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Food Waste Plan Dumped

European Commission withholds its own action plan against food waste



This weekend a Belgian umbrella organisation of NGO's called 11.11.11 launched their campaign "Sorry is not enough" with the aim to call on the general public to put pressure on policy makers to act strongly against food waste. Green MEP Bart Staes: "Saying sorry will surely not be enough for the European Commission (EC), because its highest levels are blocking its very own action plan to address food waste and to promote a sustainable food policy for Europe. A shame." Even when the European Parliament and some NGO's have called 2014 to be "the year against food waste" and even at a time when citizens are more and more sensitive to this issue, the EC has been dragging itss feet to publish the communication called 'Building a sustainable European food system'. This communication was announced to be published, after a very successful public consultation, end 2013, early 2014. The 17 page text had signatures from 3 Commissioners (DG Environment, DG Sanco and DG Agriculture) in April, well before the European elections. The EC secretariat-general, under the enlightened leadership of Secretary-general Catherine Day, blocked once again this piece of progressive and environmental policy. Outgoing environment commissioner Janez Potočnik recently said in the ENVI committee that European Commission policy developments on sustainable food, on environmental inspections, on access to environmental justice and endocrine disruptors are “ready to go and could be adopted practically immediately” Increasingly citizens, scientists, companies, organisations and policy makers are aware that the current food system is not sustainable and we will have to change throughout the food system. That means changing the (often unsustainable) ways we produce food, identifying why we are the wasting so much of everything produced (at least 30% or 1,6 billion tons every year), it means changing our attitudes towards food. Science shows us that we simply have no choice, if we want to be able to feed 8 billion people in 2030 with growing food insecurity. The reluctant attitude of the EC is a cynic asalt on common

sense. The new argument of EC's spokespeople that a food waste target is already in the Waste Framework Directive, is simply not enough to tackle this huge problem efficiently. I guess the current top officials of the EC with their blind focus on economic growth and trade think that envirmonmental policies are too much of a burden of the EU's recovery. They should know by know it is the other way round. Sound environmental policies are not only what citizens expect, they are a basis for sustainabe growth. An overwhelming majority of European citizens, 95 percent, recently said in a Eurobarometer poll that protecting the environment was personally important to them, over half of Europeans think the EU is not doing enough to protect the environment, and almost one quarter are particularly concerned by our consumption habits. When it comes to food waste, there are many ethical, environmental and social arguments, but also economical reasons to counter this. Firstly, a more sustainable use of resources and energy means gains for every modern company and society at large. The European Commission estimates itself that every euro spent on fighting food waste, will prevent 250 kilo of food being wasted, with a value of 500 euro. That is what we call a good return on investment. On top of this, municipalities can save 9 euro (less waste to be treated) and indirectly we save 50 euro on environmental costs related to climate change. As the food sector is one of the major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, it is crucial that the European Commission has a clear strategy on sustainable food production and consumption in order to mitigate climate change. With recent reports citing that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have grown at its fastest rate in three decades, it is clear that we must act now. One of the nitty gritty details of the structural changes of the EC, is that "food waste" was taken away from DG Environment and given to DG Sanco. This is no coincidence. It is clearly a political decision by the ones being busy with restructuring the EC under the leadership of secretary-general of the EC, Catherine Day. The reason for this is that Mrs.Day and Barroso's cabinet – aka the neoliberal orthodox church – did not like that Potocnik was in their eyes way too ambitious in proposing a very pragmatic and holistic approach to address the fundamental problems linked to Europe's food production and consumption. The blocked Communication on sustainable food, to make the EU's food system more sustainable, is a wake-up call to the European Union. This blocked action plan is not only relevant to address the issue of food waste. It is a particularly pertinent document because it looks at the whole food system, and the many aspects of sustainable food, that could guide the EU to move forward and secure the sustainable production and consumption of food in Europe in the coming years. It is unrealistic to believe that addressing these issues would be a reason for citizens to shun the European Union. On the contrary: it could create more trust that the right measures are being taken for the common good of European citizens and the environment. Therefore, I will next week urge the EC together with colleagues from as much political groups as possible, to publish this important piece of work, which would serve to provide European policymakers and legislators with the necessary 'food for thought'. Last but not least, the remark by an EC spokesperson that my criticism on this issue was "an example of bashing of the EC by Bart Staes" says something about their respect for elected members of parliament and how serious some at the EC take democratic control. By Bart Staes, MEP, Food spokesperson for the Greens

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