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Christina Wunder

**Communication and  
Campaigning in European  
Citizens' Initiatives**

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Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung  
Center for European Integration Studies  
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn

Walter-Flex-Straße 3  
D-53113 Bonn  
Germany

Tel.: +49-228-73-1810  
Fax: +49-228-73-1818  
<http://www.zei.de>

After successfully completing her Master of European Studies at the Center of European Studies (ZEI) in Bonn, Christina Wunder joined the Spokespersons' Service of the European Union, where she works in the press team of the Commission President. Prior to this, she obtained her B.A. in Translation, Linguistics and Cultural Studies (German, English, Russian) and spent a semester at the Moscow State Linguistic University. She gained her first professional experience in communication and press work during traineeships at the United Nations in Bonn and the European Commission in Brussels.

*Christina Wunder*

## **Communication and Campaigning in European Citizens' Initiatives**

### ***Introduction***

Effective and creative communication is crucial, whenever people need to be convinced and won for a cause. No matter if we speak of elections for a political candidate or over-regional awareness-raising campaigns for the protection of the environment – to establish a connection between political or civil society actors and the public, the latter must be taken seriously and addressed adequately. But what exactly does this mean? Is it the availability of financial resources, a whole division of PR-experts or just a witty idea, which will decide the outcome of a campaigning process? The European Citizens' Initiative, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, has the potential of becoming a new means of participation for the citizens of the 28 European Member States, *if it manages to create precisely that connection with the public*. In order to be heard by the European Parliament and the European Commission, an initiative must raise the support of not less than one million people coming from at least seven different member states. How can the organisers of an initiative achieve this and what practices are necessary, helpful or contra-productive? By means of thorough analysis and taking into account findings of communication theory, this paper will identify, which elements have to be present in the communicational activities of an organisation. It will try to determine, which practices and preconditions increase the initiators' chances of being successful. "Campaigns mostly involve communication: a conversation with society."<sup>1</sup> This analysis will help determine just what this conversation has to be like.

1 Rose, Chris, *How to Win Campaigns: Communications for Change*. London: Earthscan, 2010: 1.

## **1. Legal Basis**

The Lisbon Treaty, with its Treaty on the European Union and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, entered into force on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. It has brought about some significant changes to European procedures, with the objective of making the EU more democratic, transparent and efficient. Important is furthermore the effort to bring Brussels, being the centre of European decision-making, closer to its citizens by encouraging the latter to engage in European processes. Hence, one of these changes was the introduction of a new participatory tool, by means of which a closer connection between Europe and its citizens should be established. The aim is granting:

“A stronger voice for citizens: thanks to the Citizens’ Initiative, one million citizens from a number of Member States have the possibility to call on the Commission to bring forward new policy proposals.”<sup>2</sup>

### **1.1 Treaty on the European Union**

The legal basis for this new procedure is laid in the Treaty on the European Union. Its Article 11(4) gives European citizens the following rights:

“Art. 11 (4): Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. The procedures and conditions required for such a citizens’ initiative shall be determined in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 24<sup>3</sup> of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.”

Thus, it sets out the general implications of the new democratic participatory tool. The only numeric obligation set out in the Treaty, is the number of one million citizens, who have to support a certain initiative. The power of the European Citizens’ Initiative is clearly and strictly limited

2 Online at: [www.europa.eu/lisbon\\_treaty/glance/](http://www.europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/glance/). Accessed on: 15.08.2013.

3 Article 24 TEU: The European Parliament and the Council, acting by means of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall adopt the provisions for the procedures and conditions required for a citizens’ initiative within the meaning of Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union, including the minimum number of Member States from which such citizens must come.

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to equally the scope of power of the European Commission and to the implementation of the European Treaties. The ECI therefore cannot be invoked for any issues falling within the competencies of individual Member States.

### *1.2 Regulation 211/2011*

The Treaty provision on the European Citizens' Initiative is supported by an EU Regulation, which governs the underlying procedure: "Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative." It specifies the various conditions that have to be fulfilled by the organisers (which can be a natural person or a legal entity):

- The one million supporting citizens must originate from at least one quarter of all Member States (which in the EU 28 is seven).
- The annex of Regulation No 211/2011 lists the minimum number of signatories coming from each member states. These are linked to the number of members of the European Parliament in the respective Member State and are therefore degressively proportional.
- Statements of support, i.e. positive votes or signatures, may be collected in paper form as well as online.
- The time-limit, within which the required' one million signatures have to be collected is 12 months.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Regulation No. 211/2011 lays out the competencies and obligations of the Member States and the European Commission:

- The Member States carry full responsibility for the verification and certification of signatures from that specific Member State.
- In order to help initiators comply with European standards when collecting signatures online, the European Commission has to provide for a ready-to-use open-source software that abides by the respective technical and security standards.

<sup>4</sup> There is, however, the possibility of extension of that period, as was the case e.g. with the initiatives "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right" and "One of Us".

- In the case that an initiative succeeds to gain the support of one million citizens (and to comply with all other requirements), the initiators must be granted the right of public hearing at Union level.
- The European Commission has full discretion to decide on how to act in response to this. It may, however, equally decide not to take any action. In both cases, the Commission is obliged to justify its decision.

Assessing the democratic value of the European Citizens' initiative shall not constitute part of the present analysis. However, it should be noted that Johannes W. Pichler offers a critical evaluation on whether this new provision can create "real" democratic opportunities for European citizens or whether it is merely a tool that can be ignored or put aside even if successful. He comes to the conclusion that there are, indeed, numerous obstacles on the long way towards more direct democratic participation. However, Pichler ends on an optimistic and encouraging note: The European Union will have to actively encourage its citizens to make use of the democratic tools available to them and although this will, most probably, not be accomplished in a day, such a transition is possible and necessary.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, it is mandatory that the European Commission responds to successful initiatives in a satisfactory way to avoid participants feeling betrayed.

### *1.3 Initiative-Procedure*

The European Citizens' Initiative can be brought into being by a natural person (provided that he or she is a European citizen) or by a legal entity operating in Europe, e.g. a civil society organisation. According to the Preamble of Regulation 211/2011, the Commission must provide interested citizens with information and informal advice concerning the procedure and requirements of the Citizens' Initiative. On its official website the

5 Pichler, Johannes W. „Aufstand der Sterne. Die Europäische Bürgerinitiative,“ in: Johannes W. Pichler, *Verändern wir Europa!* (24-87), Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008: 87.

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European Commission offers a detailed explanation on the different steps of the process.<sup>6</sup>

The eight-step-procedure<sup>7</sup> starts with setting up a citizens' committee of a minimum of seven people from at least seven different Member States,<sup>8</sup> who then register the proposed initiative with the European Commission. Furthermore, they are responsible for certifying the online collection system. The subsequent collection of statements of support may take up to 12 months. In the case that the organisers succeed in collecting one million statements of support (in paper form and/or online), the Member State, in which the initiative was registered, is responsible for verifying the signatures. After successfully submitting the initiative to the Commission, the organisers receive the opportunity to present the details of their initiative to the European Parliament. In a last step, the European Commission decides on whether to act in response to the initiative and if so, what kind of action is appropriate. It must, in any case, grant detailed justification on its decision.

### **2. Communication Theory**

This chapter will analyse different approaches of communication theory towards the realisation and operation of political campaigns. Then, these findings will be applied to the European Initiative's communication process. This will make possible a detailed evaluation of the on-going initiatives and their underlying procedures to explain, which reasons might have led to certain initiatives being more or less successful.

6 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/prepare-system?lg=en](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/prepare-system?lg=en). Accessed on 19.08.2013.

7 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/how-it-works](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/how-it-works). Accessed on 20.08.2013.

8 Any participation in the European Citizens' Initiative (i.e. supporting or starting an initiative or being a member of the citizens' committee) is only possible, provided that the person in question is a European Citizen and has reached the age that allows him or her to take part in elections for the European Parliament.

