



EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

STOP VIVISECTION



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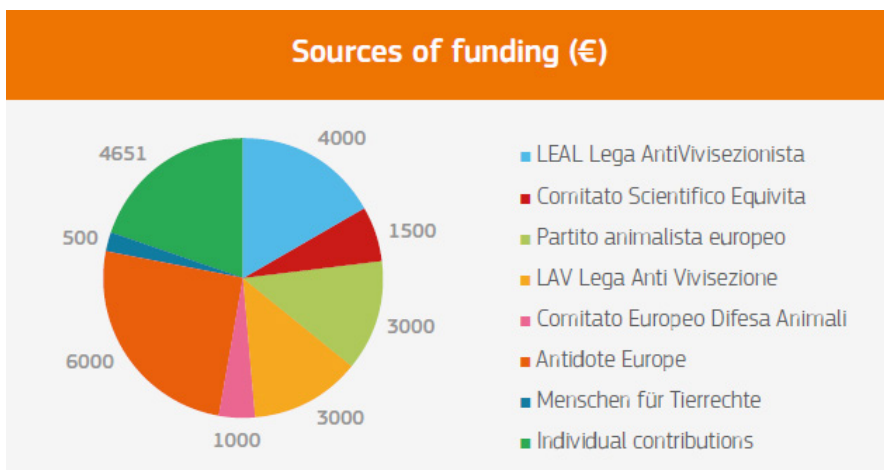
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Stop Vivisection

The Stop Vivisection initiative was registered on 22 June 2012. Its goal was to propose a European legislative framework aimed at phasing out animal experiments.

The initiative's objective was twofold:

- to annul Directive 2010/63/EU of 22 September 2010 on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes
- to present a new proposal to make the use of data directly relevant for the human species compulsory



The European Commission shared the organisers' conviction that animal testing should be phased out, but did not accept that scientific principles invalidate the 'animal model'. The Commission's view is that animal testing does not impede the development of alternative research methods. The Commission therefore did not repeal Directive 2010/63/EU, considering that it already allows for progress towards the final goal of full replacement.

This initiative set an important precedent in that, for the first time, external experts were invited to take the floor during the public hearing at the European Parliament alongside the organisers of Stop Vivisection.



Success factors

- Broad network of volunteers
- Aggressive communication campaign
- Large-scale use of social media

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The Stop Vivisection campaign

Preparation

The Stop Vivisection campaign was supported by an EU-wide alliance of more than 250 animal protection groups, scientific organisations and companies selling 'animal cruelty-free' products.

A strong network of volunteers, built up before launching the initiative and strengthened during the campaign, was key in collecting 1 million signatures. "New contacts and empowering experiences during the campaign have prepared these volunteers for other similar projects in the future".

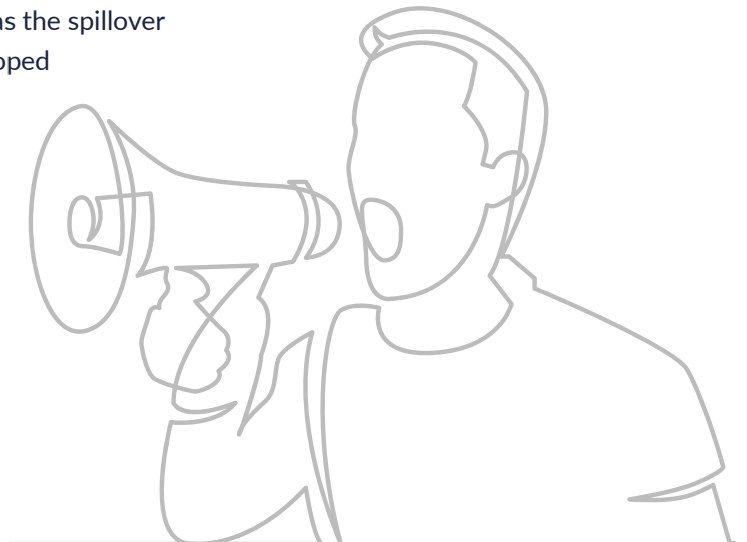
The campaign has shown the importance of planning a European citizens' initiative well in advance.

