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Executive Vice President Frans Timmermans
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Bruxelles
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London, 29 October 2020

RE: Talking Trash: the corporate playbook of false solutions to the plastic crisis

Dear Vice President Timmermans,

Plastic pollution is an unprecedented environmental crisis that has captured the concern and attention of policymakers and the public alike. Despite the increased awareness, and the flurry of voluntary commitments and industry promises to address it, the problem shows no signs of abating – indeed production is set to double between now and 2030,[1] creating a volume of single use plastics that will overwhelm waste management systems and cause significant environmental harm. If global plastic production continues at current rates, it will be responsible for 15% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.[2]

The EU has led legislative action against plastic pollution with its ambitious Single-Use Plastic Directive, which is now at the crucial stage of transposition into national law.

Our recent investigation and report entitled *Talking Trash: the corporate playbook of false solutions to the plastic crisis*, released on 17th September 2020, reveals the activities of consumer brands, retailers, the plastic industry and trade associations in delaying and undermining legislative solutions to the plastic crisis. In particular we looked at lobbying and weakening tactics by the industry related to the Plastics Strategy and the Single-Use Plastics Directive.

As it stands, the implementation of the Single-Use Plastic Directive already shows signs of having been watered down by industry pressure. For example, the industry has continuously attempted to exempt bio-based and biodegradable plastics from being defined as single-use plastics, as well as more recently to exempt items made of viscose and cellophane from the scope (and could succeed), despite the protests of citizens.[3]

In addition, the report reveals lobbying by various brands, retailers and producer responsibility organisations (PROs) in EU member states to jeopardise the implementation of deposit return systems (DRS), which are the only viable method for reaching 90%+ collection of beverage bottles. Such systems are not only highly successful at reducing

[1] UNEP (2018) Single-use plastics: A roadmap for sustainability [ONLINE] Available at: https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/25496
[2] CIEL (2019) Plastic and Climate [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Plastic-and-Climate-Executive-Summary-2019.pdf
[3] Over 150,000 people have signed a petition asking the EU Commission to uphold the SUP and not water it down by allowing exemptions. Available at: https://act.wemove.eu/campaigns/plastic-ban

plastic waste, but enjoy high support among the public – typically above 80% – as shown by multiple recent polls conducted across the EU.[4] Polling also shows that over 90% of European citizens believe protecting the environment and climate is important, with solid support for policy measures to tackle plastic pollution.[5] We are urging the Commission to clarify that DRS is the only method of separate collection that will achieve the SUP Directive targets.

We are calling on the EU Commission to ensure that the interpretation of the definition of plastic (and single-use plastics) in the Commission implementing guidelines does not undermine the ambition and objectives of the SUP Directive; exempting viscose and cellophane would put several of the measures, including the bans, at risk and undermine the impacts of the Directive.

In addition to ensuring an ambitious and timely implementation of the SUP Directive across Europe, we are also urging the European Commission to propose further legislative measures to address plastic pollution at source, and not rely on voluntary commitments from companies, given that recent studies show that even with policies like the SUP Directive in place, plastic pollution rates will only reduce by up to 7.7%, according to some studies.[6] Such measures could notably be:

- Measures to end overpackaging and support reusable products and packaging, including sector specific reuse targets and ambitious new essential requirements for packaging, as well as to promote systems that support reuse (e.g. DRS).
- Robust measures on green claims to prevent greenwashing practices by corporations, such as those revealed in our report, and ensure that consumers are not misled any more by ambitious-sounding marketing, unsubstantiated claims and voluntary commitments from plastic polluters.
- Clear communication that false solutions such as incineration, waste-to-energy, plastic-to-fuel and chemical recycling do not make a substantive contribution to the transition to the circular economy and undermine efforts towards reuse and effective mechanical recycling, which are higher up in the waste hierarchy.

We would welcome a meeting to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

Nuša Urbančič, Campaigns Director, Changing Markets Foundation

CC: Head of Cabinet, Diederik Samsom
Member of Cabinet, Helena Braun

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[4] Reloop (2020) Deposit Return Systems: Public support. 20 March [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fact-Sheet-Public-Support-20March2020.pdf

[5] European Commission (2020) New Eurobarometer Survey: Protecting the environment and climate is im-portant for over 90% of European citizens [Press Release] 3 March [ONLINE] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_331

[6] Science 18 Sep 2020: Vol. 369, Issue 6510, pp. 1455-1461 DOI: 10.1126/science.aba9475 https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6510/1455

This letter is also endorsed by:

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