

PRESS RELEASE

## EU Court opposes anti-choice activists in key judgement

**Brussels – 25/04/2018** - The European Humanist Federation welcomes the ruling of the EU's top court that rejected anti-choice activists' request to ban all EU funds for what they call "activities that destroy human embryos", mainly in research and maternal health.

In 2014, the EHF raised its voice, together with other human rights organisations, to oppose this major anti-choice offensive.

By confirming the Commission's rejection of their demands, the EU's Court of Justice reinforced the protection of key fundamental rights that humanists strongly cherish: freedom of research, girls and women's rights and especially their right to life, to human dignity and to sexual and reproductive health.

**"This ruling is a victory for democrats. It is a strong plea for fundamental rights and progress."** – said Giulio Ercolessi, EHF President.

**"The Court's decision is only one step against anti-choice strategies to oppose women's rights and freedom of research in Europe. Together with its progressive partners, including religious ones, the EHF will continue its monitoring, advocacy and mobilisation work so as to ensure that Europe remains a secular place committed to progress."**

For more information, [read the Press release](#) of the European Court of Justice

### Background

In 2014, anti-choice campaigners gathered in a new campaign called "One of Us", a religious-driven European Citizen Initiative\* that called for the "protection of the human embryo" in Europe. Supported by Pope Francis and coordinated by various religious organisations, the petition managed to reach 1.8 million signatories mostly in predominantly Catholic countries (Italy and Poland). It officially requested the European Commission to ban the use of EU funds for research, foreign aid programmes and public health activities that are linked to the destruction of human embryos, including abortion.

Back in the time, the Commission refused to take any action, on the grounds that EU money is intended to improve maternal health in developing countries and supports human embryonic stem cell research which may result in treatments for currently-incurable or life-threatening diseases.



Unhappy with the Commission's decision, the anti-choice activists took the Commission to court, arguing that it was a violation of democracy. On 23 April 2018, the Court rejected their request and supported the Commission's reasoning.

### **Why is this ruling important?**

The Court firstly and rightly reminded anti-choice campaigners that petitioning the Commission with a specific request does not mean that the Commission must act on this request by submitting a legal act.

Contrary to what "One of Us" argued, there was no violation of EU democratic rules. Because they reached the required number of signatures - 1 million - the organisers were given the chance to officially present their request to the Commission in a public hearing at the European Parliament in 2014.

The Court then ruled that the Commission had assessed well the situation and had sufficiently explained its decision. Regarding research, the Commission already reached a satisfactory compromise in supporting research while not funding projects that would "destroy human embryos". One of the request of the campaigners was therefore already met. The Commission also argued that the support provided by the EU for the health sector in developing countries contributed to decrease the number of abortions via access to safe and quality family planning services. It went further saying that a ban on abortion funding in these countries would lead to an increase of maternal mortality, which is contrary to the EU's international commitments.

\* A European Citizens' Initiative is a mechanism whereby if EU citizens from at least 7 member states collect 1 million signatures concerning a specific request, they can formally invite EU Institutions to propose legal measures in a given area of EU competence.

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