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## Abstract

This is the EuroPetition evaluation report of the service that summarises the results of the process outlined in the project Description of Work by working to the evaluation plan described in the (D2.1.1) and tested by the Pilot Trials. EuroPetition is a Local Authority provided service providing distributed citizen e-petitions engagement at local level and interaction with the European Parliament and Citizens Initiative online procedures using a proven open-source e-petitions service and experience, and building on innovative and state-of-the-art Web 2.0 applications.

The technology has proven successful and the project has met its objectives. A number of findings and recommendations are made which will contribute to ensuring the success of EuroPetition as a viable EU-wide service.

## Document History

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<b>0.8</b>	Fleshed out report following further feedback	27/01/11	Cruickshank
<b>1.0</b>	Final version	28/01/11	Cruickshank

## Executive Summary

EuroPetition is a 2 year eParticipation Programme Project that pilot trialled the coordination and submission of local e-petitions and cross-border pan-European Europetitions to the European Parliament during 2010 from 5 regions working with clusters of 19 Local Authorities in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK, potentially involving over 8 million citizens across the EU. The project has now drawn to a close and the network will continue on a self-funded basis after the project ends in December 2010.

EuroPetition is a service mediated by Local Authorities providing citizen engagement locally and distributed interaction with the European Parliament and Citizens Initiative online procedures using a proven open-source UK e-petitions service and experience, and building on the innovative and state-of-the-art Web 2.0 applications. Petitioners can use the service to start petitions and then get help from the network in generating support and signatories in the other Member States. EuroPetition is a service mediated by Local Authorities providing citizen engagement locally and distributed participation in the European Democratic procedures.

This is the evaluation report of the service that summarises the results of the process outlined in the project Description of Work by working to the evaluation plan described in the (D2.1.1) and tested by the Pilot Trials during 2010. This was achieved by working with clusters of Local Authorities and citizens in each of the 5 pilot territories to build both local and trans-national Europetitions for submission to the European Parliament. The project created a simple and scalable process which built local support for petitions and then migrated these to other territories to achieve cross-border and ultimately pan-European support.

The positive engagement with defining data standards for e-petitions and the process of the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) presents an opportunity for the EuroPetition service, as it could be adapted to support the ECI process with relatively minor modifications.

The project has demonstrated that it is possible to promote the concept of e-petitions to widen and further understand citizen participation in contexts such as Spain where the petitioning concept is new. It has also demonstrated the proof of concept of a pan-European multilingual e-petitioning eParticipation service which can help citizens forge connections with the European Parliament, reducing the democratic deficit across the EU.

In EuroPetition, the European Parliament Petitions Committee has the opportunity if they wish to take it to reduce their workload by preventing the submission of invalid petitions and taking advantage of local government to support the petitioning process.

Overall, it can be concluded that the EuroPetition project has met its objectives.

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## 1 Introduction

EuroPetition is a network of experts supporting citizens who want to petition the European Parliament from any of 5 represented Member States; Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Petitioners can use the service to start petitions and then get help from the network in generating support and signatories in the other Member States.

The EuroPetition service also ensures that petitions have been checked by experts to make sure that the petition has a reasonable chance of being within scope for consideration up by the European Parliament.

The EuroPetition pilot trials have highlighted the complexities of matching the subject matter of certain petitions to the correct European Institution. While the aim is to present Europetitions to the European Parliament wherever possible, the EuroPetition project is interested in working along with other European institutions willing to take cross border petitions. The EuroPetition service advises petitioners wherever possible as to the correct institution for their petition, including instances where a national parliament is more appropriate.

One of the most traditional ways for the general public to influence decision-making is by organising a petition. E-petition systems have already been introduced in some Member States both at National and increasingly local levels<sup>1</sup> in order to make it easier to gather signatures from a wider audience. The Lisbon Treaty introduces the idea of the European Citizens' Initiative<sup>2</sup>, whereby citizens will have the opportunity to call on the Commission to bring forward new policy proposals if they have the support of 1 million people from a significant number of EU Member States. Petitioning is a simple yet effective tool that provides an excellent first step for citizens who want to engage with their Local Council and European Parliament.

The EuroPetition network was created as an eParticipation Preparatory Action project which is looking at trailing the coordination and submission of local e-petitions and cross-border pan-European Europetitions to the European Parliament during 2010 from 5 regions working with clusters of 19 Local Authorities in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK, and potentially involving over 8 million citizens across the EU. The project is now drawing to a close and the network will continue on a self-funding basis after the project ended in December 2010.

