



# EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

## RIGHT2WATER



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# 1

## Right2Water

The Right2Water initiative (full name: 'Water and sanitation area human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!') was registered on 10 May 2012. The aim was to invite the European Commission to propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation, as recognised by the United Nations, and their provision as essential public services for all.

The main objective of the campaign was that EU legislation should require national governments to ensure and provide all citizens with sufficient clean drinking water and sanitation.

Right2Water is unique in the sense that it was the first European Citizens' Initiative that succeeded in collecting 1 million signatures.

The Commission decided to take action in different areas related to the initiative (increase transparency, stimulate innovation, etc.) and made a legislative proposal to revise the Drinking Water Directive including the obligation for the Member States to ensure access to water for the most vulnerable groups.

### Sources of funding (€)

140 000

European Federation of  
Public Service Unions



### Success factors

- Three years of preparation prior to launching the initiative
- A sketch on a prime-time show on German TV helped them collect around 200 000 signatures in the days following its transmission
- A well-established international movement

## 2

# The Right2Water campaign

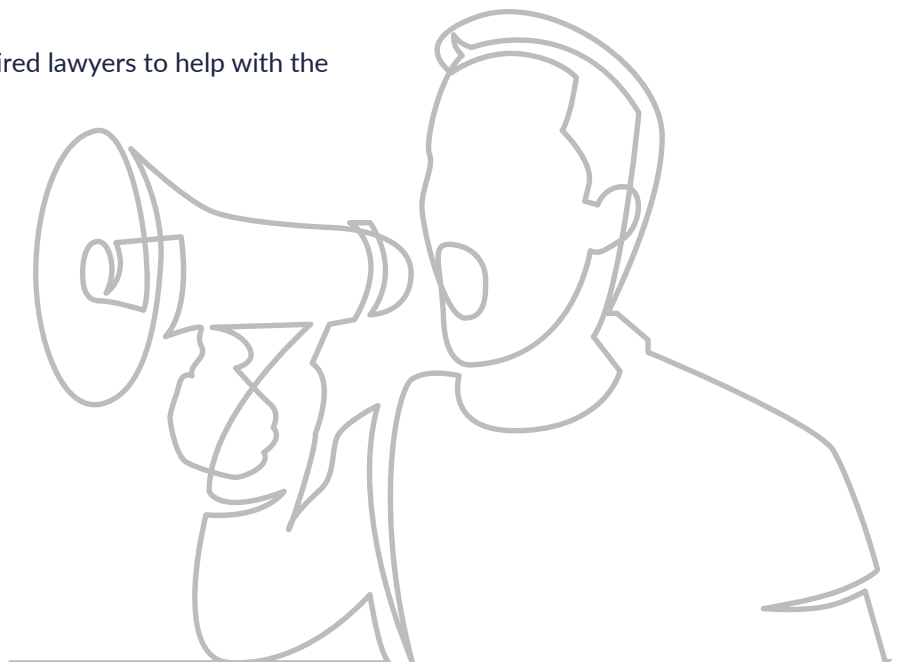
### Preparation

During a meeting in 2009, the European Public Service Union (EPSU) decided to launch the European citizens' initiative because "it was a tool with a European dimension and able to foster coalition and collaboration across Europe". This was key to the success of the initiative as the EPSU started a fund to finance the campaign three years in advance, and created a broad alliance of organisations (development organisations, social and environmental NGOs, women's organisations, churches, public water companies and municipalities) to support the campaign.

Organisers used personal contacts, EPSU members, social movements, national networks, and some European organisations (European Environmental Bureau, Women in Europe, Social Platform, European Water Movement, etc.) to raise awareness and reach out to supporters. "All partners had different reasons to support the initiative, but shared a common interest: the success of the initiative".

Careful planning of the campaign and the preparation of key messages were important. One of the national *campaign-coordinators* also highlights the importance to "choose your campaign ambassadors carefully. Make sure you have sufficient time, resources and expertise, both for substantive issues and for technical arrangements."

Last but not least, they also consulted retired lawyers to help with the drafting of the initiative.



## Implementation

On the one hand, they reached supporters through social media as well as traditional media. Still, the organisers state that campaigning was “particularly useful [on] Facebook events and groups”. Even though, Facebook has since increasingly moved from events to pages, events remain “very useful as people attending [or being interested] get notifications”.

