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# The European Citizens' Initiative: the territorial extension of a European political public sphere?

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## Abstract

*A key aim of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) introduced in 2012 was to promote transnational discussion and deliberation, but there is relatively little analysis of the impact of this feature. We use primary and secondary data collection to examine the legacies left by almost 50 ECI campaigns at the conclusion of their official status, identifying mixed results. Using data drawn from interviews with 22 Citizen Committees we identify and assess ECI campaigns which have disappeared with little trace of continued networks of communication, and at the other end of the spectrum we find a notable reach of campaigns into some Central and East European countries, in which a young cohort of post-student campaigners attracted by the use of new technologies for campaigning feature prominently. In recognition of debates about the prospects for EU democratisation which transnational contestation might provide, we identify from continuing campaigns shared features which may provide clues as to the formation of political public spheres across national boundaries.*

**Keywords:** European Citizens' Initiative:  
European Public and Political Spheres.

## Introduction: European political public spheres from the ECI?

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was '*designed to stimulate Europe-wide public debates on issues of concern to EU citizens*' (European Parliament, 2015: 5)...*one of the main benefits of this tool resides in forging links with like-minded people across the continent, facilitating pan-European debates on issues that are clearly close to citizens' concerns*' (European Commission, 2015: 2). Whilst assessments abound as to its ability to make an impact on EU politics based on its weak powers of mandation (see, for instance, Schiller and Setälä, 2012; Smith, 2012) and its operational difficulties (Berg and Thomson, 2014; European Commission, 2015; European Parliament, 2015), there are no empirically grounded conceptual analyses of its impact on promoting transnational discussion and deliberation. We provide an assessment of the legacies left by 48 ECI campaigns which had concluded their official registration by the end of 2015, examining in particular features of campaigns which bear traces of the formation of *political* public spheres across national boundaries and which extend well beyond current forms of dialogue in Brussels between political institutions and advocacy organisations.

The ECI involves a transnational campaigning process offering a mechanism of access to EU institutional deliberation for campaigns successful in acquiring, within a 12 month period, 1 million (verified) signatures from EU citizens from at least one-quarter of EU member states<sup>1</sup>. Whilst few ECI campaigns may reach the required signature thresholds to trigger EU procedures, the mechanism fulfils at EU level a well-known formulation as to how there could be '*a political public sphere which enables citizens to take positions at the same time on the same topics of the same relevance*' (Habermas 1995, p.306; cited in van de Steeg, 2010, p.36) constituted from the '*flowing contents of a circulatory process that is generated through the legal institutionalisation of citizens' communication*' (Habermas, 1995, p.306). With the ECI, the effects of campaigning for signatures making demands of political institutions, in multiple national and transnational communication spheres, is an intentional mechanism to try to bring 'politics to the people'. It raises the

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<sup>1</sup> Signature thresholds per country are weighted in relation to the size of populations.

possibility of a transnational political public sphere, and from it a challenge to those accounts which render the EU as inherently unsuitable for democracy (Kohler Koch, 2012), discussed in the following section. We examine the prospect of a transnational political public sphere in the first instance through discussion of the linkage between the properties of the ECI and those of public and political spheres. We identify our methods used to assess ECI campaigns, separating out those with no trace of continuation from those of ongoing campaigns, and continue by focusing on the properties of ongoing campaigns which may in turn form a basis for the development of European political public spheres well beyond a 'Brussels bubble'.

### **European Public Spaces and Political Spheres**

Prominent objections to the formation of a European public sphere have been the lack of a common media (Scharpf, 1996), language, and 'we-feeling' (Hrbek, 1992). Yet national boundaries need not *per se* prevent citizens from communicating with each other to common purpose, assisted by new forms of media in common use since these early assessments. Multiple identities, and an enlarged EU with substantial migratory flows, dilute some of the early objections to the possible development of European spheres. A 'homogenous and exclusive community of communication' seemingly places the bar needlessly high for a European public sphere (Knaut, 2016, p.59) in which 'the democratic function...can very well be performed by segmented and/or Europeanized national public spheres' (Eriksen, in Conrad, 2016, p.77).

Saward sees in the ECI a 'polity activating device..(as part of a) polity under constitution' (Saward, 2013: 228-236). Van de Steeg takes forward the notion of the public sphere as a polity, in which 'the political community from which the public debate emanates is the point of departure' (Van de Steeg, 2010, p.32), formed of

*'a collection of common spaces or fora in which citizens can publicly exchange ideas, opinions and information on problems they encounter while living together in the same polity'* (van de Steeg, 2010: p.39).

The consequence involves the potential for democratisation, in which a key ingredient is held to be public contestation:

*'In a well-functioning democracy, rival(s)..present and defend competing policy positions based on a contested conception of the European interest..(on such basis we find) evidence (that) European public spheres indeed exist'* (Follesdal, 2015: 261).