EuroPetition is a Local Authority provided service that enables distributed citizen engagement and interaction with the European Parliament online petitioning procedures using a proven open-source UK e-petition service and experience, and building on innovative and state-of-the-art Web 2.0 applications.

The EuroPetition project's Pilot Trials aimed to increase citizens' participation by 25%, generate Europetitions and provide a model and practical experience for future European Citizens Initiative procedures to the Commission. The project validated a simple and scalable process to build local support for petitions and then migrate these to other territories to achieve cross-border and ultimately pan-European support, by:

1. Using a specific open source tool – Public-i's e-petitions system – to enable e-petitioning to build interest and action around local and European decision making processes
2. Using Web 2.0 tools to support the core petitioning process to build necessary discussion within regions and collaboration between regions involved in the project around the

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/886045.pdf> - UK Local Government White Paper which proposes to set a new duty on local councils to respond to all petitions, including electronic petitions,

<sup>2</sup> Title II, Article 8b of the Treaty of Lisbon, "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."

common goals of trans-national European Parliament Europetitions and achieving the threshold of 1 million signatures for the European Commission.

3. Advancing eParticipation: exploring the future course of eParticipation by applying novel tools and applications to the local, national and EU decision-making processes, including their scalability with a view to mainstreaming them within institutional environments, with an emphasis on governance, transparency and engagement of civil society in legislative and decision-making processes at all levels.

As the EuroPetition service is being used in a number of cross-border decision-making cases it is being relevant in promoting eParticipation not only in the context of the Lisbon Treaty but also in many legislative and decision-making processes both nationally and at European level.

The EuroPetition Partners are set out in the following table:

**Table 1 EuroPetition project partners**

No	Partner	MAC	Role	Country
1	The National Microelectronics Applications Centre Ltd	MAC	Project Manager, Coordinator, User, Commission and EP PETI Committee requirements and service viability plan.	IE
2	Public-i Group Ltd	PI	Technology Platform service provider, service developer and operation of pilot trials	UK
3	Edinburgh Napier University	NAP	Pilot Trials Evaluation	UK
4	Bristol City Council	BCC	e-petitions experience/ UK Cluster Pilot Trials	UK
5	Dijksman.com	DC	NL Cluster Pilot Trials	NL
6	Innovation Institute for Citizens' Wellbeing	I2BC	ES Cluster Pilot Trials	ES
7	NESTOR s.c.a.r.l. (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata)	NES	IT Cluster Pilot Trials	IT
8	Malmö stad	MS	e-petitions experience/SE Pilot Trials	SE

EuroPetition is a trans-European Local Authority service providing local and distributed citizen engagement and interaction with the European Parliament's Petitions Committee and the Commission's Citizens Initiative online procedures using the proven open-source UK e-petitions service and experience, and building on the innovative and state-of-the-art Web 2.0 applications from the LEGESE<sup>3</sup>, Citizenscape<sup>4</sup> and eParticipate<sup>5</sup> eParticipation projects. The project pilots trialed the coordination and submission of local petitions, as well as cross-border and pan-European Europetitions from 5 regions in ES, IT, NL, SE and the UK with 17 Local Authorities and involving over 8 million citizens across the EU, to strengthen and broaden citizens' participation in democratic decision-making and contribute to better legislation through applying the latest available innovative ICT tools and concepts in concrete cases, by:

1. Using a specific open source tool – Public-i's e-petitions system – to enable e-petitioning to build interest and action around local and European decision making processes
2. Using Web 2.0 tools to support the core petitioning process to build necessary discussion within regions and collaboration between regions involved in the project around the common goals of trans-national European Parliament Petitions and exploring how the threshold of 1 million signatures for the European Citizens Initiatives might be achieved.
3. Advancing eParticipation: exploring the future course of eParticipation by applying novel tools and applications to the local, national and EU decision-making processes, including

<sup>3</sup> See [www.legese.org](http://www.legese.org)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.citizenscape.org](http://www.citizenscape.org)

<sup>5</sup> See [www.eparticipate.eu](http://www.eparticipate.eu)

their scalability with a view to mainstreaming them within institutional environments, with an emphasis on governance, transparency and engagement of civil society in legislative and decision-making processes at all levels.

