



NEW REPORT

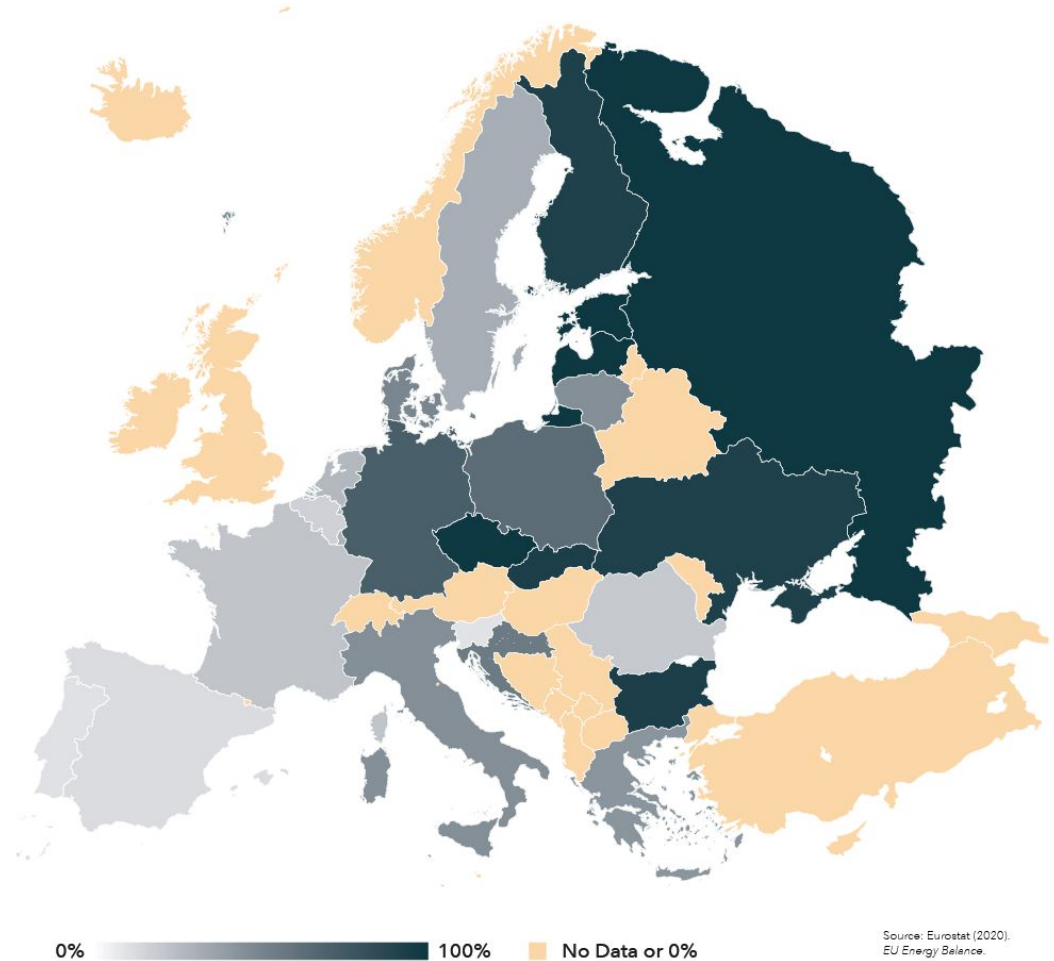
# WINTER IS COMING: PLASTIC HAS TO GO

A case for decreasing plastic production to reduce the European Union's dependence on fossil fuels and Russia



[#breakfreefromplastic](https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org)

- **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** has revealed **Europe's dependence on fossil fuels**, particularly Russian oil and gas.
- **Russia has been by far the EU's largest supplier of oil and gas.**
- **In the EU in 2020, 38% of the gas and 22% of the oil came from Russia**, a dependence that has increased since 2014.



In **August 2022** the EU adopted a regulation calling on EU Member States commits to **reduce gas by at least 15% by 31 March 2023**.

This plan reveals a **massive discrepancy** between the attention and measures taken against the consumption of fossil gas in households and the **lack of attention to the enormous energy and fossil feedstock use of the different industries** of the EU Member States.