The centrality of contestation for democratisation at EU level emerges further in debates about a political public sphere (Kohler Koch 2012; Crespy, 2014). These authors are sceptical about the democratic effects of a system of 'participatory governance' established at EU level based around opportunities for professionalised civil society organisations to contribute to EU policy-making which is often highly technical in character. For both authors, this is quite different from a system of participatory democracy bringing about 'the democratic empowerment of citizens and ..equal and effective participation' (Kohler Koch, 2012, p.820). Whilst Kohler Koch focuses more on the structural weaknesses of participatory governance procedures, both focus on the limited constituency of professionalised advocacy organisations which participate in them. Crespy strikes a more optimistic note, focusing more on 'bridging' organisations, notably trade unions and the wider social movements in which they are embedded, linking contestation to and from civil society with the proceduralised Brussels arena of technical policy making. Each share a focus that

*'public spheres emerge through the public debate of controversial issues. The more we debate issues, the more we engage each other in our public discourses, the more we actually create political communities'* (van de Steeg, 2010: p.39).

Habermas has addressed the question of a European political public sphere in a number of short contributions (Habermas, 1995, 2001). Whilst much of the focus of these involves the need for a constitution for Europe, they also include tantalising remarks related to '*public communication that transcends the boundaries of the until now limited*

*national public spheres'* (Habermas, 1995: 306). The ECI is a strikingly close fit with the conditions established by Habermas for the establishment of a political public sphere through the 'legal institutionalisation of citizens' communication' enabling 'citizens to take positions at the same time on the same topic of the same relevance.' It is a mechanism in which the stabilisation and legitimisation of the discourse takes place through some kind of institutionalisation in the form of a 'space' with specific rules & procedures of interaction' (Knaut, 2016, p.58).

### **The ECI and European Political Spheres**

The introduction of the ECI was greeted with considerable interest by commentators in deliberativist traditions, as 'one of the most important changes to EU governance processes made by the (Lisbon) Treaty' (Eriksen and Fossum, in Warleigh-Lack, 2007: 55). The ECI's first political patron in the European Commission, Vice-President Šefčovič, made explicit reference at the outset to the contribution the device might make 'to the development of a real European public space' (Šefčovič, 2010). For Fraser, the quality of a public sphere depends on the extent to which it is open to a weak public to compel public authority by holding it to account, and putting concerns on the political agenda. As well as providing for transnational networks of communication, the ECI provides a limited means for weak publics to challenge strong publics, through the agenda-setting effects of campaigns, and through weak features of answerability established for citizens' initiatives which meet the required signature threshold. This design as a means of transnational public communication is incorporated into the scheme infrastructure requirements, with proposed campaigns requiring sponsorship by a Citizens' Committee comprised of 7 individuals from 7 different member states, an entity carrying responsibility for compliance with the legal requirements of the measure throughout the conduct of campaigns.<sup>2</sup> The ECI requirement to meet minimum signature collection thresholds in at least seven member states obliged Citizens' Committees to establish campaigning infrastructures in the member states, and to translate their demands into

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative.

other official EU languages<sup>3</sup>. As some ECI activists estimate a conversion ratio approximating to five different contact conversations required to translate into a single signature of support (Kaufman, 2010), the potential for the ECI to bring political communication into European public spheres seems clear enough, with the prospect that

*'simultaneous transnationalisation and renationalisation of debate about contentious issues is consistent with the understanding of Europeanised national spheres as the functional equivalent of one overarching European public sphere (Conrad, 2016, p.70).*

The effect of this political communication is politicisation, which is *'about political conflict and the intensification of political debates in the public spheres'* (Risse, 2015: 14), in which the latter plural is intended to convey recognition of debates about Europe, in particular, in a plurality of territorial contexts (local, national, transnational) (Risse, 2015). A precondition is evident from the summation of Follesdal that

*'In a well-functioning democracy, rival(s)..present and defend competing policy positions based on a contested conception of the European interest...(on such basis we find) evidence (that) European public spheres indeed exist'* (Follesdal, 2015: 261).

Contestable frames and issues are necessarily presented in the process of campaigning and seeking signatures of support, albeit to varying degrees. By extension, some also identify in the ECI a project of great ambition by virtue of its transnational character, the potential to crystallise and organise latent constituencies of civil society around specific issues (Saward, 2013). A key innovation of the ECI is a public transnational campaigning process leading to a formal mechanism of political access, and thus quite different from previous EU practices of participation based around elite dialogue with interest representative organisations as an imperfect but best available proxy for civil society. In

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<sup>3</sup> The task of translating ECIs into the 24 official languages of the EU has recently been undertaken by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

a 'critical deliberativist perspective' on the ECI, Warleigh-Lack reflects that it 'constitutes an intriguing symbolic break with the previously dominant ideational frame for democratic reform of the EU, liberal democracy' (Warleigh-Lack, 2007: 56). This difference is reinforced by the (at best) indifferent reception to the mechanism given by leader NGOs in Brussels seeking an elite 'civil dialogue' between themselves and EU institutions (Greenwood; 2012). The design of the ECI reflects desires of EU institutions to reach beyond organised civil society into civil society itself, apparent from the comment of Commissioner Šefčovič that the ECI is 'not for NGOs, but for all citizens' (EurActiv, 2011). Campaigns hosted by established advocacy organisations have been notably fewer than those emerging from freshly drawn campaign teams (Bouza Garcia and Greenwood, 2014; EPRS, 2015).<sup>4</sup> Even taking a wider frame of reference by adding to established campaigns those which were inspired by a longer established global movement, but with an autonomous European campaign (such as the *Unconditional Basic Income* ((UBI)) campaign), new campaigns have still predominated the applications for ECI registration (Bouza Garcia and Greenwood, 2014).

