fallen dramatically, leaving Europe with a growing gap between closures and new projects. Unfortunately, Europe is perceived as a high-cost, high-uncertainty industrial location. At the same time, the competitive landscape is shifting fast due to global overcapacity and the expansion of production in other regions.

This erosion matters far beyond one sector. Chemicals are the foundation industry that enables value chains across manufacturing, from construction and automotive to clean tech, pharmaceuticals, packaging, and defence-related supply chains. When chemicals leave Europe, entire downstream clusters become more fragile, costs rise, and dependencies multiply.

Lowest utilisation rates since 1981

Belgium has long been a cornerstone of European chemical strength. The Antwerp port area forms one of the largest integrated chemical clusters globally, with exceptional logistics, a dense pipeline network, and highly productive sites. Belgium's industrial ecosystem is therefore a strategic European asset.

However, Belgium is not immune to the European crisis. We are seeing a worrying series of signals and decisions affecting investment confidence and employment prospects, including developments involving Celanese, Evonik, Envalior, BASF, TotalEnergies and INEOS. Installations have been idled for extended periods, restructuring announcements have multiplied, and major assets are scheduled for closure. In the Antwerp chemical cluster, installations are currently running at around 65% of capacity, the lowest level since 1981, while a normal utilisation rate would be 80–85%.

A limited number of flagship projects can temporarily offset negative figures on paper, but they cannot mask a fast-worsening competitiveness gap affecting the broader cluster and its supply chains. Moreover, the decision by Vioneo to cancel a flagship green project to produce fossil-free plastic and relocate investment to China is a stark warning about Europe's ability to attract first-of-a-kind industrial projects during the transition.

Belgium should serve as a warning for Europe: a highly efficient industrial base facing conditions in which even top-performing sites struggle to justify continued production or new investment.

Detrimental for EU's strategic autonomy, jobs and climate paradox

If current trends continue, Europe risks turning from a global chemical producer into a structurally import-dependent market, first for basic molecules and intermediates, then increasingly for specialty and advanced strategic inputs. Chemical sites are anchor points in integrated clusters: the closure of a single cracker, polymer unit, or key intermediate plant reverberates through downstream users, contractors, logistics providers, and SMEs. Once these ecosystems unravel, rebuilding them is extraordinarily difficult.

This poses risks for the strategic autonomy of the European union, for all kind of applications: water treatment, healthcare supply chains, pharmaceuticals, batteries, semiconductors, renewable energy components, insulation materials, and defence applications. Import dependency in these inputs is not an abstract concern; it becomes acute the moment geopolitical tension disrupts trade routes or creates export restrictions.

Besides, there is an important social aspect. The jobs at stake are not only the direct jobs in plants, but also the wider employment base of maintenance, engineering, port logistics, suppliers, and research activities. This is a major socio-economic risk for Belgium and for Europe. It poses a threat to the productive backbone that sustains our welfare model.

Finally, there is also a climate paradox. When production moves to regions with higher carbon intensity, Europe may reduce territorial emissions but increase global emissions through carbon leakage, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of our climate strategy.

The same obstacles recur across Europe

Across companies and Member States, a consistent set of drivers is repeatedly cited:

1. **High energy prices**, particularly the persistent gap between European and competitor-region gas and electricity costs, compounded by network charges and levies.
2. **High carbon costs and cumulative regulatory pressure**, which puts European industry at a severe competitiveness disadvantage that is self-inflicted, including uncertainty around compliance burdens and permitting complexity.

3. **Weak demand** in key downstream sectors, lowering operating rates and eroding margins, especially in the absence of a viable business model for higher-priced low-carbon or European products.
4. **Global overcapacity and import pressure**, with increasing volumes of competitively priced product reaching Europe, while other regions actively support domestic production through industrial policy.

These factors reinforce each other. Low demand and import pressure reduce utilisation; low utilisation kills the business case for investment; and without investment, Europe's technology edge and future competitiveness erode further.

Therefore, we respectfully urge the Commission to swiftly adopt a strong set of short-term measures capable of restoring confidence and delivering tangible improvements on the factory floor within the next 12–18 months.

This should include rapid relief from high energy and high carbon costs, a reduction of cumulative regulatory pressure that puts European industry at a competitiveness disadvantage, measures to support demand for low-carbon and European produced products in key downstream sectors, and a firm response to global overcapacity and rising import pressure driven by state-backed industrial policies elsewhere.

Europe cannot afford a slow-motion dismantling of its chemical base. Belgium's cluster illustrates both the strategic value and the current vulnerability of European industry. What is needed now is not another diagnosis, but a short-term package that improves competitiveness quickly enough to prevent irreversible capacity loss and to keep the transition investable. Europe's strategic autonomy, jobs and prosperity is at stake.

Yours sincerely,

**MEP Wouter Beke
MEP Pascal Arimont
MEP Liesbet Sommen**