

Behind the European Citizen's Initiative "One of Us"

2 popes & 1 million Europeans choose to abandon fight against maternal mortality

INTRODUCTION

The 'European Citizens' Initiative' (ECI) is a new procedure as of April 2012. It allows EU citizens to organize and collect **1 million signatures to request the EU Institutions to take action in a given area**. "One of Us" was the third such initiative to be launched.¹ It aims to halt all EU funds for any activities which involve the destruction of the human embryo. According to the "One of Us" initiators, this can include **EU development aid for maternal health (MDG 5)**, because addressing maternal health can on occasion lead to needing to provide abortion services.

Approved after legal verification by the European Commission on 11 May 2012, the organisers of "One of Us" have **until 1 November 2013 to collect 1 million signatures of EU citizens** and must meet a specified minimum threshold of signatures in at least seven EU Member States. At the time of writing, "One of Us" had already reached the requisite 1 million signatures and has obtained the necessary threshold in at least ten EU Member States, making it among the first successful European Citizens' Initiatives. Upon submission of the one million signatures, the European Commission will have to produce a legal opinion on the request for legal action of "One of Us" and a hearing the European Parliament will take place.

Those behind this initiative have a **steadfast belief that life begins at conception**, and that from this moment on it **must be protected at all costs**, regardless of the gravity of the consequences that this may have. Whilst the overarching aim of the initiators of "One of Us" would be to have a Europe - and world - where abortion is illegal in all countries and in all cases, in Europe abortion remains a competence of national governments, and in the majority of places it is available and acceptable for women who believe they need it.

Having lost the battle against women's rights in Europe, to advance the anti-choice agenda those behind "One of Us" have had to look for a different way and part of the world to promote their ideology and impose it on others. And they are attempting to instrumentalise the EU - specifically its development policy - in order to do so. Put simply, "One of Us" is an attempt **to make the EU hold the world's poorest women hostage until developing countries ban abortion**.

INTENTIONS OF THE ORGANISERS OF "ONE OF US"

According to the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, the intention of "One of Us" is to amend a range of EU laws to ensure that "no EU funds shall be allocated to activities which destroy human embryos or which presuppose such destruction." The initiative therefore stands to affect two main fields of work:

- **Research that destroys human embryos** or uses human embryonic stem cells
- **Development aid that could be used to directly or indirectly finance abortion** (for issues such as Maternal Health or MDG 5)



"One of Us" aims to amend Regulation (EC) N. 1905/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006, establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation with the following (convoluted and grammatically incorrect) wording:

"The assistance of the Union, on the basis of this Regulation, shall not be used to fund abortion, directly or indirectly, through the funding of organizations that encourage or promote abortion. No reference is made in this Regulation to reproductive and sexual health, health care, rights, services, supplies, education and information at the International Conference on Population and on Development, its principles and Program of Action, the Cairo Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals, in particular MDG n. 5 about health and maternal mortality, can be interpreted as providing a legal basis for using EU funds to finance directly or indirectly abortion."ⁱⁱⁱ

In political terms if it achieves its goal this initiative could **limit the EU's ability to engage in international commitments related to maternal health** such as the 2010 UN Secretary General's Plan on Maternal and Child Health "Every Woman, Every Child" as well as the 2010 G8 Muskoka Commitments on Maternal and Child health funding, not to mention the international consensus on international development enshrined in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, which has one of its eight goals exclusively dedicated to maternal health.

On the ground, if successful this initiative would cut the approximately 120 million USDⁱⁱⁱ in EU development aid that is currently spent each year to protect maternal and reproductive health and **lead to the untold suffering of thousands of women** who are denied basic reproductive healthcare services. For the hospitals and clinics in the developing world that provide abortion safely (in countries where it is legal) also commonly provide women with the full range of other essential reproductive health services and supplies. These are services that the initiators of "One of Us" want to deny all women in the developing world, the lack of which currently leads to the **deaths of approximately 800 women every day**.^{iv}

It is also clear that by stopping EU development assistance to healthcare providers in the developing world who provide abortions, the authors of "One of Us" want to **impose their ideology upon health systems and policies in countries thousands of kilometres away** from them. It is their goal to force the developing world's hospitals to refuse abortions of any kind to all women, regardless of how desperate for care they are. And the strings that they want to attach to European development assistance would not only advance their own agenda, but also impose restrictions on abortion providers that are far stricter than those found in any European country.

