

The Antwerp Declaration for a European Industrial Deal

“There is an urgent need for clarity, predictability, and confidence in Europe and its industrial policy.”

The undersigned companies and organisations¹ express their full support for a **European Industrial Deal** to complement the Green Deal and keep high quality jobs for European workers in Europe. As very clearly stated by the Belgian PM Alexander De Croo: “We need our industry for their innovation capacity. To come up with tomorrow’s climate solutions. That is why Europe should not only be a continent of industrial innovation but should remain a continent of industrial production”².

To meet climate neutrality by 2050 and the recently communicated 2040 target, Europe’s electricity production will need to multiply, and industry investments will need to be a factor six higher than the previous decade. This enormous challenge comes just as both large companies and SMEs face the most severe economic downturn in a decade, demand is falling, production costs increase, and investments move to other regions. A US economy that benefits from the financial support from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and its ease of accessibility, a Chinese overcapacity and increasing exports to Europe all increase the pressure for the European industry even more. Our companies face this challenge every day. Sites are being closed, production halted, people let go. Europe needs a business case, urgently.

An Open Strategic Autonomy for a competitive and resilient EU is crucial for the transition of Europe in an ever-changing geopolitical landscape. It can however only be achieved if also basic and energy intensive industries remain and invest in Europe. Without a targeted industrial policy, Europe risks becoming dependent even on basic goods and chemicals. Europe cannot afford this to happen.

Our Declaration calls to Member State Governments, the next European Commission and Parliament to:

- 1. Put the Industrial Deal at the core of the new European Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029.** We call for a comprehensive action plan to elevate competitiveness as strategic priority and create the conditions for a stronger business case in Europe. The action plan needs to include actions to eliminate regulatory incoherence, conflicting objectives, unnecessary complexity in legislation and over reporting. We ask to develop an Omnibus proposal to take corrective measures on all relevant existing EU regulations as the first piece of legislation to be presented in the next EU institutional cycle.
- 2. Include a strong public funding chapter with a Clean Tech Deployment Fund** for Energy Intensive Industries closely coordinated with a simplified State Aid framework, while respecting the Single Market rules. This should allow public de-risking of private investment into clean technologies through both CAPEX and OPEX support, with guarantees to ensure the retention and creation of quality jobs in Europe and propose a competitive and sustainable tax level across Europe.
- 3. Make Europe a globally competitive provider of energy.** The costs of energy in Europe are simply too high to compete and are not only driven by commodity prices but also by regulatory charges. The next European Commission needs to prioritise new projects for abundant and affordable low carbon renewable and nuclear energy. We need a real EU Energy Strategy with concrete actions that enable cross-border electrical power, grid expansion for hydrogen and other renewable & low-carbon molecules, and partnerships with resource-rich countries.
- 4. Focus on the infrastructure Europe needs.** Target the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Structural and Regional Funds to integrate and build a worldclass EU Energy, digital, CCUS and recycling infrastructures as soon as possible, make these Important Projects of Common European Interest. Debottleneck cross border transport and develop trans-European networks. Remove permitting obstacles for industrial transformation projects. This transformation will also require significant numbers of skilled workers that are currently in short supply. Targeted programmes will be necessary to make these available quickly.
- 5. Increase the EU’s raw materials security** through scaling up domestic mining, sustainable processing and recycling capacity for crucial raw materials, combined with new global partnerships. Scale up renewable carbon and circular carbon feedstocks, including the expansion and fast permitting of advanced chemical recycling technologies. Develop a Circular Carbon Strategy that incentivises Carbon Capture and Use (CCU), biobased feedstocks, base metals, minerals and advanced materials necessary to reach the aims of the Green Deal. Free trade agreements or other types of agreements should secure vital supplies for industry, enable access to new markets and increase exports. The EU should **look at all policy instruments against unfair competition** to ensure a real level playing field for EU industries both on the domestic and international markets, including carbon leakage protection.
- 6. Boost demand for net zero, low carbon and circular products.** Empower consumers (businesses and private) to choose net-zero and circular products, based on transparent product and environmental carbon footprints. Lead the way through public procurement and private buyer initiatives endorsed by the EU. Expand the scope of the Net Zero Industry Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act. Grow sales potentials by improved market access in international markets.
- 7. Leverage, enforce, revive, and improve the Single Market** for the transition of integrated value chains, including measures to address increased fragmentation caused by national implementation of European legislation. Create a single market for waste and recycled materials and also a true European energy market. Improve enforcement of existing measures focusing on imports.
- 8. Make the innovation framework smarter,** including fostering high-quality science, technological innovation, and collaborative policies that prioritise openness and pragmatic outcomes while embracing innovative approaches like regulatory sandboxes. Promote digitalization as a prerequisite for groundbreaking research and to enhance efficiency. Protect IP rights to bring a competitive advantage to Europe. Focus on the transfer from demonstration to innovation and first of a kind commercial technologies.
- 9. A new spirit of law-making.** Let entrepreneurship thrive to find the best solutions to overcome challenges. Legislation should create incentives for businesses to invest in clean technologies. Avoid that the Green Deal policy targets are followed by prescriptive and detailed implementing regulations. Prevent over reporting, ensure coherence, stay tuned with industrial reality and integrate legislative proposals through a stronger Secretariat General and Regulatory Scrutiny Board which systematically applies a Competitiveness Check and a European Innovation Stress Test against which each new legislation and policy initiative should be evaluated. Use robust data and scientific evidence for effective policymaking. Assess the cumulative impact of legislation.
- 10. Ensure the structure allows to achieve results.** Install a First Vice-President responsible for the delivery of the European Industrial Deal and for ensuring the seamless integration of legislation and alignment with the agenda of the next European Commission, overseeing the key DGs for the Industrial Deal in one integrated approach.

In the 2023 State of the Union Address, President von der Leyen already said “As we enter the next phase of the European Green Deal, one thing will never change... We will keep supporting European Industry throughout this transition.” This needs to be a European approach, instead of twenty-seven different national incentives, by keeping and strengthening the integrity of the internal market while keeping global competition better into account.

We need to keep industry in Europe because the industry will deliver the climate solutions Europe needs. Solutions that citizens and governments can use, but that can only be invented and implemented with speed and scale by the industry, and the support from governments. Only with a strong industrial fabric and strengthened social dialogue in Europe, can we ensure that the green transition will be a Just Transition, as agreed in the Val Duchesse tripartite declaration. A competitive European industry, based on a European Industrial Deal, is the “conditio sine qua non” for the successful delivery of the EU Green Deal. It is also the only way to show to the rest of the world that the Green Deal works for all.

**Support the declaration:
antwerp-declaration.eu**

¹ Industries in the EII ecosystem which employs 7.8 million people in Europe and provides a value added of EUR 549bn (4.55% of the EU total). Source: European Commission, DG Grow, Fiche EII, July 2022

² Speech Alexander De Croo - UNGA78, New York, 20 September 2023

Signed at the European Industry Summit, 20 February 2024, Antwerp

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