## 2.1 Terminology

Bruhn offers a set of comprehensive terminology on such communication aspects, when he differentiates between communication per se, communication of organisations, communication measures, instruments, target groups, the communication message, medium and success.<sup>9</sup> Such a differentiation will help to analyse European Citizens' Initiatives in detail and to understand the motivation and effects behind the examined communication processes.

a) *Communication*: We speak of communication, when any kind of information is transmitted from one person (or more) to another person (or more) in order to influence the addressee's opinion, attitude, expectations or behaviour.

b) *Communication of Organisations*: In connection with organisations, the term 'communication' describes the entirety of all communication tools, which are utilised to inform segments of the public about the organisation's activities and aims and, ideally, to interact with the target community in a meaningful way.<sup>10</sup> Applied to European Citizens' Initiatives, this means that the measures and instruments in question additionally function to raise awareness among the target groups about the issue itself that is represented by the initiators, e.g. environmental protection.

c) *Communication Measures*: Such measures comprise all kinds of activities, which the organisation actively engages in to reach its communicational goals, for example advertisements in newspapers, sending letters or emails, organising events, etc. If, then, different kinds of communication measures are categorised and bundled into systems according to similarities, we speak of instruments.

9 Bruhn, Manfred, *Kommunikationspolitik*, München: Verlag Franz Vahlen, 2007.

10 Notwithstanding that, in his book, Bruhn concentrates on the communication activities of commercial undertakings, the core aspects of his communication theory are equally applicable to the non-commercial activities of European Citizens' Initiatives, due to their persuasive character (see more about persuasiveness in chapter 2.2).

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d) *Communication Instruments*: Public Relations, classical advertisement or marketing are examples of the different instruments regarding communication efforts. Such communication instruments as well as their combination have to be chosen according to the different situations, target groups or settings.

e) *Target groups*: Independent of which communication measure or instrument will be chosen in order to best communicate the organisation's goals, it is mandatory to divide the campaign's activities according to the target groups, which will be addressed. These may differ according to the issue being presented.

f) *Communication Message*: The message of the organisation's communication efforts is defined as a set of conceptual ideas, which are then codified by means of different modalities, such as text, images, emotions and/or sounds. This codification takes place in order to evoke a specific impression with the recipient in support the organisation's communication goal. Paramount is usually a high degree of creativity and originality when codifying and conveying the communication message.

g) *Communication Medium*: The communication medium is the perceivable manifestation of the communication message;<sup>11</sup> hence, it is something the recipients can capture with their senses. As it replaces person-to-person communication, the communication medium becomes repeatable in its nature and makes it possible for the organisation to implement entire campaigns by conveying their message via a variety of communication media (i.e. newspaper articles, TV-spots, celebrities etc). It is helpful to coordinate these different forms of communication media, when creating and operating a publicity campaign; applying a holistic and

11 Although Bruhn strictly differentiates between the "means of communication" and "communication medium," he notes that the difference is often difficult to tell. Such a distinction is, however, not necessary for the purpose of this analysis. Given the similarity of the two terms, it suffices to combine them in the single term "communication medium."

harmonious communication mix, rather than a multitude of incoherent tools can be significantly more effective.<sup>12</sup>

*h) Communication Success:* The success of certain communication activities can be defined as the achievements within the addressed target groups, which are traceably due to the organisation's communication efforts.<sup>13</sup> Bruhn stresses the importance of communication controlling, which means that all previous communication activity has to be examined systematically. This allows the organisers to draw conclusions on which measures and activities were helpful for achieving the communication goal and which were not. Controlling, thus, helps to improve future communication activities as well as to better understand past ones.<sup>14</sup>

#### *2.1.1 Terminology and the European Citizens' Initiative*

In the case of European Citizens' Initiatives, the above-described terminology is equally applicable. The organisers of the initiative can choose from an array of *communication measures*, the most common of which are physical promotion, e.g. through stalls in the town centre, and online promotion, where the regular uploading of news content is an important tool to engage with the target audience. In line with the budget available to the initiators, they can invest in the different *communication instruments*, this being e.g. public relations or classical advertisement. It is important to note that, for a political campaign like the European Citizens' Initiative, Public Relations is the instrument, on which organisers should be focussing most. Classical advertisement enjoys very low credibility, while in contrast Public Relations create more credible results; this is particularly helpful when dealing with issues of political sensitivity. By managing the communication between the initiators and the targeted segments of the

12 For more information on the strategy of integrated communication, see Bruhn 2007: 85ff.

13 Bruhn, Op.cit., 1ff.

14 Ibid., 515.

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public, it creates awareness or interest and, ideally, some form of engagement with the issue in question.<sup>15</sup>

Very generally speaking, the public can be divided into three groups, according to their interest in political issues. 75% of the public are not interested in political developments, while 20% are interested and 5% are even politically active themselves.<sup>16</sup> In terms of concrete possibilities for the initiative, we can distinguish between the three groups as those who will most probably not, maybe or probably support an initiative.<sup>17</sup> In order to avoid major stray-losses by wasting valuable resources on the wrong segments of the public, i.e. those who are not – and probably will not be – interested in issues of political significance, it is mandatory to identify the politically interested *target group* and to concentrate on this segment of the public only.<sup>18</sup> Some PR experts regard classical advertising for campaigning as an outright waste of resources, because, within such advertising, it is impossible to concentrate the organisation's efforts on the relevant target groups;<sup>19</sup> this leads to huge stray-losses without delivering any significant success.<sup>20</sup> The *communication message* with regard to European Citizens' Initiatives is always connected to the issue in question.

If, for example, a given initiative seeks to raise spending on student exchange programmes, the message conveyed by the initiative and codified by means of different modalities, must be: Education is important, therefore substantial investments in education are important.

15 Lichtblau, Theresa, "Campaigning" in: Johannes W. Pichler, *Verändern wir Europa!* 313-358. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008: 337.

16 *Ibid.*, 322.

17 Pichler, Johannes W, and Theresa Lichtblau. "Die Europäische Initiative Online," in: Johannes W. Pichler, *Verändern wir Europa!*: 413-434. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008: 420.

18 Lichtblau, *op.cit.*, 322.

19 Scott, David Meerman. *Die neuen Marketing- und PR-Regeln im Social Web.* Übersetzung: Reinhard Engel. Heidelberg u.a.: Verlagsgruppe Hüthig Jehle Rehm GmbH, 2012: 47f.

20 An interesting thought is the question of the quality of democratic representation. If the European Citizens' Initiative is supposed to represent the people of Europe, should it only selectively be directed to a relatively small segment of the European society (if that notion exists) or should it aim at reaching and convincing the whole of the Union?

The most interesting *medium* of communication for the organisers of a European Citizens' Initiative is the homepage, as it enables to reach out to segments of the public directly and without anything impeding or disrupting direct communication.<sup>21</sup> The European Citizens' Initiative's *communication success* is easy to determine, since it is collecting one million signatures, which then have to be checked for truthfulness and are monitored. It is, in any case, helpful to evaluate one's own communication activities in order to comprehend, which measures and instruments were particularly valuable and supporting, and which should be modified or left out in future efforts.

## 2.2 *Persuasive Communication*

Common to all European Initiatives is the persuasive character of the associated public relations campaign, since *any* political campaign is characterised by a strong persuasive nature.<sup>22</sup> Previously, we defined communication as the transmission or extraction of information. However, Ungeheuer stresses the individual nature of every communication act, according to which the information can be modified in the mind of the receiver upon perceiving, sensing or interpreting the information. This is very important for capturing the character of persuasive communication.<sup>23</sup>

We can summarise any act of persuasive communication (and equally the process of a European Citizens' Initiative) the following way: a person (P1) would like to convince another person (P2) to perform a certain action (A2) instead of the action it would normally perform. The goal is, hence, to convince people to change their behaviour and to set up and sustain *processes that are not normal or "business as usual."*<sup>24</sup>

21 Pichler and Lichtblau, *op.cit.*, 424.

22 Lichtblau, *op.cit.*, 313.

23 Ungeheuer, Gerold, *Einführung in die Kommunikationstheorie*, Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2010: 67ff.

24 Rose, Chris. "12 Basic Guidelines for Campaign Strategy," 2006. Online at: [www.campaignstrategy.org/articles/12basicguidelines.pdf](http://www.campaignstrategy.org/articles/12basicguidelines.pdf). Accessed on 06.09.2013.

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Ungeheuer formulates this process in the following way:

<i>Case a)</i>	P1: A2!	<i>Case b)</i>	P1: A2!
	P2: Yes.		P2: No.

