



Utrecht, 14 Dec. 2006

To:
Commission President Barroso
Commissioners Kyrpianou, Dimas, and Vice Presidents Verheugen, Wallström
Director Generals of DG Sanco, DG Environment, DG Enterprise
Ministers of Health, Environment, and Industry of the EU Member States
Members of the European Parliament in the:
Environment, Public Health & Food Safety Committee (ENVI)
Women's Rights & Gender Equality Committee (FEMM)
Industry & Trade Committee (ITRE)
Employment & Social Affairs (EMPL)

Re: Recommendations for Environmental Health in the Lisbon Strategy, and Beyond

Dear President Barroso,

We are writing you in response to a growing wave of scientific, social, and political concern regarding effects of the environmental burden of disease (EBD) in the European Union. These concerns were once again highlighted in Brussels on November 27th at the "International High-Level Roundtable on Environmental Health and the Lisbon Agenda" (HLRT). Disturbing new evidence was presented on the EBD and debate ensued about how to tackle this in the context of the Lisbon Agenda.

Internationally renowned scientists discussed how increases over the last decennia in allergies, asthma, cancers, neuro-developmental disorders, cardiovascular disease, and even obesity, amongst others, have been linked to exposure to environmental pollutants. Economically speaking, this means high societal costs and the loss of tens of thousands of healthy life years; aspects that undermine EU aims to become the most progressive, competitive economy in the world. At the same time, reports from the WHO and DG Sanco confirm that public health is a key determinant of economic development.¹ "If Europe is to compete in the global knowledge society, it must also invest more in its most precious asset—its people."²

A "knowledge-based economy" is based on children developing healthy and smart in a competitive global society. However, new research shows that certain industrial substances in common use have neuro-toxic properties, that foetal and early childhood exposure to low doses of neurotoxic chemicals can damage the developing brain and lead to neuro-developmental disorders like learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, mental retardation, loss of IQ points, etc. Currently one in six children has developmental brain damage.³ Policies geared at protecting public health, particularly of (unborn) children, can reverse these trends, and policies that stimulate eco-innovation can lead to substitutes for dangerous substances while simultaneously boosting competitiveness.

Along with other Lisbon proponents, you have explained that we must first meet our economic objectives in order to secure our social and environmental aims. It is dangerous to assume economic growth can only be achieved at the cost of environmental and social deregulation. Such argumentation ignores the complex inter-linkages between environmental pollution, health protection and employment in today's societies. In

¹ Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (2001), "Macroeconomics and health: Investing in health for economic development." See also, European Commission DG Health and Consumer Protection (2005). "The contribution of health to the economy in the European Union," pg. 12.

² Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok (2004), "Facing the challenge: The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment."

³ Grandjean, P., Landrigan P.J. (2006), "Developmental neurotoxicity of industrial chemicals." *The Lancet* (368).

addition, data presented at the HLRT disputed the misconception that the most developed economies are always the healthiest. In fact, increases in modern diseases like cancers, asthma, and allergies (amongst others), particularly among children, are highest in the richest countries. In Europe cancer among children is increasing 1% per year. Sadly, a recent survey in the Netherlands showed that 75% of children who survive this disease have disabilities that require healthcare for the rest of their lives. The increase of asthma and respiratory diseases among children in Europe is alarming (one in seven children suffers from it) and this affects their quality of life, school attendance and results in education. Often such health problems continue into adulthood. This also affects the availability of parents for the workforce.

During the HLRT, Commissioner Kyprianou's representative confirmed that European citizens are regularly exposed to complicated mixtures, and that even very low levels of exposure can cause adverse human health effects. The representative from DG Enterprise remarked, "I don't want the panel to conclude that Lisbon is opposed to environment and public health—the challenge is to ensure that they go hand in hand." Indeed, this is the challenge our attached Position Paper and recommendations seeks to meet.

Clearly, all the key players must move in the right direction to address the above mentioned urgent problems. But there must be leadership from the EU Commission, Council, and Parliament, to ensure this happens in time. Therefore we call on you to take the next steps in your Community policies to ensure this is the case.

The attached position paper contains our recommendations, along with insights and outcomes of the High Level Round table and highlights from developing scientific evidence. It also shows that public opinion is favourable to the shifts in political prioritisation needed to tackle the environmental burden of disease.

Our main recommendations are as follows:

1. **Shift the conventional risk assessment paradigm**
2. **Policies targeted at alleviating the environmental burden must be based on the precautionary principle**
3. **Integrate health into all policies at Community and National level**
4. **Children, the basis of a future Europe, are the most vulnerable to effects of pollutants and therefore need to be especially protected**
5. **Effective regulation and eco-innovation can boost health protection and competitiveness**
6. **Citizens' concerns are at the heart of Lisbon**

We trust you will take these recommendations into your deliberations on the *Community Lisbon Report*, the 2008 revision of the *Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs* and any revisions to the *National Reform Programmes*, or related National policies. The recommendations will also benefit the mid-term review of the *Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010*, the upcoming *White Paper on Health Strategy* from DG Sanco and the midterm review of the *6th Environmental Action Plan*.



Sascha Gabizon
International Director
Women in Europe for a Common Future