LEGAL REASONING BEHIND "ONE OF US"

The "One of Us" initiators, who include several qualified attorneys, have misled their supporters through unsound legal reasoning and an **incorrect reading of the EU Treaties**. As the legal basis for the initiative, they cite the 2011 European Court of Justice case of "Brüstle V Greenpeace," where the Court declared that scientific findings emanating from procedures which involved the destruction of the human embryo could not be patented, as support for their absolutist position against abortion

under any circumstance. However, in making this judgment, the Attorney General in its final remarks explicitly mentioned that "the definition of the human embryo in the framework of the patent right is not comparable with the definition of the human embryo in other areas, explicitly with regard to the termination of pregnancy that needs to take into account the individual's situation of conflict."^v Selective and out-of-context citations of legal judgments are at best amateurish and at worse deliberately misleading.

The "One of Us" initiators also maintain that because the European Union lacks an explicit competence in the area of abortion, it cannot fund abortion-related services through its development aid. This too represents a simplistic and incorrect reading of the EU Treaties. EU funding on maternal health is based on the EU's competence in international development cooperation, which is outlined in **Article 208 of the Lisbon Treaty**, where it says: "the Member States shall comply with the commitments and take account of the objectives they have approved in the context of the United Nations and other competent international organizations," namely the Millennium Development Goals.^{vi}

Furthermore in 2005 in the "European Consensus on Development" the Presidents of the Commission, Parliament and the Council defined the framework of common principles within which the EU and its Member States will implement their development policies. In this document they state that "the **EU is seeking to meet the Millennium Development Goals**, to which all the UN member states subscribe."^{vii} And more recently the EU Council Conclusions on the Overarching Post 2015 Agenda stated that "We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action** and the **Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development** and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights."^{viii}

These clear references to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the MDGs bear witness to the **legal and political support that exists at the EU level for programmes, policies and funding for maternal health, including where maternal health services include abortion**. The absence of a specific EU competence on sexual and reproductive health and rights (which could include abortion) therefore is not an impediment to supporting maternal health in developing countries. Likewise if the

EU had a specific competence in sexual and reproductive health and rights (which could include abortion) this would allow the EU Institutions to legislate on these matters within the European Union, but this would not automatically have an impact on EU development aid priorities or funding.

Moreover by introducing an ECI related to abortion and having it deemed receivable by the European Commission, the Initiative unwittingly undermines its own argument that the EU does not have the competence to fund abortion-related activities in developing countries. As a Citizens' Initiative can only be deemed receivable if it falls within the competences of the European Union, the **acceptance of this ECI further clarifies that funding abortion in developing countries does indeed fall within the EU's competences.** While "One of Us" argues that the EU shouldn't fund abortion in developing countries, the very legal existence of "One of Us" is proof that the EU can fund abortion in developing countries.

"ONE OF US:" A RELIGIOUS OR CITIZENS' INITIATIVE?

One of the ambassadors for the "One of Us" campaign states that it is "not a catholic campaign, but an initiative of civilization, based on reason and the founding principle of democracy, the equality of every man."^{ix} However, closer scrutiny of the initiators and supporters of the "One of Us" campaign reveals them to be **nearly exclusively religious organisations** acting on the basis of personal religious ideology to influence public policies governing the general public (or in this case, women in developing countries) regardless of whether those affected by the policies share the same religious beliefs.

For example, "One of Us" is the brainchild of an Italian MEP, Carlo Casini. MEP Casini is also an Honorary Member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life^x and the founder and President of the Italian Movement for Life (Movimento per la Vita), essentially the Italian anti-abortion movement. MEP Casini is a high ranking and respected member of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, having been elected for the centrist UDC (Union of Christian and Centre Democrats) party in Italy. While centrist on many issues, on social and ethical issues, the UDC holds a **hardline and uncompromising view** which often place them at odds with EU values, as best exemplified by the European Parliament's rejection of UDC co-founder Rocco Buttiglione

for the position of EU Commissioner in 2004 for his views on social issues.

The "One of Us" signature collection campaign was **launched in the Vatican City** on 20 May 2012, where the Pontifical Council for the Laity states: "Within this wide context, the Italian Pro-Life Movement have organised an event in the Paul VI Hall in Vatican City. Groups involved include the Neocatechumenal Way, Communion and Liberation, the Focolare Movement, Catholic Action, the Forum of Family Associations, the Pope John XXIII Community and the Renewal in the Holy Spirit. The event is called "One of us" and will take place on 20 May in the morning from 9:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m."^{xi}

The multitude of anti-choice organisations at the national level across the EU that are engaged in signature collection also all have religious connections. **In many cases, the national "One of Us" partners are the local anti-abortion movements.** In several countries, local Bishops lent a helping hand.^{xii} José Ramos-Ascensão, the Legal advisor for Health, Research & Bioethics of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) stated "Pro-life NGOs and Catholic organizations will naturally play a key role for the success of "One of Us." **Clear moral support from the Bishops' Conferences** around Europe is also expected."^{xiii}