Implementation

The organisers of the campaign mainly used social media to attract public attention. However, they also took advantage of the options provided by traditional media. The campaign gained considerable support from "a TV campaign in Italy that was privately sponsored."

Collection of signatures

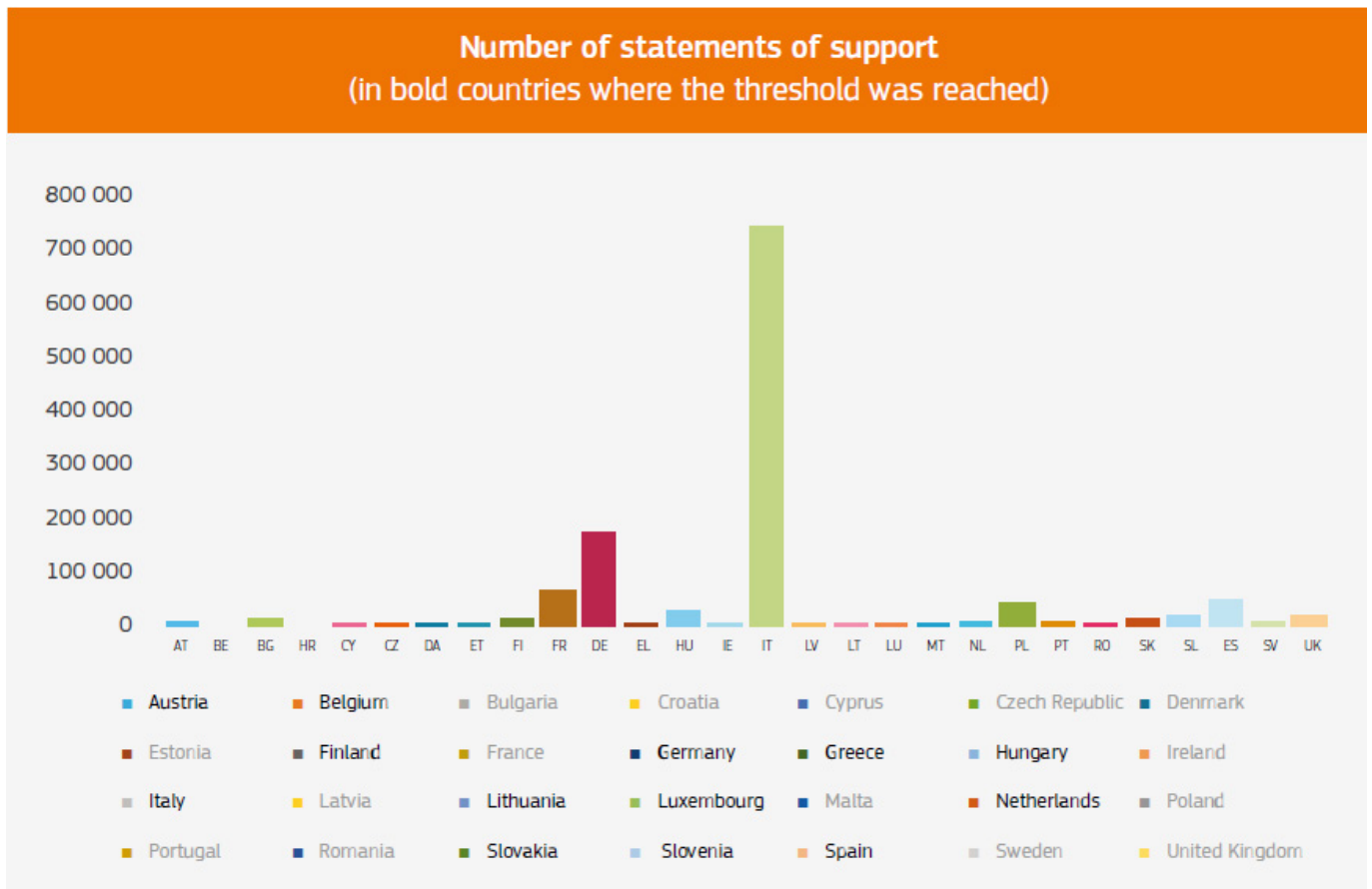
A key factor in the collection of statements of support was the spillover strategy followed during the campaign. Organisers developed strong networks in one country, collecting as many signatures as possible, and then they used this country as a leverage for the next one. Indeed, once a critical initial mass of support had been created, the focus of the campaign moved on to the next country in a coordinated way.