*In case a)* no persuasion is necessary, since P2 already agrees with acting in the way P1 suggests. However, *in case b)*, simply naming (and explaining) the action, which P1 would like P2 to perform, is not enough. P1 needs to convince P2 by applying a certain persuasive strategy, this being a communicational act we call C1.<sup>25</sup>

Applied to the European Citizens' Initiative, we can say that the persuasive action C1 is the communicational campaign, which takes place to convince citizens to support the initiative with their signature. The campaign does not only function by giving information about the issue in question – or to say it in Ungeheuer's model: by naming A2 – but also by trying to influence the individual nature of that specific communication act, C1; in other words, by trying to influence the way the target audience perceives and interprets the information. This becomes all the more important, as we observe that in political campaigns in general, emotions occupy a much more crucial place than knowledge or reason, since they modify the way, in which the receiver interprets the new information. Having done significant research in precisely this field, Drew Westen has found that “the political brain is an emotional brain.”<sup>26</sup> This thesis has been upheld and put into practice by most PR-specialists, as e.g. Lichtblau emphasises that an opinion is built on an emotional level and is eventually reinforced by tangible arguments.<sup>27</sup> This means that C1 has to be characterised as containing not only information on the desired action A2, but also an emotional component, which modifies the individual perception by P2. In practical terms, this means that a successful strategy for an initiative's communicational campaign must, primarily, utilise emotions to maximise

25 Ungeheuer, op.cit., 67ff.

26 Westen, Drew, *The Political Brain*, New York: Public Affairs, 2007: XV; 36.

27 Lichtblau, op.cit., 325.

the motivation of the audience to sign the initiative, and secondary, to increase their knowledge about it.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we can conclude that, in order to be successful, the campaign of a European Citizens' Initiative has to perform communicational efforts, which go beyond simply informing the public about their issues and concerns. It has to codify its communication message in such a way that it addresses people's minds *and* hearts, while being interesting and original.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3 Campaigning Strategy

As mentioned above, for persuasive communication to be successful, a communication (or campaigning)-*strategy* is needed.<sup>30</sup> Chris Rose offers a 12-step basic guideline, outlining crucial elements of such a strategy.<sup>31</sup> However, since this analysis cannot take into consideration all components from the viewpoint of the organisers, but can only observe from the perspective of the receivers, not all of these are accessible for the present investigation. I therefore outline a selection of analysable elements.

First of all, it is mandatory to define the general notion of the initiative's campaign: It is a communication process – C1 – which aims at guiding the target audience from the starting point, ignorance, to the finish line: taking action in favour of the initiative. The campaign evolves to that point by undergoing the phases *Awareness, Alignment, Engagement* and *Action*. Rose provides a vivid example for this differentiated process by comparing the campaign to a fire alarm: First, awareness makes everyone realise that there is a fire; then, thanks to alignment,<sup>32</sup> people collectively acknowledge

28 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 22f.

29 Of course, this does not call for underestimating the importance of high-quality content. For this, see Scott, op.cit., 65; 197ff.

30 Windahl et al. have comprehensively categorised a set of basic strategies concerning the practical use of communication theory (Windahl, Sven, Benno H. Signitzer, and Jean T. Olson. *Using Communication Theory: An Introduction to Planned Communication*. London (et al.): SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009: 52ff). However, this chapter does not go into the many different categories of strategies, but will focus on a mix of good practices instead.

31 Rose, 2006, op.cit.

32 "Alignment gets everybody looking in the same direction, agreeing what the problem is, who suffers, who's to blame and what the solution is" (Rose 2010, 21).

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the present danger. Through engagement, they select an escape route and then take action and escape the dangerous situation.<sup>33</sup> The whole campaign should be divided into numerous steps and resemble a “critical path,” where the organisers stick to each phase of the process until that specific sub-goal is achieved. This strategic approach makes it possible to keep track of the initiative’s achievements and challenges without losing the overall picture. To succeed, the “critical path” must prevent the target audience from being overburdened and losing interest in the issue.<sup>34</sup>

The previous chapter recognised the need to integrate emotions into the communication process,<sup>35</sup> and Rose reinforces this necessity. If something is “only” improvable, it will hardly motivate as many as one million people to take action and support an initiative. Crucial is furthermore that the issue be general enough to enable a wide spectrum people to support and identify with it, rather than being complex and detailed.

“Normally the task is to find the pieces of an issue or concern which are unacceptable to a big enough group of people to get the effect you need. In general it is better to campaign against a small part of a big problem, where that part is 99% unacceptable to the public, than to campaign against say half of the overall problem, where that is only unacceptable to 1% of the population.”<sup>36</sup>

The requirements set out by the European legislation – one million statements of support from at least seven different Member States – are not easy to fulfil, therefore it is crucial to enable a maximum number of people to identify with the issue and feel outraged enough to take action. The unacceptability approach is the best way to narrow the communication message down to the interests of the widest possible spectrum of people.<sup>37</sup> Any communication messages and measures should be straight-forward and easy to grasp, so that the audience can take it in before losing interest (hence the well-known K.I.S.S.-rule: keep it simple, stupid).<sup>38</sup> However,

33 Rose, *op.cit.*, 17

34 *Ibid.*, 125ff.

35 Westen, *op.cit.*, 2007.

36 Rose, 2006, *op.cit.*, 3.

37 Rose, 2010, *op.cit.*, 182.

38 *Ibid.*, 360.

while emotions are indeed crucial, they can never stand alone without becoming empty and meaningless. As they go hand in hand with action, a campaign has to “personalise *and* create events.”<sup>39</sup> “Hope, injustice and anxiety may be the fuel but events should be the engine of campaigns,” since what is ultimately remembered by people is “events and outcomes, not opinions.”<sup>40</sup> We can conclude that the campaign’s communication strategy, or the “critical path,” should be constructed not only around emotions and arguments, but also events.

Furthermore, the initiatives should, as much as possible, address the target audience directly and convince them that the issue in question is in their immediate interest. The campaign must create a feeling of emergency and demonstrate to the receivers that a lack of action will affect them and their surroundings directly and severely.<sup>41</sup> If successful, such a feeling of urgency is a catalyst for motivation, since getting active becomes the only viable option. Well-established networks will significantly help to raise attention for the initiative, as they can reach out to a high number of people without having to spend valuable resources on establishing good connections first.<sup>42</sup> Hence, having a good and well connected network or being supported by a large organisation (such as Greenpeace, etc.) can help to promote the initiative’s campaign. In order to find out who potential supporters – and, in fact, opponents – are, it is necessary to analyse the forces in favour and against the initiative.<sup>43</sup> During the process of creating and operating this “battle plan,”<sup>44</sup> it is furthermore highly desirable to integrate young people into the planning and the operation of the campaign, since they have the know-how and experience of the best ways to attract and convince their peers.<sup>45</sup> Mixed-age groups become even more effective,

39 Ibid., 23, emphasis added.

40 Ibid., 22.

41 Ibid., 172.

42 Lichtblau, op.cit., 317.

43 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 116.

44 The word campaign does indeed originate from a military context. To this day, one of the possible definitions of this word is: “a connected series of military operations forming a distinct phase of a war” (Merriam Webster: “campaign”). Lichtblau also refers to this connection (Lichtblau, op.cit., 315).

45 Pichler and Lichtblau, op.cit., 419.

when the organisers of the initiative integrate the social media into their campaign, since younger people tend to be more familiar with these new media platforms.

### **3. Analysis of Initiatives**

This chapter will present a selection of on-going European Citizens' Initiatives. By means of thorough analyses, the above-described theoretic approaches shall be applied. The aim is to identify possible reasons for the success and failure of certain campaigns.

#### *3.1 Water as a Public Good*

The first and so far most successful European Citizens' Initiative is called "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!" (further referred to as the "water-initiative"). Although it terminated only on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2013, it succeeded in collecting the required one million statements of support from seven different Member States already on May 9<sup>th</sup>. By the end of the initiative process, it counted 1,884,790 statements of support.<sup>46</sup> Why was it so successful? Without doubt, the issue "water" is a crucial one, but so is "environmental protection," "climate change" or "education." This chapter shall analyse the specificities of the water-initiative and show which practices may have led to its great success.

