

Keynote address by Romina Pourmokhtari, Minister of Climate and the Environment for Sweden

- Distinguished participants, dear colleagues,
- Our presidency is now well on its way, and our aim is to make the EU greener, safer, and freer. These matters are not isolated.
- Europe faces several challenges connected to the triple planetary crisis. The effects of climate change are becoming more apparent. Extreme weather events have been hitting all parts of our Union in the last years, resulting in forest fires, floods, droughts, melting glaciers and heat waves. Our freedom as well as our security is challenged by the climate and biodiversity loss we are facing.
- The alarming loss of biodiversity is escalating and needs to be reverted. Our societies are deeply dependent on biodiversity in so many ways, not least for our food security.
- For many Europeans, the issue of pollution is one of the most prominent environmental issues in their everyday life. To retain the support and legitimacy of our work, it is essential that we also demonstrate how the green transition will result in an improved quality of life of our citizens.
- Now, this political reality that we find ourselves in proves, again, the necessity of the green transition. The shift away from fossil fuels is vital for our climate and environment, as well as for our security. Ensuring prosperity through the green and energy transition is therefore a key priority for the Swedish Presidency.
- To our stakeholders of circular economy,
- I want to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of how we extract, process, use and then recycle and reuse our resources. The transition to a circular economy is a key element of the green transition.
- Extraction and processing of materials is responsible for 50% of global greenhouse gas emissions while also causing biodiversity loss, pressure on our water bodies and pollution of harmful substances.
- By making the transition to a circular economy we can reduce carbon dioxide emissions from extractive and basic material industries,

manufacturing, construction, transportation, and other sectors when we reduce our waste streams, resource consumption and use less materials.

- Many of our European businesses already see the possibilities of the green transition, by decreasing pollution and creating a more resource efficient, non-toxic, and circular economy.
- By using technological advancements and promoting innovation for circular solutions through legal incentives, we can increase the competitiveness for European businesses globally. European circular products and services will be more and more in demand, which will create green jobs and strengthen economic recovery while decreasing our environmental impact.
- Europe is at a challenging time, not only due to the triple planetary crisis but because we have a cruel war raging on our doorstep. This has emphasised the need of a safe and secure supply of raw materials to increase our independence and reduce the dependency of imports from unstable and undemocratic regimes. By keeping our resources in regional cycles through increased reuse and recycling, we can strengthen the European self-sufficiency.
- This is especially important for valuable materials for new technologies such as critical raw materials and minerals for battery production, and for food supply and energy.
- During our Presidency, we will seek to advance key files that will help the EU economy become circular and promote non-toxic material cycles and an increased use of recycled materials. I would like to highlight a few of them:
- Sweden has already kick-started negotiations on the important Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation. It has great potential to reduce the environmental impact of packaging and packaging waste, to simplify for all companies in the internal market and for all consumers. The proposal's ambition to reduce packaging waste, reduce unnecessary packaging and improve recycling and reuse are therefore very important. The new rules can also provide predictability and investment security for companies.
- Furthermore, we will try to progress as much as possible on the important negotiations of the Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation. It will enable us to set targeted product requirements on, for example, durability, reusability, and reparability, for everyday products such as clothing,

footwear, and furniture, promoting sustainable product choices. We hope to deliver a council mandate during our Presidency.

- Finally, we aim to deliver a council mandate on the Waste Shipment Regulation to facilitate transports of waste for reuse and recycling within the EU. Putting this important regulation in place is also central to counter illegal waste transports and in making sure that our waste challenges are not exported to countries outside the union.
- Apart from these, there are other already tabled proposals that are prioritized by the Swedish Presidency. In addition, further upcoming regulatory proposals awaits us during the spring, so we will certainly have our hands full.
- One of them which is coming quite soon is the Critical Raw Materials Act, which will be an important step towards reducing our dependency on third countries of critical raw materials for the green transition, as well as for our continued work on circularity.
- To our stakeholders of circular economy,
- To reach a non-toxic circular economy, the continued implementation of the EU's chemicals strategy for sustainability is of high importance. The Strategy received a comprehensive support from the Council when it was presented.
- As the current Chair of the Council, I would like to express some concern over the delays and uncertainties surrounding the delivery of various pieces of the strategy and in particular the proposal for a revised REACH regulation. REACH is a central element in the implementation of the Chemicals strategy and the Green Deal. It is also the cornerstone for an extended generic risk management driving the necessary substitution of substances of concern in articles.
- To achieve a circular economy, substances of concern need to be replaced by safe and sustainable alternatives in articles and materials. If the proposal on the revised REACH legislation would be put forward by the Commission during our presidency, I would kick-start the negotiations without delay.
- In the meantime, I welcome the recently presented broad restriction proposal on PFAS which was recently prepared and presented by five member states and I'm proud that Sweden is one of them. Restricting hazardous substances groupwise is in line with the Chemicals strategy and will contribute to achieving a circular economy.

- To our stakeholders of circular economy,
- The challenging times we are facing cannot be used as an excuse for inaction. Our citizens expect more from us - and rightly so!
- We, as politicians, together with European industries, have a responsibility to provide solutions to these challenges and to deliver concrete results to the benefit of the people in our Union and beyond. I am convinced that we can do that, and I look forward to working with you all in ensuring that we will, throughout this coming semester and forward.
- Thank you.