



BRUSSELS, 17 January 2020

To: Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic

CC: Charles Michel, President of the European Council

Tomislav Čorić, Croatian Minister of Environment and Energy

Milan Kujundžić, Croatian Minister of Health

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the EU Green Deal

Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

### **Open letter on environmental health priorities for Croatia's presidency of the Council of the European Union**

Croatia holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of 2020. As Executive Director at the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) I would like to share with you our priorities on how we consider that the Presidency can help advance the protection of health from environment and climate threats in the next months, particularly regarding the EU Green Deal proposal.

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organization bringing together over 80 member organisations across the European region, working for better health through a healthier environment. Please find our [reaction](#) to the Green Deal Communication proposed by the European Commission, as well as a [letter](#) HEAL and its members sent to all the EU Commissioners on 4 December 2019.

**On climate action**, swifter and more decisive action is needed than what was proposed in the Green Deal Communication – with an EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal of at least 65% by 2030 and a clear timeline for revising the 2030 goal in the first months of 2020. The science and thousands of protesters worldwide have made it clear that it's now or never. If we don't get rid of fossil fuel consumption in the next decade, global warming beyond 2 degrees is inevitable. Health groups urge European governments to ensure the EU Green Deal and national commitments reflect the urgency, and include measures e.g. to urgently end all fossil fuel subsidies, ensure healthy energy and incentives for active and sustainable mobility.

**On air quality**, we welcomed the EU Commission's promise to align the current air quality standards more closely with the science-based recommendation of the World Health Organization as a major and long awaited step forward. During your presidency you intend to adopt Council Conclusions on air quality at the March Environment Council. These conclusions should reflect the urgency to act on air pollution for health protection, and pave the way forward for translating the EU Green Deal ambition into clear steps for clean air in 2020, with a view to aligning the EU air standards with the WHO guidelines.

**On chemicals**, the proposal on the table is an important step in the right direction to protect health from hazardous chemicals, as it commits to ensuring a toxics-free environment through a chemicals strategy for sustainability, which we hope to see out in early 2020. It also promises to incorporate more quickly the latest

scientific evidence on endocrine disrupting chemicals and combined effects of chemicals into regulatory frameworks, which we think needs to trigger rapid action to reduce exposures. With increasing pollution and related health effects, speeding up protection through enhanced chemical regulations led by the precautionary principle is the only viable option to lead the transition to resilient economies and true sustainability. The upcoming industrial and circularity plans should mention non-toxic cycles and pollutants emission reduction objectives as their contribution to the zero pollution ambition and make a clear reference to the chemicals strategy as the overarching frame for this topic.

Finally, **on environmental health and the European global role**, we welcome the EU's Commission commitment to greening the Western Balkans, a key area in the EU's immediate neighborhood. Air pollution, from fossil fuelled power plants or other sectors knows no borders. As evidence shows, transboundary pollution coming from accession countries affects the health of people in EU countries, including Croatia, which has a unique role as a Balkan country holding the holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU. In view of the Zagreb planned EU-Western Balkans May Summit the EU needs to prioritise pollution control, air quality and climate mitigation for health within the EU accession process in particular by demanding the same level of ambition for all accession countries and supporting and strengthening the Energy Community. In addition, no EU-related financial support should be given to companies planning new coal power capacity at all, irrespective of the type of project they are applying for.

HEAL is looking forward to working with you during the Croatian Presidency and supporting you in delivering the path to a healthy planet for healthy people.

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.

HEAL's over 80 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.

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