##### *3.1.1 Financial resources*

The organisers of the water-initiative started their efforts from a fairly privileged situation. With EUR 100,000, granted entirely by EPSU, the biggest European Trade Union (European Federation of Public Service Unions), this initiative was blessed with significantly higher funds than any other European Citizens' Initiative.<sup>47</sup> The availability of financial resources is a crucial factor for any professional campaign – even if not necessarily the most important one. In order to address media and regional attention

46 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/](http://www.right2water.eu/). Accessed on 10. 09 2013.

47 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000003](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000003). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

and to benefit from their “far-reaching echo,” it is necessary to be able to pay for technical equipment, professional PR-experts, legal advisers etc.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, high financial resources are no guarantee for success – a strong issue and a good strategy are equally important. Although not downplaying the importance of capital, Pichler suggests that the ultimate success of an issue depends on its emotional potential first and only then on the invested financial resources.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.1.2 Networks

The fact that the initiative “Water and Sanitation are a Human Right!” was supported by the European Federation of Public Service Union, helped it to establish good networks as well as to utilise and benefit from the existing networks of EPSU. “The more heterogeneous these [networks] are, the more segments of the public can be reached out to.”<sup>50</sup>

“EPSU is the largest federation of the ETUC [European Trade Union Confederation] and comprises 8 million public and private service workers from over 265 trade unions; EPSU organises workers in local, national and European administration, health and social services, environmental services and in the energy, water and waste sectors in all European countries including in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, Russia and Central Asia. EPSU is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI), the global federation.”<sup>51</sup>

EPSU’s members, being inter alia involved in water services in the European Member States were presumably not only willing to fund the project with EUR 100,000, but also to provide further support by means of reaching out to their networks. Since it is in the direct interest of EPSU to protect current providers of water systems, it is safe to say that this was a great advantage for the initiative. Furthermore, the organisers of the water-initiative managed to win 67 “ambassadors,” 79 Members of the European

48 Schwaiger, Johannes. „Fundraisingm“ in: Johannes W. Pichler, *Verändern wir Europa!*: 381-412. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008: 382.

49 Pichler, op.cit., 77.

50 Lichtblau, op.cit., 317.

51 Online at: [www.epsu.org/r/1](http://www.epsu.org/r/1). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

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Parliament and 167 supporting organisations for their cause.<sup>52</sup> These individuals and organisations publicly promoted the initiative, raised awareness among their affiliates, partners and supporters about the issue and thereby may have encouraged them to participate.

### 3.1.3 *Communication Measures*

Although Lichtblau reflects on the idea of a possible homogenisation of the European public,<sup>53</sup> it remains questionable if something like a homogeneous European public exists. Even if it did, the amount of over 500 million people makes a diversified campaigning approach all the more necessary. While maintaining a harmonious communication mix, which creates a sense of corporate identity, it is mandatory to apply a variety of measures and instruments in order to reach out to large segments of the public.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned previously, the organisation's homepage is the "heart piece" of the European campaign<sup>55</sup> but this does not mean that it suffices to maintain a web presence only. In fact, not only the "digital divide, which separates the internet-literates from the internet-illiterates"<sup>56</sup> calls for a heterogeneous approach. By giving the advice: "Don't argue, do," Rose recognises the importance of initiating political and promotional events.<sup>57</sup> Such events are very powerful communication measures, since they create a sense of connectedness between the sender and the receiver of a message. When the receivers become engaged in an issue rather than just being informed, when they can interact with the initiative, rather than just listen or read one-sided promotion, they become more likely to take the next step of supporting it. The initiators of "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right" followed this approach and created an array of events across the European Union to motivate and reach out to the highest possible amount and diversity of people. The initiative's website offers a visual

52 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/ambassadors](http://www.right2water.eu/ambassadors); [www.right2water.eu/gallery/members-european-parliament](http://www.right2water.eu/gallery/members-european-parliament); [www.right2water.eu/supporting-organisations](http://www.right2water.eu/supporting-organisations). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

53 Lichtblau, op.cit., 323.

54 Bruhn, op.cit., 3.

55 Pichler and Lichtblau, op.cit., 424.

56 Pichler, op.cit., 79.

57 Rose, 2006, op.cit., 3.

map, in which interested people can see at one glance, where the project will be present. Creating events is crucial, since the “best campaigns communicate themselves because they involve doing, not advocacy. Deeds speak louder than words.”<sup>58</sup>

#### *3.1.4 Addressing the Target Audience*

How does the water initiative address its target audience? As established above, a successful campaign is characterised by an element of persuasion, i.e. by triggering a change in the target audience’s behaviour.<sup>59</sup> In order to be willing to change their own behaviour, they have to feel directly affected by the issue. Only if there is a perceivable conflict between their interests and the status quo, will they become active. At this point, it can be helpful to not only simplify the language used in the initiative’s communication efforts – K.I.S.S. – but also to narrow down the issue per se. To recall: “it is better to campaign against a small part of a big problem, where that part is 99% unacceptable to the public, than to campaign against say half of the overall problem, where that is only unacceptable to 1% of the population.”<sup>60</sup> This is precisely what the organisers of the water-initiative did.

The need of a human rights based approach and a 100%-coverage of water and sanitation services was the key argument communicated by the water-initiative. But looking closer into the goals of the initiative, one will realise that this was only one of three goals. Indeed, it goes on to also seek to improve the way in which national water and sewage services are being operated: Member States should be obliged to ensure that such services are being run in a “transparent, accountable and participative manner” and the initiators lament that “a lack of investment in water infrastructure [,] caused by the siphoning off of money for profit and other purposes [,] has led to excessive leaks, water-service disruptions and unaccountable

58 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 22.

59 Ungeheuer, Gerold, Einführung in die Kommunikationstheorie, Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2010: 67ff.

60 Rose 2006, op.cit., 3.

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management”.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the organisers put an emphasis on the Member States official development policy and the Millennium Development Goals. The Annex states that the European Commission should “propose legislation that helps to reach the MDG’s; that goes beyond these goals to reach universal access to water and sanitation and that scales up efforts that are being taken.”<sup>62</sup> Hence, two more points in the document by the organisers supplement the first demand, but were not stressed in the official campaign:

1. That the EU institutions and Member States are obliged to ensure that all inhabitants enjoy the right to water and sanitation.
2. That water supply and management of water resources must not be subject to “internal market rules” and that water services are excluded from liberalisation.
3. That the EU increases its efforts to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.<sup>63</sup>

It was a helpful strategy that the organisers of the European Citizens' Initiative “Water and Sanitation are a Human right” focussed on that exact argument, which would be supportable by most. An abundance of information or the versatility of arguments might not overstrain the target audience per se, but would nevertheless make the campaign as a whole less catchy and less attractive to the public.

### 3.1.5 *Communication Medium*

In order to communicate their message (i.e. “Water is a Human Right”), the initiators of this ECI made use of several different types of media (as described before: internet, mass media, etc). Once more, such media include not only the obvious possibilities, such as television, newspapers and websites, but comprise also informal channels via persons and celebrities. By integrating 67 “ambassadors” and 79 Members of the

61 Annex to water-initiative. „ec.europa.eu“, 2012. Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000003](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000003). Accessed on 11. 09 2013.

62 Ibid., 9.

63 Ibid., 10.

European Parliament into the campaign, the initiative managed to utilise each of these well-known personalities as a communication medium, which would carry the message to their respective environment. Such a strategy does not only increase the desired level of outreach of the information, but also enhances its credibility.

The most central medium of the initiative was, however, the homepage. By the end of the initiative, approximately 1,550,000 statements of support were signed online, while only about 315,000 were signed on paper, i.e. via physical signature collection.<sup>64</sup> This does not mean, however, that the other measures and media were not successful – they may have motivated supporters (presumably young, internet-affine people) to visit the homepage and sign the initiative. The aim of a good homepage is to present some significant added value for the receiver, as it combines “information, communication and entertainment.”<sup>65</sup> The right2water-homepage succeeded in doing so, by offering a news-section, appealing graphics and photos as well as by giving opportunities for participation. Drawing the lots to “Win an exclusive ‘Water is a human right!’ beach towel!”<sup>66</sup> integrated people directly into the initiative process. Furthermore, an incorporated Facebook “Like” button as well as a “Tweet” function allowed young people to spread the issue easily and quickly in their social networks. There is, however, a point worth criticising about the homepage: In a Union of 28 different Member States and 24 official languages, it is crucial to offer the initiative’s content and information in a maximum number of languages. While the water-initiative was successful in including topics from many countries (in events, news articles etc.), linguistic implementation of the homepage is improvable. Although the website is available in 11 languages, not all content has been translated.<sup>67</sup> Users, who do not speak sufficient English might be discouraged to gather more information about the initiative or, simply, to sign it. Given the abundant availability of

64 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/thank-you-signing](http://www.right2water.eu/news/thank-you-signing). Accessed on 15.09.2013.