As the world's first transnational citizens' initiative, the ECI warrants evaluation in terms of its ability to contribute to a process of communication among citizens in public attempts to articulate the common good (Liebert & Trenz, 2012). A recent classification of campaigns introduced since the emergence of the ECI, in which a little over half of the campaigns made contentious demands upon EU institutions, rather than those broadly consensual with the direction of travel of EU public policy (Bouza Garcia and Greenwood, 2014). Nonetheless, in our adaption of criteria for what constitutes politicisation of European public spheres, we see no need for these debates to originate in EU specificity, but may involve attempts to apply ideas from a wider context in an EU policy setting. Thus, a number of ECIs 'draw down' global campaigns, in which the EU specific context may be limited. Such campaigns are better captured as politicising issues in Europe rather than campaigning on EU specific issues, without necessarily expecting tangible

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<sup>4</sup> It is nonetheless clear from the 3 campaigns to have met the 1 million signature threshold that such attainment requires the driving backing provided by a professionalised social movement.



EU policy outcomes. Indeed, as we discuss in the next section, the non-territorially specific character of issues could be expected as one of the factors distinguishing between campaigns in terms of durability beyond their status as an ECI.

### **Assessing the ECI in European Public Spaces**

A cursory glance through the list of proposed ECI campaigns shows how it has helped to pluralise the range of issues under consideration by EU institutions<sup>5</sup>. Where established advocacy organisations led ECI campaigns, the results were sometimes startling, either in terms of the number of signatures collected, or the extent to which the campaigns escalated in national contexts. A conspicuous example of the latter involves four very large demonstrations (the most recent estimated between 40,000-80,000) in Ireland against the introduction of water charges, in the year following the conclusion of the ECI '*Water is a Human Right!*' (Right2Water) ECI, which collected almost 2 million signatures. Each of these events explicitly incorporated mantras linking the events with the campaign, and symbols of European solidarity invoked through the waving of Greek flags (Guardian, 2015). Conrad refers to the 'Right2Water' campaign as the 'remarkable awakening of a transnational public sphere' (p.65)

Around 6.65 million signatures have been collected by official ECI campaigns up to 2015, of which ten official ECI campaigns are known to have attracted more than 100,000 signatures (ECAS, 2015; Table 1) under highly regulated conditions. Although awareness of the ECI remains patchy across member states, there are exceptions where campaigns have featured strongly; a qualitative sample found around half of participating German citizens had heard of the ECI (Eurobarometer, 2014) after the issues behind the 'Right2Water'<sup>6</sup> campaign featured prominently in a comedian's sketch on German television as well as

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of diversification of agendas for political institutions would include: *Weed Like to Talk* (legalise cannabis); *End Legalised Prostitution in Europe*; *An End to Front Companies*; protecting eavesdropping on lawyer-client interactions; help for pet & stray animals; punishing Switzerland for its treatment of migrant workers; and end to bullfighting; *singing the European anthem in Esperanto*; etc.

<sup>6</sup> '*Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!*' (see Table 1), in which Germany accounted for around two-thirds of the EU wide total of almost 1.9million signatures collected.

coverage in the German TV news programme 'Monitor' (Plottke, 2015). The '*STOP-TTIP*<sup>7</sup>' unofficial campaign, the early focus of which included an application to register an ECI, is approaching 3.5 million signatures at the time of writing.

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<sup>7</sup> Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

**Table 1:** Total number of signatures collected by registered ECI campaigns

Signature collection total	ECI
Over 1 million (validated signature total)	One of us (1,897,588) Stop Vivisection (1,326,807) Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity! (Right2Water) (1,884,790)
100,000-300,000	Do Not Count Education as part of the Deficit! Education is an Investment! End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens' Initiative to give the Earth Rights EU Directive on Dairy Cow Welfare European Free Vaping Initiative European Initiative for Media Pluralism Single Communication Tariff Act Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) - Exploring a pathway towards emancipatory welfare conditions in the EU Weed like to talk
50,000-100,000	Fraternité 2020 - Mobility. Progress. Europe
25,000-50,000	30 km/h - making the streets liveable!
Below 5,000	Act 4 Growth Let me vote Pour une gestion responsable des déchets, contre les incinérateurs Teach for Youth -- Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0
Undeclared	Central public online collection platform for the ECI High Quality European Education for All Kündigung Personenfreizügigkeit Schweiz New Deal for Europe Suspension of the EU Climate & Energy Package Turn me Off!

