

Greenpeace submitted the first test case European Citizens' Initiative in December 2010. Please find below and [online](#) a concise briefing outlining our position on this engagement tool.

European Citizens' Initiative - Greenpeace briefing

The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in December 2009, enshrines the right for one million Europeans to petition the European Commission and require it to draft legislation on the basis of their demands (or justify its refusal to do so). This right is known as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

In December 2010, Greenpeace and Avaaz submitted a one million signature ECI in accordance with the rules established by [EU treaties](#). The ECI was in response to the first authorisation by the Commission in March 2010 for the cultivation of a genetically modified (GM) crop in Europe in 12 years. This authorisation was in direct breach of a request by all 27 member states for a review of the approval system for GM crops. It also raised serious health and environmental concerns. The ECI therefore called for a moratorium on all new authorisations and a review of the GM approval process.

On 1 April 2012, new [operating rules](#) on the workings of the ECI will come into force.. This briefing clarifies Greenpeace's position on the ECI and the status of the initiative on GM crops.

Greenpeace EU director Jorgo Riss said: *"The citizens' initiative is a good idea in principle, but in reality one million euros will go a lot further to lobby the Commission than one million signatures. Data requirements for the citizens' initiative are far too restrictive, while lobbyists continue to have direct access without disclosing names and addresses, let alone their passport numbers. Over a year ago, one million people from all over Europe signed a one million citizens' initiative for a moratorium on GM crops and a strengthening of safety assessments. Their voices have been heard, since the Commission has yet to authorise new GM crops."*

What we think of the ECI

The ECI is a useful but flawed tool designed to encourage Europeans to participate in the EU political process. The ECI rules coming into force on 1 April are meant to ensure the reliability of personal data provided in any future petitions. However, Greenpeace believes the rules are too restrictive, to the point of discouraging participation, particularly by individual citizens. Full name, full address and nationality are more than enough to check the validity of any signature. Also requiring date, place of birth and passport or ID details is cumbersome, unnecessary and risky for data protection reasons.

ECI signatories will be held to a much higher level of scrutiny than any of the thousands of lobbyists who regularly walk the corridors of power in Brussels. They do not have to disclose who they are, who they work for, who they meet, why they meet, when they meet or how much money they spend on lobbying. Greenpeace also shares the concern of transparency group Alter-EU that at least one private consultancy ([Fleishman Hillard](#)) is already offering to use the ECI on behalf of private business interests.

Why our ECI counts Whatever the formal status of the 2010 Green-peace/Avaaz initiative, the Commission should respond to the demands of over a million citizens from across Europe, who represent the concerns of millions more (see below). Our initiative broke new ground in terms of the quantity and quality of data collected. All data collected (full name, address, nationality and date of birth) was screened to ensure the rejection of incomplete, invalid or duplicate signatures.

Since December 2009, the right for Europeans to use the ECI is enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty ([article 11, paragraph 4](#)). The subsequent establishment of further rules to implement an existing right cannot suspend that right. A string of European Court of Justice rulings state that rights granted in EU treaties that are unconditional and sufficiently precise are directly applicable. Case C-8/81 Becker vs Munster Tax Office for instance, found that where a provision of EU law gives rights to citizens and provides for member states to lay down the conditions under which this right could be exercised, the omission by a member state to lay down such conditions cannot prevent the citizen benefitting from the right granted under EU law.

Greenpeace/Avaaz ECI - facts and figures

- Launched in March 2010, soon after the antibiotic-resistant GM potato Amflora was authorised for cultivation in Europe. The authorisation disregarded majority public opposition, environmental risks and health concerns raised by the European Medicines Agency and the World Health Organisation.
- Received by Health Commissioner John Dalli on behalf of the Commission on 9 December 2010.
- Signed by 1,030,308 European citizens from every single member state (signatures mostly collected online).
- Signature screening to reject incomplete, duplicate or invalid signatures.
- Large quantities of signatures from France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Spain, Belgium, Austria, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Greece, Denmark and Luxembourg. Minimum thresholds of signatures were exceeded in 12 countries, five more than the minimum required by the new rules.
- Signatures gathered in seven months, five months earlier than required by the new ECI rules.

The first ECI – stop genetically modified crops

The Greenpeace/Avaaz initiative called on the European Commission to stop the authorisation of new GM crops until safety assessments are strengthened, in accordance with what EU environment ministers unanimously requested at a Council in [December 2008](#). The EU's risk assessment procedure for GM crops is inadequate. It fails to assess the long-term risks of GM crops, cherry picks positive scientific studies while rejecting evidence from member states and independent scientists, and treats environmental risk from one country as applicable to the of Europe (see for example [Mon810](#)). The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is also frequently embroiled in conflict of interest scandals. In the latest case, the Commission put forward a former Monsanto lobbyist to be appointed to the board of the [EFSA](#).

What happens next

Since our initiative calling for a stop to GM crop authorisations and a reform of the approval process, there has been a de facto moratorium on GM crops for cultivation in Europe. But the Commission has failed to improve the approval process. A review of EFSA guidelines is still far from being agreed.

Biotech company BASF, the makers of the anti-biotic-resistant GM potato that sparked the initiative, has since [mothballed its European operations](#), reducing the number of GM crops on the European market to one: Monsanto's MON810 GM maize, modified to produce a pesticide toxin.

Meanwhile, [EU surveys](#) show that public rejection of GM food continues to grow: "61% of Europeans disagree that the development of GM food should be encouraged". Collecting signatures for another petition on the same subject now would lead to the same results. Our initiative was a first test case for the EU and although we have no immediate plans to launch another, we may do so in future.

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Greenpeace images of the ECI handover in December 2010 – available on request for free use:

[Photo](#)

[Video](#)

[Europe by Satellite](#) footage.

This briefing is also available on www.greenpeace.eu

For breaking news and comment on EU affairs: www.twitter.com/GreenpeaceEU

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