

**To: Ms Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission;
Mr Piotr Serafin, Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration**

**Cc: Ms Teresa Ribera, Executive Vice-President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition;
Mr Stéphane Séjourné, Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy**

Re: Academics for NGOs – LIFE funding

Brussels, 9th of July 2025

Dear President Von der Leyen and Commissioner Serafin,

We are writing to you as a group of concerned academics, united by our deep commitment to democracy, civic participation, and the protection of the environment. As the European Commission prepares to unveil its proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2035 on 16 July, we are alarmed by reports indicating that these proposals may threaten the integrity and existence of dedicated funding for environmental NGOs, particularly the LIFE programme, EU's flagship environmental funding mechanism.

According to leaked documents of the Commission proposal, the new Competitiveness Fund being considered under the MFF may absorb environmental and climate priorities in the name of budgetary flexibility.

We are not alone in our concerns. A [cross-party group of 60 Members of the European Parliament](#) has already expressed strong opposition to the merging of competitiveness and environmental objectives, warning that this shift threatens to weaken the EU's environmental commitments at a critical moment. Environmental NGOs fear that this restructuring could marginalise their role and financial sustainability.

These concerns come amid a broader and more troubling trend. Since November 2024, EU-funded NGOs have been the target of an orchestrated campaign of political intimidation and defamation. [This campaign](#), instigated by members of the centre-right EPP and amplified by far-right groups, has relied on false claims, media manipulation, and disinformation tactics. In a deeply concerning development, EPP leader Manfred Weber recently aligned with far-right political factions to set-up a dedicated Working Group on NGO funding within the Budgetary Control Committee of the European Parliament, despite [no evidence justifying its creation](#). These attacks reveal precisely that the issue isn't about budgetary control of EU funds but more about a concerning [turn towards authoritarianism](#) via the erosion of democratic and civil rights. The EU funding allocated to environmental NGOs accounts for just 0.006% of the overall budget, yet these groups are being scapegoated for political gain, while polluting industries continue to [invest millions to influence EU policy](#) but are spared from the intense scrutiny leveraged against civil society.

We are deeply concerned by this exploitation of NGOs as political pawns. What is currently unfolding within EU institutions mirrors recent developments in the United States, where ideological attacks have led to the defunding of NGOs, universities, and international aid. Europe must not follow this path. Collaborations between academia and the wider civil society, and NGOs in particular, is crucial to ensure that research evidence directly informs policy-making and benefits the interests of society.

We therefore call on the European Commission to:

- **Permanently end the political attacks on NGOs funding;**
- **Ensure the LIFE programme remains an independent, standalone component of the upcoming MFF;**
- **Keep environmental priorities clearly distinct from the proposed Competitiveness Fund;**
- **Tie EU investment to transparent and democratic decision-making processes, including partnership and multilevel governance, to foster public trust and accountability.**

The European Commission must take urgent action and follow through on the above demands to reverse the authoritarian and undemocratic trends we are witnessing. Failing to do so risks undermining the democratic legitimacy of the policymaking process, and ultimately trust in European Institutions, in which NGOs are an essential stakeholder.

We remain at your disposal for further dialogue and reiterate our firm support for a democratic, inclusive, and environmentally responsible European Union.

Sincerely yours,

Prof Jason Hickel, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Prof Julia Steinberger, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Prof Giorgos Kallis, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Prof. Karel Prach, University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic

Prof. Dr. Martin Führ, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Public Law, Legal Theory and Comparative Law, Darmstadt, Germany

Prof. Dr. Adeline Otto, Hasselt University/KU Leuven, Belgium

Prof. Ekaterina Domorenok, Associate Professor, University of Padova, Italy

Prof. Claudio Cattaneo, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Prof. Dr. Klaus Henle, Department of Conservation Biology & Social-Ecological Systems, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Germany

Prof. Óscar Carpintero, University of Valladolid, Spain

Prof. Jonas Van der Slycken, visiting professor, Ghent University & Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Prof. Emeritus Dr. Danijel Rebolj, University of Maribor, Slovenia

Prof. Miroslav Svoboda, Czech University of Life Sciences, Czech Republic

Prof. Dr. Klaus Henle, Helmholtz Zentrum für Umweltforschung – UFZ, Germany

Prof. Dr. Joyeeta Gupta, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam

Prof. Mario Biggeri, University of Florence, Italy

Alison Hough BL, Senior Lecturer, Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone, Ireland.

Tuuli Hirvilammi, Senior Lecturer, Tampere University, Finland

Jessika Richter, Associate Senior Lecturer, Lund University, Sweden

Martin Calisto Friant, Lecturer, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Dr Emily Barritt, Chaire de Professeur Junior, Université Paris Dauphine – PSL, France

Dr Eri Bizani, Research and Teaching Associate, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Dr. A. Cristina de la Vega-Leinert, German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research, Leipzig, Germany

Dr. T. van der Sluis, Sr. Researcher, Wageningen Environmental Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Dr Iryna Herzon, Senior Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland

Dr Mladen Domazet, Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, Croatia

Dr Ernest Aigner, Social-Ecological Systems Institute, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany

Dr Filka Sekulova, Senior researcher, Department of Economic History, University of Barcelona

Dr Steffen Lange, Pluralist Economics, University of Siegen, Germany

Dr Helena Fornstedt, Researcher, Uppsala University, Sweden

Dr. Katharina Keil, Junior Lecturer, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Dr. Amaranta Herrero Cabrejas, Department of Economic History, University of Barcelona
Amaranta Herrero Cabrejas, researcher Department of Economic History, University of Barcelona

Dr. Kerstin Hötte, Assistant Professor, Kedge Business School, Paris, France

Dr. Robin Schulze Waltrup, Researcher, Bielefeld University, Germany

Dr Stefanie Gerold, Researcher and Lecturer, Sociology of Technology and the Environment,
Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany

Dr. Michael Miess, Senior Researcher Ecological Macroeconomics, Environment Agency Austria, Austria

Dr. Richard Bärnthaler, Assistant Professor in Ecological Economics, University of Leeds, UK

Dr. Gavin Daly, TU Dublin, Ireland

Dr Miklós Antal, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.

