
4. Fraternité 2020

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Editor's summary: This ECI was launched by alumni of EU exchange programmes like Erasmus, EVS and Leonardo da Vinci to enhance these programmes and build grassroots EU democracy. OCS glitches wiped out nearly half of its 12-month signature collection period, which expired just as it was gaining momentum. This campaign, run on a shoestring by volunteers, relied heavily on social media and youth networks. It helped raise awareness of the need for paid traineeships and better funding for EU exchange programmes.

An ECI to enhance EU exchange programmes and EU democracy

The citizens' committee of *Fraternité 2020* decided to launch an ECI, believing that the ECI can strengthen EU democracy by helping to restore trust in the democratic system of government. We saw it as a pilot project to test whether a more participatory form of democracy was possible in the EU. European citizens, particularly young people, want to influence EU Institutions and build a "bottom up" Europe.

The goal of the *Fraternité 2020* ECI was to enhance European Union exchange programmes such as *Erasmus* and the *European Voluntary Service (EVS)*, in order to contribute to a united Europe based on solidarity among its citizens. We strongly believe that the expansion of these programmes would also help to lower youth unemployment and stimulate sustainable growth by investing in Europe's people: our continent's most precious resource. Research has shown that working or studying abroad can help improve career prospects. Former *Erasmus* participants have reported that the experience exceeded their expectations and enriched both their personal and professional lives.

Fraternité 2020 also advocated financial support for paid traineeships, including via the *Leonardo da Vinci* lifelong learning programme. It is hard to break into the labour market without an employment track record. Yet many young Europeans float from one unpaid full-time traineeship to another, without improving their career prospects. Young people whose parents cannot afford to support traineeships simply face exclusion from many careers.

We feel privileged to have "had our go" at changing Europe. Even if in the end our ECI did not succeed, we feel like we achieved something. Through our ECI and our campaign's participation in public hearings, conferences, debates and online chats, we raised awareness of the need for both better *Erasmus* funding and paid traineeships.

A campaign with a wide network of support, run on a shoestring budget

Fraternité 2020 got the most support from NGOs, universities and MEPs. It was supported by a number of renowned academics and NGOs from all over Europe including: AEGEE, ESN, ESU, Campus Europae, Europa-Union Deutschland, ESTIEM, ECAS, Think Young, Generation Europe Foundation, JEF Belgium and The Austrian Institute for European Law and Policy. It was also supported by 75 Members of the European Parliament.

Fraternité 2020 had very limited funds – only a few thousand Euros. We also had limited opportunities to organise events in different EU member states, as well as a limited ability to participate in conferences and mobilise the broader civil society.

We only collected signatures online. So we used a lot of social media to promote our ECI and contact various European organisations, students and universities. However, because the ECI itself is a new tool, we encountered significant challenges getting visibility and approaching ordinary citizens who had never heard about the ECI.

Online collection system problems stalled campaign for over five months

The biggest problem for *Fraternité 2020* was the long time gap between when our ECI was registered (May) and when we could begin to collect signatures (November). This was due to major problems with the online collection system (OCS). Eventually, with the help of the European Commission, the first supporting MEPs and youth organisations, we started collecting signatures. However, it was obviously difficult to arouse the same kind of interest in November that we had had in May, when our initiative attracted important media coverage, including being featured in the main news of ARTE Journal: one of the largest and highest quality TV channels in Europe.

Signature collection peaked at times when student funding was threatened

Timing was, in fact, a significant factor in attracting support throughout the life of the ECI. In December 2012, when *Erasmus* faced a significant funding crisis and the future of the programme was in doubt, we collected almost 40,000 signatures with little effort on our part. We collected an additional 30,000 signatures purely through our own efforts. We find this quite remarkable. Had our ECI continued, we could almost certainly have collected many signatures when the Spanish government decided to restrict education grants for Spanish students abroad. Just after our ECI expired, a new online petition was launched to support Spanish *Erasmus* students.

Support linked to *Erasmus* involvement and youth unemployment

The most support for our ECI came from citizens of countries that either receive or send many *Erasmus* students, where youth unemployment is high and/or where Erasmus scholarships are limited. We got the most signatures from citizens of the following countries, in decreasing order of support: Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy, France, Poland, UK, Finland, Portugal, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania. The four most popular destinations for *Erasmus* students are Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Spain sent the largest number of students abroad, followed by Germany and France. In countries such as Spain, Italy, Poland and Portugal, youth unemployment is also very high. Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania not only face problems with youth unemployment but also offer very few *Erasmus* scholarships to their students.

How to improve the ECI

Based on our experience, here are our recommendations for improving the ECI:

1. More practical support, including regular meetings with the European Commission about the progress of the ECI and problems with the online signature collection system.
2. Mandatory free translations by the European Commission for all ECIs.

3. The possibility to use the ECI to ask for a change in the treaties.
4. The same personal data requirements for signing an ECI in all EU member states. Do not ask for ID numbers. Only collect date of birth, nationality and address of residence.

Simona Pronckuté is member of the Citizens' Initiative Committee of the ECI Fraternité 2020.
www.en.fraternite2020.eu

Table – Collected Signatures – Final Figures

Country		Signatures Collected	Country Quota
Code	Name		
AT	Austria	974	14,250
BE	Belgium	8,261	16,500
BG	Bulgaria	1,766	13,500
CY	Cyprus	159	4,500
CZ	Czech Republic	1,176	16,500
DE	Germany	15,284	74,250
DK	Denmark	460	9,750
EE	Estonia	494	4,500
EL	Greece	1,226	16,500
ES	Spain	9,094	40,500
FI	Finland	2,105	9,750
FR	France	4,996	55,500
HR	Croatia	-	9,000
HU	Hungary	1,288	16,500
IE	Ireland	475	9,000
IT	Italy	6,099	54,750
LT	Lithuania	1,496	9,000
LU	Luxembourg	109	4,500
LV	Latvia	340	6,750
MT	Malta	136	4,500
NL	Netherlands	1,800	19,500
PL	Poland	4,555	38,250
PT	Portugal	1,843	16,500
RO	Romania	1,596	24,750
SE	Sweden	731	15,000
SI	Slovenia	606	6,000
SK	Slovakia	1,133	9,750
UK	United Kingdom	2,210	54,750
EU	<i>Signatures</i>	70,412	1,000,000
	<i>“Significant” Countries</i>	0	7

Signatures were collected online only.

Source: www.en.fraternite2020.eu/signatures.html

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

AN ECI THAT WORKS!
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

2014, The ECI Campaign, Alfter (Germany)

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

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