



Facing the changes – New challenges for the competitiveness of the European chemical industry

**Congress Declaration
10th ECRN Congress**

Warsaw, 5-6th December 2012

The 10th Congress of the European Chemical Regions Network (ECRN) adopted the following declaration, which is addressed to the European Commission and to the authorities at the regional level.

Since the chemical industry is of major importance to European and regional economies, there are several fields that need priority attention and targeted measures. Hence,

1. while recognizing the impacts and consequences of the financial and economic crisis on the European regions with high potential of chemical industry and underlining the urgency to find ways to stabilize market conditions and restore growth,
2. while anticipating the outcome of the ongoing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union for the period 2014-2020 as the new budget period approaches,
3. while supporting the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and the objective of the EU becoming a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy;
4. while emphasising the importance of decisive efforts to act on the Flagship Initiatives of “An industrial policy for the globalisation era”, “Innovation Union”, and “Resource efficient Europe” in particular,

The European Chemical Regions Network

takes this opportunity to voice the common interests of the chemical regions and draw attention to the following issues and areas in the regions:

To the European Commission:

European strategies and initiatives must be developed with recognition of the specific questions that are raised in the regions. Answers should be relevant to all regions in Europe, and support their efforts to promote sustainable growth and employment.

1. Cohesion policy and structural funds must then answer the questions of how to best support regions to enhance the framework conditions for competitiveness of the chemical industry and develop respective strengths and needs according to the regional needs.
2. The future cohesion policy and structural funds should support and prioritise in their intended platforms value-added collaboration, including:
 - Strengthening the existing feedstock integration which successfully interlinks basic chemical companies and downstream chemical companies and fosters innovation and sustained creation of value.
 - New forms of cooperation between chemical companies, universities and research institutes and public authorities (e.g. PPP, involving the entire triple helix).
 - Vital partnerships at local level in which chemical companies, public authorities and other organisations work closely together in terms of policy formation, implementation, and evaluation.
3. Cohesion policy and structural funds should be aligned with other European policies such as industrial policy and competitiveness objectives and the forthcoming Horizon 2020 and support clusters in business-related operational frameworks and strategies for supporting competitiveness.

Essentially, these concern a common approach in the fields of:

- Clusters, innovation, research and development,
 - Logistics infrastructures,
 - Energy and resource efficiency, climate and environmental issues, and
 - Skills development, education and training.
4. Further activities in the above-mentioned fields should be included in the European agenda, concerning:
 - exchange of views, good practice experiences and success stories that already exist at regional level;

- lessons learned as tools to inspire regions for solutions that are tailored to their local needs;
 - all efforts known for sustainable growth and employment; and
 - actions to ensure that regions remain competitive.
5. The advantages of local strategic frameworks are not only focused on integrated solutions in the various fields, but they lead to the development of cross-sectoral visions and solutions.

It is therefore necessary to take these activities as chances and challenges into account and address them with targeted measures at regional level.

6. European initiatives are needed to upgrade Europe's transport and logistics infrastructures. This is a key area of joint actions, and advances in the field yield benefits both to the regions and the chemical industry.
7. Regions have the best knowledge of local application of policy initiatives and implementation; it is therefore vital that the European institutions to work closely with regional representatives. The regional dimension should be acknowledged on the competitiveness agenda and in the European industrial policy.

To authorities at regional level:

Regional and local authorities are confronted with the challenge of designing strategies that are appropriate for the conditions and needs of their specific regions. The challenge is not copying others, but learning from each other and with each other.

Thus, regional authorities are particularly well-positioned to develop and implement targeted measures that meet the needs of regional stakeholders and address the specific challenges they are encountering. Therefore:

1. Regional action is needed especially to reach out to SMEs and provide support for concrete initiatives encouraging entrepreneurialism and new start-ups;
2. Decisive measures need to be taken to enhance energy and resource efficiency;
3. Regional insights should be leveraged in addressing future skills needs. The knowledge-intensive nature of the industry and its transformation give rise to demand for new skills and capacities and regions can provide new, innovative ways to address these needs; and
4. It is necessary to ensure a strong long-term vision in strategy and policy development and implementation, and to analyse and evaluate consequences and impacts of decisions to achieve sustainable solutions and results.

As a network of regions, the ECRN will contribute to these areas in multiple ways, including:

1. continuing cross-regional collaboration within the network and engaging with new regions and partners,
2. building on the positive outcomes and results of previous projects (ChemClust and ChemLog), disseminating the outcomes, and initiating new interregional collaboration projects
3. encouraging regions to leverage Structural Funds, Horizon 2020 and other EU opportunities in regional development strategies and initiatives to support the competitiveness of the chemical industry and capacities to address future challenges smart specialisation and preparing for the next programming period for structural funds.
4. engaging its member regions in a discussion on industrial policy, seeking to integrate the regional strategies and approaches with the newly updated European industrial policy (outlined in the Communication from the European Commission on 10 October 2012) and communicate the regional perspectives also to the European policy-makers.

Finally, the European chemical regions wish to underline the crucial importance of collaboration and mutual learning in order to find the best and most effective ways to address the challenges and transformation taking place in Europe, in the industry, and within regions. In this regard, networks like ECRN can play a central role in creating favourable conditions for exchange of experiences and provide a platform for engaging with stakeholders.

Through this collaboration, the activities of the ECRN support not only the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, but also the development of European regions.

Warsaw, 6.12.2012