Dr. Tilman Hartley, University of Cologne, Germany.

Dr María Fernanda Godoy León, Sustainable Resource Use, Social-Ecological Systems Institute, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany

Dr András Lányi, Associate Professor, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Dr. Ritu Verma, Adjunct Professor, Carleton University, Canada

Dr. Eleonora Gea Piccardi, Postdoctoral researcher, Center for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

Dr. Claudiu Eduard Nedelciu, Postdoctoral researcher, Department of Geography, University of Bergen, Norway

Dr. Martin Fritz, Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Germany

Dr Gabriella Kiss, associate professor, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary

Dr Daniela Del Bene, Ca Foscari University, Italy

Dr. Monica Pons Hernandez, Postdoctoral researcher, Faculty of Law, University of Bergen, Norway.

Dr. Julia Grosinger, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Habil Elke Weik, Associate Professor, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Dr. Virginie Comorge, Postdoctoral researcher, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Bergen, Norway

Dr. Veronika Kiss, GreenFormation, Hungary

Dr. Florian Rabitz, Kaunas University of Technology and Vilnius University, Lithuania

Dr Elsa Tsioumani, University of Liege, Belgium

Dr. Konstanze Haubner, Postdoctoral researcher, Department of Earth Science, University of Bergen, Norway

Dr Maciej J. Grodzicki, Assistant Professor, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland

Dr. Elsa Maria Cardona Santos, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig, Germany

Dr Emile Frison, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, Brussels, Belgium.

Dr. Dario Cottafava, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Department of Business, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Dr Bartek Goldmann, University of Trento, Italy

Dr Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue, Radboud University, the Netherlands

Dr Vivien Fisch-Romito, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Dr Joel Millward-Hopkins, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Dr. Zehra Taşdemir Yaşın, Postdoc Researcher, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Dr Elena Hofferberth, Postdoctoral researcher, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Dr Vincent Perrot, Vrije Universiteit Brussels, Belgium

Dr Marcus Petz, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Dr Kinga Krauze, European Regional Centre for Ecohydrology PAS, Poland

Dr Iwona Wagner, UNESCO Chair of Ecohydrology and Applied Ecology, University of Lodz, Poland

Dr Jakub Kronenberg, Social-Ecological Systems Analysis Lab, University of Lodz, Poland

Dr Dominik Kopeć, Department of Biogeography, Paleoecology and Nature Conservation, University of Lodz, Poland

Jean-André Davy Guidicelli, PhD researcher, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Francisco Moreira, Senior Researcher, BIOPOLIS-CIBIO, Vairao, Portugal

Félix Garnier, PhD student, Bordeaux Sciences Economiques, France

Oskar Wood Hansen, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Josefine Henman, PhD student, Lund University, Sweden

Ilja-Valentin Sagvosdkin, PhD student, Europa-Universität Flensburg

Giacomo Ravaioli, PhD student, University of Lisbon, Portugal

Mariia Kostetckaia, PhD candidate, Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Cecilia Castellani, PhD student, University of Pisa, Italy

Associate prof. Louison Cahen-Fourot, Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Denmark

Andreas Huber, Researcher, Sociology of Technology and the Environment, Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany

Lukas Spatz, PhD student, Justus Liebig University Giessen , Germany

Silvia Montagnani, PhD student, University of Lille and Frankfurt (C3S), France & Germany

Coralie Boulard, PhD student, KU Leuven, France & Belgium

Alexandrine Lanson, PhD student, Technical University of Berlin, Germany

Lorenzo Velotti, Research Fellow, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy

Charles Duprez, PhD student, EHESS, France

Sarah Anne Stevens, PhD candidate, Leiden University, Netherlands

Antoine Richet, Climate adaptation specialist, Bangkok&Paris

Edoardo Carminucci, PhD student, University of Bologna, Italy

Marius Hübler, PhD candidate, University of Kiel, Germany

Edit Hunyadi, PhD researcher, Department of Environmental Sociology, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

Sebastian Drue, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Germany

Victor Cannilla, PhD Researcher, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Jure Vetršek, Head of Department for Efficiency and Built Environment, Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Jessica Berneiser, Researcher, Fraunhofer-Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, Germany; PhD candidate University of Groningen, Netherlands

Adrien Chanteloup, PhD candidate and researcher, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Jan Stalzer, PhD researcher, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Hugo Vacus, PhD student, Sciences Po Paris, France

Zoé Jan, PhD student, Sciences Po Paris, France

Elena Álvarez Blanes, PhD Candidate, Universidad de Burgos, España.

Alba Forns Gomez, PhD Candidate and researcher, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Fabian Fischbach, PhD Candidate and researcher, University of Bonn, Germany

Tabea Waltenberg, PhD candidate, University Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Dorothee Quade, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Germany

Tatjana Marn, Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana

Victoria Yavorskaya, PhD Researcher, University of Graz, Germany

Lea Tamberg, PhD researcher, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Omer Tayyab, PhD Researcher, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Franziska Höhne, PhD Researcher, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany

Juliette Alenda-Demoutiez, PhD, Radboud Universiteit, the Netherlands