

Antwerp Counter-Declaration: Standing up for rules that protect democracy, people, and planet

On February 11, President von der Leyen convened again with hundreds of corporate representatives during an event organised by CEFIC, a powerful lobby group for Europe's chemical industry, just hours before meeting with EU heads of state. This recurring pattern of exclusive engagement raises a fundamental question: is European policy being shaped by its 450 million citizens, or by the continent's largest industrial lobbies? The timing also gives industry a privileged opportunity to feed its demands directly into the EU heads of state summit on Competitiveness taking place the following day. The rollback threatens to intensify after this summit which will discuss a suite of deregulation proposals, most of which come straight from industry¹.

Since 2024, the [Antwerp Declaration](#) has acted as a shadow roadmap for the European Union. What is framed as something that will boost the economy has increasingly become a vehicle for dismantling the EU's democratic safeguards. We are witnessing a systematic rollback of vital climate, environmental, digital and social protections—hard-won progress now being traded for corporate concessions behind closed doors. So far, the EU has delivered fast and hard **for polluters, rights-abusing corporations and shareholders, but not for people**.

The Commission has even undermined its own procedural safeguards, failing to provide impact assessments and credible scientific or economic evidence for key proposals, and neglecting meaningful consultation processes. When the European Ombudsman raised concerns, the Commission's response was not to correct its approach, but to weaken its own better-regulation rules.

At the same time, industry lobbying has unlocked billions in public subsidies, justified by claims of economic crisis and capital shortages that have since proven to be vastly overstated. Many of these same companies continue to prioritise short-term shareholder payouts over investing in a just and sustainable transition.

Framing democratic rules as obstacles to growth fuels a dangerous race to the bottom, where the most harmful industries are rewarded with weaker rules and more public funding, while people face austerity and declining protections.

We reject this corporate-led deregulation agenda. Europe's industrial and economic strategy must strengthen — not sacrifice — environmental integrity, social justice, human rights, labour rights and democratic accountability. Strong standards are not a burden — they are the foundation of Europe's long-term economic resilience. Public

¹ https://cdn.table.media/assets/europe/ger-ita-non-paper-competitiveness_en_finale.pdf

money and political power must serve society as a whole, not entrench the influence and profits of the industries most responsible for the crises we face.

To defend the public's rights to health, to a livable environment and to decent working conditions, we say we need

Rules to protect democracy, people and planet

1) Re-vitalise European democracy

The second Von der Leyen Commission's focus on competitiveness is reflected in its more intensive contact with corporate actors: 40% of meetings of Commissioners' cabinet members were with company representatives, 29% with business associations, and only 16% with NGOs. This imbalance risks policy capture.² In addition, the Commission has created new spaces, such as "Reality Check Workshops" and "Implementation Dialogues", that are set up in an untransparent manner and further reinforce this imbalance, opening up new avenues for corporate influence.

Civil society organisations, NGOs, environmental organisations, trade unions and academia, as key representatives of the public interest, must be heard, protected, and given meaningful access to decision-making.

The EU's current deregulation agenda reflects corporate lobbying more than the priorities of ordinary people: addressing the cost of living, ensuring strong public services and safe working conditions, and taking decisive action on the climate, biodiversity, and pollution crises. Lawmaking must not be steered by the very industries responsible for pollution, climate harm, discrimination, unlawful processing of sensitive data, mass surveillance and other harms. These safeguards cannot be dismantled to satisfy the demands of the most polluting and risky sectors.

Instead of shrinking civic space and sidelining public voices, the EU must strengthen democratic participation.

2) Rules exist to protect the public

People across the EU are increasingly exposed to forever chemicals (PFAS), pesticide pollution, unsafe working conditions and more frequent extreme weather. This generates huge costs to society, both economically and in terms of wellbeing³. Instead

² <https://table.media/en/europe/feature/lobby-contacts-second-vdl-commission-has-more-frequent-meetings-with-companies>

³ <https://basic.coop/en/actualites/study/pesticides-a-model-thats-costing-us-dearly/> & <https://foreverpollution.eu/lobbying/the-bill/>

of more “omnibuses⁴” that undermine protections, we need better and stronger rules to ensure access to clean water, air, and food, guarantee safer workplaces, safeguard our privacy and personal data online, and protect us from risky applications of AI.

