**Save Bees and Farmers ECI**

**meeting EU Commissioners Kyriakides & Jourova**

**Date**: Friday 25th November 2022

**Time**: 15-17h

**Place**: Berlaymont building EU Commission

**Participants representing Save Bees and Farmers ECI:**

* Dr. Martin Dermine (PAN Europe, Belgium, main representative)
* Dr. Helmut Burtscher (Global2000, Austria, member of the citizens committee)
* Annemarie Gluderer (South Tirol, Italy, member of the citizens committee)
* Constantin Dobrescu (Romapis Romania, member of the citizens committee)
* Prof. Polyxeni Nicolopoulou Stamati MD. PhD (Greece, member of the citizens committee)
* Karl Baer (former representative of citizens committee, now member of the Bundestag, Germany)
* Beate Beller (WeMoveEU, Germany)
* Clara Bourgin (Friends of the Earth Europe, France)
* Corinna Hoelzel (BUND, Germany)
* Johann Lütke Schwienhorst (Aurelia Stiftung, Germany)
* Luis Morago (Avaaz, Spain)
* Madeleine Coste (Slow Food Europe, France)
* Natalija Svrtan (PAN Europe, Croatia)
* Tjerk Dalhuisen (PAN Europe, Netherlands)
* Veronika Feicht (Umweltinstitut München, Germany)

**Representatives from the European Commission:**

* Věra JOUROVÁ, Vice-President for Values and Transparency
* Stella KYRIAKIDES, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
* Patrick CHILD, Deputy Director-General DG ENV
* Mihail DUMITRU, Deputy Director-General DG AGRI
* Maria Pilar AGUAR FERNANDEZ, Director - Health and food audits and analysis, DG SANTE
* Eduard HULICIUS, Member of Cabinet Jourova
* Rudiger BOOGERT - Head of Unit - Policy Priorities & Work Programme, responsible for the European Citizens' Initiative, SG
* Bettina DOESER, Head of Unit - Nature Conservation & Biodiversity, DG ENV
* Gaelle MARION, Head of Unit - Environmental Sustainability, DG AGRI
* Silvia KERSEMAKERS - Team leader - European Citizens' Initiative, SG
* Andreas GUMBERT, Policy Officer - Natural Capital & Ecosystem Health, DG ENV
* Sofie HOFKENS - Policy Officer - Pesticides – Placing on the market, DG SANTE E4
* Marina HADJIYANNI - Policy Officer - Biodiversity - Environmental Sustainability Unit, DG AGRI
* Aline SPRIET SG.D2, Javier Francisco DOMINGUEZ ORIVE, Anita LOMBARDO SG.D2 - Policy Officers, European Green Deal, SG
* Adriana MUNGIU - Policy officer - European Citizens' Initiative, SG

1 Introduction : message from representatives of the citizens committee

My name is Martin Dermine, I am from Belgium, I work at PAN Europe and I am the main representative of this ECI. On behalf of the Save Bees and Farmers ECI, we would like to thank you for receiving us and listening to our 3 demands that we will develop in a few moments. This ECI is composed of over 200 organisations: health and environmental NGOs, beekeepers, farmers, drinking water companies and private companies. But before going any further, we would like to thank the European Commission for the publication of its European Green Deal in December 2019. We still remember Ursula von der Leyen's words when she presented the Green Deal and said that "it is no longer just about handing over to our children a planet where living is comfortable, but a planet where living is possible". When I heard these words we had the feeling that the EU Commission had finally recognised the urgency of the climate- and biodiversity crises.

We also saw the publication of the Farm-to-Fork, the Biodiversity Strategy and the Chemical Strategy for Sustainability as a response to the need for a holistic approach to catalyse the transition to a sustainable food system that is so important in the face of the current crises. And part of this holistic approach are the two very specific legislative proposals for setting binding pesticide reduction targets and also targets for nature and biodiversity restoration. These two legislative proposals overlap in content with our ECI's demands 1 and 2, even if the ECI's pesticide reduction target of 80% reduction by 2030 is even more ambitious.