A critical factor for the success of the initiative was a sketch on a German prime-time TV show that led to a sharp spike of around 200 000 new signatures. They tried to replicate this in other countries but “it was time consuming” for organisers and they did not have the same success in attracting the attention of national media.

On the other hand, offline activities were important and reached supporters through activists in the cities. Organisers also set up a network of local contact points where people could report what they did in the street or the workplace, enabling the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

The interplay between the European organisers and the national campaigns was a key factor. The organisers explain that “the entire campaign was designed [in a way that provided the opportunity for] the European coordination to exchange with the national partners”.

One of the national coordinators stated that it was necessary to make local adjustments. “We modified a little the campaign slogan *Water is a Human Right* to read *Water is a Basic Right* (*Vesi on perusoikeus* in Finnish), which sounded more familiar and was used when referring to the Finnish Constitution.” This example shows that European coordination is important but that the need for flexibility regarding national dimensions and particularities is equally relevant.

Besides, national partners directly cooperated with each other. Those exchanges helped national campaigns to grow further. The organisers state that “the success of the collection in several countries is explained by the expansion of the numbers of national partners.”

For the campaign to be successful, it was important that a great number of people could identify with the goals of the initiative. In the case of this campaign, the organisers saw their advantage in the fact that “water is something that all people need in everyday life, and nothing in our society could function without water.” This baseline allowed for almost everyone to identify with the goal of the campaign.

