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### 3. Stop Vivisection

Adriano Varrica

*Editor's summary: This ECI was created by a loose coalition of individual animal rights activists and national animal protection groups to develop European legislation to phase out animal experimentation. Despite a limited budget, this grassroots campaign collected over 1.3 million signatures via extraordinarily dedicated volunteers and effective social media. Its start was delayed by six months due to problems with the online collection system (OCS). It encountered low citizen awareness of the ECI and discomfort sharing personal data.*

#### **An ECI to end animal experimentation**

The ECI *Stop Vivisection* asks the European Commission to abolish *Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes* and put forward a new proposal aimed at phasing out the practice of animal experimentation and making compulsory the use in biomedical and toxicological research of data directly relevant for humans.

Its legal basis is *article 13, TFEU* which states that “*the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals*”. This invokes a moral obligation to respect the fundamental rights of animals which must therefore be recognised as an EU priority and addressed through a coherent legal framework.

In a 2006 Eurobarometer poll, 86% of Europeans agreed that imposing pain and suffering on sentient and defenceless beings through animal experimentation, including “vivisection”, is an intolerable practice. Furthermore, there are solid scientific principles that invalidate the idea that testing on animals can predict impacts on humans. Animal experimentation can therefore pose a danger to human health and the environment. It also hinders the development of new methods of biomedical research conceived for humans that are more reliable, relevant, cheaper and efficient than animal experimentation.

#### **ECI campaign run by a loosely-coordinated network of active volunteers**

The ECI *Stop Vivisection* was a volunteer-run, bottom-up campaign supported by a pan-EU alliance of more than 250 animal protection groups, scientific organisations and companies selling “animal cruelty-free” products. Many of these organisations were small, local groups focused on specific animals such as dogs and rabbits.

Its volunteers were its most important and powerful resource. Many had significant previous experience campaigning on animal rights issues in different European member states. The campaign itself had loose central coordination and lacked the resources to meet in person, relying heavily on Skype and other online communication. This made cross-border campaigning challenging. But it also allowed the campaign to draw on the skills and resources of people throughout the continent. It also empowered national coordinators and individual animal right activists to develop campaign approaches appropriate to their local context.

## **Campaign built volunteer civic skills, transnational connections and European identity**

According to one national coordinator, many volunteers felt the benefit of actively working for a campaign they felt strongly about. Getting involved with the ECI turned out to add to their quality of life by putting them in touch with like-minded people they could bond with. Not only did this lead to new friendships and better connections to other campaigners and NGOs, but volunteers also learned a lot about what did and did not work. This combination of empowering experiences and new contacts prepared volunteers for other civic projects. For example, one volunteer organised an emergency truck to Romania using the abilities and contacts gathered from working on the ECI *Stop Vivisection*. Several volunteers repeatedly stated they were ready to take on another ECI if the right subject presented itself.

## **Problems with the OCS delay start of campaign by six months**

The ECI *Stop Vivisection* operated with a limited budget. This created particular challenges in preparing to launch the campaign, especially when setting up the online collection system (OCS). One could conclude that the ECI is not intended for low-budget initiatives like the *ECI Stop Vivisection*, but rather only for big, well-organised NGOs that already have a presence in Brussels.

Our ECI was officially registered in June 2012, but due to problems with the online signature collection system (OCS) could only begin collecting signatures in January 2013. A loss of six months of campaigning and signature collection time! Fortunately, the Commission started a new 12-month signature collection period once the OCS was functioning.

Despite the flaws in the OCS, the online approach to signature collection helped tremendously. Results were regularly updated and shared throughout the campaign network. This served to boost morale and motivate volunteers to continue with the campaign. It also clearly demonstrated in which countries more active campaigning and volunteer engagement was needed.

