

To: Klaus Iohannis, President of Romania

CC:

- Donald Tusk, President of the European Council
- Heads of States of EU Member States
- Grația Leocadia Gavrilescu, Vice Prime Minister, Minister of the Environment
- Sorina Pintea, Minister of Health
- Miguel Arias Cañete, European Commissioner for Climate Action & Energy
- Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
- Vytenis Andriukaitis, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Brussels, 29 April 2019

RE: Sibiu Summit - health protection from environmental and climate threats needs to shape our common European future

Dear President Iohannis,

As you are preparing the conversation on the future of Europe at the upcoming Sibiu Summit, and considering how the EU can deliver on issues that really matter to people, HEAL would like to underline the clear added value of the European Union action on environment and climate protection for people's health.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a [leading European not-for-profit organisation](#) addressing how the environment affects human health in the EU and beyond. Our alliance brings together over 75 member organisations working on tackling environmental and climate threats to health, with a focus on clean air, phase out of hazardous chemicals, climate change mitigation, clean energy and healthy mobility.

At the Sibiu Summit, HEAL encourages you to show leadership in making environmental protection and climate change mitigation a priority for the Future of Europe strategy. Such a focus is clearly needed given the body of science that shows of the many health impacts from environmental pollution and climate change, and with a view to protecting those who carry the greatest risk of being harmed, our children.

We invite you to consider especially the following areas that provide a clear added value for people's health, especially future generations:

1 / Healthier Europe: a reinforced commitment on environment and climate

The EU has been a global leader on environmental protection and climate action. In order to steer activities of the next decade and ensure the success of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, a strategy in the form of a detailed Environment Action Programme (EAP) is needed. An 8th EAP should be the guidance document of the overall EU budget 2021 –2027 and clearly linked with MFF programmes. It should also be clearly referenced in the European Semester; include regular evaluation of the activities and a dedicated steering committee.

The Programme should also contain stronger activities from the EU environmental implementation review, and last but not least a communications plan to increase awareness of both policy-makers and the public on the importance of environmental and climate measures and the leading role the EU plays.

2 / Safer Europe: a European Union that protects

- From climate threats

Climate change is the greatest threat to health of the 21st century. At the same time, measures to tackle global warming offer significant opportunities to prevent disease and ill-health.

The EU has been at the forefront in initiating measures to drive down greenhouse gases emissions, and plays a leading role in the implementation of the landmark Paris Agreement. In order to succeed, ambitious national commitments by EU member states are needed, echoing the concerns of the growing climate movements with Fridays for Future and others.

Based on the draft national energy and climate plans (NECPs) HEAL is concerned that member states miss out on the opportunity to advance on those measures that will be a win-win for our climate, the air and health protection. As a first step in determining such measures an assessment of the benefits to health of all goals and priorities in the climate and energy field is needed. HEAL urges the Romanian Presidency to encourage all Member States to include health co-benefits assessment in their revised NECP.

- From hazardous substances

Currently only a fraction of the over 100,000 chemicals sold on the European market are thoroughly evaluated for health and environmental impacts, and even fewer regulated. Various individual and groups of chemicals – such as endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) or flame retardants – are currently overlooked by the European regulatory frameworks. None of the existing regulations addresses the real-life effects of the cocktail of chemicals that daily life offers.

The European citizens expect ambitious commitments that will bring major public health wins, which will also trigger industrial innovation through safer substitution. While HEAL welcomed that the recent EU EDC Communication has the goal of minimizing exposures and protecting health, we consider that it fails to lay out proposals to control EDCs across all EU laws, in order to reduce the environment and people's exposure. [A key demand from the EDC-Free Europe campaign](#), a coalition of over 70 health, environmental and consumer organisations, that is glaringly absent is "a concrete action plan aiming for a high level of protection for human health, especially vulnerable groups, and the environment". This is disappointing response to the urgent problem illustrated by increasing research findings showing health harm, [sometimes decades later](#).

HEAL therefore calls on EU member states under the Romanian presidency to seize the opportunity to significantly improve the lives of millions of EU citizens: commit to closing obvious regulatory loopholes such as cosmetics, toys and food packaging or the toxic recycled EDCs that find their way into our bodies. With Council Conclusions at the environment Council following the Sibiu Summit, the Council could input into the general update of the EU regulatory framework on endocrine disrupters, and mandate the European Commission to update the first and still current strategy, just twenty years after was published.

- From air pollution

Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to health, leading to heart and lung disease, and harming especially children's healthy development. The good news is that health harm from air pollution is completely preventable, however, EU member states are not doing enough to keep the EU's air quality standards.

HEAL calls on the Romanian Presidency to push each Member state to keep to standards and consider further measures that will reduce emissions. The Romanian EU presidency also has a key role to play in addressing air pollution from the Western Balkan countries, as a country that is greatly affected by transboundary pollution. A recent report by HEAL and others "[Chronic coal pollution](#)" estimated that every year air pollution from Western Balkan coal power plants is responsible for an estimated 3,900 premature deaths, 8,500 cases of bronchitis in children and other chronic illnesses. The health issues these plants cause adds up to lost productivity and health costs of up to EUR 11,535 million.

3 / Budget: a European Union that invests in environmental health

- Aligning budgetary priorities with environmental objectives

It is of utmost importance to make efficient use of the European taxpayers' money, to enhance health, environmental and climate protection. The EU budget should therefore be a representation of the EU's priorities and its values. As an obvious prerequisite for policy coherence, those priorities should be in line with the objectives set in the 7th Environment Action Program. Such a strategy would decrease the strain on healthcare budgets and economic productivity from our current unhealthy collective ways of life.

- Relocating adequate resources to climate and environment measures

When negotiating the future of the EU budget, we ask you to consider the following environmental health concerns. Prior to any EU public investment, environmental and health impact assessments should be conducted and the results used transparently in setting up the investment priorities.

Equally, phasing out subsidies for fossil fuels as they result in health costs up to 8 times their amount in the EU alone, and ending financial support of chemicals in goods and foods that are directly or indirectly toxic to current and future generations is urgently needed in order for Europe to transition to a post-toxic near future with a sustainable economic model.



We are available and looking forward to answering any questions you or your team may have and working closely together on health and the environment.

Yours sincerely,

Genon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health. Website: www.env-health.org.