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PRESS RELEASE Save Bees and Farmers European Citizens Initiative: citizens demand the end of the pesticides era

Jointly with over 200 organisations across Europe, PAN Europe is preparing to celebrate the success of the second anti-pesticides European Citizens Initiative (ECI), having collected over 1 million signatures from across Europe. If this ECI is validated by the European Commission, both the European Commission and the European Parliament will have to respond to the demands of the citizens for a synthetic pesticide-free and bee-friendly agriculture.

The *Save Bees and Farmers* ECI asks for 1. A reduction of 80% in the use of synthetic pesticides by 2030 and 100% by 2035 in the EU 2. Measures to restore biodiversity on agricultural land and 3. Massive support to farmers to transition towards agroecology.

An ECI is accepted by the European Commission if it reaches over 1 million validated signatures (10-15% will be invalidated by the authorities). The organisers consider the ECI will be successful if it reaches a minimum of 1.15 million signatures. Furthermore, thousands of paper signatures still need to be accounted for in the final calculation.

At the time of sending out this press release, 1,132,142 signatures have been collected and the organisers are glued to the website, which is updated in real time, for the final numbers.

Dr. Martin Dermine, policy officer at PAN Europe and one of the lead organisations behind this ECI says: "*We are coming to the end of this successful two-year journey, where we mobilized civil society across the EU, to fight pesticides. With this second successful anti-pesticides ECI, citizens are sending a very clear signal to EU institutions and the European Commission that synthetic pesticides must be phased out, not only reduced by 50% as the European Green Deal proposes*".

Natalija Svrtan, a campaigner at PAN Europe says: "*Our success must be reflected in the ongoing revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive: empty promises from politicians when it comes to effectively protecting biodiversity against pesticides must come to an end. Scientists show that industrial agriculture is the main cause of the collapse of biodiversity and is responsible for causing diseases in citizens. It is high time that we reconcile harmony among agriculture, environment and biodiversity, paving the way for a much needed agroecological transition*".

Dr. Dermine further added: "*Till date, only 6 out of the 108 launched ECIs (6%) have been successful. The Covid sanitary situation has prevented us from collecting signatures in the street or organising events. We trust this massive citizens movement will push the EU Member States' agriculture ministries to stop following the interest of agribusiness and finally start protecting the health of the citizens and the environment*". Successful ECIs impose for the European Commission to analyse and answer citizens' demands while the European Parliament will receive the 7 members of the Citizens Committee in a hearing and have the possibility to write and vote on a resolution based on the citizens' demands.

The organisers have 3 months to hand over the signatures to national competent authorities for validation. The authorities then have 1 month to validate the signatures.

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