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Member of the European Commission

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Mr Damiano Di Simine  
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Dear Ms Messa,  
Dear Mr Di Simine,

Thank you for your letter to President Juncker who asked me to reply.

I share your concerns regarding the continuous degradation of soil in the EU, as stated also in the 2015 State of Environment Report of the European Environment Agency<sup>1</sup>. Soil is a finite resource and soil-related ecosystems services are essential to meet many societal challenges.

The European Commission is aware of the ongoing European Citizens Initiative People4Soil-as registered by the Commission on 12 September 2016.<sup>2 3</sup>

I would like to reassure you that the Commission continues working to protect soil and to restore soil ecosystems. Since 2006 the EU Soil Thematic Strategy<sup>4</sup> has significantly contributed to raise awareness and to improve knowledge on soil. In the recent years, a lot of efforts have been made to integrate soil protection into various EU policies, in particular fostering the sustainable management of soil as part of the Common Agricultural Policy<sup>5</sup>.

Within the EU, work is ongoing in the Expert Group set up in 2015 jointly by Member States<sup>6</sup> and the Commission to reflect on "how soil quality issues could be addressed using a targeted and proportionate risk-based approach within a binding legal framework" and in line with the 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme requirement.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/open/details/2016/000002>

<sup>3</sup> C(2016)5705 final

<sup>4</sup> COM(2006)231

<sup>5</sup> Article 110.2(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, OJ L347 – 20.12.2013, page 347.

<sup>6</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=3336>

<sup>7</sup> Decision No 1386/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet' OJ L 354, 28.12.2013

Under the Commission's recently adopted Action Plan for "Nature, People and the Economy", the Commission is also planning to come forward with guidance aimed specifically towards improving the recognition of ecosystem services by integrating them into decision making.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development there is new momentum for the protection of this fragile resource at global level. The Commission is actively promoting soil protection at international level through its participation in and partnership with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Environment Program, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Global Soil Partnership. The implementation of the SDGs in the EU will certainly provide additional opportunities in the coming months to advance soil protection in the EU.

I wish you all the best for your initiative and for the work you are doing to raise awareness on the importance of soil protection at EU, national and local levels.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karmenu Vella', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Karmenu Vella