In total, 800,000 signatures were collected online and 500,000 signatures were collected on paper. Country quotas were reached for nine member states, with the largest number of signatures coming from Italy. Most of the 1.3 million signatures were collected in the last three months of the campaign. In July 2013, the campaign had collected 500,000 signatures. After that, work through national committees and social media was intensified. With over 150,000 “likes”, the ECI *Stop Vivisection* Facebook page had more followers than those of any other ECI.

Since most signatures were collected online, the OCS is a crucial aspect for the future development of this new democracy instrument. The official ECI regulation promises that the OCS will be easily accessible and user-friendly. However, in its current version, it is neither and thus needs to be simplified.

The paper signature collection forms were likewise not as user-friendly as they could be. For example, on the German form, the font was too small and contained some unnecessary information.

## **ID requirements created multiple barriers to citizen support**

Citizens complained that they were required to provide too much personal information to support our ECI. In particular, ID numbers required by many member states raised serious privacy concerns

and deterred many citizens from supporting our ECI. We thus recommend simplifying the personal data requirements requested when signing.

EU citizens who live outside their country of nationality also reported problems signing our ECI. National regulations must be changed or a new method created so that *all EU citizens may support an ECI, regardless of where they live*.

Last but not least, the ECI is not very well known among EU citizens, so confidence in the ECI instrument is limited. EU and national institutions need to prove that they take the ECI instrument seriously. They also must sufficiently inform citizens and raise public awareness of the ECI.

One big question, however, remains. What happens *after* the ECI *Stop Vivisection's* successful collection of 1.3 million signatures of support? Support statements are being verified by national authorities with results expected by the end of March 2014. If successful, a public hearing will be organised within the following three months. Our organisers and supporters expect action resulting in policy change.

*Adriano Varrica is campaign coordinator for the ECI "Stop Vivisection". [www.stopvivisection.eu](http://www.stopvivisection.eu)*

Table – Collected Signatures – Final Figures November 2013

<i>Country</i>		<i>Signatures Collected</i>	<i>Country Quota</i>
<i>Code</i>	<i>Name</i>		
AT	Austria	12,186	14,250
BE	Belgium	<b>33,569</b>	16,500
BG	Bulgaria	<b>15,422</b>	13,500
CY	Cyprus	624	4,500
CZ	Czech Republic	5,172	16,500
DE	Germany	<b>183,028</b>	74,250
DK	Denmark	4,851	9,750
EE	Estonia	<b>6,179</b>	4,500
EL	Greece	2,296	16,500
ES	Spain	<b>63,515</b>	40,500
FI	Finland	<b>12,738</b>	9,750
FR	France	<b>91,058</b>	55,500
HR	Croatia	3,134	9,000
HU	Hungary	<b>30,636</b>	16,500
IE	Ireland	4,759	9,000
IT	Italy	<b>700,980</b>	54,750
LT	Lithuania	5,255	9,000
LU	Luxembourg	1,309	4,500
LV	Latvia	3,643	6,750
MT	Malta	2,043	4,500
NL	Netherlands	11,251	19,500
PL	Poland	<b>44,953</b>	38,250
PT	Portugal	14,245	16,500
RO	Romania	2,229	24,750
SE	Sweden	8,473	15,000
SI	Slovenia	<b>25,852</b>	6,000
SK	Slovakia	<b>13,359</b>	9,750
UK	United Kingdom	24,048	54,750
EU	<i>Signatures</i>	1,326,807	1,000,000
	<i>“Significant” Countries</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

Bold numbers mean that the Country Quota is reached.

Source: [www.stopvivisection.eu/en/content/signatures](http://www.stopvivisection.eu/en/content/signatures)

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**Learning from the first two years of the European Citizens' Initiative**

**Edited by** Carsten Berg and Janice Thomson

**Prefaces by** Maroš Šefčovič, Martin Schulz and Dimitris Kourkoulas

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This book contains contributions from 16 ECIs,  
14 analytic and prospective contributions, and two interviews.

You may order the book by email: [contact@citizens-initiative.eu](mailto:contact@citizens-initiative.eu)

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