EUMANS
Fiscal code: 9644729058
Address: VIA DI SAN BASILIO 64, Italy, Rome
Tel: 0688921034
Email: info@eumans.eu

## Open Letter to the European Institutions

# European Civic Assistant as the Gateway to Open Democracy

## *Turning the European Civil Society Platform into a Single, Multilingual, AI-Powered Entry Point to Civic Participation*

**To:**

- The European Commission (DG JUST, DG CNECT, Secretariat-General)
- The European Parliament (Committees on AFCO, LIBE, ITRE)
- The Council of the European Union
- The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)

Dear President, Commissioners, Members of the European Parliament, and Distinguished Representatives,

As mapped in the recent STOA Panel Study on EU Civic Engagement, Europe already disposes of a genuinely wide array of tools for citizens to take part in its democratic life: Have Your Say for public consultations, the European Citizens' Initiative portal for cross-border petitions with real legal teeth, the Citizens' Engagement Platform and European Citizens' Panels for deliberation, and dozens of national and local equivalents besides.

Each is valuable. Almost none of them speak to one another, and almost nobody outside specialist policy circles can navigate all of them at once.

A citizen who wants to know whether they qualify for funding, how to file a complaint, or which of these tools even fits their concern needs, in practice, something close to a law degree. **EUMANS believes that is a democratic failure hiding behind an abundance of good intentions.**

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## The Civil Society Platform: A Step, Not *the* Gateway

The incoming Civil Society Platform, a flagship of the Commission's 2025 EU Strategy for Civil Society, is a welcome addition to this landscape. From 2026, it will provide a structured framework for dialogue between the Commission and a select group of civil society organisations on the protection and promotion of the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. But structured dialogue with roughly thirty selected organisations is not, by itself, a gateway for the roughly 450 million Europeans that Strategy is meant to ultimately serve.

As the Platform's digital architecture is being designed, we ask that it be built as — or paired with — something more ambitious: a pan-European, multilingual, AI-powered **Civic Assistant**, open to every citizen, not only to its institutional members.

## A GPS for Democracy: The Civic Assistant

We propose a Civic Assistant: a **plain-language, conversational guide**, **integrated and interoperable** with Have Your Say, the ECI portal, the Citizens' Engagement Platform, national and local participatory tools, and the Civil Society Platform's own Knowledge Hub on Civic Space.

Ask it where to find funding for a local initiative, how to launch a European Citizens' Initiative, or which public consultation is open on a topic that matters to you, and it answers in your own language, in plain terms, pointing to the real tools and the real people who can help.

Think of it as a GPS for democracy that does not choose the destination, but simply helps citizens find the road there themselves.

## A Civic Artificial Intelligence to Empower Citizens

The Civic Assistant would embody the distinction between an AI to empower citizens, and one that decides for them. And this distinction matters more than it might first appear.

An opaque algorithmic system that quietly decided, on a citizen's behalf, which consultation was relevant to them or which funding call applied to them would not be a democratic tool — it would be a new gatekeeper dressed in the language of accessibility.

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We ask instead for a Civic Assistant built on the opposite principle: **privacy-by-design, open source**, **interoperable**, and **answerable to the citizens it serves**. Its role is to expand what a citizen can do for themselves, never to decide on their behalf.

To stay grounded in what EU institutions are actually doing, rather than in guesswork, it should be **trained on public, structured civic-participation data** — precisely the Democracy Data Space we propose in our companion letter, *European Data Spaces for Democracy Data Commons*.

And wherever possible, it should **run on Europe's own open language technology** rather than on proprietary systems built and governed outside the Union. In other words, the Civic Assistant should be part of the European Civic Artificial Intelligence ecosystem Eumans has been advocating for since 2024.

**EuroLLM** and the wider **OpenEuroLLM** project — EU-funded, open-source, multilingual foundation models already covering all 24 official EU languages, and several more besides (including SpeakEU) — are a natural technical backbone: public money already invested in public AI infrastructure, put to public work.

## Leveraging Existing EU Initiatives

This proposal builds on and connects existing European efforts:

- **EU Strategy for Civil Society (2025) and the Civil Society Platform** (operational from 2026) – the institutional home and natural first deployment ground for the Civic Assistant.
- **Have Your Say and the European Citizens' Initiative portal** – the two most-used civic participation tools the Assistant should integrate first.
- **The Citizens' Engagement Platform and European Citizens' Panels** – existing deliberative tools that should sit behind the same conversational front door.
- **The Commission's Knowledge Hub on Civic Space** – a natural content and legal-support partner for the Assistant's guidance function.
- **EuroLLM and OpenEuroLLM** – EU-funded, open-source, multilingual foundation models, ready to serve as the Assistant's linguistic backbone.
- **The Interoperable Europe Act** – the legal basis for making previously separate portals work together behind a single interface.
- **The AgoraEU programme** (€9 billion foreseen for democracy-relevant funding in the next EU budget) – a funding vehicle for building and maintaining the Assistant under the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework.

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- **The Democracy Data Space**, proposed by EUMANS in our companion letter – the structured data layer the Assistant should be trained on, and should help enrich in turn.

## A Call To Action

We therefore urge the European Institutions to:

1. **Build the Civil Society Platform's digital front end as — or alongside — a single, multilingual, AI-powered entry point to civic participation**, integrated with Have Your Say, the ECI portal, and the Citizens' Engagement Platform.
2. **Make it privacy-by-design and open source**, built on EU-funded open multilingual models such as EuroLLM, not on proprietary non-European systems.
3. **Design it to expand citizens' agency, not replace it** — natural-language guidance toward the right tool and the right people, never an automated decision made on a citizen's behalf.
4. **Fund it as public democratic infrastructure**, drawing on the Civil Society Strategy's own funding commitments and the AgoraEU programme.

Democracy should not require a law degree to access. A citizen who wants to understand how the European Union works, and how to make their voice heard within it, deserves an answer as easy to get as directions to the nearest train station.

We ask the European Institutions to build that answer — and to make sure that, when they do, **it points citizens toward power, rather than standing in front of it**.

We stand ready to collaborate with EU institutions, civil society, and the open-source AI community already building Europe's public language infrastructure, to make the Civic Assistant a reality.

**Sincerely,**
**Marco Cappato - Founder & President, EUMANS**
**Francesco Vecchi - Civic AI Campaign Coordinator, EUMANS**