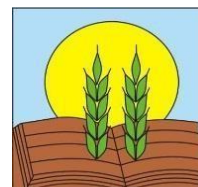


**ON THE OCCASION OF the
5th of DECEMBER**

**Designated by the UN as
WORLD SOIL DAY**



OPEN LETTER

**To the EUROPEAN COMMISSION, the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and
the COUNCIL of the EUROPEAN UNION**

Re: Soil degradation is a prime example of the need to think globally and act locally

TO:

**MR. JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**MR. ANTONIO TAJANI
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**MR. DONALD TUSK
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL**

**MR. PHIL HOGAN
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**MR. KARMENU VELLA
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

**MR. BOYKO BORISOV
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

**CC:
TRIO PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL
ESTONIA (2017), BULGARIA (2018), AUSTRIA (2018)**

**CC:
PEOPLE4SOIL ECI COMMITTEE**

Sofia, 1/12/2017

**Dear President Juncker,
Dear President Tajani,
Dear President Tusk,
Dear Commissioner Hogan,
Dear Commissioner Vella,
Dear Prime Minister Borisov,**

We are addressing you to flag the need of adopting a soil protection policy of the EU and a road map to implement the commitment of the EU to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda *inter alia* towards a “land degradation neutral world”.

We are an NGO cluster, championing digital transformation. However, it is our firm belief that technological development should not be at the expense of non-renewable natural resource. Our soils are in danger of depletion because of expanding cities, deforestation, unsustainable land use and management practices, pollution and climate change. The current rate of soil degradation threatens the capacity to meet the needs of future generations. With this responsibility in mind, the 68th UN General Assembly declared 2015 the International Year of Soils.

To illustrate the magnitude of the problem, we will refer to the data ¹ recorded by the Commission on the impact of soil degradation in the European Union:

- Between 1990 and 2006 a potential agricultural production capability equivalent to a total of 6.1 million tons of wheat has been lost. This is a loss of almost 5% of the average annual European wheat production within a short time-span;
- Estimated costs of soil degradation reach up to 38 bn. Euro per year;
- An estimated 115 million hectares are subject to water erosion and 42 million hectares are affected by wind erosion;
- An estimated 45% of European soils have low organic matter content;
- The number of potentially contaminated sites is estimated to approximately 3.5 million. - The list can be continued

We admit that the adoption of the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection (2006) and the Report on its implementation (2012) is definitely a step forward towards raising awareness of the threat to food security and food safety we face in Europe and globally. However, the European Union needs a comprehensive legislation providing for prevention of soil degradation and restoration of degraded soils. In this regard, it is regrettable that the proposal for a Framework Directive has been pending for 8 years due to a blocking minority in the Council and withdrawn by the Commission (2014). It is also regrettable that no new proposal has been tabled since then to address the complexity of soil threats such as contamination, erosion, organic matter decline, salinization and acidification, sealing, compaction, landslides. By comparison, several countries including the USA, Japan, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Izrael, New Zealand have established soil protection policies which include legislation, guidance documents, monitoring systems, identification of risk areas, inventories, remediation programs and funding mechanisms for contaminated sites for which no responsible party can be found.

We were encouraged by the People4Soil campaign of more than 550 local associations and research institutes in 26 Member States (including two Bulgarian research institutes – Bulgarian Soil Science Society and Nikola Pushkarov Insitute of Soil Science Agrotechnology and Plant Protection) to initiate a petition to enact a European legislation and begin urgent action to reverse soil degradation. It is evident that European citizens feel the need to solve a common problem by common action. We also appreciate the efforts of the Estonian Presidency in organizing high level conference (4-6 October 2017, Tallinn), titled “Soils for sustainable food production and ecosystem services”.

On the basis of the above, we are addressing herewith the European institutions and the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council with an appeal to:

¹ SEC(2006)620 ; SEC(2006)1165

- Initiate a review of the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection;
- Initiate a legislative proposal requiring Member States to identify risk areas, set risk reduction targets for those areas and establish programs of measures to achieve reverse in soil degradation;
- Incorporate existing measure into a consolidated legal framework and establish a monitoring system on the basis of digital mapping of soils

We are confident that the EU will make a speedy delivery on the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, but first and foremost on the expectations of its citizens.

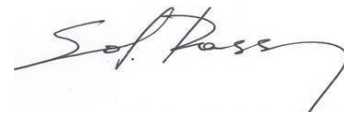
We believe that once adopted this EU policy could be shared and implemented on wider international scale including through the UN system. The 5th of December is designated by the UN as World Soil Day, and its next marking in 2018 will be a good opportunity for the European Union to announce globally its comprehensive policy for soils protection.

We were encouraged to undertake this current initiative of ours, hoping to continue our positive experience of cooperation with the Commission so far: Our open letter of May 2008 to VicePresident Gunter Verheugen regarding standardisation of all chargers for mobile phones resulted in an initiative that came into effect in 2014 as part of the eco-design package (published in 24 Hours Daily); Our open letter of June 2011 to the then Vice-Presidents Neelie Kroes, Viviane Reding, and Commissioner John Dalli, calling on the EU to become a “WiFi paradise” which eventually evolved into “#WiFi4EU” initiative adopted on 29 May 2017, aimed at bridging the digital divides in Europe (published in 24 Hours Daily).

Yours Truly,

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 OSCE Chairman in Office (2004) Chairman of Parliamentary Defence / Foreign Affairs Committee and MP (1990-1991, 2001-2009)



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 Director General for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008-2012)
 Member of the core team on accession negotiations with the EU (1998-2001)

