

## Q&A European Citizens' Initiative

### Facts and figures

#### How many signatures are you presenting?

1,030,308 verifiable signatures.

Country:	Signatures:	ECI Quota:	Fulfilled:
France	471,182	55,500	
Germany	124,129	72,000	
Italy	58,539	54,750	
Spain	65,243	40,500	
United Kingdom	60,168	54,750	
Belgium	74,327	16,500	
Austria	45,310	14,250	
Lithuania	9,463	9,000	
Netherlands	24,799	19,500	
Sweden	14,614	15,000	
Poland	8,823	38,250	
Ireland	8,434	9,000	
Slovenia	6,410	6,000	
Greece	7,034	16,500	
Denmark	12,577	9,750	
Bulgaria	6,027	13,500	
Hungary	3,960	16,500	
Portugal	9,784	16,500	
Romania	4,251	24,750	
Finland	3,815	9,750	
Luxembourg	5,150	4,500	
Czech Republic	1,324	16,500	
Malta	1,168	4,500	
Cyprus	1,334	4,500	
Slovakia	843	9,750	
Latvia	904	6,750	
Estonia	696	4,500	

**TOTAL 1030308**

**12 out of 27**

The EU institutions agreed that a minimum of 7 out of 27 countries must meet the required quota.

**Citizens in how many countries have signed the initiative?**

All 27 members states

**How long did it take to collect the signatures?**

7 months

**How were they screened to get rid of fakes, repeats etc?**

All signatures were collected and processed through the Avaaz data base. The system is configured to technically reject double signatures and only allows one signature per e-mail address. All signatures have been screened and incomplete or invalid signatures have been removed. The data collected follows closely the strict criteria proposed by the Commission.

**Tell me about the artwork at the handover event**

The handover of the 1 million signatures was encapsulated into a massive piece of three-dimensional art-work created by the famous artist Kurt Wenner. The image of the art work, which illustrates a biologically diverse and organically farmed field of crops surrounded by the 1 million names of citizens that signed our petition, was printed on a massive banner (22 meters by 22 meters) in eco-friendly materials.

## The ECI

**What is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)?**

The ECI is a tool that allows European citizens to formally request that the European Commission initiate EU laws (in areas where it has the power to do so) on the basis of a European petition signed by at least one million Europeans. The tool is sanctioned by the EU Lisbon Treaty, which was adopted in December 2009.

**Why was it created?**

Following the worst European election turnout ever and polls showing falling enthusiasm in the

European project, the ECI was created as a flagship tool to re-motivate citizens to participate in European decision making.

**What are the rules governing the ECI?** After a full year of discussion, on December 6 the European Parliament, Commission and Council reached a compromise agreement on the procedures and conditions to implement the European Citizens Initiative. The European Parliament is expected to vote on the agreement on Dec 15, 2010.

The compromise conditions include:

- A mandatory public hearing for every successful citizens' initiative with the European Commission and the European Parliament.
- An admissibility of any citizens' initiative at the time of registration.
- A citizens' committee which shall organize each ECI and communicate with the European institutions.
- Signatures must reach a minimum quota of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Member States.
- Citizens' initiatives will only be given 12 months to collect 1 million signatures.

The Commission's full proposal can be found [here](#)

### **Is the Avaaz/Greenpeace initiative an ECI?**

Yes. Case law from the European Court of Justice states that when the EU treaty provides rights which are unconditional and sufficiently precise, these rights are directly applicable. Article 11, which creates the ECI, is unconditional and sufficiently precise.

The Greenpeace and Avaaz initiative not only meets, but exceeds many of the ECI procedures and conditions agreed by the trialogue last week:

- We collected over 1 million, verifiable signatures from all 27 member states
- We met the quota in 12 countries – well over the required minimum (see country numbers above)
- We collected the signatures in 7 months – 5 months less than the maximum period

- All of the signatures are verifiable
- The request is within the remit of the Commission

We have made clear to the Commission our willingness to hire an auditor to verify the signatures and comply with whatever the final ECI verification system is once the regulations are in place.

### **What has the EU Ombudsman said about the validity of the Avaaz / Greenpeace Initiative.**

On 25 April 2010, the EU Ombudsman, Nikiforos Diamandouros, said on French radio: *“It would be a political disaster to have a very large number of signatures and then obtain a decision by the Commission saying that it’s not admissible.”*

### **What do you expect the Commission to do with it?**

We expect the EU Commission to seriously consider and respond to the one million citizens clear request for a ban on GM crops and an independent, scientific body to thoroughly assess their risks within the obligatory four months with a public hearing.

