
7. 30 km/h – Making Streets Liveable!

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Editor's summary: This ECI created a vibrant new network of active transportation advocates to instigate action at EU level, stalled for over 20 years, to reduce residential speed limits. One of only two ECI campaigns to use its own server for online signature collection, it lost nearly half of its signature collection time and much of its budget correcting OCS software glitches. Handicapped by cumbersome procedures, potential supporters' refusal to share personal data, poor media awareness of the ECI and technical limits to campaigning via social media, its signature numbers were disappointing. However, it succeeded in changing local laws and making speed limits a subject of public debate throughout the EU.

I don't like what I'm doing now: counting and sorting paper ECI support statements. Some national administrations use random sampling to validate signatures. So I'm trying to minimize the number declared invalid. Once again, I'm agonising over why all this must be so complicated! It's time to look back at our ECI campaign.

ECI to build on European Parliament support for 30 km/h

We organised the ECI *30 km/h – making streets liveable!* to establish a new 30 km/h (20 mph) standard urban speed limit throughout the EU; 50 km/h would become the exception. Local communities would be free to decide on other speed limits, provided they could prove that the needs of the most vulnerable road users were met.

Since its introduction in 1983, the 30 km/h speed limit has been widely recognised as “best practice”. It makes our roads safer, cuts greenhouse gas emissions, halves transportation noise, reduces stress, creates more public spaces and makes our cities more liveable.

The European Parliament's support, in its 2011 road safety report, for 30 km/h in residential areas created a positive momentum which convinced us to launch an ECI. The ECI seemed to be the strongest instrument available to reach out to active people in all EU countries. We also expected that EU institutions would publicize the ECI and so help attract media attention for the first ECI campaigns.

Network building: an exciting experience

Preparation started in summer 2011 and lasted one surprisingly exciting year. Our network then grew from 35 supporting partner organisations in September 2012 when we announced the ECI to 53 on registration day two months later. Our network kept growing, currently standing at 76 organisations in 18 countries. It includes umbrella organisations, national NGOs and small regional groups from the health sector, environmental groups, transportation NGOs (i.e., cyclists, pedestrians, car sharing companies), urban planners, children's protection groups, road safety NGOs and victims of road accidents. We've become a colourful medium-sized network.

A legal challenge: meet the EU competence standard for registration

Wording the ECI text was a challenge. Our issue straddles two areas of EU-member state shared competency: environmental and transportation policy. Critics said our issue fell outside of EU competency and was contrary to the subsidiarity principle. This was exactly how this issue had been blocked for more than 20 years! In 1987, the Commission announced a legislative procedure to introduce Union-wide speed limits, but nothing concrete ever happened.

After several months of work and legal advice, we produced a proposal which was accepted by the Commission. This finally put an end to the criticism and confirmed that the EU is the right body to set these standards. This very early success might, in fact, turn out to be a major long-term achievement of our ECI. It also proves that potential ECI campaigns need legal advice. Many other ECIs were rejected for *falling outside the Commission's powers* due to overly fussy legal checks.

Time-consuming and expensive glitches with OCS software

Due to numerous major programming faults, it took us *five months* and around 7,000 Euros in staff time and server rental fees just to install the Commission's online signature collection system (OCS) software. The Commission eventually let ECI organisers use their server based in Luxembourg. But this offer came too late for us.

It took another month to fix new software glitches when we uploaded additional language versions. We had to pressure the Commission, including sending a formal letter of complaint and posting to Commissioner Šefčovič's Twitter account, to get technical help. Our OCS was finally ready a few days before Christmas, after several press events had already been cancelled. Imagine how frustrated many activists were with the idea of campaigning just before the holidays.

Even after the online signature collection began, software problems continued. We received many complaints like: *"I tried to sign the petition but I kept receiving an error message...you are going to discourage many people from signing."* Those who tried signing again got an answer like *"An error occurred. Number 34H79. Please contact your provider."* This felt unfriendly, both to citizens and to us organisers. Some improvements to the OCS were made in late 2013, after over a year of discussions between ECI campaigns and the Commission. This is great, but it came too late to make a difference for us.

Signature gathering begins with one extraordinarily demanding day

I will never forget the first day of our signature gathering period. How much we had to do in *one single day*! As soon as we got the European Commission's acceptance message and access to the software, we had to: inform all partners, get the OCS running (with no time for testing), finalise 27 different forms and upload to 13 different websites, register additional language versions for validation by the Commission, publish media releases, and talk to journalists. These were excessive demands for us and all medium-sized or smaller networks. They raise questions about the balance of rights and demands mentioned in the ECI implementing regulation.

How to improve the OCS

Looking back, we feel that the online collection system (OCS) is unnecessarily complex. This is due to the bureaucratic approach to designing and administering it. We recommend that:

1. Organisers be given access to the software several days before the ECI is formally registered in order to test it.
2. The Commission engage more technical support staff to correct faults faster. Technical support was very professional, but more technicians are needed.
3. Organisers of the first ECIs which used the Commission's software be reimbursed for additional expenses incurred due to its failings.
4. ECI texts be considered *a document of major significance* for the Commission translation services and translated into all official languages by the first day of signature gathering. This would also save considerable time, since translators sometimes had to make repeated corrections of our ECI text.
5. Organisers choose the exact start of the signature gathering period, perhaps within a period of two to three months. This initial time period is vital to organisers for planning publicity and public relations.

Formitis: personal data requirements lead to mistakes and lost supporters

"How can you give an invalid signature if you are sure you want to support the ECI and take the trouble to fill in your data?" asked a friend. People make mistakes. But we found many more invalid signatures than we expected, for a variety of reasons.