65 Pichler and Lichtblau, *op.cit.*, 425.

66 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/win-exclusive-%E2%80%9Cwater-human-right%E2%80%9D-beach-towel](http://www.right2water.eu/news/win-exclusive-%E2%80%9Cwater-human-right%E2%80%9D-beach-towel).

67 See for example, online at: [www.right2water.eu/de/news/struggle-water-struggle-democracy](http://www.right2water.eu/de/news/struggle-water-struggle-democracy). Accessed on 18.09.2013.

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financial resources, it is not clear why some articles and items were not translated.

What separates successful communication from the mere giving out of information, is its two-way character.<sup>68</sup> While the water-initiative's homepage lacked a comments-section, in which users could express and exchange their thoughts and thereby engage in two-way communication and interaction, this was compensated by the fact that the initiators of "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right" operated a Facebook page as well as a Twitter account. This is a crucial point to bear in mind, since Facebook and Twitter can help to address young people, which in turn bear great opportunities for a European Citizens' Initiative. Young voters are generally more likely to support or engage in Union matters, since they are the ones who are most likely to be confronted with the consequences of these decisions in their future.<sup>69</sup> Other Facebook users have the possibility to post statements, pictures or interesting articles on the initiative's wall and thereby get the feeling that they are heard by and connected to the initiative. The operators themselves can keep the Facebook community updated with information or express their support to other organisations by "liking" their corporate fanpages.

In this way, networks can be created and broadened to maximise the outcome of their efforts. 8,241 people expressed their support for the water-initiative by clicking "like," while 426 users were talking about it on Facebook. These considerations are particularly interesting, as they increase the "viral outreach" of the initiative:<sup>70</sup> if one person "likes" or comments on the right2water-Facebook page, everyone who is interconnected with that person (i.e. their Facebook friends) will see that comment as news on their own Facebook newsfeed, even though they might not yet be familiar with right2water. Hence, it creates an opportunity to increase and intensify the outreach of the initiative's content.

68 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 16.

69 Pichler and Lichtblau, op.cit., 419.

70 "Viral Reach: The number of unique people who saw your post or page mentioned from a story published by a friend. These stories can include liking, commenting or sharing on your page, answering a question or responding to an event." Online at: [Simplymeasured.com](http://Simplymeasured.com). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

### 3.1.6 *Critical Path to Success*

Previously, it was recognised that the campaigning process of the initiative should be divided and operated according to a specific plan of action. This process starts with analysing the status quo concerning the awareness of the target audience and tackles many different steps along the way.<sup>71</sup> It ends with controlling the success and staying connected with the participants of the initiative. The News-section of the initiative's website portrays such an approach. Analysing the entries from the first half of 2012 until this day, one can understand the evolving process from catching people's interest, over depicting some partial success, to finally counting one million signatures.<sup>72</sup> The section included news items related to the issue, which were either relevant to the Union as a whole, to some regions or individual countries. Announcing small successes throughout the campaigning process, created a positive note by indicating that this is the opportunity to engage in European decision-making rather than being powerless.<sup>73</sup> This may have motivated people to participate in the initiative and to be part of the success. Such examples were: "More than 165,000 people vote against water privatisation in Madrid" or "Lithuanian energy workers collect over 500 signatures at annual sports games."<sup>74</sup> It is furthermore helpful to utilise external developments or events to attract media attention.<sup>75</sup> The organisers of the water-initiative did this with headlines like: "2 years since adoption of the human right to water – Implement it".<sup>76</sup> Articles, such as "As long as we remain silent, we are the accomplices of murders"<sup>77</sup> may have helped further to motivate people to act, by creating a feeling of urgency and intensifying emotions. The initiative did not stop its efforts until the very

71 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 125ff.

72 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news](http://www.right2water.eu/news). Accessed on 18.09.2013.

73 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 21.

74 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/more-165000-people-vote-against-water-privatisation-madrid](http://www.right2water.eu/news/more-165000-people-vote-against-water-privatisation-madrid); [www.right2water.eu/news/lithuanian-energy-workers-collect-over-500-signatures-annual-sports-games](http://www.right2water.eu/news/lithuanian-energy-workers-collect-over-500-signatures-annual-sports-games). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

75 Lichtblau, op.cit., 318.

76 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/2-years-adoption-human-right-water-implementation-it](http://www.right2water.eu/news/2-years-adoption-human-right-water-implementation-it). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

77 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/so-lange-wir-schweigen-sind-wir-die-komplizen-der-moerder](http://www.right2water.eu/news/so-lange-wir-schweigen-sind-wir-die-komplizen-der-moerder)-long-we-remain-silent-we-are. Accessed on 10.09.2013.

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end of the collection period, although the required number of signatures was collected already on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2013. After having reached one million, the organisers strived for 1,5 million, then for 2 million, knowing that more supporters will create more media attention and hence apply more pressure on the European Commission to act. The water-initiative's homepage uses a very vivid and suiting image to portray the successes of the campaign: a cup of water, which is gradually filled in the course of the campaign. After the collection process had ended, the cup was completely filled with water.

Again, such an approach motivates potential supporters and may convince them to use this unique opportunity to join the rewarding movement and to become a part of the success story. It is important to note that the campaign did not terminate after achieving the main communication goal (i.e. reaching the desired number of supporters). Controlling the success and continuing to communicate with the target audience is mandatory to maintain credibility and to satisfy the participants.<sup>78</sup> While, of course it is not possible to judge the controlling-process of the organisers from the outside, it is indeed possible to assess the follow-up communication with the initiative's participants.

Recognising that the success of this initiative would not have been possible without the many people who have become active and supported the organisers' efforts, the organisers state on their homepage: "We would like to thank everybody who has signed and a special *THANKS!* to all the people who have helped us to collect signatures. You have made this ECI a huge success!"<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, participants are informed about the events and processes to follow: *We would like to let you know about the next steps:*

- Validations of the signatures by the 28 member states by the 9<sup>th</sup> of December.
- Hearing in the European Parliament.
- Answer and actions from the European Commission early next year.<sup>80</sup>

78 Bruhn, op.cit., 515.

79 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/thank-you-signing](http://www.right2water.eu/news/thank-you-signing). Accessed on 11.09.2013.

80 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/thank-you](http://www.right2water.eu/thank-you). Accessed on 13.09.2013.

In addition to reading the regular news posts on the homepage, users, who are interested in the follow-up processes concerning the water-initiative, can sign up for an informative newsletter and keep abreast of relevant events and developments conveniently and directly. As laid out in the legal base of the European Citizens' Initiative, the European Commission is not obliged to take any action and if it does, it can choose the content and form of action freely. Therefore, it is highly desirable to continue to attract attention by the mass media as well as by participants. Knowing that the first successful European Citizens' Initiative is backed and followed up by a significant number of citizens, it will put more pressure on the Commission to react to the initiative in a satisfying way. An article at Spiegel.de, the online version of the German weekly news magazine, is only one of many examples, when it states in its headline: "Protests against water-privatisation: EU surrenders before Citizens' Initiative."<sup>81</sup>

This chapter has shown which practices and strategies can be helpful in order to create some significant attention among European citizens and media and to motivate people to support a European Citizens' Initiative. Positive factors in this success were: an issue, which has the potential to concern and shake up a wide enough spectrum of people, the availability substantial financial resources for the campaign's communication measures, and finally the presence of strong and well-connected networks, which are willing to and capable of supporting and spreading the initiative's professional campaign.

### 3.1.7 Follow up

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, the European Commission welcomed the organisers of the initiative for a symbolic hand-over of the 1,680,172<sup>82</sup> signatures<sup>83</sup>

81 Online at: [www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/service/eu-kommissar-barnier-nimmt-wasser-versorgung-von-privatisierung-aus-a-907198.html](http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/service/eu-kommissar-barnier-nimmt-wasser-versorgung-von-privatisierung-aus-a-907198.html). Accessed on 21.08.2013.