People do not want toxic chemicals in their bodies, unsafe working conditions, polluted food and drinking water, or constant online tracking. Children should be able to play in parks without exposure to harmful substances like PFAS and families should not find forever chemicals (TFA⁵) in their meals due to deregulated pesticides legislation.

3) No blank cheque for polluting industries

Polluting industries are paying nosebleed dividends to shareholders, year-in year-out. From 2010 to 2023, European firms in key energy transition sectors generated €2.1 trillion in net profit and distributed €1.6 trillion to shareholders—a staggering 75.3% of their total net profits (and about 40% of Germany’s GDP, for comparison).⁶ They do not need extra capital injections paid by taxpayers, who face cuts to healthcare, education, and climate action. The problem is not a lack of capital — it is a misallocation of existing resources. We should invest in a future-oriented, toxic-free and decarbonised economy, not prop up toxic-fossil-intensive sectors resisting the energy and toxic-free transition. Finally, polluting companies should bear the costs of harm caused by their products, not society, respecting the Polluter Pays Principle.

4) A new spirit of law-making should be evidence-based law-making

Omnibus packages are dismantling crucial protections without scientific evidence or proper impact assessments.⁷ Proposals are short-sighted, industry-driven, and ignore their effects on people and the planet⁸. Lawmaking must be evidence-based and safeguard health, rights, the environment, and Europe’s long-term sustainability goals. Basing laws on the immediate demands of profit-driven industries — often the very ones responsible for pollution, exploitation, techno-driven discrimination and the climate crisis — is fundamentally misguided.

Instead, EU lawmaking should be grounded in solid evidence, expert advice, and the voices of the most impacted communities. Civil society organisations, NGOs,

⁴ An EU Omnibus is a legislative package that bundles multiple, often diverse, amendments into a single, comprehensive document designed for a single vote. Launched by the European Commission, these aim to weaken laws and reduce accountability for businesses, in the name of boosting ‘competitiveness’.

⁵ Trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) is a highly mobile and persistent “forever chemical” belonging to the PFAS group, extensively used in industrial, agricultural, and pharmaceutical applications. As a byproduct of F-gases and pesticides, it has become ubiquitous in the environment, including water, soil, and food, raising concerns about long-term accumulation. - <https://www.pan-europe.info/resources/reports/2025/12/unseen-and-unregulated-tfa-forever-chemical-europe-s-cereals>

⁶ <https://friendsoftheearth.eu/publication/shareholders-over-solutions/>

⁷ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/recommendation/en/215920>

⁸ <https://thegoodlobby.eu/academics-warn-of-back-door-move-to-institutionalise-deregulation/>

environmental organisations and trade unions, scientists, and independent experts must guide decision-making, ensuring policies serve people and the planet — not just a handful of polluting and energy-intensive companies.

Signatories of Antwerp Counter-Declaration: Standing up for rules that protect democracy, people, and planet

16 March 2026

Društvo Ekologi brez meja

#DiasporaVote!

3WF Hannover - Forum für eine andere Welt e.V.

75inQ Institute for Inclusive Energy Transition

Aalem for Orphan and Vulnerable Children, Inc.

achACT

Action pour le Développement des Jeunes au Congo

Action Solidarité Tiers Monde

ACV-CSC Belgium

Alaska Community Action on Toxics, USA

Alternatives Durables pour le Développement (ADDF)

Amigas de la Tierra España

Animal Advocacy & Food Transition

Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (AbL) e.V.

Arisa

Artemisszio Foundation

ARTICLE 19

ÄrztInnen für eine gesunde Umwelt (ISDE Austria)

Aspiration

Association Addictions France

Association BIOM

Association Canticle of the Sun /Naphimnusz Teremtésvédelmi Egyesület/Hungary

Association for Help and Self-Help of Homeless People "Kings of the Street"

Association For Promotion Sustainable Development

Association Hyla

Association of Ethical Shareholders Germany

Association Terre et Développement

ATTAC España

Attac France

Attac Germany

Aurelia Stiftung

Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC)