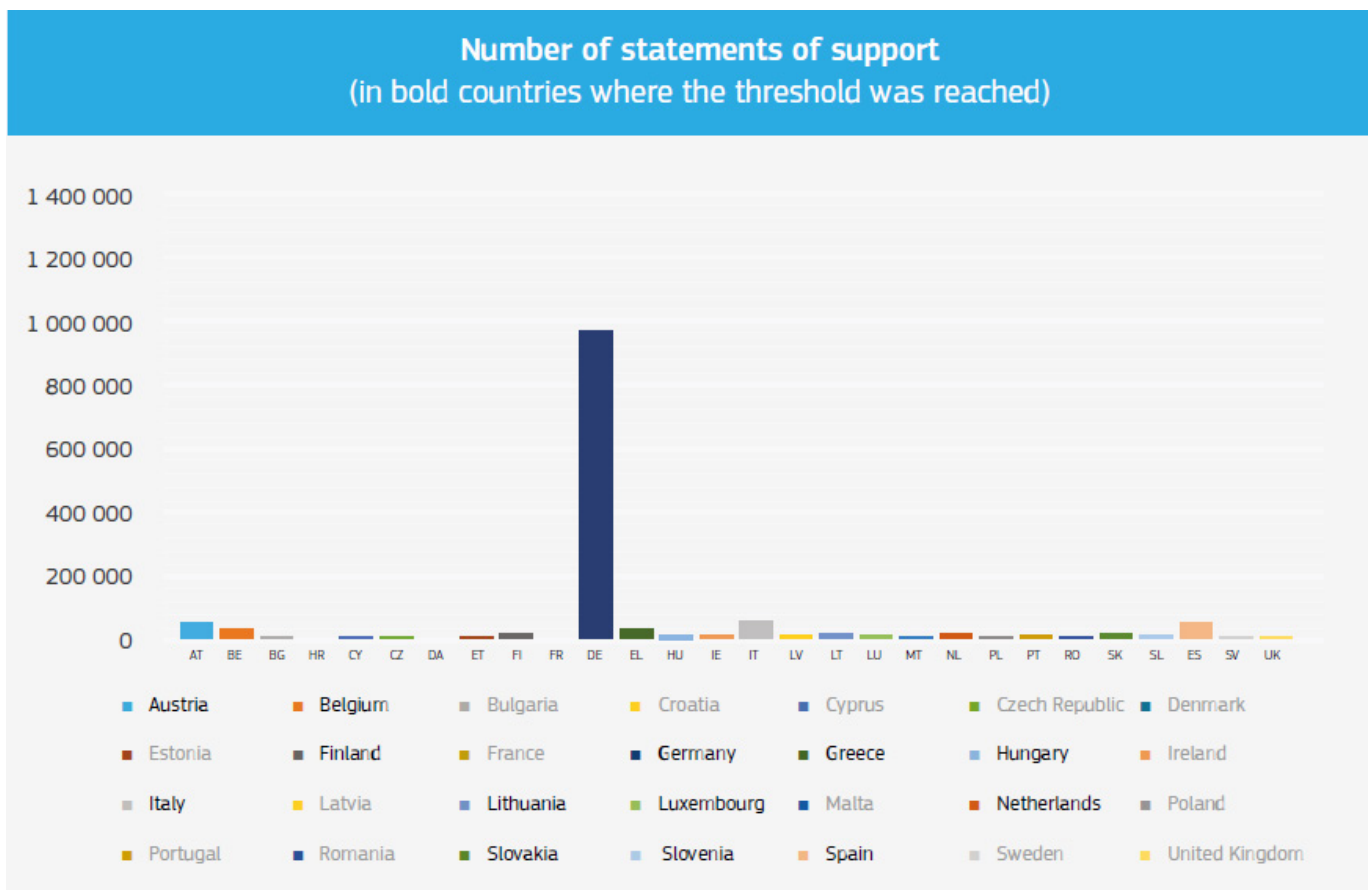


## Collection of signatures

“Citizens were aware of the problem of access to clean water”, which facilitated the collection of signatures. In fact, initial targets set by organisers were surpassed in Italy, Spain and Greece, three countries subject to some of the “most drastic austerity policies at that time following privatisation of basic services”.

Six months after the start of the collection period, they were able to identify the countries where it was easiest to collect signatures, and focused their efforts on these. When they reached the threshold in a country, they tried to collect a minimum of 5% over that threshold.

By the end of the collection phase, 84% of the 1.7 million signatures had been collected online and the remaining 16 % on paper.



## Verification and submission

The initiative was submitted on 20 December 2013 along with certificates confirming the validity of 1 659 543 statements of support. In some countries, signature verification took much longer than in others. Around 200 000 signatures did not pass the verification process.

# 3

## The impact of the Right2Water campaign

### Examination and Commission decision

The meeting with the Commission, represented by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, took place on 17 February 2014. In the afternoon of the same day, the organisers presented their initiative at a public hearing at the European Parliament.

The organisers thought the public hearing “was about having a public debate with the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the Commission” in order to discuss how to achieve the objectives of the initiative, which is something that did not happen. “There were some interventions by MEPs but no debate surrounding the initiative”.

As already mentioned, in its Communication of 19 March 2014 (see press release), the Commission set out the actions that it committed to implement.

More information on the follow-up actions can be found on the European Citizens’ Initiative website.



## Follow up

To disseminate the results of the campaign, the 'Right 2 Water' Initiative, made use of its news bulletin. Already before the end of the initiative, organisers sent out updates "to different countries in their respective language."

An important outcome of the initiative was the network that was created during the campaign. The connections built were kept even after the finalisation of the European citizens' initiative. In fact, building a long-lasting network "was one of the ideas when the ECI was launched." This shows that the long-term strategy does not end with the European citizens' initiative but can go beyond that. Organising an initiative can be a good first step to build long term partnerships and alliances.

One of the main learning points from the organisers is to focus more on the work on the national level. The design of national campaigns was considered crucial for the successful implementation of a European Citizens' Initiative campaign. According to the organisers, "the work of coalition building at national level" is extremely important.



## Lessons learned

- "The enormous attention received, and the awareness-raising impact of the initiative made the significant resources invested in campaigning worthwhile."
- The fact that the initiative was based on a major and already well-established international movement made it possible to secure the necessary number of supporters.
- Specifically, the 1.2 million signatures collected in Germany were the result of a strong national campaign that benefitted from excellent media coverage – investigative programmes, a comedy show, newspaper articles, etc.



## Hints and tips for future organisers

- Build an alliance with diverse groups to ensure success.
- Set up action and campaign plans at all levels: EU, national and local!
- The sooner you start with the preparation, the greater the chance of success.
- Contact MEPs who can help you with your campaign.
- Campaign in national languages to facilitate citizens' engagement.
- Gain the support of 'celebrities'.
- Personal contacts and social media are key during the campaign. Use the press in an intelligent manner.
- Make sure people involved in the campaign are able to explain the initiative and how the European Citizens' Initiative works.
- Establish a strong link between local and national politics and your initiative, explaining possible implications of a yes or no so that citizens can link the topic with the political issues in their communities.