82 It must be noted that the initial number of 1,884,790 signatures was reduced to 1,680,172, as the Commission can only accept signatures validated and confirmed by the Member State authorities.

83 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/sefcovic/headlines/news/2014/02/2014\\_02\\_17\\_eci\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/sefcovic/headlines/news/2014/02/2014_02_17_eci_en.htm). Accessed on 25.02.2014.

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validated by the responsible Member State. In his statement, Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič said:

“Today is a good day for grassroots democracy. I am extremely happy to meet the organisers of this European Citizens' Initiative. Their presence here proves the success of our joint efforts to make this ambitious new instrument of participatory democracy work. It is also positive news more generally, especially in an electoral year, as it shows how it is possible to mobilise and motivate citizens, even across borders.”<sup>84</sup>

The subsequent public hearing in the European Parliament saw the numerous and active participation of over 400 citizens.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, it was widely covered by the European media<sup>86</sup> and transmitted live by the European broadcaster EbS.<sup>87</sup> After hearing the views and arguments of the initiative's organisers, the European Commission has to decide until 20 March, whether and how it intends to follow up on this first European Citizens' Initiative.

### 3.2 “One of Us”

The second European Citizens' Initiative to succeed in collecting one million signatures is called “One of Us” and seeks to improve the protection of embryonic life from the moment of conception, by urging 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.”<sup>88</sup> “One of Us” was registered almost at the same time as the water-initiative and took four months longer to succeed in collecting one million statements of support. In the course of the collection, it was able to collect as many as 1,901,947 signatures. Bearing in mind that, of course, the two initiatives are not entirely comparable, this section will still

84 Online at: [www.europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-14-9\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-9_en.htm). Accessed on 17.02.2014.

85 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/news/hearing-european-parliament-great-success](http://www.right2water.eu/news/hearing-european-parliament-great-success). Accessed on 20.02.2014.

86 Online at: [www.right2water.eu/press-review](http://www.right2water.eu/press-review). Accessed on 25.02.2014.

87 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?sitelang=en&ref=I086392](http://www.ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?sitelang=en&ref=I086392); [www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/de/committees/video?event=20140217-1500COMMITTEE-ENVI-DEVE-IMCO-PETI](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/de/committees/video?event=20140217-1500COMMITTEE-ENVI-DEVE-IMCO-PETI). Accessed on 25.02.2014.

88 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/](http://www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/). Accessed on 08.09.2013.

analyse, how the organisers tackled certain communicative challenges and what practices may have led to the initiative's success.

### *3.2.1 Financial Resources*

“One of Us” was funded with EUR 50,000. This sum was provided entirely by Fondazione Vita Nova, an Italian “Movement for Life,” whose mission is to promote and protect human life from the moment of conception.<sup>89</sup> Hence, in terms of funding, “One of Us” was the initiative with the second biggest budget to finance its campaigning activities.

### *3.2.2 Networks*

The homepage does not indicate, how many MEPs and “Ambassadors” backed the initiative (as was the case with “Water and Sanitation are a Human Right”). However, leaders of 33 organisations have joined the initiators in their efforts to protect embryonic life. Furthermore, the initiative “is built on wide support: churches, politicians, MEPs and civil society leaders are committed to supporting the initiative in various ways.”<sup>90</sup> Such a network is highly effective, as e.g. church communities are very likely to be in favour of such an ethical issue. Weekly church visits, in which the religious leader talks about the topic and motivates the community to provide their signatures, may have presented very potent tools to the organisers. It is furthermore possible that church communities actively promoted the campaign and collected signatures in their local environments in support of this European Citizens' Initiative.

### *3.2.3 Communication Measures*

Using its homepage as its main dissemination platform, “One of Us” regularly updated and complemented its news section. Such content, being informative and interesting, keeps the target audience abreast of relevant events and developments. By creating media-effective events and actions, the organisers diversified their array of communication measures. Events included a “European Day in support of the initiative ‘One of Us’,” which

89 Online at: [www.fondazionevitanova.it](http://www.fondazionevitanova.it). Accessed on 08.09.2013.

90 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/](http://www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/). Accessed on 07.09.2013.

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was also referred to as “Click & Sign Day,” the “Week for life 2013” in Brussels, several “One of Us General Assemblies” or engaging in the “European Year of Citizens 2013” under the title “It’s our Europe: Let’s get active!” This shows that once more, Rose’s recommendation to “Do” rather than “Argue”<sup>91</sup> has been followed and might have contributed to the achievements of “One of Us.”

### 3.2.4 *Addressing the Target Audience*

The title of the initiative fighting to protect embryonic life is well chosen: “One of Us” conveys a feeling of belonging together, leaving no one behind and being an inseparable and solidary community. Such an emphatic approach, combined with effective and professional communication, has led to thousands of people – in fact, over one million – to express their support for this issue.

Citing Bonfadelli,<sup>92</sup> Lichtblau recognises that there are three theoretical approaches to a communication strategy: the cognitive, affective and social strategy.<sup>93</sup> All three were present and clearly identifiable in both, the water-initiative as well as in “One of Us.” However, what is particularly striking about the latter is precisely that social component, which is addressed in a wholesome manner: starting from the title, following through the events up to the goal and the consequences behind this movement. Every part of this initiative reinforces the message that embryos are human beings and should be covered by the same human rights standards and protection like every-  
“One of Us.” In this way, the issue is personalised, without directly depicting the calamities of individuals. When utilising the effective strategy of personalising the problem, it is crucial to not only focus on the unacceptable and tragic, but at the same time offer and justify a possible solution, otherwise it will lead to frustration and withdrawal.<sup>94</sup> While there clearly is the need to convince the target audience of the unacceptability and scandal of the issue, it is also crucial to show opportunities to change

91 Rose 2006, op.cit., 3.

92 Bonfadelli, 2001: Medienwirkungsforschung.

93 Lichtblau, op.cit., 326.

94 Rose 2010, op.cit., 21.

the current situation to the better. Furthermore, the campaign must convince the receivers that the opportunity and need to implement the solution is present *now*. An article posted in the news-section of the initiative's homepage does this effectively when its headline states: "Now it's Time to be Worried." It shows that the problem is already at hand and that the issue cannot be delayed. Furthermore the style in which the article is written, resembles that of a blog, which adds a personal component to it:

"One of my friends, who doesn't really follow the biotech scene, said to me one time, "When you tell me to worry about it, I will worry about it." I replied, "Worry. Now." Human cloning is not coming. It is already here. It is time to stop pretending that this is a problem for our children and grandchildren. This is our issue to tackle."<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, this article is representative of the initiative's efforts to maximise "the motivation of the audience, not their knowledge."<sup>96</sup> By creating a feeling of urgency, it may have motivated many European citizens to express their support for "One of Us." The initiators make use of strong emotions and "negative feelings," which have long proven to be highly effective in attracting attention and manoeuvre opinions into a certain direction by relying on fear and discomfort.<sup>97</sup> The best example for this strategy is the article "Newborn Baby Rescued From Sewage Pipe, Neighbors Hear Crying."<sup>98</sup> The story, especially in combination with a photo of the rescued new-born, leaves the reader appalled and distressed. What is interesting is that the shocking event described in the article is not directly connected with the issue, which "One of Us" is promoting. While many people might still be undecided whether to support or oppose research on human embryos, e.g. stem cell research, everyone can agree that the depicted tragedy is appalling and that all possible efforts have to be undertaken to avoid such a story to happen again. Westen has shown that negative feelings, be they created consciously or subliminal, are likely to lead to significantly more negative opinions about a person or issue.

95 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/human-cloning-is-here-now-its-time-to-be-worried](http://www.oneofus.eu/human-cloning-is-here-now-its-time-to-be-worried). Accessed on 15.09.2013. Emphasis added.

96 Rose 2006, op.cit., 1.

97 Lichtblau, op.cit., 345f.

98 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/newborn-baby-rescued-from-sewage-pipe-neighbors-hear-crying](http://www.oneofus.eu/newborn-baby-rescued-from-sewage-pipe-neighbors-hear-crying). Accessed on 13.09.2013.

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Creating distress with the help of such stories may lead to affecting the receivers' views about a similar issue, too.<sup>99</sup> In this specific article, Rose's recommendation to rally against the unacceptable<sup>100</sup> was effectively put into practice. Everyone can agree that the story described in the article above is highly unacceptable and appalling, even though it is not directly connected to embryonic research. It is imaginable that this has touched many people and led them to support the "One of Us"-Initiative.

