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EU Officials Join Civil Society's Call to Reinforce the European Citizens' Initiative

High-level Event Highlights Urgent Need to Reform and Strengthen Participatory Democracy in the EU

The Good Lobby and Compassion in World Farming today (3 June) brought together activists, EU officials, NGOs and legal experts at an event in Brussels to explore the future of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and its role in the EU's democratic life.

Launched in 2012, the ECI was designed to give EU citizens a direct voice in shaping EU law and policy. Yet, of the 115 initiatives submitted thus far, only 13 reached the 1 million signature threshold and none have directly resulted in new EU legislation. This underscores concerns about both its accessibility and institutional follow-up.

Over 100 participants joined the event "How Can European Citizens' Initiatives Make a Difference for Civil Society?", both in person and online. They discussed the challenges and potential strategies for effectively leveraging this instrument of direct democracy. This conversation is especially timely in the context of a new political landscape characterised by limited access to policymaking and shrinking civic space across Europe.

A central focus was the landmark *End the Cage Age* ECI, which successfully gathered 1.4 million signatures and led to the first legally-binding commitment by the European Commission to propose legislation by 2023. Yet, with no legislative proposal on the table, the organisers have now taken the case to the Court of Justice of the European Union, raising serious concerns about the ECI's credibility and follow-through.

Vinciane Patelou, Head of EU at Compassion in World Farming, said: *"The End the Cage Age movement took years and millions of individuals to turn into a successful ECI. As the European Commission refuses to listen to its citizens by continuing to delay proposals to ban cages, the upcoming ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU will determine whether ECIs are an effective tool for civil participation or an illusion of democracy."*

Professor Alberto Alemanno, Founder of The Good Lobby, said: *"The ECI remains an extraordinary yet underused agenda-setting instrument in the hands of European*

citizens. There has never been a better time to revamp it to increase EU institutional responsiveness to citizens' demand while democratically legitimating EU action. The EU needs its citizens as much as the citizens need the EU to solve their common problems."

The European Ombudsman Teresa Anjinho said: *"The ECIs by allowing citizens to set the agenda and engage with public institutions enable their direct participation in the ongoing development of a much-needed European political space."*

Speakers at the event included:

- Alberto Alemanno (The Good Lobby, HEC Paris)
- Teresa Anjinho (European Ombudsman)
- Vinciane Patelou (Compassion in World Farming)
- Thomas Hieber (lawyer in the End the Cage Age legal case)
- Adriana Mungiu (European Commission)
- Loránt Vincze (Member of the European Parliament)
- Carsten Berg (The ECI Campaign)

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For more information or to arrange interviews, please email
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Notes to Editors

2. Pictures of the event can be accessed [here](#) (to be credited to Compassion in World Farming and The Good Lobby).
3. [Compassion in World Farming](#) was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer who became horrified at the development of intensive factory farming. Today Compassion is the leading farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to ending factory farming and achieving humane and sustainable food production. With headquarters in the UK, we have offices across Europe, in the US, China and South Africa.
4. [The Good Lobby](#) is a non-profit civic start-up working to democratise lobbying and make political systems more equitable. TGL supports nonprofits, foundations, and progressive businesses in shifting public policy through strategic advocacy, communications, and cross-sector alliances. It helps organisations navigate and engage with the EU policy process, offering consulting and training on issues such as civic engagement, sustainability, corporate due diligence, and social justice. TGL's partners include WWF Europe, Eurogroup for Animals, European Climate Foundation, UNICEF, and Open Society Foundations.