Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz

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CC: Mr. Julien de Ridder

8 May 2018

**Re: Information to Committee of Regions staff to sign up for the Belgian local elections 14.10.2018**

Dear Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz,

According to Eurostat statistics, Belgium and, in particular, the Brussels-Capital Region - the capital of the European Union - suffers from one of the largest democratic deficits in the entire European Union. The 210,000 Europeans in the Brussels Region represent a quarter of the potential electorate in the municipal elections. But only 14% were registered in the last elections in 2012.

The European Commission finds, in its report COM (2018) 44 on the application of Directive 94/80/EC, that Belgium has one of the lowest shares of Europeans registered to vote in the municipal elections, even though the share of mobile EU citizens in the total population is among the highest.

The myths around elections persist and dissuade people to register. According to a major survey conducted in 2013 by the former Brussels Europe Liaison Office, the low registration rate of EU citizens was mainly due to the fact that they did not receive all the necessary information in time. Too few know, for example, that it is very easy to register (before July 31), but also to de-register after the elections, that it is possible to vote by proxy the same day in case of absence, or that their registration for the municipal elections in Belgium does not prevent EU citizens from voting in their country of origin. Today, the situation is unchanged.

A collaborative campaign to raise awareness among European citizens has therefore just been launched with a view to the communal elections of October 14th:

* "VoteBrussels" created by the Migration Policy Group AISBL and co-funded by the European Commission's "Rights, Equality and Citizenship 2014-2020" program, as part of the FAIREU project led by the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
* "Think European: Vote Local" created by the Office of the Commissioner for Europe and International Organizations at the request of the Brussels Government.

To meet this challenge, the Brussels-Capital Region and European civil society are working together, as well as with the Brussels municipalities. For example, "Think European: Vote Local" has published, with the support of "VoteBrussels", a brochure in three languages ​​(French, Dutch, English), A3 posters (in English) and a complete dossier (in English). These are available on the website www.commissioner.brussels. Based on a pilot project in Luxembourg (OLAI) and other European projects, "VoteBrussels" has then trained about 50 "mobiliser" volunteers - half of whom work in the European institutions - to disseminate electoral information during professional and socio-cultural events, on social networks and via the intranet of institutions.

We seek your support to promote these campaigns to the staff of your institution. We believe that, as President of the Committee of the Regions, you could play an important role in raising awareness among European citizens of their political rights in the municipal elections in Belgium in 2018 and in particular in the Brussels-Capital Region.

Our partners and volunteers mentioned several ideas that we would like to present to you during a possible meeting, in particular the idea of a personalized letter and / or video message (s) from you to the staff of the Committee of the Regions. We would also like to distribute posters and / or brochures to each staff member.

If we want to get stronger support for the European project and to make our policies and expertise resonate with the citizens, Europeans, and especially the staff of the European institutions, must engage and make use of their right to vote in municipal elections in their country of residence - one of the fundamental rights linked to European citizenship since the Maastricht Treaty. This is one of the great achievements of European integration which improves local democracy and the daily life of everyone in a municipality.

To make the European Union a success is also to make a success of the presence of its institutions in Brussels; and a success of local democracy in the capital of the European Union. The European institutions can set an example. Your support can give greater visibility to the many "civic" initiatives of European civil servants, including the one aimed at strengthening their political participation in their municipality.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to a positive reply to our request.

Best regards,



Isabelle Chopin Assya Kavrakova

Director, Migration Policy Group Director, European Citizens Action Service