Another relevant aspect to the campaign was the support from local and national organisations. A purely European campaign would probably not have provided the same success. The organisers explained that they “relied on support [from] local individuals.”

The initiative’s limited funds created specific challenges related to the setting up of the online collection system. However, in response to these difficulties faced by the organisers during the start-up phase of the European Citizens’ Initiative, the Commission provided the hosting of the organisers’ online collection systems beyond its obligations under the Regulation, as well as providing technical assistance and training. The Commission also exceptionally accepted statements of support collected until 1 November 2013 (beyond the official 12 months) for all initiatives registered before 31 October 2012.

Just under 60% of signatures were collected online, while over 40% were collected on paper.



| Verification and submission

The initiative was submitted on 3 March 2015 along with certificates confirming the validity of 1 173 130 statements of support.

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The impact of the Stop Vivisection campaign

Examination and Commission decision

The meeting with the Commission took place on 11 May 2015. The organisers met with European Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen and the Director-General for Environment. The organisers also presented their initiative at a public hearing at the European Parliament on the same day.

In its Communication on 3 June 2015 (see press release), the Commission committed to a series of follow-up actions:

- Accelerating progress in the three Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement) through knowledge sharing;
- Support to the development, validation and implementation of new alternative approaches;
- Enforcement of compliance with the three Rs principle and alignment of relevant sector legislation;
- Engaging in dialogue with the scientific community.

Regarding the last point, the Commission organised a scientific conference in Brussels on 6-7 December 2016 to debate alternatives to animal testing. At the same time, the Commission reported on the progress of the follow-up actions (see report).

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

According to organisers, the Commissions' response to the initiative did not meet their expectations.



| Follow up

The information channels (e.g. the website and social media channels) that were built up during the campaign also helped the organisers share the results of the campaign after the European citizens' initiative was implemented.

Advocating to stop vivisection did not finish with the end of the campaign for the European citizens' initiative. In fact, "some of the organisations still network on the subject of animal experimentation". The network and the synergies created during the implementation of a European citizens' initiative do not stop after the campaign but actually provide the potential to keep growing far beyond.



Lessons learned

- For the organisers, "the campaign built volunteers' civic skills and transnational connections and strengthened the European identity of everyone involved". The role of the people who built up such skills was considered very important for the campaign.
- Despite difficulties with the online collection system, they considered the online collection of statements of support "crucial" to the initiative's success in collecting 1 million signatures.
- According to the organisers, "a successful initiative has one logical conclusion: legislative change". Even if this does not always occur, "a well organised European citizens' initiative is a public awareness exercise that will contribute to political change".
- The privately sponsored TV campaign was a crucial element of the campaign. According to the organisers, they would "not have attained the one million required signatures" without this TV campaign.



Hints and tips for future organisers

- Volunteers are the most important and powerful resource... rely on them!
- Use online communication tools and social media in your campaign.
- Update volunteers on signature collection regularly to boost their morale and motivate them.
- Rely on partners' personal contacts and networks: they are key to an initiative's success.
- Focus on countries where you have strong partners in order to reach national thresholds.

