



# ***The competitiveness of the chemical industry and the factors affecting it - 3E (Energy supply, Education & Skills, Economy & Innovation)***

**Congress Declaration  
12<sup>th</sup> ECRN Congress**

**Ústí nad Labem, 22 October 2014**

On the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> ECRN Congress, our network presents the following declaration to voice the common interests of the chemical regions regarding competitiveness and cooperation in the European chemical industry.

## **(1) Chemical industry and competitiveness**

- a. Ústí hosted the follow-up conference for the High Level Group on the competitiveness of the European chemical industry under the heading “Delivering the High Level Group results in the regions” in 2009. Numerous projects and initiatives have been implemented both at the regional and European level since, but we must continue to work together to maintain the strong position of Europe and its regions as the global conditions evolve.
- b. Competitiveness and innovation remain topics of key importance. When it comes to the chemical industry, we would like to draw attention to three key factors in particular, notably the **3Es**: **E**nergy supply, **E**ducation and skills, and **E**conomy and innovation. In Europe and at the regional level, we must ensure that the chemical industry can operate in an environment and within framework conditions that enable and foster competitiveness in a sustainable manner.
- c. To maintain favourable framework conditions for competitiveness, an integrated, modern industrial policy is needed. In this regard we are in favour of the EU industrial policy approach that brings together economic, environmental and social policy strategies. We hope to see such approach continued also by the next Commission. Implementation and development of policies with a long-term orientation and continuity is important.
- d. Moreover, competitiveness should be fostered through a future-oriented and evidence-based strategy that aims for benefits beyond mere economic growth and cost optimisation. Europe should value the potential inherent in quality, skills and innovation. In this regard the importance of regional implementation and locally

relevant, tailored strategies should be recognized. A distinct strength of Europe lies in the diversity of its regions. Regional competences and subsidiarity principle should thus be respected in European policy making.

- e. The chemical industry is a key sector not only in the ECRN member regions, but in the overall European economy. Beyond being a strong industry in itself, it is a vital enabling industry that bears significance to numerous other sectors and branches along the value chain. Therefore it is essential to ensure that it can continue to prosper in Europe.

## **(2) Skills development and training – fostering talent in chemistry**

- a. Beyond framework conditions and policies, there is one aspect in particular that is of crucial importance for the competitiveness of our industry. That is the human factor: skills, training and education. In order to gain competitive edge on global markets, it is imperative that we ensure the availability of top-class human resources and bright minds in Europe.
- b. In the context of the chemical industry, high quality of education in natural sciences and a sound technical and scientific training are immensely valuable. To maintain a sufficient skills pool and to build expertise, the entire spectrum of education must be addressed.
- c. We should familiarize children with science from a young age, build their interest in experimental discovery throughout basic education, and continue to develop talent in further education and research. Furthermore, complementary training opportunities should be provided and lifelong learning mentality should be mainstreamed in order to ensure continuous development and upgrading or “re-skilling” of competence portfolios to keep up with global changes.
- d. Europe is diverse, regions are very heterogeneous, and specific skills needs vary across branches and along different parts of the value chain. These differences need to be acknowledged. However, we can all also learn from the existing good practices and tried and tested solutions implemented across Europe. To do so, we have to share those experiences and be open to mutual learning. As an interregional network, ECRN will seek to play its part in facilitating such exchange and scouting good practices across our member regions.
- e. Furthermore, solutions co-designed and co-developed by industry, authorities, educational institutions and universities can yield benefits beyond better education and new approaches to training. Close collaboration of different partners provides fertile ground also for new innovations and solutions. Clusters often act as regional hubs that bring together the industry, universities, research centres and other partners. They can contribute also to the training and education agenda.

### **(3) Collaboration and mutual learning – importance of networking**

- a. Policies are turned into practice through implementation. The multiple examples provided at the ‘Market of Ideas’ during the 12<sup>th</sup> ECRN Congress illustrate the diverse ways challenges can be tackled and opportunities can be seized. Successful initiatives often share one specific trait; collaboration. Collaboration, exchange of experiences, and mutual learning are key tools for developing the most effective strategies to seize the opportunities and work towards future prosperity. Through cooperation and by bringing different partners together, beneficial solutions and win-win situations yielding added value to all participants can be achieved.
- b. Cooperation occurs at various levels; within regions and clusters, across borders in an inter-regional setting, in joint projects around Europe, as well as in strategic partnerships across the globe. Therefore it should also be enabled and supported at various levels. Within regions, cooperation can help in creating locally relevant solutions. Across regions, clusters and networks can rise to new levels and extend their scope via collaboration. At the European level, good results can receive the needed leverage to achieve excellence and contribute to solving global challenges.
- c. Fruitful cooperation requires openness and willingness to work towards common objectives and develop joint strategies. It is also important to support and facilitate creation and development of new contacts and relationships. In this regard, we appreciate the provisions in European Cohesion Policy and Smart Specialisation that encourage stakeholder collaboration and inclusive processes. It is also important to continue to support partnerships and projects on key areas such as innovation, clusters, logistics, energy and resource efficiency, bioeconomy, green and sustainable growth, and training and skills development.
- d. Collaboration should be inclusive. Good ideas often emerge from practical action, and therefore it is important to foster a regional ecosystem that enables also participants with more limited resources – such as SMEs – to engage and participate in cooperative processes. Openness to bottom-up innovativeness and an eye for emerging innovations can open avenues for fast-track growth in the future.

The aim of the European Chemical Regions Network is to improve the competitiveness of chemical regions, facilitate collaboration between regions, and to represent the common interests of the chemical regions in Europe. We are dedicated to enhancing interregional collaboration and cooperation across regions and clusters and we strongly believe that networks like ECRN can play an integral role in providing a platform for engaging with chemical stakeholders and mutual learning. We are committed to continuing our work and further cooperation in order to contribute to the achievement of common European objectives and to advance development and foster prosperity and well-being in European regions.

12<sup>th</sup> ECRN Congress, Ústí nad Labem, 22.10.2014