**One industry remains a complete oversight in the EU public energy and climate debates: the petrochemicals industry.**



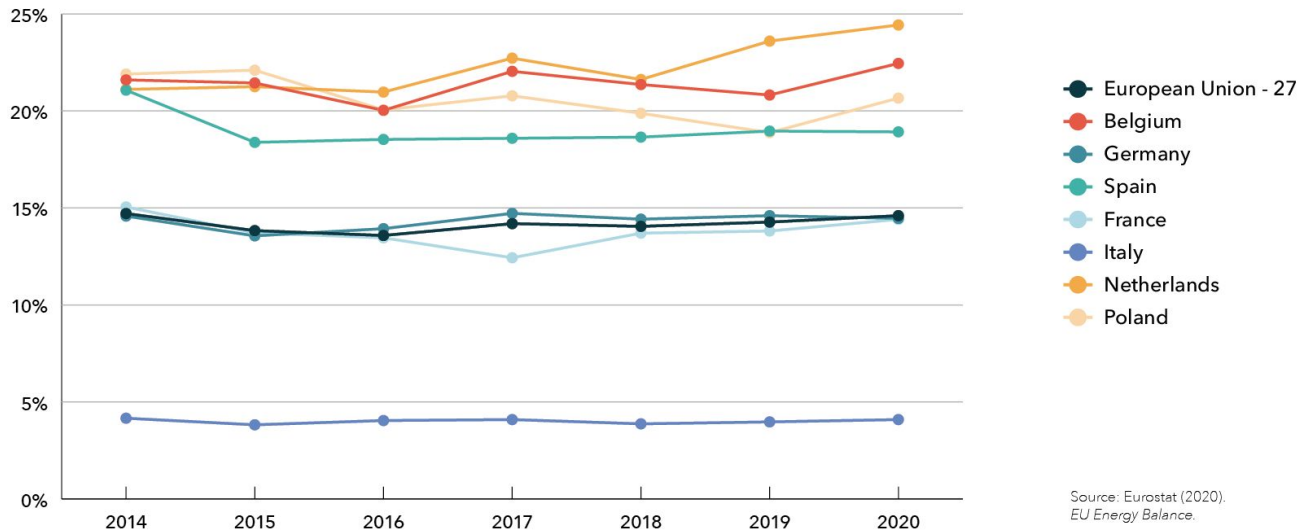
Q VISUAL THINKERY

- **Yet, nearly 15% of all the fossil gas consumed in 2020 in the EU was used to manufacture petrochemicals** (energy for the process and feedstock).

- EU's **biggest petrochemical-producing** countries are Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Italy and Poland.

- Final gas consumption for petrochemicals production rises to a **quarter for the Netherlands**, a fifth for Belgium and Poland, and 15% for Germany.

[Figure 1.1] Share of final gas consumption for petrochemical production in the EU 2014-2020



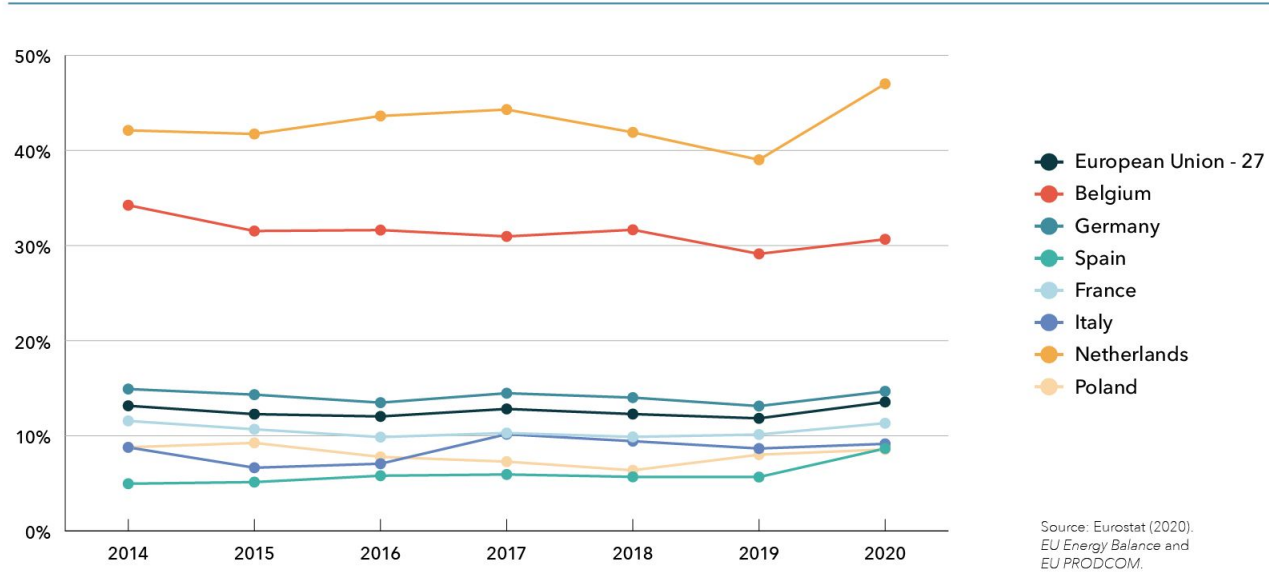
Source: Eurostat (2020). EU Energy Balance.

