President Ursula von der Leyen,
European Commission,
Rue de la Loi 200,
1040 Brussels,
Belgium.

Brussels, 17 November 2025

RE: Preventing the EU's imminent self-destruction of its cobalt industry

Dear President von der Leyen,

On 16 September 2025 you delivered the opening keynote at the 'One Year After the Draghi Report' Conference, stating:

> *"Today a single country controls 75% of the processing of cobalt [...] This is a critical situation – no doubt about it. But there is nothing inevitable about it. With the right policies, we can shore up our security, and build our independence. And this is what Europe is up to today."*

Your remarks came as a surprise to Europe's cobalt industry, as this is not what Europe is up to today. Only months earlier, your Commission tabled a proposal that, if adopted, would decimate Europe's cobalt value chain. These measures would make it impossible to meet the targets set out in the Critical Raw Materials Act in the foreseeable future, and almost certainly leave Europe much further away from its targets in 2030 than it was in 2024.

The damage is already being felt. Companies are diverting investment away from the EU, and the proposals will only result in greater dependence on the US and China for materials that are strategic to defence, and vital to the green, circular and digital transitions.

It is not too late to change course.

The proposal in question is the sixth revision of the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic substances Directive (CMRD), which proposes an unworkable Occupational Exposure Limit for cobalt. We support the establishment of an Occupational Exposure Limit, and indeed called for one, but the proposed level of 10µg Co/m^3 inhalable is both worse for workers' protection and devastating for the industry.

There is no evidence of adverse health effects in the workplace at the higher value of 20µg Co/m^3, which already protects workers' health. By contrast, imposing a 10µg limit would simply offshore European jobs to jurisdictions with higher exposure limits (like the United States federal limit at 100µg, or China with 50µg) – undermining both worker safety and industrial sovereignty.

According to KU Leuven's Metals for Clean Energy study, cobalt demand in Europe will rise by 350% by 2050. To maintain today's modest level of self-sufficiency, Europe's industry must grow by at least that much. To achieve Europe's own Critical Raw Materials Act benchmarks, it must grow faster still. Yet under the Commission's proposal, we forecast that Europe will lose one in six cobalt sites and jobs, including 71% of all battery precursor manufacturing, 32% of cobalt recycling and 21% of metallurgical alloy manufacturing (used in aerospace and defence). No other jurisdiction – including within the EU – has adopted a value this low.

The opportunity cost is immense: at a time when Europe should be attracting investment to secure its raw materials base, it risks doing the opposite.

In its response to the Commission's consultation, Rheinmetall warned of the impact these measures will have on Europe's defence readiness:

> *"It is clear that the defence supply chain in general will be negatively impacted from stricter rules. At a time where the EU is put at risk from third party and faces security threats, effects that diminish the defence production capabilities of EU companies should be carefully considered with regard to benefits and risks."*

Industry therefore calls on the Commission to adopt a 20µg limit, without any further proposal to reduce. This is the value that already exists in nine EU member states, supported by decades of workplace data, and still among the strictest in the world. It would remain challenging, yet achievable, preserving both worker safety and industrial competitiveness.

With the Council expected to conclude discussions in December, there remains time to correct course and safeguard Europe's strategic autonomy. We, the undersigned, would urge you to review the disconnect between this policy and the Critical Raw Materials Act, Europe's defence a security goals, the circular economy, and twin transitions. It is important Europe takes time to fully understand the consequences before it is too late. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

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