

Press release
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essencia and the federal government join forces to keep Belgium in the top league for chemicals and life sciences

Louvain-la-Neuve, 15 September 2015 – *The Belgian federation for the chemical and life sciences industry, essencia, and the federal government are to relaunch the High-Level Group on Chemicals and Life Sciences. This dialogue platform aims to provide a practical support framework to consolidate the chemical and life sciences industry in Belgium.*

Following the success of previous High-Level Groups, the federal government and essencia today announced the creation of a new High-Level Group on Chemicals and Life Sciences at an official set-up meeting attended by Prime Minister Charles Michel and representatives from essencia. The meeting was hosted by enzyme chemistry firm Realco.

essencia and the federal government have identified four key areas: **employment, energy, innovation and health protection**. The wage costs of round-the-clock working, government support for renewable energies, expanding the reduced rate of withholding tax for researchers to include graduates, and the national register of nanomaterials will be among the issues discussed by the working groups to be set up for each key area. Their goal is to seek practical solutions to boost the sector's competitiveness and develop an action plan by the end of 2016.

Prime Minister **Charles Michel** welcomed the HLG's relaunch: *"The chemical and life sciences industry is one of the economic mainstays of our country. Employing around 90,000 people and accounting for almost a third of industrial investment in Belgium and over half of all private R&D spending, it is Belgium's leading export sector and plays a vital role in our economy. High-quality dialogue between companies and government is more essential than ever to identify the practical steps needed to boost the economy and jobs. The establishment of this new High-Level Group therefore fits perfectly with the federal government's growth strategy."*

"The Belgian chemical and pharmaceutical industries now face greater global competition, particularly from the US chemical sector which is enjoying a major renaissance thanks to the exploitation of shale gas. The industry in Europe risks overcapacity which will result in consolidations. A structural dialogue between the sector and the federal government within this new High-Level Group is therefore vital to strengthen the leading position of the Belgian chemical and pharmaceutical sector on the world stage," said essencia's Managing Director **Yves Verschuere**.

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essencia represents 800 companies in the chemical, plastics and life sciences (pharmaceuticals and biotechnology) industries in Belgium.