- **And nearly 14% of all the oil consumed in 2020 in the EU was used to manufacture petrochemicals** (energy for the process and feedstock).

- Final oil consumption for petrochemicals production rises to a **47% for the Netherlands**, 31% for Belgium and Poland, and 15% for Germany.

- Together, **the EU's 7 biggest petrochemical-producing countries** account for **75% of the EU's final oil consumption and 81% of the fossil gas consumption.**

[Figure 1.5] Share of final oil consumption for petrochemical production in the EU 2014-2020



- **Plastic production is by far the largest industrial oil, gas, and electricity user in the EU,** overshadowing other energy-intensive industries. It was **responsible for nearly 9% and 8% of the EU's final consumption of fossil gas and oil,** respectively, in 2020.

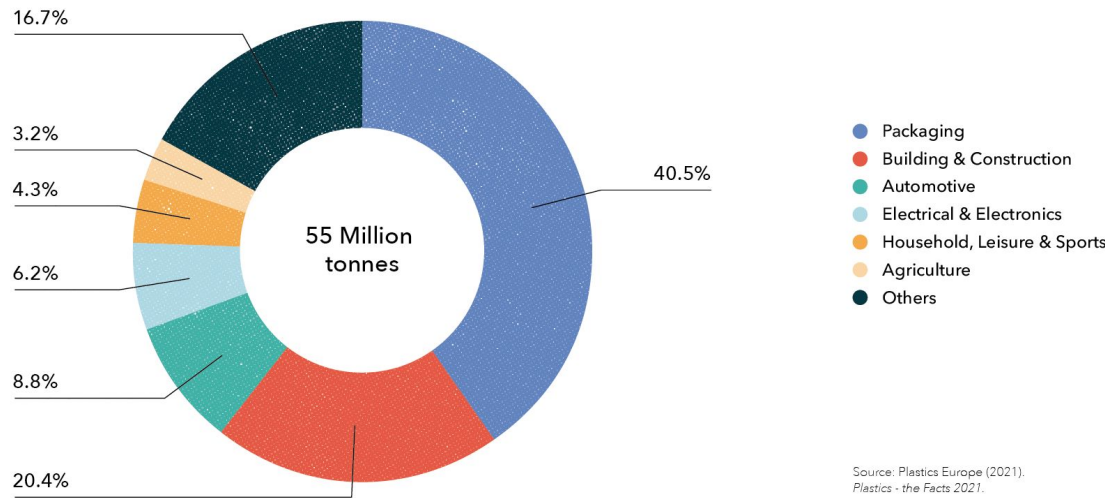


- **Plastic production is also the most energy- and feedstock-intensive of all the processes of the petrochemicals industry.** It accounts for **a fifth (21.98%) of industrial gas** and **two-fifths (37.58%) of oil consumption in the EU.**
- More than **40%** of it is **single-use plastic packaging.**