Source: ECAS (2015); interviews

The design concept of the ECI follows a key criterion presented by Risse for the Europeanisation of public spheres in which 'fellow Europeans are present in the various national and issue-specific public spheres as both speakers and audiences' (Risse, 2015: 10; see also Eder, 2007) and in which claims are made across borders (Koopmans & Statham, 2010, cited in Risse, 2015: 11). In a recent analysis, Checkel concludes that:

*'For a Europe defined as the old EU-15...beyond any doubt something is happening. That is, public spheres – at least among elites – indeed are being Europeanized, creating new transnational communities of communication. For ..the EU existing today..any conclusions are heavily constrained by data limitations...however, empirical extrapolation and theoretical logic suggest that, in this new EU, the construction of and effects wrought by Europeanized public spheres will be slower and weaker' (Checkel, 2015: 239).*

Yet campaigns aimed at issues such as raising living standards, translated into native languages, would be likely to carry particular appeal in Central and East European (CEE) countries where average incomes lag behind those in western Europe. Opportunities for participation well beyond the EU-15 are facilitated by the requirement for transnational Citizens' Committees, as well as by transnational education programmes and other EU youth related programmes purposefully aimed at providing opportunities for interaction between young people across member states. A striking feature of ECI campaigns to date involves the disproportionately strong presence among Citizens' Committees of the 21-30 age cohorts, around twice that of each of the next nearest groups, 31-40 and 41-50 (EPRS; see also Gherghina and Groh, 2016). Many CCs have the feel about them of student, or post-student, politics. This reflects a degree of 'directed experimentation' on some university Masters courses in political science, with 3 CCs drawn from Sciences-Po Paris alone; nonetheless, one of these, *Weed Like to Talk* succeeded in collecting almost 170,000 signatures in the process of campaigning. The ECI concept is likely to carry disproportionate appeal among student groups relative to other segments of civil society, with its opportunities for vigorous public campaigning, deployment of discourse, communication and e-skills, and transnational fellowship and adventure inherent in the ECI itself. Some campaigns can be expected to dissolve as students and young people move on, but the networks created during these life stages, as well as taste for campaigning developed during the course of an ECI, can also be expected to have some durable effects. We examine this in the following section by further examining the properties of durable campaigns, but before doing so acknowledge that (as with some of the Sciences-Po ECIs), not all ECI registration requests were lodged with the intention of prolonged public campaigning, and thus limited expectations can be made of those who concede that their main purpose in launching an ECI had been related to networking (Pfafferott, 2014). For some, the establishment of a formal organisation as a by-product from a campaign seemed to be a more achievable goal than the attainment of a large number of signatures (Bouza Garcia and Greenwood, 2014).

### Data Collection

The parameters of the ECI itself permit a degree of funnelling for data collection purposes. The duration of ECI campaigns is constrained by the maximum signature collection period of 12 months, followed by a period for the verification of signatures (3 months), a public hearing in the European Parliament, and subsequent response from the European Commission (a further 3 months). Only three campaigns met the required threshold of 1 million signatures<sup>8</sup> during the collection period, while 12 could be assessed at the expiry of their 12 month registration period. A further 10 which had been registered by the Commission were withdrawn by their host CC, of which half were subsequently re-presented and most have completed the 12 months duration<sup>9</sup>. The terms of reference of our enquiry determined that the four signature collection campaigns which were still in progress at the time of analysis would be excluded, but also that (18)<sup>10</sup> proposed campaigns which were refused registration (Table 2) would be included in the analysis. The ECI is a political opportunity structure, such that an enquiry seeking to establish its impact on a European public space needs therefore to take account of all the public impact of campaigns inspired by the measure, whether they fulfilled the criteria for admissibility or not. For some proposed ECIs, a refused registration provided only the first stage of a campaign which continued after the decision. An endeavour seeking to link public space impact with campaign properties therefore needs to take into account all of those using the ECI facility in any form after the conclusion of their encounter with the ECI.

**Table 2:** Refused<sup>11</sup> ECI Registrations

ECI
Abolición en Europa de la tauromaquia y la utilización de toros en fiestas de crueldad y tortura por diversión

<sup>8</sup> From 7 different EU member states, weighted for the size of the country, defined in Regulation 211/2011 operationalising the ECI (see footnote 3) and specified at <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/signatories>

<sup>9</sup> *Single Communications Tariff; Let me Vote; End Ecocide in Europe; European Initiative for Media Pluralism. Vite l'Europe sociale! Pour un nouveau critère européen contre la pauvreté* is currently open for signature as *For a Socially Fair Europe! Encouraging a stronger cooperation between EU member states to fight poverty in Europe.*

<sup>10</sup> The first *Unconditional Basic Income* ECI proposal, subsequently registered in modified format, was set apart from this category, as it was included for analysis in the group of campaigns running their course without meeting the required threshold.

<sup>11</sup> All were refused on a judgement made by the European Commission that their demands fell outside of the scope of EU Treaty competencies.