My name is Helmut Burtscher-Schaden, I am from Austria and I work for Global2000, I am the deputy representative of the citizens committee. We think that there is no need to explain the urgency of action in more detail. Three comprehensive scientific reports by the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have already done so in 2019 – with the FAO general secretary Graciano da Silva warning in unusually stark terms of "biodiversity loss that seriously threatens the future of our food, livelihoods, health and environment". And we are sure that the Commission was very aware of these scientific reports when it presented the European Green Deal

But what we want to demonstrate, and are very good at demonstrating, is the public interest in taking action to make agriculture more environmentally friendly and to limit the use of pesticides. What could better underline this than the fact that of the only seven successful ECIs that have been held since 2012, two ECIs deal with problems linked to pesticides: Stop Glyphosate and Save Bees and Farmers.

2 Short tour de table: people introducing themselves

3 Testimonies from members of the Citizens Committee

**Annemarie Gluderer, organic farmer**

I took over the representation for Italy in the Citizens' Committee of the ECI because I had to: for our organic farm, as a mother and grandma for a future for our grandchildren.

Organic farming is our philosophy of life, we have been doing it for 33 years. Our herbs are not treated with pesticides at all, we even do without those that would be allowed in organic farming - and it works! Biodiversity, crop rotation and targeted soil cultivation are our recipe for success. Pesticides are out of the question for us, pesticides kill and have no place on food.

However, our organic farm is surrounded by land that is sprayed a lot because of intensive apple production. Pesticides drift onto our property, our organic herbs are contaminated with them and can no longer be sold as organic goods. This causes us great economic damage and if that were not enough, we become "criminals":

Control authorities sent us 7 penalty notices for mislabelling, penalty amount over 100,000 €. We did not pay, this would be tantamount to an admission of guilt. This was followed by 3 criminal trials in court, our herbs were confiscated. We, the aggrieved parties, were accused, a company closure threatened, guiltless, we were hated and ostracised.

How often we just sat there, shocked - we hugged each other and cried. Our 3 children asked us to carry on, for them and the grandchildren. That is our mission now and that is why we are here.

But the hammer was yet to come!

In 2017, we received a penalty notice from the South Tyrol Quality Label. A residue analysis had shown that our herbs were treated with Captan, a synthetic chemical pesticide. The accusation read: "Although it is probably a matter of drift, the sale of these herbs could result in serious irreversible damage to the South Tyrol Quality Label, as Captan is a pesticide that is harmful to health".

We as an organic farm do not use pesticides because we are concerned about our health and about the future of our grandchildren. If captan lands on our organic fields via drift, captan is in the air, it gets into the water, into our homes, into schoolyards and home gardens.

While our conventionally farmed neighbours are allowed to carry on as before without any consequences, we were no longer allowed to sell our herbs and we are punished because others use these substances that are harmful to health!

Because there is unfortunately still no law in the EU that protects organic farms, we had to invest 150,000 € out of our own pockets in protective measures against drift. In the meantime, we have even "fled" and grow our organic herbs 30 km away from our farm headquarters at 1300 m above sea level, in an unspoilt area with grassland cultivation. Currently there are only 2 conventional apple orchards there, yet!

The example of our farm shows how little conventional and organic farming can coexist.

For us there is only one solution: a pesticide ban here and now! I ask for it!

**Constantin Dobrescu, beekeeper, board member of Romapsis and Beelife**

As a representative of a beekeepers’ organisation and being a beekeeper myself, I would like to bring a testimony from the field about the need for a total ban on synthetic pesticides. Every year, thousands of Romanian beekeepers face serious losses of bees in circumstances that are clearly linked to the use of pesticides. The situation is getting worse every year and is linked to the increasingly industrial agriculture practiced in my country. This means monocultures, chemical herbicides, a widespread use of melliferous plant hybrids that offer less nectar and pollen in exchange for higher productivity. And, unfortunately, this comes hand in hand with greater plant susceptibility to pests, requiring greater quantities of pesticides. It's certainly no mere coincidence that nowadays it's not uncommon for beekeepers to see a carpet of dead bees left behind when they move their hives out of a sunflower field. It is also no coincidence that it is precisely in the year of the resumption in Romania of the already 'traditional' derogation from the neonicotinoid ban for sunflower that we are experiencing the worst end to the beekeeping season in many years, with many bee colonies reduced to a handful of bees and an unprecedented number of total colony losses in October. Totally unusual for this time of year. From the beekeepers' point of view, Romania's case is probably one of the worst in the EU in terms of pesticide use. But as a board member of BeeLife, a European beekeepers' organisation, I confirm that pesticides are equally problematic for bees across Europe. Without a bold approach to the pesticide issue, the future of bees and other pollinating insects, our entire environment and the food security of EU citizens is at risk.