However, the movement has also spread beyond the Catholic world to reach **other religious communities** such as in Romania. Here the Holy Synod of the Romanian Patriarchate expressed its full support behind the initiative in July 2013. And it "recommends all of the dioceses under its jurisdiction, as well as all organizations functioning with the blessing of the Romanian Orthodox Church, to support and make known this initiative, in order for as many as possible signatures to be raised."^{xiv}

In politics, while individual politicians from several political backgrounds have expressed their support for "One of Us," the **only European level political family** to do so is the youth network of the small and minoritarian political party called **European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)**.^{xv} ECPM is composed of small political parties with a mainly Traditionalist Protestant leaning, as opposed to mainstream Protestant creeds. Member political parties affiliated with ECPM include such actors as the Swiss party the Federal Democratic Union EDU-UDF, which supported the referendum to ban minarets in 2009, and a Dutch political party, the SGP (Staatskundige Gereformeerde Partij), which does not believe women should vote.^{xvi}

FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE

Far from being the result of civil society in the European Union working on behalf of EU citizens (as the ECI was intended to be), "One of Us" has depended on **two high level and well-resourced non-EU sources** of influence to reach their goals: the foreign government of the city-state of the Holy See and the US Christian Right.

The Holy See's Influence

The Holy See, a foreign government which maintains diplomatic relations with the EU, was directly involved at several levels in "One of Us." To begin with at the highest level, the Heads of State of the Holy See, both **Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, have spoken in favour of "One of Us"** and urged their faithful to support and sign the initiative.^{xviii}

At an intermediate level, Catholic Bishops in various European countries did likewise and **churches** were often the setting for **signature collections**. The secretariat of "One of Us" is based at 205 Chaussée de Wavre in Brussels, just behind the European Parliament. This is in the Catholic Church of the Fathers of the Holy Sacrament (Eglise des Pères du Saint-Sacrement).



Eglise des Pères du Saint-Sacrement
205 Chaussée de Wavre, 1050 Brussels

US Christian Extremism coming to Europe:

The legal focal point for "One of Us" is Grégor Puppink, Director General of the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ).^{xix} ECLJ was founded by US extremist Christian televangelist, the Reverend Pat Robertson in 1998 in Strasbourg, France as a European off-shoot of the American Centre for Law and Justice (ACLJ). Robert-

son is noteworthy for his **extremist stance on women's rights**. In a 1992 fundraising letter he stated: "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."^{xx} Among other founders and board members of ECLJ are the founders of the ACLJ, Jay Sekulow and Roger Kiska of American Christian-right organisation "Alliance Defending Freedom."

Recently, Grégor Puppink has been part of the **leadership in the French anti-gay marriage demonstrations** "La Manif Pour Tous" (LMPT), displaying a particular affinity with the more extremist components of the LMPT who styled themselves as "Le Printemps Français" (the French Spring). The African arm of the ACLJ, the East Africa Centre for Law and Justice (EACLJ), has supported anti-abortion and homophobic initiatives in several African countries in recent years, which the European Union has formally opposed.^{xxi}

CONCLUSIONS

The "One of Us" initiative has been motivated by a realization amongst antichoice forces in Brussels that they have **lost the battle against science, women's health and their right** to choose about abortion in Europe. As a consequence its organisers have sought a more insidious route to advance their anti-choice cause, by identifying a **new battleground in the lives of the world's poorest, most vulnerable and most voiceless women**. The women whose wellbeing is the target of the most off-track Millennium Development Goal on Maternal Health, who are most likely to die at childbirth or suffer the horrendous and debilitating consequences of it. They are precisely those who one would expect to be the first priority of charitable European initiatives.

The authors of "One of Us" have obtained the signatures of **1 million Europeans who appear to support their cause**. But the communications efforts on "One of Us" have been misleading to their own supporters. In portaying "One of Us" as an initiative to ban human cloning, forced or coercive abortions and gendercide

"I greet the Movement for Life and wish every success to the initiative called "One of Us"."
Pope Benedict XVI, 3 February 2013^{xvii}

among others, "One of Us" supporters were unaware of the initiative's real context and intention:

- **Approximately 800 women die every day at childbirth**, and the vast majority of their deaths could have been prevented with access to maternal and sexual and reproductive health care services.
- **"One of Us" is a direct attempt to stop the EU funding** projects aiming to solve this problem.
- **"One of Us" attempts to undermine the Millennium Declaration**, the global agreement that has done by far the most to end global poverty. And its focus is the part where there is still the most to do.
- "One of Us" is trying to compel developing countries to **change the complex way their health systems are structured and run.**

"One of Us" is a demonstration of the rising **potential that a small clique of fundamentalist individuals and organizations can have to gain substantive support for their issues in Europe.** They have done this by leveraging the organizing force of religious hierarchies, thus highjacking well-intentioned religious sentiment, as well as turning to extremist, foreign-backed organisations for assistance. The forces supporting this agenda are becoming increasingly professionalized and vocal, and the EU's decision-makers must be vigilant.