AVICENN @VeilleNanos

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination

Bellona Europa

Benedetti Life

beweging.net

Biodynamic Association Denmark
Biodynamiske Forbrugersammenslutning
BioForum
Biofuelwatch
BirdLife Estonia
BirdLife Sverige
BLOOM
Bond Beter Leefmilieu
BREAD OF PEACE
Broederlijk Delen
Bündnis für eine enkeltaugliche Landwirtschaft
Campagna Abiti Puliti
CAN Europe
Cantine sans plastique France
Carbon Market Watch
Caritas Europa
CC.CCOO Spain
Center za trajnostni razvoj podeželja Kranj
Centre tricontinental - CETRI
Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, CIPRODEH (Honduras)
Centro Hondureño de Promoción Para el desarrollo Comunitario
Centro Palmares de Estudos e Assessoria por Direitos
CHEM Trust
Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
Children's Environmental CHealth Foundation (CEHF)
CICrA Justicia Ambiental
CIEL (Center for International Environmental Law)
CIPRA Slovenija
Civil Liberties Union for Europe
Civil Society Advocacy Network on Climate Change and the Environment Sierra Leone (CAN-SL)
Clean Air Action Group (Hungary)
Clean Clothes Campaign
ClientEarth
Climate+Tech Think-tank
Climaxi
CNCD-11.11.11
Coalition Secrets Toxiques
Collectif Ethique sur l'Etiquette
Comité Schone Lucht
Common Weal
Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws)
Compassion in World Farming
Conseil National des Associations Familiales Laïques (France)
Coordination gegen BAYER-Gefahren
Coordination Santé Environnement Rhône-Nord (France)

Corporate Europe Observatory
COSPE Italy
Croatian Youth Network
CSEMET Nature and Environmental Protection Association
Danes je nov dan, Inštitut za druga vprašanja
Danish Ecovillage Network
Datenpunks Bremen
Datenpunks e.V.
De Landgenoten
Defend Democracy
Deutsche Umwelthilfe
Deutscher Naturschutzring
Diaspora in Action for Human Rights and Democracy (DAHARD)
Die Bürokratiemonster
Digihumanism - Centre for AI & Digital Humanism
Digitalcourage e.V.
Društvo Organizacija za participatorno družbo
Društvo Tenzin
Druživa, o.z., Slovakia
DUM - Association of Artists
Earth Ethics, Inc.
Earth Thrive
Earthsight
ECOCITY
ECODES (Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo)
Ecological Restorations
Ecologistas en Acción
EcoNexus
ECONGOOD Austria
Ecoropa
EcoStan environmental platform / Union of Photojournalists of Kyrgyzstan
Ecoteca
Ekō
EKOenergy ecolabel
Electra Energy
Emanat Institute
Engineering Without Borders
Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk (epn) Hessen e.V.
Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk Sachsen e.V.
Environmental center for Development Education and Networking (EDEN)
Estonian Green Movement
EU-LAT Network
Eurogroup for Animals
EuroMemo Group
European Civic Forum
European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ)

European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)
European Digital Rights (EDRI)
European Environmental Bureau
European Federation of Building and Woodworkers
European Federation of Public Service Unions
European Network for Environmental Medicine
European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER)
European Sex Workers' Rights Association (ESWA)
European Transport Safety Council
European Water Movement
FAIR
Fairwatch Italy
Federación SETEM
Fédération SEPANSO Aquitaine
FEMNET e.V.
FIAN Deutschland
FIAN Österreich
FNV Overheid
Focus Association for Sustainable Development
Foodwatch
Foodwatch Netherlands
Forum Ökologie & Papier
Forum za slobodu odgoja - Forum for Freedom in Education
France Nature Environnement
Friends of the Earth - SPZ
Friends of the Earth Finland
Friends of the Earth Ireland
Friends of the Earth Malta
Friends of the Earth Netherlands
Friends of the Earth Europe
GAIA - Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental
Gaia Foundation
Gallifrey Foundation
Générations Futures
Gen-ethisches Netzwerk e.V.
GLOBAL 2000 - Friends of the Earth Austria
Global Aktion - Denmark
Global English Africa Empowerment Initiative (EDUAFRICA)
Global Health Advocates
Global Justice Ecology Project
Global Witness
GMWatch
Göd- ÉRT Environmental and Urban Protection Association
Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet (GASP)
GRANDS-PARENTS POUR LE CLIMAT
Green Circle of Pécs (Pécsi Zöld Kör, Hungary)