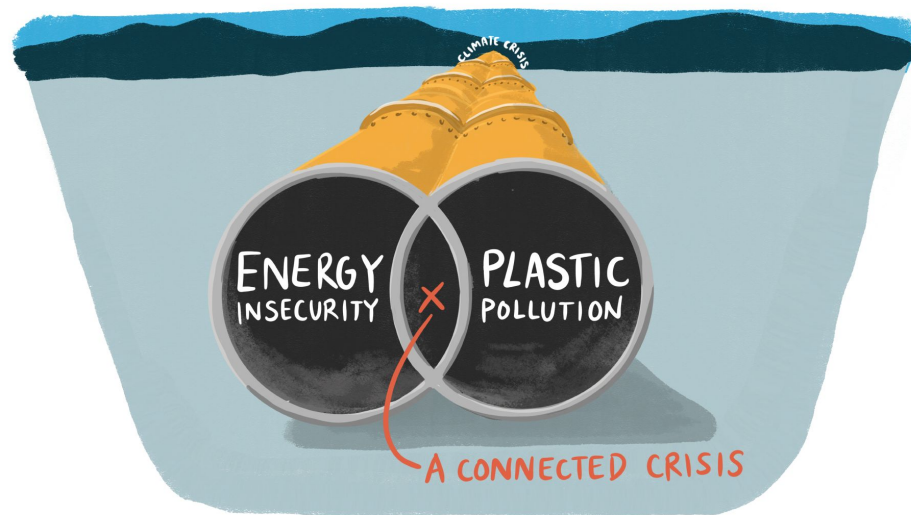
- **In 2020, the EU produced 55 Mt of plastic, including over 22 million tonnes of plastic packaging.**  
 The fossil fuel use to produce this amount of packaging represents **more than the final gas consumption of Hungary and the final oil consumption of Austria.**

- **Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland** not only are the EU's biggest oil- and gas-consuming countries for plastics production. They are also **responsible for 77% of all plastic packaging waste in the EU.**

[Figure 2.1] EU plastics demand by segments in 2020



- The EU and its Member States' **answer to the energy security crisis** has been to **ask citizens to reduce their consumption**, marginally invest in renewable energy, and secure or explore **new trade agreements with the US, Norway and African countries like Sénégal or Nigeria**.
- This is a **short-term fix for a long-term problem**, that **deepens the climate crisis** and imposes significant environmental and health costs on the countries and communities where extraction occurs.
- The EU must seize this **opportunity to implement real system change measures to tackle at once the energy, climate and plastic pollution crises**. Looking at **reducing fossil fuels consumption** in the industry sector, starting with the **production of unnecessary single-use plastics and packaging**, and fostering the development of **Zero Waste production and consumption models** could contribute a great deal.



© VISUAL THINKERY





Achieving a **50% prevention target of plastic packaging** combined with a **90% recycling objective by 2030** could **save the equivalent of the Czech Republic's 2020 final oil and gas consumption** in just 10 years.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS to the EU and its Members States

- ⚡ **Ambitious and fastened implementation of existing legislation preventing waste** → Waste Framework and Single-Use Plastics Directives.
- ⚡ **Adopt ambitious measures on packaging prevention** in the context of the upcoming Packaging Packaging Waste Directive.
- ⚡ Ensure that measures taken to address the energy crisis **restrict non-essential industry oil & gas use**.
- ⚡ Push for **high ambition on upstream measures** within the negotiations of the **plastics treaty**.
- ⚡ **Stop building new fossil fuel infrastructure** – including petrochemical facilities, starting with a moratorium or freeze on permitting of new virgin plastic production facilities.
- ⚡ Engage with the European petrochemical industry to set up **decarbonisation plans and a fossil-free future pathway** and a needed **just transition** for this sector.

**Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland** not only are the EU's biggest oil- and gas-consuming countries for plastics production. They are also **responsible for 77% of all plastic packaging waste in the EU**. These countries should take the lead in **implementing measures to drastically reduce plastic production and consumption.**



Q VISUAL THINKERY

#breakfreefromplastic

**CIEL** CENTER for INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



**Delphine Lévi Alvarès**

*European Coordinator*

Break Free From Plastic

[delphine@breakfreefromplastic.org](mailto:delphine@breakfreefromplastic.org)

[www.breakfreefromplastic.org](http://www.breakfreefromplastic.org)

Read more at

<https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/winter-is-coming/>