

Mr. Frans Timmermans  
First Vice-President  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049 Brussels  
Belgium

Brussels, 16th December 2016

## Co-operative retailers support the EU Ecolabel for Tissue Paper

Dear Mr. Timmermans,

At a meeting of the College of Commissioners held on 25th October, President Juncker suggested that the EU Ecolabel for the “Tissue Paper” Product Group should be discontinued. The reasoning for making this proposal is unclear.

A little over a week before this meeting, on 13<sup>th</sup> October, you spoke at the launch of SDG Watch. Over the course of your nuanced speech, you mentioned how “the stakes could not be higher” on the issue of sustainability. You also talked about how concrete measures would need to be taken at the European level on each of the SDGs, and about the imperative of working together with people from the private sector “who really want to make changes”.

Many retailers, like ourselves in Euro Coop, recognize that stocking tissue paper products with the EU Ecolabel means that we can offer consumers a chance to take real action to reduce their environmental impact. The stringent criteria of the EU Ecolabel for tissue paper means our retailers can confidently sell these products in the knowledge that their production is associated with reduced air emissions of sulphur and greenhouse gases and decreased water pollution through reduced emissions of chlorine compounds and organic waste. These products are also associated with less energy consumption and more prudent management of natural resources because they are produced with either recycled fibres or virgin fibres that come from sustainably managed forests.

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The features of these products also have a role to play in making concrete steps towards achieving the SDGs that you spoke about on 13<sup>th</sup> October. They are particularly relevant for meeting goals 6, 12 and 15. The reduced emissions of chlorine compounds and organic waste to water and sulphur to the air means that these products contribute to achieving SDG 6.3 to improve water quality and SDG 12.4 to achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle. Similarly, given that the fibres must come from either recycled sources or sustainably managed forests, these products are linked to SDG 12.2 to achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources and to SDG 15.2 to promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests. The use of recycled fibre is also associated with SDG 12.5 to substantially reduce waste generation. Finally, and perhaps most directly of all, the EU Ecolabel for tissue paper products contributes to SDG 12.6 to encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices, and to SDG 12.8 to ensure that people have the relevant information for lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Not only does the EU Ecolabel for tissue paper contribute to achieving the SDGs by creating a market for products with high environmental standards, more than anything, it is something that consumers can trust. This has been illustrated through consistent and sound market share growth over the years. In fact, Euro Coop's members are so confident in the EU Ecolabel for this product group that some have their own private-label tissue products that bear the certification. For instance, Coop Italia first introduced a private-label EU Ecolabel toilet paper onto the market in 1999. Their range of EU Ecolabel products has since expanded considerably, with growth of 3% this year and a turnover of €15 million.

In your role as First Vice-President of the European Commission, Euro Coop asks you to support the retention of the EU Ecolabel for the "Tissue Paper" Product Group, and strengthen the EU Ecolabel overall. Rather than dismantling the EU Ecolabel by eliminating important product groups like tissue paper, there needs to be more investment to develop the label and criteria so that uptake grows all over Europe. As well as being good for European consumers, retailers and producers, the EU Ecolabel has much to contribute to the EU's efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Yours sincerely,

Massimo Bongiovanni  
President