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A new EU legal norm, self-abolition of the European Parliament and its structures, must be immediately adopted
Cohesion policy for the equality of the regions and sustainability of the regional cultures
Création d'une Banque publique européenne axée sur le développement social, écologique et solidaire
Enforcing self-determination Human Right in the EU
Ensemble pour une Europe sans prostitution légalisée
Ethics for Animals and Kids
Fortalecimiento de la participación ciudadana en la toma de decisiones sobre la soberanía colectiva
Minority Safe Pack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe
My voice against nuclear power
One Million Signatures for a Europe of Solidarity
Our concern for insufficient help to pet & stray animals in the EU
Recommend singing the European Anthem in Esperanto
Right to Lifelong Care: Leading a life of dignity and independence is a fundamental right!
Stop TTIP
The Supreme Legislative & Executive Power in the EU must be the EU Referendum as an expression of direct democracy
To hold an immediate EU Referendum on public confidence in European Government's (EG) competence.
Vite l'Europe sociale! Pour un nouveau critère Européen contre la pauvreté

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Of all ECI registration requests, we made initial approaches by email to 32 campaign committees, were able to establish contact with 24 CCs, and undertake 22 interviews (Table 3).

**TABLE 3 HERE**

These interviews helped to identify the public reach of campaigns, cross-checked with campaign websites and, in some cases, follow-up interviews with wider members of campaign teams particularly central to identifying campaigns with continuing medium to high profile. Our interviews reflect the point that some of the traditional approaches of assessing a public sphere involving scrutiny of media-content do not fully capture what is 'out there,' particularly in the ECI context where most signatures are collected online (European Commission, 2015; EPRS, 2015). Similarly, other approaches involving frame and discourse analysis may be ill-suited to assessing impact (Bennett, Lang & Segerberg, 2015) in which collective identities may be formed and re-formed in time and space (Eder, 2007). Whilst the pluralisation of data sources allowed for some degree of triangulation, the usual qualifications apply in using narratives from campaigners as a means to assess the reach of campaigns.

Refused Registration campaigns

The proposed initiatives which refused registration requests can be expected to encounter three types of response from campaigners: challenge (in the General Court of the European Court of Justice), a pathway pursued by 6 campaigns; modify with a newly worded proposal which fits the parameters of the scheme (2 campaigns)<sup>12</sup>; or exit. The majority of refused proposals seem to have progressed no further as campaigns (Table 4), and most of those which took the option of challenge seemed to be focused primarily on legal proceedings before the General Court. The principal exception to both of these patterns involves the '*STOP TTIP*' campaign, which seems to have been energised by its refusal as an ECI, using the frame of rejection as a basis to attract substantial petition signatures. The campaign website presents itself as 'an alliance of more than 450 civil society organisations and trade unions from all over Europe<sup>13</sup>' and makes reference to demonstrations gathering 25,000 individuals in a number of European cities including a concentrated focus of protest events across Romania.<sup>14</sup> For public sphere impact, there are a variety of noteworthy features of the campaign (for a review see De Ville and Siles-Brugge, 2015), including responsiveness of EU institutions to demands for transparency of negotiations, and politicisation of the (hitherto obscure, technical component in EU trade agreements) Investor-State-Dispute-Settlement (ISDS) mechanism to the point that it has become a key sticking point in transatlantic negotiations. The example is significant, because the regulatory emphasis of EU competencies and correspondingly technical character of much EU legislation is a core difficulty in making issues amenable to public discussion, as any cursory glance at the list of topics/files open on the *Europa* online consultation portal *Your Voice in Europe* would confirm. The '*STOP-TTIP*' campaign seems to have broken through this barrier by presenting a rather technical issue in an amenable form for public discussion, and in doing so bringing a high degree of contention to public spheres. Conrad refers to the STOP TTIP initiative as an example of an issue which 'can lead to a conflict-induced awakening of the European public sphere' (Conrad, 2016, p.76).

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<sup>12</sup> Not in Table 2, but analysed as the successor proposals subsequently registered.

<sup>13</sup> STOP TTIP, Supporting organisations, <https://stop-ttip.org/supporting-organisations/>, accessed on 11 August 2015.

<sup>14</sup> STOP TTIP, No to Corporations Dictating Legislation! <https://stop-ttip.org/blog/no-to-corporations-dictating-legislation/>, accessed on 11 August 2015.





**Table 4:** ECI registration requests with limited or no trace of continuing public campaigns

<b>Campaign</b>	<b>Registration outcome</b>
30 km/h – making the streets liveable!	Accepted
Abolición en Europa de la tauromaquia y la utilización de toros en fiestas de crueldad y tortura por diversión	Refused
Act for Growth	Accepted
A new EU legal norm, self-abolition of the European Parliament and its structures, must be immediately adopted	Refused
Central public online collection platform for the ECI	Accepted
Cohesion policy for the equality of the regions and sustainability of the regional cultures	Refused
Création d'une Banque publique européenne axée sur le développement social, écologique et solidaire	Refused
Do Not Count Education Spending As Part Of The Deficit! Education Is An Investment!	Accepted
Enforcing self-determination Human Right in the EU	Refused
Ensemble pour une Europe sans prostitution légalisée	Refused
EU Directive on Dairy Cow Welfare	Accepted
Fortalecimiento de la participación ciudadana en la toma de decisiones sobre la soberanía colectiva	Refused
High Quality European Education for All	Accepted
Kündigung Personenfreizügigkeit Schweiz	Accepted (tactical <sup>15</sup> )
Let Me Vote	Accepted
New Deal 4 Europe – For a European Special Plan for Sustainable Development and Employment	Accepted
One Million Signatures for a Europe of Solidarity	Refused
Our concern for insufficient help to pet & stray animals in the EU	Refused
Suspension of the EU Climate & Energy Package	Accepted
Teach for Youth -- Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0	Accepted
The Supreme Legislative & Executive Power in the EU must be the EU Referendum as an expression of direct democracy	Refused
To hold an immediate EU Referendum on public confidence in European Government's (EG) competence	Refused
Turn me Off!	Accepted (tactical)

<sup>15</sup> Campaigns seemingly without intention to run the 12 month course are marked as tactical.