### 3.2.5 *Communication Medium*

While, as recognised above, emotions play a major role in political campaigning, competency and credibility should reinforce the message of a campaign. Hence, it can be helpful to include experts and specialists into the initiative's efforts. Functioning as a communication medium, they can convey the communication message to the target audience. While policy makers enjoy the lowest possible level of trust in Europe, medical practitioners are trusted most.<sup>101</sup> "One of Us" did not only include statements of experts in its numerous news-articles, but also offered some substantial background information on its homepage. In the section "Important Documentation," potential supporters could read a wide array of academic articles or watch videos, in which relevant topics are explained in detail. These represent, of course, an additional offer – the rest of the campaign simplifies scientific findings in order to help the receiver understand the issue quickly enough, i.e. before he/she loses interest over the complexity of the issue.

A very helpful medium for "One of Us" was a number of famous policy makers and celebrities, who had, in one way or another, come in contact with the topic of abortion. Telling their personal story, about e.g. their mother deciding against abortion in the last minute,<sup>102</sup> they succeeded in

99 Westen, op.cit., 58.

100 Rose 2010, op.cit., 182.

101 Lichtblau, op.cit., 328, citing W&V/Media & Marketing, 2006: 100.

102 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/chers-mom-almost-had-abortion-changed-mind-at-the-clinic/](http://www.oneofus.eu/chers-mom-almost-had-abortion-changed-mind-at-the-clinic/); [www.oneofus.eu/justin-biebers-mom-tells-why-she-chose-not-to-abort-at17/](http://www.oneofus.eu/justin-biebers-mom-tells-why-she-chose-not-to-abort-at17/); [www.oneofus.eu/irish-senator-supports-one-of-us-campaign/](http://www.oneofus.eu/irish-senator-supports-one-of-us-campaign/). Accessed on 18.09.2013.

effectively diverting interest from “tabloid topics” to subjects, which are related to the issue in question. The celebrities shift from being the content of documentation to being the medium, which carries the communication message to not only their individual surroundings, but to a much larger environment. Once more, “One of Us” moves away slightly from its official credo 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,”<sup>103</sup> to generally opposing the termination of pregnancies. However, since there is a general thematic between the two, it is possible that people, who are undecided about embryonic research, but oppose abortion, then sympathised with the initiative. Lichtblau refers to such an approach as “moralisation”: What was most effective here was depicting the problem in a concrete situation and thereby placing it in a more general value context. By such means, the problem gets moralised. Contrary to political problems, where the solution would depend on action by the government, the responsibility for a moral problem is placed on every single individual.<sup>104</sup> This creates an immediate need for action, which can then function as a catalyst for the target audience’s willingness to engage in something.

Like “Water and Sanitation are a Human Right,” “One of Us” operates a corporate Facebook page as well as a Twitter account. It is important to ensure that a two-way communication is possible, by means of which the target audience can communicate with, rather than just observe the initiative. The Facebook page counts 8,161 likes and 1,199 people who have been talking about “One of Us” on Facebook. This is a highly effective way to increase and intensify the initiative’s communication success, as users can feel connected and heard. The positive effects of viral outreach described in 3.2.5 are equally applicable.

### *3.2.6 Critical Path to Success*

Once more, evaluating the content of the homepage’s news section, gives indications on how the organisers of the initiative constructed their

103 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/](http://www.oneofus.eu/initiative-explanation/). Accessed on 12.09.2013.

104 Lichtblau, *op.cit.*, 329.

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“critical path to success.” The initiators published articles informing the public about the issue in general, included people from the political and public life into their campaign, and made an effort to undergo the critical evolution from “Awareness” over “Alignment,” to “Engagement” and finally “Action.”<sup>105</sup> The “One of Us” team managed to utilise external events and news as cornerstones to promote their message, e.g. by reporting about developments outside of the European Union, publishing the headline: “North Dakota State Legislature: ‘Personhood’ rights to be extended to the unborn.”<sup>106</sup> Such news implies that the organisers of this initiative are not alone in battling for the protection of embryonic life, but that others also take this issue seriously and try to change things to the better. Further into the initiative process, the organisers managed to address the target audience directly, when they reported “Over 850,000 people have signed the petition to protect human embryos in Europe. Have you?”<sup>107</sup> Such a headline conveys a picture of success, while urging the reader to also do their part and provide their signature.

As was demonstrated previously, the actual *amount* of financial resources is not decisive for the success or failure of an initiative (while of course, they have to be present). Although “One of Us” had only half the financial resources compared to those of the water-initiative, it managed to collect *more* signatures. The initiative’s campaign motivated almost two million people to express their support. Hence, there is reason to assume that success is more dependent on how effectively the available resources are spent, rather than the actual amount. Furthermore, the analysis of “One of Us” has shown that it is very helpful to have an issue, which can be easily emotionalised and has the power to evoke strong feelings and dismay. Hence, it confirms Pichler’s statement that “ultimately, success depends on

105 Rose, 2006, op.cit., 2.

106 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/north-dakota-state-legislature-personhood-rights-to-be-extended-to-the-unborn/](http://www.oneofus.eu/north-dakota-state-legislature-personhood-rights-to-be-extended-to-the-unborn/). Accessed on 11.09.2013.

107 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/over-850000-people-have-signed-the-petition-to-protect-human-embryos-in-europe-have-you/](http://www.oneofus.eu/over-850000-people-have-signed-the-petition-to-protect-human-embryos-in-europe-have-you/). Accessed on 07.09.2013.

the issue and its emotional potential and only then on the amount of invested capital.”<sup>108</sup>

### 3.2.7 Follow up

1,742,156 of the collected signatures were ultimately validated by the responsible Member State authorities.<sup>109</sup> It will subsequently present its arguments and concerns to the European Parliament in a public hearing.

## 3.3 Unsuccessful Initiatives

Having first analysed two successful European Citizens’ Initiatives and having identified possible reasons for these achievements, the following part of my analysis tries to explain why some initiatives struggle to convince enough people of the significance of their issue. However, it is important to note that any results, although based on findings of communication theory, can represent only suggestions and estimations. None of the following initiatives have succeeded in collecting the required one million statements of support, nor are they likely to do so within the officially granted collection period. What are possible reasons for this? There are some topics that virtually everyone can agree with; at the same time, other issues are more polarising and cause frictions between supporters and opponents. Both, however, fail to motivate enough people to actively sign it. This chapter will try to determine why.

### 3.3.1 European Initiative for Media Pluralism

The media-initiative is funded with EUR 2,000 by two civil society organisations<sup>110</sup> and has collected 14.272 statements of support so far. Having failed to reach one million signatures, it re-registered its initiative on 19.08.2013 to try again. Although the initiators do try to follow a similar approach as “One of Us” or the water-initiative, i.e. including

108 Pichler, po.cit., 76f.

109 Online at: [www.oneofus.eu/one-of-us-is-confirmed-as-the-first-european-citizens-initiative-in-number-of-statements-of-support](http://www.oneofus.eu/one-of-us-is-confirmed-as-the-first-european-citizens-initiative-in-number-of-statements-of-support). Accessed on 21.02.2014.

110 These were: „Alliance Internationale de Journalistes“ and „European Alternatives.“ Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2013/000007](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2013/000007). Accessed on 19.09.2013.

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people from the media and public life in their campaign, reporting about external events or communicating with the target audience on Facebook and Twitter,<sup>111</sup> the process “Attention, Alignment, Engagement, Action”<sup>112</sup> is not successfully completed. Although the initiative’s website has a very appealing design, it seems to fail to create enough outrage and motivate people to get active, as the issue is fairly abstract and does not make the target audience feel directly affected. It might be more helpful to address the issue from the viewpoint of the audience by creating stories and events, which take into account the perspective of the average citizen.<sup>113</sup> The fact that the initiative is not available in any languages other than English, may once more reduce the perception of relevance for the recipient’s own life. A possibility to create a feeling of outrage among the target audience could have been to more frequently utilise external events as cornerstones.<sup>114</sup> In that case, an additional effort should also be made to relate the relevant events to the individual in order to help him or her to identify with the issue.

