



Pro-life campaign threatens EU research funding

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One of Us

A pro-life group (called “One of Us”) has succeeded in collecting more than 1 million signatures supporting a statement which urges the EU to “end the financing of activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos, in particular in the areas of research, development aid and public health.”

The signatures collection was organised in the framework of a “European Citizens’ Initiative”, a tool that allows citizens to invite the Commission to initiate a legislative process.

What is the European Citizens' Initiative?

The European Citizens Initiative was introduced in the Lisbon Treaty (2007) as a key innovation to improve the participation of European citizens in the EU and to encourage direct democracy. It came into force in May 2012.

With the EIC, European citizens can invite the European Commission to propose legislation in a policy area where the EU has competence.

What are the main requirements to complete a European Citizens' Initiative?

The initiative should be promoted by a citizens committee composed of EU citizens having their residence in 7 different EU countries

An organisation cannot promote the initiative but can be supporter, as long as this support is transparent (for instance, if an organisation brings financial support)

The initiative should be backed by at least 1.000 000 citizens from minimum 7 EU countries to be considered by the European Commission.

Signatures are to be collected within one year.

The “One of us” case (I)

On Monday 11th November 2013, the calculation of the individual supports given to the European Citizen Initiative One of Us will be closed.

This number will be greater than 1,891,000, which makes this pro-life initiative the first and the largest success. 20 countries have reached the minimum threshold of signatures

The “One of us” case (II)

The subject matter of the initiative is : “Juridical protection of the dignity, the right to life and of the integrity of every human being from conception in the areas of EU competence in which such protection is of particular importance”

The main objectives are: “The human embryo deserves respect to its dignity and integrity. This is enounced by the ECJ in the Brüstle case, which defines the human embryo as the beginning of the development of the human being. To ensure consistency in areas of its competence where the life of the human embryo is at stake, the EU should establish a ban and end the financing of activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos, in particular in the areas of research, development aid and public health.”

What has been done by ESHRE as a reaction to the One of Us initiative?

As a reaction, ESHRE published a statement on its website

Further documentation will be published in the January 2014 issue of Focus on Reproduction.

Several ESHRE staff (members) are willing to organise a European Citizens' initiative to represent ESHRE's members' interests and to ensure a commitment to funding.

A session has been proposed for the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research

Proposed session at World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research

Session title: Human embryos for health and research

Johannes Evers (NL): Reproductive health and its risks

Siladitya Bhattacharya (UK): The value of assisted reproduction

Alan Handyside (UK): Why are human embryos needed for research?

Anna Veiga (E): Human embryonic stem cells and regenerative medicine

Guido Pennings (B): The donation of human embryos for stem cell research

What could be the goals and the main messages of an ESHRE initiative?

These could be:

Proving that funding stem cell research is (democratically) legitimate

Making sure that European patients can benefit from the progress of embryonic stem cell research in the future

Question

Are other members of the Biomed Alliance interested in joining the ESHRE initiative?