## Continuing campaigns in European Public Spheres and beyond

We judged ten ECI related campaigns to have continuing medium to high profile public campaigns (Table 5), which can be broken down into three categories by reference to the extent of their independence from globalised campaigns. The first involved campaigns which were largely the latest episode of longer established global campaigns, involving nuclear power, the legalisation of cannabis, and media pluralism.

**Table 5:** ECI registration applications with continuing medium-high profile public campaigns

Campaign	ECI as primary EU campaign initiator?
End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens' Initiative to give the Earth Rights	Y
European Free Vaping Initiative	Y
European Initiative for Media Pluralism	N
My voice against nuclear power	N
One of us	Y
Stop TTIP	Y
Stop Vivisection	N
Unconditional Basic Income	Y
Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!	Y
Weed Like to Talk	N

Of the remainder, the ECI had been a key moment in campaigns which were highly focused on the EU. The second sub-category of ongoing campaigns involved the three which achieved well over 1 million signatures, *One of Us*, *Stop Vivisection*, and *Water & Sanitation are a Human Right*. Each of these campaigns lie embedded within established social movements, in which the campaigns are core to the movements themselves. While these have established lines to global campaigns, the EU campaign is a major and distinct episode. Thus, the *Water & Sanitation are a Human Right* campaign is contextualised by a series of preceding localised campaigns against water privatisation in territories outside Europe, as well as a UN declaration dating from 2010, but provides the beacon of campaigns against water privatisation. This leaves a third sub-category, comprising three campaigns, *End Ecocide in Europe*, *European Free Vaping*, and *Unconditional Basic Income*, which were either independent or largely autonomous from global campaigns and whose origins lay more in entrepreneurial individuals than established

organisations. The European Free Vaping Initiative had a context of vaping activism in the US (Hedling and Meeuwisse, 2015), but started as an autonomous EU campaign in (unsuccessfully) seeking exclusion for e-cigarettes from the regulatory scope of the 2014 Tobacco Products Directive. On completion, it progressed by gathering support from medical organisations on both sides of the Atlantic, acting as a leading transatlantic bridgehead between EU and US campaigns.<sup>16</sup> The other two, *UBI* and *End Ecocide*, had some degree of linkage to preceding campaigns in other territories by way of loose ties, but were mostly independent from them. Thus, the UBI campaign had a context from the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) dating from the 1980s, and in some countries to social movements embracing trade unions, ATTAC and *Blockupy*,<sup>17</sup> but was driven by an autonomous campaign centred on individuals. Likewise, the *End Ecocide in Europe* ECI brought a UN concept of ecocide to the European level, but was driven by an autonomous campaign centred on individuals, who, at the conclusion of the campaign, re-branded it under the name 'End Ecocide on Earth.' To some extent the boundaries between the sub-categories are fluid; thus, at some point in between the second and third sub-categories lies the *Stop TTIP* campaign, with its strong contextual grounding in the alter-globalisation movement, counterpart (though less prominent) US campaign, and a foundation stone for a wider territorial campaign. A trend seems to be that politicisation draws from a wider context to an EU policy context, and then in the reverse direction. Campaigns drawing from global contexts lived on in the European public spaces, but those with a sole EU focus seem less likely to do so unless they can be connected to campaigns in other territories.

Among the surviving campaigns, celebrity endorsement was a key feature in the momentum of the *STOP TTIP*<sup>18</sup>, *UBI* and *End Ecocide* campaigns,<sup>19</sup> in which a spike in signature collection was quickly visible to campaigners. This was a feature of a number of campaigns in Bulgaria, in

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<sup>16</sup> Medical Organisations Supporting Vaping and E-cigarettes.

<https://sciencecig.wordpress.com/move/>, accessed on 11 August 2015.

<sup>17</sup> <https://blockupy.org/en/> accessed on 11 August 2015

<sup>18</sup> Jamie Oliver on TTIP: "I really don't want beef with growth hormones, nor chicken washed with chlorine ... and I certainly don't want our farmers undermined". STOP TTIP, If you Love Good Food and Farming, Stop TTIP!, <https://stop-ttip.org/blog/if-you-love-good-food-farming-stop-ttip/>, accessed on 11 August 2015.