**Dr. Polyxeni Nicolopoulo, environmental pathologist, university of Athens**

Like the bees, children are the “canaries in the coalmines”: they are sensitive bio-indicators for impending disease, harm and economic loss. Children are “vulnerable, valuable, and at risk” from hazardous agents like pesticides in their environments, as the EEA reported to the WHO London Ministerial Conference in 1999.

From their labours in fields, factories and chimneys in the 18 t century, to their involuntary consumer exposures to hazardous chemicals, pesticides and radiations in the 21 st century, children, from foetuses to teenagers, have been particularly susceptible to the health costs of so called economic “progress.

We know from the WHO that “Life expectancy at birth is one of the strongest explanatory variables for the growth in GDP” so we also diminish the economic value of children when we endanger their health with environmental pollutants like pesticides.

As Margot Wallström, Environment Commissioner said in 2001” What is good for children is good for the whole society! “

There are seven sound reasons why children are more “Vulnerable, Valuable and at Risk” (EEA 1999) than adults:

• There is greater scientific complexity, uncertainty and ignorance about children’s health
• Children are generally more biologically sensitive to harmful agents
• They have greater exposures to pesticides via their ground level behavior, a factor recognized in the EU Toys directive.
• They live longer so that harm has longer time to impact on today’s children
• And much harm from pesticides today will only impact on tomorrow’s children via the inter-generational effects of some pesticides
• There is benefit inequity: children get fewer benefits from pesticides production and use, such as job,s and from many adult consumer products: and finally
• Children lack political and social power: they suffer from involuntary harm from environmental pollutants yet children have least power to avoid that harm.

The increases in some cancers, reproductive disorders, asthma and other respiratory diseases, in neurological damage, autism and in attention deficit disorder has been called the “new paediatric morbidity” and pesticides are contributing significantly to that morbidity. Yet research and exposure limits for pesticides often ignore the effects on children.

It is almost 30 years since the report from the US NAS said that “we are conducting a massive toxicological experiment and our children are the experimental animals” in their report on “Pesticides in the Diets of Children” from 1993.

Let’s heed the lessons of lead, of mercury, of the pregnancy pill DES, of PCBs and dioxins, and protect our children from pesticide exposures. We do not want them to become guinea pigs as well as canaries!

4 Origin of the ECI + Context today

**Veronica Feicht**

In order to shed some light onto how our “Save Bees and Farmers” ECI came to be, I would briefly like to take you back four years. Because at that time, in the spring of 2018 Bavarian citizens were, for weeks on end, forming long queues all across the federal state, to enter their city halls and put their signatures underneath the demands of the citizens’ referendum “Save the Bees!”.

This referendum called for changes made to Bavaria’s nature protection law, all of them aiming at halting the loss of biodiversity and increasing protection for natural habitats. This “Save the Bees!” citizens’ referendum turned out to be the most successful one that Bavaria had ever seen, and inspired similar initiatives in several other German federal states.

At the same time we were seeing that we were not alone in Germany in our wish to move away from a pesticide-based agricultural system. Across Europe we knew of similar movements – of the Marcia-Stop-Pesticidi walks in Italy, of the monthly protest of the “Nous voulons des Coquelicots” movement in France, of the people of the village of Mals in Northern Italy who had had their own referendum to become the first pesticide-free municipality in Europe, of beekeeping communities across the whole Europe suffering from colony losses, of organic farming representatives and of health organizations, and of so many others that were raising their voices about the dangers of pesticide, all across the continent.

Hearing all of their voices, and remembering that in 2017 over a million Europeans had signed the “Stop Glyphosate ECI”, which had not only asked for a glyphosate ban, but also for quantitative pesticide reduction targets, we realized that we needed to bring “Save the Bees!” to the European level. Because people across the entire EU wanted to move away from pesticides, because pesticide policies are being decided in Brussels, and because we wanted to give European citizens a tool to influence these policies that have such a huge effect on their own lives.

Now four years after Bavarians were forming queues, waiting to sign their citizens’ referendum, we can add to their signatures the signatures of over one million Europeans who are demanding an end to the pesticide era.

**Karl Baer**

We will support the pesticide reduction initiative in the European Parliament and the EU Council. We have over 200 organisations behind this ECI and we will keep mobilizing them to support the pesticide reduction proposal.