Green Liberty
Greenpeace
Greenzone Environmental Association
Grøn Hverdag
Health and Environment Justice Support
Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport)
Hogar sin Tóxicos (Spain)
Homo Digitalis
Human Development Research Initiative (HDRI)
Human Environmental Association for Development-HEAD
Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation
Humusz Szövetség
Hungarian Society for Environmental Education (HSEE)
Interessengemeinschaft für gentechnikfreie Saatgutarbeit (IG Saatgut)
ISDE, International Society of Doctors for Environment
Isde, International Society of Doctors for Environment Italy
Jesuit European Social Centre
Jordanian Society for Desertification Control& Badia Development
Jordens Vänner / Friends of the Earth Sweden
Journalists for Human Rights
Jugend im Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUNDjugend)
Kampagne für Saubere Kleidung / Clean Clothes Campaign Germany
Kaya, coalition belge des écopreneurs
Kleindatenverein
Koalicja Żywa Ziemia (Living Earth Coalition)
Kokopelli
kolekTIRV
Kulturno umetniško društvo Morgan
La Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo-España
Landsforeningen Praktisk Økologi
Latvian Fund for Nature
LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme)
Leefmilieu
Legambiente
Les Amis de la Terre - Belgique asbl
Life and Chemistry Office
Link-AR Borneo
Linked Farm
LobbyControl e.V,
Magosfa Foundation for Environmental Education and Eco-tourism (Hungary)
Meten=Weten
Miljøorganisationen NOAH
Mondiaal FNV
Mothers Rise Up
Mouvement Ecologique (FOE Luxembourg)
Muchi Children's Home

Nanny Africa
National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary
Nature et Progrès Belgique
Naturefriends Greece
Naturvernforbundet
Natuur & Milieu
NaZemi
Neo-Agri
No Plastic In My Sea
Notre Affaire à Tous
Observatoire du principe pollueur-payeur
Ocean. Now!
OGM dangers
OIKOS - Cooperação e Desenvolvimento
ONG LA GRANDE PUISSANCE DE DIEU
Palombar - Associação de Conservação da Natureza e do Património Rural
Partnerschaftsverein Kreis Groß-Gerau - Masatepe/Nicaragua e.V.
pax christi - Kommission Solidarität Eine Welt, Germany
PBCO
PELUM Association
Permakultur Danmark
Pesticide Action Network Europe
PIC - Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment
Plesni studio Intakt Ljubljana, Slovenia
Policy Lab
Polish Ecological Club in Gliwice
Poliscope
POLLINIS
PowerShift e.V.
Pro Wildlife
Red Europea ODHACO (Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos Acción Colombia)
Revo Prosperidad Sostenible
REZERO
ritimo
ROMAPIS Federația Asociațiilor Apicole din România
Rose Ajoh
Self-sustaining Cities
Seminatural Community Conservation Association
SITO seeds
Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control
Slow Food
Solidagro
SOLIDAR
SOMO
Stichting Zaadgoed
Studio 25

Success Lady NGO
SÜDWIND-Institut für Ökonomie und Ökumene
Sustainable Environment Development Initiative
Szakszervezetek Együttműködési Fóruma (SZEF)
Terra Hub Croatia
The Aluna Foundation
The Danish Seed Collectors/Foreningen Frøsamlerne
The Good Lobby
TP Organcis
Trajna
transform!europe
Transparency International EU
TROCA - Plataforma por um Comércio Internacional Justo
Trócaire
Udruga Zelena Istra
Umanotera, The Slovenian Foundation for Sustainable Development
Umweltinstitut München e.V.
UNBLACK THE BOX
Union Nationale de l'Apiculture Française
Voedsel Anders Vlaanderen
Vredesactie (Belgium)
WEAll Iberia Wellbeing Economy Alliance Iberia (Spain and Portugal)
WECF international
Werkgroep Natuurlijk Imkeren - WNI
WICCA, Cameroon
WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform
Women Engage for a Common Future, WECF
Women In Climate Change Action (WICCA)
Women In Development Europe+ (WIDE+)
World Economy, Ecology & Development (Germany)
WSM - We Social Movements
Young Volunteers for Environment (JVE Cameroun)
Youth and Environment Europe
Zavod Projekt Atol
Zavod Tri
Zemljane staze (Earth Trek)
ZERO - Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável
ZERO - Association for the Sustainability of the Earth System
Zero Waste Alliance Ireland