<sup>19</sup> End Ecocide, Vivienne Westwood supports End Ecocide', <https://www.endecocide.org/>, accessed on 11 August 2015.

particular, where a number of ECIs (*Education is an Investment; End Ecocide; European Initiative for Media Pluralism; Fraternité 2020; My Voice Against Nuclear Power; UBI*) reported unexpectedly high levels of support. The UBI campaign in Bulgaria resulted in the highest signature collection tally for the initiative across the EU-28 after Germany and France, with a multiple of 2.5 of the quota required.<sup>20</sup> The campaign was also boosted by the involvement of Bulgarian trade unions<sup>21</sup>, support from domestic NGOs and acts of entrepreneurship from active campaign supporters. Substantial success in collecting signatures elsewhere in Central and Eastern European countries, notably Croatia (*UBI; STOP-TTIP*), Estonia (*End Ecocide in Europe*), Hungary (*STOP-TTIP*) and Romania (*Single Communication Tariff Act*), followed significant television and radio coverage in particular, due to nationally organised campaigns. Does this mean that 'domestic politics matter as never before in relation to the EU' (Checkel 2015: 237) apply to the impact of ECIs on European public spheres? The importance of domestic supporting campaigners in order to achieve signatures seems clear enough, with an average of 37% of signatures obtained on paper rather than online (EPRS, 2015). Continued use of domestic politics frames in order to maximise signature collection also seems clear enough, particularly where campaigns raise acute local issues which are easily generalizable to countries close by, but these involve linking the ECI with national politics<sup>22</sup>, <sup>23</sup>. Interviews with CCs indicated that some of the local NGOs supporting ECIs in CEE countries had limited experience of campaigning on EU related issues. Nonetheless, surviving campaigns have gathered support using not only domestic speakers, but also from key celebrity endorsement from (English speaking) Europeans such as Vivienne Westwood (*End Ecocide in Europe, STOP-TTIP*) and Jamie Oliver (*STOP-TTIP*).

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<sup>20</sup> Email exchange with Klaus Sambor, UBI Campaign Committee, 5.2.2014.

32,006 signatures were obtained by the UBI campaign in Bulgaria.

<sup>21</sup> Bulgarian trade union supported the *Unconditional Basic Income and Education is an Investment!* ECIs.

<sup>22</sup> Such was the case for example with '*European Initiative for Media Pluralism*' ECI which in Hungary framed the campaign with concerns of freedom of speech restrictions implemented by the current Hungarian government led by Viktor Orbán.

<sup>23</sup> The '*Education is an Investment!*', which collected over 100 000 signatures had its centre in Greece. It focused on objecting austerity measures on education relevant in the Greek financial crisis, but which also attracted significant support from nearby Bulgaria and Cyprus.

## Conclusion

A number of key design features of the ECI make it well placed in concept to contribute to promoting transnational discussion and deliberation. Whilst assessments have been undertaken of campaigns during their institutional ECI status, we assessed the contribution of the ECI to the formation of political public spheres across national boundaries. We examined the legacy of campaigns following their conclusion, and sought to establish whether there might be identifiable properties of continuing campaigns. We undertook interviews with 22 Campaign Committees, as well as taking stock of a range of other evidence. We noted in particular degrees of success in signature collection of some campaigns in Central and East European countries.

We judged ten ECI related campaigns to have continuing medium-high profile public campaigns offering a contested conception of the European interest, and which carry features of the formation of political public spheres across national boundaries. Of these, three were 'new' ECI campaigns in terms of both subject and origin, *End Ecocide in Europe*, *European Free Vaping*, and *Unconditional Basic Income*, and which had run the course as full signature collection campaigns. *End Ecocide*, and *UBI*, 'drew down' global campaigns into a European policy context, indicating no pre-requisite to originate in EU specificity. A fourth, *STOP-TTIP*, had origins in a focus as an ECI registration, as well as grounding in a global context. *STOP-TTIP* is notable for politicising a somewhat technical element of trade agreements, in that the technical character of many EU legislative files otherwise seems to have been a confine in the politicisation of public spheres. The linkage to globalised topics seems to be a key feature in durability, but *STOP-TTIP*, *Free Vaping*, and *End Ecocide*, have notably expanded from European to wider territorial campaigns. In the first three years of existence, in quantitative terms, the observed public sphere impact of campaigns might appear modest. However, the mobilisations surrounding continuing campaigns have been particularly notable in countries with short EU traditions, such as Bulgaria and Croatia, speaking for the instrument's potential in politicising public spheres. Notably, the Bulgarian mobilisation follows a pattern in which trade unions provide a key bridge between the spheres of public

contestation and EU politics, in which conflict plays a central role (Crespy, 2014). The ECI seems to fulfil the criteria of a 'transnational discursive space' 'shaped by a process of ongoing communication, knowledge exchange & discourse production, constituted by transnational networks of actors' from diverse cultural, social, language & institutional backgrounds' (Knaut, 2016, p.59). The ECI offers the prospect of converting this discursive space into a political sphere through the 'legal institutionalisation of citizens' communication' (Habermas, 1995, p.306). All of the continuing campaigns enjoy globalised linkages, either as those 'drawn down' in a European context, or expanded into a wider territorial arena, and largely driven by a young cohort of campaigners for whom the ECI offers them an outlet for political energies. For the continuing campaigns, the contestation they generate across national boundaries seems to challenge the premise that the EU has an insulated system of participatory governance unsuitable for democracy.

