



## What impact might the next EU leadership have on the chemicals strategy for sustainability?

While a more industry-friendly EU reform agenda may lie ahead, it is important to remember that the fundamentals of the CSS will remain, says Julien de Cruz, head of public affairs at REACHLaw

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As the EU prepares for new leadership at the end of this year, the ambitious Green Deal and chemicals strategy for sustainability (CSS) could be facing some serious headwinds. With energy costs far higher in Europe than in the US, industry is feeling the squeeze. In this context, the grouping approach being taken to PFAS restriction may increasingly be viewed by European politicians – and even segments of the public – as a potential roadblock to innovation, sparking broader debates about the long-term impact on industry.

Behind closed doors, complex discussions are taking place in ECHA's committees and Commission working groups to find a balanced approach to regulating large group of substances, but across the continent, there is a growing sense of soul-searching about how far Europe can push its green agenda without sacrificing its competitiveness on the global stage.

With the rise of populist and right-wing parties, and uneasy governing alliances and coalitions in the Netherlands, Italy, France and Germany to name but a few, Europe's once-hopeful green optimism has been replaced by growing anxiety over high energy prices and an EU leadership seen as increasingly disconnected.

About a year after the likes of Emmanuel Macron and

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Alexander De Croo called for an EU regulatory break, including on chemicals legislation, Commission president Ursula von der Leyen presented the Antwerp Declaration for a European Industrial Deal to make investment in the EU industrial base a priority for the next EU institutional cycle.

While the public may still support bans on harmful chemicals such as PFAS, there is mounting concern about losing Europe's industrial base and falling behind in the race to electrification, especially as China and the US take a more aggressive, hands-on approach to regulation and subsidies. The political landscape in Europe today is a far cry from the one that enabled the sweeping REACH and CLP regulations of the early 2000s.

The European Parliament elections this June reflected a

broader shift toward right-wing politics across member states, with the ENVI Committee - responsible for key legislative files like REACH, CLP, as well as ECHA budget and delegation of competences - leaning more to the right.

While these political shifts may delay or dilute the long-anticipated EU REACH revision, they are also likely to bring heightened scrutiny to planned restrictions and authorisation dossiers. However, the European Commission and member states have ensured that critical substances stay firmly on the agenda of ECHA committees, largely insulated from the political tides of the European Parliament. PFAS, Chromium VI and others will continue to keep both regulators and industry occupied. To get a full sense of this, one needs only to explore the growing roster of substances under regulatory focus on the ECHA assessment of regulatory needs list.

Meanwhile, key concepts such as 'essential use' and 'sustainable by design' have been safeguarded, and could be implemented through secondary legislation, largely bypassing direct input from the European Parliament.

#### European Commission: change is coming

In Brussels, there is a running joke that real power often lies with the institution next door, rather than the one in focus. But when it comes to chemicals regulation, the reality is clearer: the European Commission, particularly DG ENV and DG GROW, holds the reins. This is why the upcoming shake-up within the Commission could be pivotal for the chemicals industry.

New Commissioners-designate are due to be vetted by Parliament, with each nominee appearing before committees for hearings. Once a single Parliament vote approves the team, the European Council will make formal appointments. These fresh faces will bring new priorities to their portfolios, and this could signal real change for industries reliant on EU regulatory frameworks.

One clear example is Jessika Roswall, the Commissioner-designate for Environment, who has been tasked in her mission letter with overseeing a chemicals industry package, simplifying the REACH regulation a move in line with industry and some member states' calls for more "industrial realism". Pair this with Stéphane Séjourné's Vice Presidency for

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Industrial Strategy and Teresa Ribera Rodríguez's focus on a competitive transition, and it is hard not to see a shift toward pro-industry reforms.

However, changes at the Commission go beyond just personnel. The months following these appointments often see a reorganisation within the Commission's structure - reallocation of legislative files across Directorate-Generals, Directorates and Units. This reshuffling can result in budget cuts, external studies being sidelined, or certain concepts being abandoned altogether. This could impact the time and resources policy officers have to focus on key legislative files.

Still, while the signals may point to a more industry-friendly reform agenda, particularly for chemicals, it is important to remember that, as such, the fundamentals of the CSS will remain.

A notable reduction in the ambitions of the CSS seems increasingly likely, following a recent Commission [report](#) on competitiveness by Marco Draghi. The report highlights the drawbacks of the current EU risk management process and warns that the PFAS proposal could collapse under its own complexity.

For industry, this is not a time to sit and watch. This is the moment to plan and act strategically. If your substance portfolio supports decarbonisation and energy independence, offers room to innovate towards circular and low-carbon alternatives, or develops new methodologies to address lab capacity and animal welfare issues, you are aligned with Draghi's findings.

Make your efforts visible, pinpoint key opportunities, and engage with policymakers to emphasise your unique contributions. The Brussels decision-makers might pay closer attention in 2025.

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by Chemical Watch News & Insight.*

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