The Commission has reacted to the voices from citizens and science and made proposals for a reduction of pesticides and the restoration of nature. And even though we think the Harmonised Risk Indicator in the Annex of SUR renders the target to reduce the risk of pesticides completely ineffective; and even though I think it lacks the vision of an organic continent; the sustainable use regulation you proposed would actually bring significant and positive change.

It does so because it has some highly impactful provisions. Excepting at least protected areas from the common use of chemicals in European landscapes is impactful. Forcing the Member States to actually reach binding targets heals the central flaw of the Sustainable Use Directive, which barely had any impact at all.

That’s why you are facing so much resistance. It’s not the Russian invasion in Ukraine. It’s agri-business‘ and land owners‘ resistance to change. The EU Council is meeting today and we are concerned by the ongoing discussions. There is a chance that your SUR proposal is watered down to something without any impact at all or even fails completely. If you let this happen, history’s verdict will be as clear as today’s scientific evidence. We need biodiversity to feed ourselves.

The 200+ organisations ask to maintain the current proposal and fix the HRI proposal asap.

**5 Objectives of Save Bees and Farmers ECI**

**Objective 1 80% reduction of synthetic pesticides until 2030 and 100% reduction in 2035**

**Natalija Svrtan**

Since the implementation of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive in 2009, pesticide consumption has not decreased, on the contrary, in several EU Member States has increased.

Synthetic pesticides, including highly hazardous substances, particularly toxic to human health and to biodiversity, are being applied in high amounts in conventional farming processes. Pesticides that are used for decades and that are considered safe today will be banned in a few years, as they suddenly are classified as toxic to reproduction, carcinogenic or toxic to bees for instance! History shows that there is no safe use of synthetic pesticides and scientific evidence shows it is urgent to move away from this toxic model of agriculture!

The ECI goal - 80% reduction of synthetic pesticides by 2030 and complete phase-out by 2035, is aimed at preserving the essential resources needed for food production, which are healthy, productive soils and biodiversity. Once lost, it will present an unsolvable problem for conventional farmers themselves! In the same vein, food production should not harm citizens' health, either through direct exposure of users and bystanders or through pesticide residues in food and the environment.

Phasing out synthetic pesticides is also beneficial to farmers themselves: while preserving their health and the health of their families, becoming independent from the agrochemical industry will increase their economic resilience.

Scientific research, and experiences from farmers who move into the path of a real Integrated Pest Management show that this scenario is not only possible, but it leads to a long term increase in farmers' profitability, while protecting people's health, biodiversity and water resources.

**Martin Dermine**

While we positively welcome the proposal from the Commission to reduce pesticides by 2030, we believe that a longer-term plan to fully phase out synthetic pesticides should be designed. Furthermore, the proposal from the Commission to reduce by 50% the more hazardous pesticides, namely the Candidates for Substitution, is not enough: according to EU rules, Member States should have substituted them long ago as alternatives exist: they should thus be phased out on the short term!

Farmers' own experience shows that IPM can lead to reducing pesticides up to 80% does not lead to significant yield reductions. The current geopolitical context should thus not be used as an excuse to water down the Commission proposal for a Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation.

In the same vein, organic farming leads to an increase in employment in rural areas, while public subsidies to farmers stay in the pocket of the farmers themselves, rather than feeding the agrochemical industry.

Many farmers are currently suffering from the bad reputation they have because of the use of agrochemicals but we, as NGOs, also observe that farmer unions constantly oppose to substantial reductions in pesticides, despite of the harm they cause to the farming community, by harming their health and that from their families, as well as by destroying biodiversity they rely on to produce food!

It is thus paramount that the Commission and Member States move towards a strong and continuous reduction in the use of synthetic pesticides.

**Objective 2 Restoration of biodiversity in agricultural land**

Corinna Hoelzel

The use of synthetic pesticides and the destruction of habitats are 2 main reasons for the loss of biodiversity. Therefore protection and restoration of habitats like hedges, trees, wildflower strips, extensively managed grassland and buffer zones around water bodies are key. That should happen in sensitive areas and protected areas as well as on agricultural fields.

Protected areas are important for the retreat and survival of insects. Modern pesticides have negative effects on biodiversity already in very low doses. Therefore we urgently need areas completely free of pesticide use, we need sensitive areas where organic farming is possible and we immediately need pesticide free buffer zones for rivers and sensitive areas which prevent pesticide drift.