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## Interviews

CC interviewee	Campaign title	Date
Heike Aghte	30 km/h - making the streets liveable!	13.4.2015
Alexis Anagnostakis	One Million Signatures For A Europe Of Solidarity	25.5.2015
Michael Berlin	To hold an immediate EU Referendum on public confidence in European Government's (EG) competence;  The Supreme Legislative & Executive Power in the EU must be the EU Referendum as an expression of direct democracy;  A new EU legal norm, self-abolition of the European Parliament and its structures, must be immediately adopted.	14.04.2015
Frank de Boer	Minority Safe Pack	20.4.2015
Vincent Chauvet	Single Communication Tariff	06.5.2015
Bruno Constantini	Right to Lifelong Care: Leading a life of dignity and independence is a fundamental right	04.5.2015
Attila Dabis	Cohesion policy for the equality of the regions and sustainability of the regional cultures	13.4.2015
Domenec Devesa	New Deal 4 Europe	30.3.2015
Gaël Drillon	Pour une gestion responsable des déchets, contre les incinérateurs	28.4.2015
Marcel Goertz	European Free Vaping Initiative	31.3.2015
Ana Gorey	A High Quality European Education for All	30.3.2015
Stanislas Jourdan	Unconditional Basic Income	22.4.2015
Patricia Lorenz	My Voice Against Nuclear Power	30.3.2014
Vincent Mabillard	Let Me Vote	15.4.2015
Jean-Sébastien Marre	Teach for Youth 2.0.	23.4.2015
Giovanni Melogli	European Initiative for Media Pluralism	02.04.2015
Prisca Merz	End Ecocide in Europe	30.4.2015
Sean Oriain	Singing the European Anthem in Esperanto	31.3.2015
Silvana Panciera	Ensemble pour une Europe sans prostitution légalisée	05.5.2015
Panagiotis Papadopoulos	Education is an Investment	22.4.2015
Simona Pronckute	Fraternité 2020	15.4.2015
Lilia Tamam	Bulgarian co-ordinator, End Ecocide in Europe	08.5.2015

**Table 3: Data collection from campaigns seeking registration as an ECI**

Campaign	Contact point available?	Response?	Interview?
30 km/h - making the streets liveable!	Y	Y	Y
Abolición en Europa de la tauromaquia y la utilización de toros en fiestas de crueldad y tortura por diversión	N	N	
Act for Growth	Y <sup>24</sup>		
A new EU legal norm, self-abolition of the European Parliament and its structures, must be immediately adopted	Y	Y	Y
Central public online collection platform for the ECI	Y	Y	N
Cohesion policy for the equality of the regions and sustainability of the regional cultures	Y	Y	Y
Création d'une Banque publique européenne axée sur le développement social, écologique et solidaire	Y	N	
Do Not Count Education Spending As Part Of The Deficit! Education Is An Investment!	Y	Y	Y
End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens' Initiative to give the Earth Rights	Y	Y	Y
Enforcing self-determination Human Right in the EU	Y	N	
Ensemble pour une Europe sans prostitution légalisée	Y	Y	Y
EU Directive on Dairy Cow Welfare	Y	N	
European Initiative for Media Pluralism	Y	Y	Y
European Free Vaping Initiative	Y	Y	Y
Fortalecimiento de la participación ciudadana en la toma de decisiones sobre la soberanía colectiva	N	N	
High Quality European Education for All	Y	Y	Y
Kündigung Personenfreizügigkeit Schweiz	Y	N	
Let Me Vote	Y	Y	Y
Minority Safe Pack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe	Y	Y	Y
My voice against nuclear power	Y	Y	Y
New Deal 4 Europe – For a European Special Plan for Sustainable Development and Employment	Y	Y	Y
One of Us	Y	N	
One Million Signatures for a Europe of Solidarity	Y	Y	Y <sup>25</sup>
Our concern for insufficient help to pet & stray animals in the EU	Y	N	
Pour une gestion responsable des déchets, contre les incinérateurs	Y	Y	Y
Recommend singing the European Anthem in Esperanto	Y	Y	Y
Right to Lifelong Care: Leading a life of dignity and independence is a fundamental right!	Y	Y	Y
Single Communication Tariff Act	Y	Y	Y*
Stop TTIP	Y <sup>26</sup>		
Stop Vivisection	Y	N	
Suspension of the EU Climate & Energy Package	Y	N	
Teach for Youth – Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0	Y	Y	Y
The Supreme Legislative & Executive Power in the EU must be the EU Referendum as an expression of direct democracy	Y	Y	Y
To hold an immediate EU Referendum on public confidence in European Government's (EG) competence.	Y	Y	Y
Turn me Off!	N	N	
Unconditional Basic Income	Y	Y	Y*
Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!	Y	N	
Weed like to talk	Y	N	

<sup>24</sup> Website observation

<sup>25</sup> By email

<sup>26</sup> From extensive public communication available at <https://stop-ttip.org/>