FURTHER READING

To find out more about this issue, please consult:

- The European Citizens' Initiative Official Register: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing>
- "One of Us" campaign overall website: <http://www.oneofus.eu>

National "One of Us" websites:

- "Un de nous" campaign, France: <http://www.undenous.fr/>
- "Einer von Uns" campaign, Germany: <http://www.1-von-uns.de/>
- "Uno di Noi" campaign, Italy: http://www.mpv.org/uno_di_noi/
- "De menselijke waardigheid" campaign, Netherlands: <http://www.demenselijkewaardigheid.nl/>
- "Uno de nosotros" campaign, Spain: <http://www.unodenosotros.eu>

SOURCES

- ⁱ The European Citizens' Initiative Official Register <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing>
Sourced on 12/09/2013
- ⁱⁱ LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL "ONE OF US" § 5 <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000005>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Euromapping 2012 <http://www.epfweb.org/epf-publications/9/Euromapping/> Sourced on 12/09/2013
- ^{iv} World Health Organisation Maternal Mortality Factsheet <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/>
Sourced on 12/09/2013
- ^v FIP 6/2012 – Molnár-Gábor – Brüstle gegen Greenpeace, Silja Vöneky <http://www.jura.uni-freiburg.de/institute/ioeffr2/online-papers/fip6.2012.bruestle.gg.greenpeace.pdf>
- ^{vi} Article 208 of Lisbon Treaty : <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union-and-comments/part-5-external-action-by-the-union/title-3-cooperation-with-third-countries-and-humanitarian-aid/chapter-1-development-cooperation/496-article-208.html> Sourced on 12/09/2013
- ^{vii} The European Consensus on Development <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/european-consensus/> sourced on 12/09/2013
- ^{viii} EU Council Conclusions on the Overarching Post 2015 Agenda http://www.europa.eu/articles/en/article_13692_en.htm sourced on 12/09/2013
- ^{ix} « One of Us » Ambassador : Massimo Gandolfini, Direttore Dipartimento di Neuroscienze e Primario U.O. di Neurochirurgia Fondazione Poliambulanza di Brescia: <http://www.oneofus.eu/> sourced on 30/08/2013
- ^x Pontifical Academy for Life website: http://www.kolegiumrim.kbs.sk/uploads/academy/about_us_members.php sourced on 04/09/2013
- ^{xi} Pontifical Council for the Laity: <http://www.laici.va/content/laici/en/media/notizie/movimenti-per-la-vita.html> sourced on 04/09/2013
- ^{xii} "One of Us" website: <http://www.oneofus.eu/austrian-bishops-express-support-for-one-of-us-campaign/> sourced 04/09/2013
- ^{xiii} COMECE website: <http://www.comece.eu/europeinfos/en/archive/issue150/article/4941.html> sourced 05/09/2013
- ^{xiv} "One of Us" website: <http://www.oneofus.eu/the-romanian-patriarchate-supports-the-one-of-us-european-citizens-initiative/> sourced 04/09/2013

^{xv}European Christian Political Youth Network website:
<http://www.ecpyn.org/k/n9308/news/view/564761/481500/ecpyn-endorses-one-of-us-campaign-and-calls-for-signatures.html> sourced 04/09/2013

^{xvi} "Party penalised for woman snub: A Dutch court has ruled that the state must stop funding a fundamentalist Calvinist party, because it refuses to allow women to be full members." BBC News, Wednesday, 7 September 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4223376.stm>

^{xvii} "One of Us" website:
<http://www.oneofus.eu/pope-benedict-xvi-supports-the-one-of-us-campaign-in-favour-of-human-life/> sourced 04/09/2013

^{xviii} "One of Us" website:
<http://www.oneofus.eu/immediately-following-the-recitation-of-the-angelus-on-sunday-pope-benedict-xvi-expressed-his-support-for-the-movement-for-life-mpv/> sourced 04/09/2013

^{xix}European Citizens' Initiative Official Register:
<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2012/000005> sourced 04/09/2013

^{xx}Highbeam Research website:
<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-1021641.html> sourced 05/09/2013

^{xxi} "Colonizing African Values: How the US Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa", Political Research Advocates, Kapya Kaoma, 2012:
<http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/Colonizing-African-Values.pdf>