

Věra Jourová
Vice-President, European Commission
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Brussels, 23 May 2024

Joint call to the European Commission to honour participatory democratic tools

Dear Commission Vice President Jourova,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you to express our concern on the inaction of the European Commission as regards its responses to a number of European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs). ECIs were established more than a decade ago by the Commission to enable citizens to have a direct say in shaping the European Union's laws. The Commission has responded to ten successful ECIs, however, it has drastically failed to follow through on the commitments made in its responses. **ECIs are an important piece of the democratic process, and citizens need to know that when they avail of this tool, they can rely on its delivery.** With the European elections around the corner, another important part of the democratic process, we urge the Commission to prove the reliability and trustworthiness of the ECIs by honouring them, and thus democracy as a whole.

In 2021, the Commission [responded](#) to the ECI "**End the Cage Age**" with a clear commitment - to propose legislation by 2023 to phase out, and ultimately prohibit the use of cages on farms. This commitment represented a significant step in addressing the concerns of the 1.4 million citizens who asked for this ban. Despite creating legitimate expectations for those EU citizens, at the time of truth, the European Commission failed to come forward with a proposal, and has, so far, failed to provide any concrete timeline for doing so.

The "**Save bees and farmers! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment**" ECI urged the Commission to accomplish three main goals: helping farmers switch to sustainable techniques, restoring biodiversity in agriculture, and eliminating synthetic pesticides by 2035. It aligned with the calls made later on, during the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#), where citizens emphasised the need for food production that is affordable, safe, equitable, sustainable, and climate-responsible in order to preserve ecosystems, biodiversity, and food sustainability. The [response of the Commission](#) in 2023 was to implement the proposals that were then being negotiated by co-legislators, such as

the nature restoration and SUR proposals, rather than proposing new laws. However, this suggestion has fallen short of keeping the Commission's commitment.

The backtracking of the Commission on both ECIs calls into question the very *raison d'être* of the ECI instrument itself and severely undermines the trust that citizens have in the EU's democratic process. Despite its objective to enable participatory democracy, none of the ten successful ECIs have produced a concrete legislative outcome, and it seems that **citizens' demands have only had a marginal influence on the Commission's legislative agenda.** Up to ten million citizens called for new laws, and yet, none of them have been properly heard. This is startling when one considers how the Commission reacted to the farmers' protests, amending over a couple months the Common Agricultural Policy that had taken years to be democratically negotiated.

The farmers' protests across the EU not only led to the weakening of existing measures but also to the abandonment of plans to strengthen biodiversity protection. These emergency and short-sighted decisions fail to consider the bigger long-term picture, compromising the EU's Green Deal ambitions on environment and animal welfare. In addition, **the still missing sustainable food system framework continues to jeopardise the very objectives of this critical deal framed to be one of the main priorities of this Commission.**

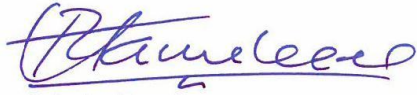
The acceleration of the transition to sustainable, equitable food systems, with higher animal welfare and without the need for pesticides, will benefit farmers and consumers alike. Robust legislation can harmonise and simplify rules while easing competition and guiding farmers on future-proof investments. As [the EUCRA report](#) emphasises, there is a critical need for concrete policies that support resilient farming and dietary shifts, as well as for fostering food environments that can ensure higher animal welfare, protected biodiversity and fair prices that support farmers in this transition, while being accessible to consumers.

In a few weeks, citizens from across all 27 member states will go to the polls to elect their own representatives. Yet, **it is critical that the participatory tools created to bring citizens closer to the EU institutions prove worthwhile.** The European Union otherwise risks losing citizens' interest and engagement in the European Union. Citizens already feel, to a large extent, disconnected from the EU. This is demonstrated by the rise in anti-EU rhetoric and eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament as well as national ones.

We, the undersigned, ask the European Commission to prioritise these two files in the early days of the next mandate, without further delays. We call for:

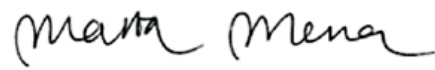
- A concrete timeline of when the remaining animal welfare legislation proposals will be published in order to honour the EC's response on the "End the Cage Age" ECI
- An ambitious regulation for reducing pesticide use, aligned with the Farm to Fork objectives and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity targets.

Signatories



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CEO, Eurogroup for Animals

**EUROGROUP
FOR ANIMALS**



Marta Mesa,
Secretary General, Slow Food



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