Many mistakes occurred when gathering signatures on paper in countries requiring personal document numbers. For example, in Austria, many people copied their driver's licence number instead of their passport number. Activists in tourist regions inconveniently needed to carry multiple forms and first ask potential supporters their nationality and place of residence.

Many people, in all EU countries, were uncomfortable about giving extensive personal data. We discovered many support statements with neat handwriting that left out personal document numbers and/or the date or place of birth. People asked why they had to give so much personal data. *"This is only about agenda setting, why all the fuss?"*, they'd wonder. Some noted how co-signing a petition to the European Parliament only requires one's name and town. Many simply walked away after they saw the ECI support form. This effect worsened after mid-2013 press reports of the NSA tracking online personal data.

Convincing people to give their data might have been possible, but would have required many more activists than we had – and the size of our network was impressive to many. We believe the whole signature collection system, both on paper and online, needs to be much more user-friendly, including fewer personal data requirements and hopefully one system for all countries.

Challenges using social and mainstream media limit "snowball effect"

As campaign coordinator, I monitored online signature collection and observed that several countries' signatures grew faster than others. A sudden gain could often be linked to a special event. For example, a huge press conference in France prompted 500 French online signatures in one

weekend. However, despite several attempts, no “snowball effect”, where signatures would grow exponentially through sheer momentum, ever happened. Challenges in using both social and mainstream media certainly contributed to this.

Experts in online campaigning advised us to use direct links from the online collection system (OCS) to social media. They were astonished to learn this is not possible with the Commission’s OCS! Simple details could have made a difference – like changing the screen that pops up after supporters sign.

Mainstream media appear to have no idea what the ECI is. German media mistook the ECI for the German expression “BI”, an informal group without any specification. In other countries, the ECI was mixed up with e-petitions. It seems as if editorial staffs have not been informed about the ECI. In the end, we created basic media information about the ECI instrument itself and the importance of this new EU citizens’ right. This was not our job and we had lots of other things to do.

Positive side effects: reducing speed limits to 30 km/h taken up at local levels across the EU

Apart from the positive EU legal admissibility check, we experienced some amazing side effects during signature gathering. They took place at the local level and in different countries. Local authorities were deeply impressed that their citizens were taking action continent-wide and supporting the issue in such an ambitious way. So it turned out that the European level of the campaign made a difference!

Spain: The city council of Bilbao approved a motion to make the speed limit 30 km/h in residential areas.

Poland: 13 Polish mayors and representatives of municipalities, including the mayor of Gdansk, signed a declaration of support for our ECI and highlighted the benefit of having 30 km/h as the EU standard.

France: Influenced by the wide discussion the ECI generated, Paris significantly increased the number of its 30 km/h zones.

Slovenia: ECI activists launched a local petition in Ig (near Ljubljana), prompting the local authority to implement the first 30 km/h zones in the town.

Belgium: A lower speed limit has become a big issue. A survey in Wallonia showed majority public support for lowering urban speed limits.

Germany: Prompted by ECI activists, the city of Würzburg (Bavaria) is officially discussing a 30 km/h speed limit for the city centre. The mayor of Güstrow (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) publicly asked citizens to support the ECI.

Our network now has 76 partner organisations in 18 EU countries: nearly twice as many as at the beginning of our campaign. Since new partners joined recently, we believe that more are still to come. The ECI was just the beginning!

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Table – Offline versus Online Collection – Final Figures November 2013

Country		Signatures Collected			Country Quota	Relation Paper/Online
Code	Name	on Paper	Online	Total		
AT	Austria	282	1,674	1,956	14,250	14% / 86%
BE	Belgium	315	3,466	3,781	16,500	8% / 92%
BG	Bulgaria	-	66	66	13,500	0% / 100%
CY	Cyprus	-	21	21	4,500	0% / 100%
CZ	Czech Republic	-	100	100	16,500	0% / 100%
DE	Germany	7,460	15,763	23,223	74,250	32% / 68%
DK	Denmark	-	173	173	9,750	0% / 100%
EE	Estonia	-	41	41	4,500	0% / 100%
EL	Greece	59	65	124	16,500	48% / 52%
ES	Spain	1,159	4,360	5,519	40,500	21% / 79%
FI	Finland	-	148	148	9,750	0% / 100%
FR	France	169	3,761	3,930	55,500	4% / 96%
HR	Croatia	-	-	-	9,000	
HU	Hungary	3	109	112	16,500	3% / 97%
IE	Ireland	-	210	210	9,000	0% / 100%
IT	Italy	30	1,334	1,364	54,750	2%/98%
LT	Lithuania	-	19	19	9,000	0% / 100%
LU	Luxembourg	-	61	61	4,500	0% / 100%
LV	Latvia	-	62	62	6,750	0% / 100%
MT	Malta	-	29	29	4,500	0% / 100%
NL	Netherlands	5	189	194	19,500	3% / 97%
PL	Poland	10	765	775	38,250	1% / 99%
PT	Portugal	2	477	479	16,500	0% / 100%
RO	Romania	-	61	61	24,750	0% / 100%
SE	Sweden	10	171	181	15,000	6% / 94%
SI	Slovenia	-	88	88	6,000	0% / 100%
SK	Slovakia	-	59	59	9,750	0% / 100%
UK	United Kingdom	1,154	2,519	3,673	54,750	31% / 69%
EU	<i>Signatures</i>	10,658	35,791	46,449	1,000,000	23% / 77%
	<i>“Significant” Countries</i>	0	0	0	7	

Sources: 30kmh.eu/statistics and *Figures from the Campaign Organisers*

The text and table in this file are a part of the book:

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