For farmers Integrated pest management is already mandatory. Yet at least for Germany this is only theoretical. There is no priority for preventive and non-chemical alternatives on the ground. There is very little education and guidance for conventional farmers about alternatives to pesticides and about how to create habitats for insects, birds, bats or amphibians on agricultural land. We need definitely more pressure and more incentives for ecological measures.

The EU proposals for SUR and the restoration law are an important step towards the protection of biodiversity. Unfortunately, some member states and lobby organisations are strongly fighting against it, using false and misleading arguments. We hope that the over 1 million signatures show the general support in the society for ambitious pesticides and biodiversity policies. We hope the Commission can see this as a sign of support to stay on track and we urge you to not backtrack on your proposals.

**Tjerk Dalhuisen**

I was born 3 meters away from the Poison Storage Room. Yes, we sold pesticides. My father was director of a farmers cooperative. We lived above the shop. When my father took me on a tour to visit farmers in the cooperative he would point at pastures with thousands of flowers. Saying: “That farmer doesn’t take care of his land, we have a product for that.”

I don’t blame him. That was what he was taught in his education. He thought it was progress. It is the narrative of chemical farming. Productivity at all costs. Monoculture in the fields and in the minds. No attention for soil fertility, water retaining capacity, biodiversity, water quality, human health.

I recently visited this area where I grew up in the east of the Netherlands. It made my heart weep. We call it “landscape pain’ in Dutch. Yes, it was green, very green. With trees, but no hedgerows, no biodiverse fields, no flowers, very few insects and bird. Green monocultures of ryegrass all over. Sprayed with animal dung and artificial fertiliser for maximum production. Killed with glyphosate at a regular base, to ‘renew’ the grass. Creating the infamous glyphosate-treated orange killing fields that we see in many EU countries in early spring.

Soil fertility and biodiversity are built over millennia. But monocultures and pesticides use are predatory. It steadily destroys the fundament of farming itself. That is why intensive chemical farming is not sustainable at all. It does not give us food security in the long run. On the contrary, it will bring us misery, a scorched earth and a silent spring.

Many people in the Netherlands know that intensive farming is a dead-end road. It is all over the news and so are the farmers protests. They are desperate, driven in this productivity trap. They see no way out, tied to excessive loans by the banks. Many don’t see a future for their children on the farm, many don’t have a successor. Now the focus is on excess nitrogen, next will be the extremely poor water quality and the collapse of biodiversity. This can only be addressed by drastic reduction of pesticide use.

We have to act now. Governing is looking ahead. We do need healthy soils, clean water, hedgerows, flowers and insects back in our fields. Not only in nature areas but everywhere in the agricultural land. Let’s take away the pain from our landscapes, address the concerns of our farmers and guarantee the biodiversity so necessary for sustainable food security.

**Objective 3 :** Public support to farmers to transition towards agroecology

**Clara Bourgin**

Madeleine and I will be speaking about objective 3 on the public support to farmers to transition towards agroecology.

It is crucial that EU Commission and Member States ensure that farmers do not become victims of this necessary change, but rather frontline actors of the transition. The transition towards more sustainable and toxic free food systems will only happen if farmers are supported through public policies. The resources are there, it is just a question of how to use them.

CAP

* Huge amounts of money going towards big industrial farms and agrochemical companies instead of supporting small diverse and sustainable farms
* Although the new CAP has been described as being “greener and fairer” it continues to give subsidies on the basis of hectares, encourages large-scale industrial production, and locks farmers in a system that forces them to spray large amounts of pesticides .
* There needs to be a complete reform in how CAP subsidies are allocated.
* In the shorter term, the revision of the CAP strategic plan taking place every year as an opportunity to amend and redirect funding
* Looking towards the next CAP revision, pesticide reduction and full integration of IPM and support to farmers in the transition towards agroecology must finally become an integral part of the post-2027 CAP.
* CAP money is an important chunk of the EU budget and citizens clearly demand it to be used in a positive way: CAP money should be conditioned to a strict gradual pesticide reduction and the respect of environmental rules. Supporting intensive farming practices cannot be an option anymore.

Severing the toxic relation between farmers and chemicals

* At the moment, the majority of trainings and advices for farmers are done by companies that have an enormous financial interest in promoting and selling pesticides.
* Instead, there should be truly independent and free trainings for farmers to help them transition towards agroecological practices and gain real independence from using synthetic pesticides. There needs to be sufficient public funds and resources allocated to this and any financial support from the agrochemical industry towards farmers and farming organisations needs to be prohibited.