Most people would probably agree with the general notion that media pluralism is important. However, it appears that the issue does not seem appealing and urgent enough for the target audience to get active and force a change. Since the initiative is funded by only two small organisations, it probably lacks the advantage of having a large and effective network to fall back on. These reasons, combined with the fact that the media-initiative had a budget of only EUR 2,000, may have led to the unsuccessfulness of the “European Initiative for Media Pluralism.”

### 3.3.2 “30 km/h – making the streets liveable!”

Although this European Citizens’ Initiative can dispose over a significantly smaller budget than the water-initiative or “One of Us,” it still has the

111 Online at: [www.facebook.com/ECImedia](http://www.facebook.com/ECImedia); [www.twitter.com/MediaECI](http://www.twitter.com/MediaECI). Accessed on 18.09.2013.

112 Rose, 2006, op.cit., 2.

113 Rose, 2010, op.cit., 27.

114 Rose, 2006, op.cit., 3.

substantial amount of EUR 12,050.<sup>115</sup> It is striking that this budget is made up not only of contributions by civil society or road safety organisations, but also by individuals, who donated from EUR 250 up to EUR 500 each. This shows that the issue is strongly supported by some segments of the public. From a communications perspective, the initiative is very well organised, as it partners with many organisations, which use their networks to support the “30 km/h”-proposal. The news-section of the homepage regularly reports about relevant events, which are chosen according to the language selected by the user. The cover picture, two children trying to manoeuvre their way across a busy street, creates a feeling of alert, while the initiative’s Facebook page enables the target audience to engage in two-sided communication.

However, despite the dedication of some individuals and segments of the society, “30 km/h – making the streets liveable!” advocates an issue, which is unlikely to be supported by *everyone* and there was indeed some substantial resistance from the media and the public against such a plan.<sup>116</sup> In the presence of such a controversial issue, the drawbacks of two-way communication become visible on the initiative’s Facebook page: users do not only post positive and supporting comments, but also strongly criticise the initiative and express their opposition against the project. Hence, it lies in the nature of the topic that it is much more difficult to provide pieces of concern, which are supportable by the whole of the public; much rather, this is an issue, which is supported only by a relatively small segment of the society.<sup>117</sup> The initiative closed on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2013 with 35.791 signatures.<sup>118</sup>

115 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/finalised/details/2012/000014](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/finalised/details/2012/000014). Accessed on 26.02.2014.

116 See for example: Online at: [www.heise.de/autos/artikel/Widerstand-gegen-Tempo-30-in-der-Stadt-waechst-1621717.html](http://www.heise.de/autos/artikel/Widerstand-gegen-Tempo-30-in-der-Stadt-waechst-1621717.html); [www.abendzeitungmuenchen.de/inhalt.eine-demo-fuer-entschleunigung-tempo-30-spaltet-die-stadt.d6cd1dad-2a8e-42e3-bd47-204de7d8e718.html](http://www.abendzeitungmuenchen.de/inhalt.eine-demo-fuer-entschleunigung-tempo-30-spaltet-die-stadt.d6cd1dad-2a8e-42e3-bd47-204de7d8e718.html); [www.derwesten.de/panorama/adac-ist-gegen-regelgeschwindigkeit-von-tempo-30-id7288540.html](http://www.derwesten.de/panorama/adac-ist-gegen-regelgeschwindigkeit-von-tempo-30-id7288540.html). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

117 Unfortunately, it was not possible to find out how many people oppose the 30 km/h limit. However, there are numerous articles in the media, which report about speed limit opponents, including the German automobile club ADAC (See footnote 115).

118 Online at: [www.en.30kmh.eu/](http://www.en.30kmh.eu/). Accessed on 26.02.2014.

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### 3.3.3 *End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens' Initiative to give the Earth Rights*

The Ecocide-initiative is funded by two individuals, rather than civil society groups or environmental agencies and has a budget of EUR 3,324<sup>119</sup> and has so far obtained 112.446<sup>120</sup> statements of support. The name of the initiative expresses what the organisers strive for. However, their endeavours go beyond simply fining or challenging ecocide:

“The main idea of our initiative is intriguingly simple: Environmental destruction must become a crime. A crime for which those responsible can be held accountable.”<sup>121</sup>

The draft Ecocide Directive, as the initiators propose it, sets out different types of Eco-crimes: Crimes against Humanity, Nature, Future Generations as well as Crimes of Ecocide and of Cultural Ecocide. For each of these offences, the perpetrator (being the superior of a company or government) “*shall be liable to be sentenced to a term of imprisonment*” by the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

While the initiative's homepage does leave some room for improvements, e.g. a more attractive design or a regularly updated news-section, the associated Facebook-page is more appealing. There, the initiators as well as users and supporters can post interesting or entertaining messages, pictures and videos; the page includes, for example, an “Ecocide Rap”-video,<sup>122</sup> which promotes the issue in a clever and amusing way. Despite its engaging Facebook page, which has the potential of attracting especially young people, who could function as drivers of change,<sup>123</sup> the initiative does not generate sufficient media attention and does not motivate enough citizens to sign their initiative. Although the initiative is supported by some individual MEPs, activists and members of national parliaments, a vast part of its supporters is comprised of students' associations, actors or novelists. This is not detrimental per se, but such a

119 Online at: [www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/finalised/details/2013/000002](http://www.ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/finalised/details/2013/000002). Accessed on 26.02.2014.

120 Online at: [www.endecocide.eu/](http://www.endecocide.eu/). Accessed on 26.02.2014.

121 Online at: [www.endecocide.eu/home/?lang=en](http://www.endecocide.eu/home/?lang=en). Accessed on 10.09.2013.

122 Online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=\\_Ga8s3C-43I#t=73](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=_Ga8s3C-43I#t=73). Accessed on 20.09.2013.

123 Pichler and Lichtblau 2008, op.cit., 419.

base of supporters lacks the benefits of large organisational networks, which could promote and communicate the issue to high numbers of people, as was the case e.g. with “Water and Sanitation are a Human Right” or “One of Us.” This may be one of the reasons, why the initiative has not succeeded to collect one million statements of support in due time.

## ***Conclusion***

This paper analysed the communication campaigns of five European Citizens’ Initiatives. The aim of the current study was to identify necessary and helpful elements of a political campaign, which have the potential of motivating a wide spectrum of people to get active and provide their statement of support to the given initiative.

On an overall basis, the analysis has first of all shown that all issues differ significantly in their content and possibilities; therefore, different approaches can prove more or less helpful. If, for example, a subject is very emotional and sensitive, this potential should be fully realised to give justice to the severity of the issue. Taken together, the results of this study have illustrated that the following factors are necessary and productive, when trying to reach out to the “European public.” The subject, which the European Citizens’ Initiative fights for, must have the potential of being emotionalised to some significant extent. Codifying the communication message in an emotional and emphatic way has proven to be highly effective. This emotional component unfolds its potential especially, if it is reinforced by tangible arguments and interesting information, which is ideally backed by some degree of expert knowledge. Events, which integrate the target audience into the communication process, improve the effectiveness of the initiative’s endeavours. Furthermore, the relevance of networks is clearly confirmed by the current findings: Thanks to the support of well-connected organisations and individuals, the efforts of the campaigning process can be intensified. It did not surprise that the availability of significant funding is an important precursor of being successful. However, success is not guaranteed by financial resources, neither is it determined by the amount of it – crucial is the question, whether the available money is spent effectively. Forceful tools in the

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campaigning process of European Citizens' Initiatives were addressing the target audience directly, making them feel immediately affected by the issue in question and to reduce the complexity of the issue to an argument, which is accessible to the majority of people.

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the initiators must try to influence the way in which the target audience receives and interprets the information disseminated by the campaign. The major challenge is to find a way to address a very wide spectrum of people, while taking into account the diversity of the European public. The findings of this analysis make several contributions to the existing knowledge on political campaigning. By putting general findings in the European perspective and by applying important evidence of communication theory to the concept of European Citizens' Initiatives, the analysis has given a clearer picture of how such evidence can function in the unique concept of European integration.

As more and more people exercise their right of democratic participation by means of the ECI, such information may help initiators to better evaluate their chances of reaching out to segments of the European society. Further research in this field is needed to increase the understanding of the significance and implications of the European Citizens' Initiative. This tool may create entirely new possibilities for the European public, and it is important to capture its potential academically.



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