

Trying Times and a Wave of Light

CEFIC President Ilham Kadri on the Antwerp Declaration and Championing Europe's Industrial Revival

A struggling industry in Europe, a new group of European policy makers, and a movement that has united 25 industry sectors in calling for the business case for investments in Europe. Ilham Kadri, CEO of Syensqo and the newly-instated President of the European Chemical Industry Council, CEFIC, shares the industry's status quo and the latest on the Antwerp Declaration for a European Industrial Deal.

CHEManager: Ms. Kadri, first of all, congratulations on your appointment as CEFIC President. Can you provide us with a snapshot of the European chemical industry today?

Ilham Kadri: Thank you, I am honored to represent the European chemicals industry in what I believe can be a defining period for industry at large. Looking back over the past five years, I have seen our industry fully embracing its transformation journey. Back in 2020, we were one of the first to come out in support of the EU Green Deal. Today, this is our bread and butter.

“Industry needs the business case to invest in Europe.”

Yet, let's not underestimate the scale and speed needed for this transformation, it is simply enormous for an industry like ours. The chemicals industry is quite specific in this regard, for our industry we need to change not only what we produce, but also how we produce, all in less than 30 years. And we are impacted by each angle of the transformation; as we go climate-neutral, circular, digital, and transition to safe and sustainable chemicals.

Without chemicals there is no Green Deal. The chemicals industry is the mother of all industries. Whether you look at wind turbines, batteries, insulation, recycling technologies, all these materials depend on chemicals. With the EU Green Deal our industry has agreed on what we need to achieve. The green and digital transformation

aspects are clear, yet there have been recurring questions on how can we achieve this. Not least while remaining competitive and resilient here in Europe.

Practically, what is needed to move towards building a sustainable, competitive and resilient industry in Europe?

I. Kadri: This is what gives me great pride: our industry did not wait to be given the answers. We took the lead in developing the 'Antwerp Declaration for a European Industry Deal' to complement the EU Green Deal. Now co-signed by around 1,200 organizations, it lays out how Europe can achieve its sustainability goals, while remaining resilient in face of dependencies and geopolitical tensions, and competitive against global players.

We are heading towards a new EU institutional cycle after the European Elections where a new European Parliament has been elected and subsequently new leaders in the European Commission will be chosen. I believe this is a year when change can, and must, be possible! The Antwerp Declaration lays the foundation for our new European leaders to support a strong industry while keeping quality jobs in Europe. I am immensely proud of this development, and it is my ambition to make sure these calls are carried over and support an industry that thrives in Europe.

You have alluded to the challenges facing industry, can you tell us more about this and how the Antwerp Declaration responds to it?

I. Kadri: Right now, I hear the worrying calls of industry leaders, of large



Ilham Kadri, CEO of Syensqo and President of CEFIC

and small companies, that Europe is quickly losing its competitive edge. So, the key and overarching message of the Antwerp Declaration is: industry needs the business case to invest in Europe. Outsourcing production to other regions will not help Europe become more sustainable, resilient, competitive. We need to keep a competitive industry and quality jobs here in Europe and show the rest of the world that the Green Deal can work.

Yet economic signs point in another direction: take last year for example, the EU27 chemicals industry experienced a decline of 8% in production compared to 2022, and chemical exports to the rest of the world fell by €16 billion. At the same time, I saw in

the EU Commission's Strategic Foresight Report that about €620 billion of public and private investments are needed yearly to deliver the European Green Deal and the REPowerEU Plan.

This brings the question: how can we accelerate a costly transition, when figures show that large and small companies have faced the most severe economic downturn in a decade? Here lie the calls of the Antwerp Declaration: we need clarity, predictability and confidence in Europe and its industrial policy.

Could you explain in more detail what the Antwerp Declaration says, please?



I. Kadri: The declaration lays out ten action points. In summary, we want to see an Industrial Deal embedded into the structure, budget and fabric of the next institutional cycle's programs and strategic agenda. So, one of our key asks is to have a Vice Commission President who oversees the moving parts across the Commission ensuring that policies are effectively implemented and everything works together seamlessly.

“The Antwerp Declaration has turned into a movement.”

The Declaration also calls for self-sufficiency in raw materials and for measures to boost demand for sustainable products. We want to see innovation at the heart of our efforts, driving progress and new solutions which are not only discovered in Europe but also scaled up and supported here too. As it states “Europe must remain a continent of industrial production”.

Importantly, the urgency to go climate-neutral is growing each day, and if we want to move quickly, we need a simplified, efficient and agile regulatory system, while maintaining the bar on safety and environmental protection. We need to cut the red tape and make it easier for industry to invest right here on European soil.

The Antwerp Declaration has created huge momentum for an industrial deal. How do you see the developments on the ground?

I. Kadri: Just a few months ago, together with 73 CEOs, we presented the Antwerp Declaration to Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Today, around 1,200 organizations across 25 sectors have joined us in support. A strong dialogue is in place, in particular with the Unions. This is an achievement in itself as it sends a clear message to policy makers that industry is united in its call: We need a strong Industrial Deal to complement the EU Green Deal and safeguard quality jobs in Europe.

The Antwerp Declaration has turned into a movement. Competitive-

ness is becoming one of Europe's most talked-about topics and top priorities. We see notions of the Antwerp Declaration resonating in the Competitiveness Council conclusions, throughout Enrico Letta's high-level report on the Single Market. It was even referenced in a joint statement by France's economic and finance minister, Germany's economic minister, and Italy's minister for businesses after they discussed how to increase European competitiveness and productivity.

“Competitiveness is becoming one of Europe's top priorities.”

Quite an achievement in a short period of time. And what's next

I. Kadri: Now is not the time to sit back. I want to see industry continuing to keep competitiveness at the forefront of the next European Strategic Agenda and Commission work program. At the same time, with the sig-

natories, CEFIC is rolling out deep-dive discussions with various stakeholders to go into further detail what is meant by the different references in the Antwerp Declaration. For instance, we recently held a dialogue with civil society on climate and energy issues, with experts on how to boost biotech in Europe, and with unions on how Europe can ensure quality industrial jobs in Europe.

I believe this approach is an open and solution-oriented way to kick-start the next phase of the EU cycle and ensure that the voices of industry and the millions of workers it employs are heard.

Arguably more important are the European elections where all EU citizens have had the chance to share their views and shape the future of the next EU agenda. I hope everybody took this opportunity and used their vote. I look forward to sharing updates in the coming months.

■ www.cefic.org

■ www.antwerp-declaration.eu

The future of Europe is made with industry.

We've signed the Antwerp Declaration.

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