## **Our petition**

### **What does the Avaaz and Greenpeace initiative call for?**

The initiative calls on European Commission president José Manuel Barroso to “put a moratorium on the introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops into Europe and set up an independent, ethical, scientific body to research the impact of GM crops and determine regulation.”

### **When and why did you start the initiative?**

In March 2010, the European Commission authorised the cultivation of the BASF antibiotic-resistant GM potato (Amflora), the first GM crop authorised in the EU in 12 years. The decision disregarded EU legal requirements, the will of EU members states and public opinion and the advice of international medical institutions such as the World Health Organisation and the European Medicines Agency. Avaaz and Greenpeace responded by immediately launching the initiative.

### **What's wrong with GM?**

Genetic engineering is highly unpredictable. The techniques used are random and imprecise. Because scientists still understand very little about how genes work, genetic engineers frequently find unexpected side effects when they move genes across species, or even within the same species. These unexpected effects could potentially cause allergies or have toxic effects.

Once GM organisms have been released into the environment and the food-chain, they cannot be recalled. As living organisms they multiply and cross-breed posing irreversible threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. GM crops have already escaped from farmlands causing contamination of conventional and organic crops.

The long-term impact of GM food on human and animal health remains unknown. Citizens want precautionary action need to protect us and future generations food from GM contamination.

GM crops are controlled by a handful of agro-chemical corporations through intellectual property rights; GM crops belong to six companies: Monsanto, Dow, Syngenta, Bayer, Dupont and BASF (with Monsanto owning 87% of all GM seeds). These six also control 73% of the agro-chemical market. So the same firms making GM seeds profit from the extra pesticides necessary for GM farming. Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta are also the largest seed firms in the world, controlling 47% of the market.

Genetic engineering puts the world's natural biodiversity at risk of contamination in an unforeseeable and uncontrolled way and does not increase yields. GM seeds are subject to patent claims that will indirectly increase the price of food and, as a result, will not alleviate poverty or hunger and pose a threat to food sovereignty. A 2008 report compiled by over 400 scientists from around the world is clear that GE crops have no role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals or in eradicating hunger.

### **What's wrong with the current EU GM testing system?**

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has so far failed to adequately assess risk of GM crops. EFSA relies mainly on data submitted by the same biotech companies that are applying for approval while neglecting the evidence brought forward by independent scientists. Moreover, the independence of EFSA's management is frequently called into question.

We are calling for the establishment of an independent, scientific EU body to assess the long-

term environmental, health and socio-economic impacts of GM crops. This is something that the EFSA has so far failed to do.

**The Commission published a proposal to amend the GMO authorisation system. How does the petition fit in with this?**

Our demands fit perfectly within these discussions. As long as the EU is debating the authorisation system, it shows it is weak and no GM crop should be authorised until it is improved. The Commission proposal does not address the core problems related to GMOs. It does not ensure that health and environmental risks are properly assessed at EU level and that GM contamination is prevented.

**How many GM crops are authorised and commercially cultivated in Europe?**

There are two GM crops authorised and commercially cultivated in Europe: the Monsanto pesticide-producing maize (MON810) and the BASF antibiotic-resistant potato (Amflora).

**How many are authorised for food, feed & other uses?**

There are 39 products authorised for food, feed and/or import and processing. The vast majority of European food companies avoid GM ingredients because of consumers' rejection.

**Are you against all kinds of genetic engineering and biotechnology?**

In line with the precautionary principle, Greenpeace campaigns against the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment. Greenpeace does not campaign against contained use of GE organisms. We are in favour of technological advancement in agriculture and the application of certain modern biotechnologies, such as marker-assisted selection, a non-invasive process that significantly speeds up conventional breeding processes and does not pose the risks of genetic engineering.

**What do the public think of GM crops?**

This initiative is not about what Avaaz and Greenpeace think, it is about what one million Europeans think and it is in line with the predominant public opinion. According to the newest (October 2010) Eurobarometer on Biotechnology# the percentage of Europeans opposing GM food is increasing. The majority of Europeans is opposed to the development of GM food in Europe (61%). Europeans believe that GM food is fundamentally unnatural (70%), is not safe for their health and that of their family (59%), is not safe for future generations (58%), and

benefits some people but puts others at risk (57%). The survey also highlights that there is widespread awareness about GM food (84%). This clearly shows that public opposition to GM food is based on knowledge and choice, not on ignorance as the biotech industry has claimed for years.