**Madeleine Coste**

I will further develop 3 demands the ECI has to support farmers in the transition:

1. First, as stated before, we have many alternatives to the use of pesticides - agroecological solutions already exist, and several modeling studies demonstrate that shifting to agroecology can feed Europeans healthily, reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, help to restore biodiversity and protect natural resources. We need to rapidly increase the dissemination of k**nowledge and orient research** towards agroecology and put an end to public research going into developing synthetic pesticides, Genetically Modified Organisms including New Genomic Techniques.
2. **Stop importing agricultural products which do not meet European standards,** in order to level the playing field and protect our farmers from unfair competition with farmers from third countries that still use synthetic pesticides or GMOs. This is very important in order to help European farmers be less at a disadvantage, and obviously would contribute to protecting the health of food producers and the environment in those third countries. The Maximum Residue Levels for pesticides in imported food should be the same as for food produced here.
3. Third, in order to move towards a pesticide-free Europe, as already said, we need a real paradigm shift, including **re-localising our food systems, supporting artisanal food production who often farm in a more virtuous way, and supporting farmers by developing local / short food supply chains** and distribution systems which give more bargaining power to farmers. This also requires allowing member states and regions to develop more on-farm processing facilities such as mobile slaughterhouses, and adapting hygiene rules which today are still very restrictive for small scale producers.

Supporting producers to transition to sustainable food systems must become a key objective of the **Sustainable Food Systems legislative framework**. It will also be important for the framework to allow for inclusive and meaningful participation from relevant stakeholders and especially **civil society and farmers themselves**, or this transition will never happen.

**6 Concluding remarks**

**Martin Dermine**

Today, we have had the honour to represent over 1 million EU citizens and over 200 organisations throughout the EU, asking for a pesticide-free Europe. Many wanted us to fail, to be able to attack the Commission EU Green Deal towards a toxic-free environment. Once again, when it comes to pesticides, to protect people's health as well as biodiversity against vested interest, the democratic signal is clear: it is not just one ECI, but many democratic initiatives, many Eurobarometers, the Conference for the Future of Europe, all pointing just towards one direction: a strong and rapid reduction in pesticides. Some decades ago, the lack of political engagement towards less pesticides could eventually be justified by the lack of scientific information on the risks of pesticides, as well as by the lack of evidence that agroecology could do the job. Today, only the agroindustry lobby keeps denying the fact pesticides lead to birth defects, to early puberty or cancers. Only them keep pretending that neonicotinoids are not a problem to bees and that glyphosate is indispensable in this world. Since decades, IPM- and organic farmers have showed the way towards production of healthy and environmentally-friendly food. As the representatives of over 1 million Europeans, who ask for a true change, not just a cosmetic pesticide reduction: we ask for a transformative evolution, where agriculture and environmental or health protection become compatible again, where European rural areas become vibrant places, where farmers are considered as heroes by citizens, because of the crucial role they play in our society.

**Helmut Burtscher-Schaden**

As Martin said, 20 or 30 years ago, the lack of political commitment to reducing pesticide use might have been due to a lack of definitive clarity on the impact. But at least 15 years ago, when the Commission proposed legislation to reduce the risk and the dependence on pesticides, to protect ecologically sensitive areas, and to substitute more hazardous pesticides with less hazardous ones, the importance of these objectives was known.

Member states and the Parliament agreed to these objectives in 2009 when they adopted the Sustainable Use Directive and 1107/2009, but member states subsequently failed to follow the laws they had adopted. From this background we see it as a fatal signal in terms of democratic policy if some member states are now torpedoing the SUR, trying to delay it or - as is already being speculated in newspapers - try to kill the file.

 We, as representatives of civil society, will therefore do what we can to demand a responsible policy from our elected governments to protect the environment and human health from dangerous pesticides.

Citizens need hope. We need positive news and a positive vision for their future. Climate change, the health and biodiversity crisis and the current geopolitical situation are leading to a loss of confidence in institutions. This fosters nationalism and anti-democratic political movements.

The Green Deal, on the other hand, with its measures to protect the climate and biodiversity, is a project of hope for many people in Europe. We therefore call on the Commission to stick to the Roadmap in the interest of Europeans.

In the name of 1.1 million Europeans, that have signed the Save Bees and Farmers ECI we call on the European Commission to

1. establish a plan to phase out synthetic pesticides by 2035

2. restore biodiversity, including on agricultural land and

3. ensure a strong public support to farmers in the transition towards agroecology.