This was achieved by working with clusters of Local Authorities and citizens in each of the 5 pilot territories in ES,IT,NL,SE,UK, in order to build both local and trans-national petitions for submission to the European Parliament. The project created a simple and scalable process which builds local support for petitions and then migrates these to other territories to achieve cross-border and ultimately pan-European support.

This is the evaluation report summarises the results of the process set out in the Evaluation Plan (D2.1.1) issued in June 2009, and tested by the Pilot Trials in WP2.1 during 2010.

A number of **Findings** are listed, often supported by **Recommendations** where the finding is particularly significant and/or there is a clear action that could be taken. The term 'EuroPetition' is generally used to mean a petition targeted at the European Parliament.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 3 Summarises the research approach developed in the evaluation plan (D2.1.1)
- Section 4 Reviews the evaluation process for measuring the objectives defined in the Description of Work
- Section 5 Gives an overview of the interim evaluation report delivered to the project to inform the development, implementation and operational processes
- Section 6 Reviews the evaluation findings
- Section 7 Describes how the project team engaged with the drafting of the regulation defining the operation of the ECI, particularly the aspects relating to ICT implementation.
- Section 8 Concludes the report.



## 2 Project Evaluation

### 2.1 Project and Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation plan was designed to support the efficient and timely realisation of the evaluation objectives identified for WP2.1 in the project's description of work, namely:

- To work with potential system users (local authority and citizens) **to establish the most appropriate factors to investigate** in order to evaluate the system against the baseline, project objectives and targets
- **Evaluation of the operational EuroPetition service Pilot Trials** in 5 varied clusters of Legislative Authority contexts, countries and languages against the project objectives and targets.
- **To assess the experience and learn the lessons** of the EuroPetition system, actors and procedures (what does and does not work, and why) during the pilot trials at local, crossborder and European level, in preparation for subsequent market roll-out of the service to other European countries.
- **To evaluate the legislative participation impact** of EuroPetition, including its political impact and affect on policy-making processes, its impact on cross-border cooperation between citizens, and its relationship to wider aspects of e-governance.
- **To test the assumptions of the Initial Viability Plan** (D2.3.1) as a key input to the EuroPetition Sustainability Plan (D2.3.2) in WP2.3.
- **To establish further contextual issues** that will need to be addressed in implementing EuroPetition in different legislative, constitutional, political and linguistic environments beyond the pilot trial instances.

This was undertaken in parallel with the on-going operation and support of the EuroPetition service in the 5 Regional Clusters to enable the Pilot Trials to take place.

The Description of Work established a number of project objectives and related targets that provide a remit for the project partners. The evaluation plan set these out in a three-fold classification around the headings of 'acceptability and take-up', 'democratic impact', and 'viability' as shown in the table below.

**Table 2 Project objectives**

Objective	
1.	Demonstration of a local and European-wide EuroPetition service.  <i>(Acceptability and Take-up)</i>
	(a) Adoption and operation of at least <b>1 regional multimedia discussion</b> forum in each in each of 5 Pilot Trial Regions across the EU in ES,IT,NL,SE and UK, (b) Adoption and operation of a localised EuroPetition service in each of 5 Pilot Trial Regions across the EU in ES,IT,NL,SE and UK, and resulting in at least <b>5 local petitions</b> for consideration within each of the regions. (c) Provision of <b>1 cross-border EuroPetition</b> from each of the 5 Regions for submission to the European Parliament's <b>PETI</b> Petitions Committee (5 in total). (d) One pan-European <b>Citizens' Initiative EuroPetition</b> where citizens will call on the Commission to bring forward new policy proposals with the support of 1 million people from the Consortium's 5 EU Member States (ES,IT,NL,SE,UK).

Objective		
2.	Increased participation of citizens in EU issues and/or cross-border issues among EU countries. <i>(Democratic impact)</i>	<b>25% increase in citizen participation</b> in democratic processes through participation in e-petitions to their regional, cross-border and EU decision makers, in 5 very different legislative regions across the EU during the project.
3.	Sustainable operation of the EuroPetition Service <i>(Viability)</i>	(a) <b>Viability Plan</b> for subsequent sustainable operation of the service across Europe.

## **3 Research Approach**

### **3.1 Research Principles**

The evaluation approach was to identify and exploit data that is both tangible, accessible and easily observed, and also to set in place processes and measures to identify and exploit less easily accessible but potentially valuable data, to inform an understanding of the project process and outcomes. The aim throughout is to substantiate findings through verification and triangulation, to produce a robust assessment of the extent to which research objectives are met.

Additionally, a further concern of the researchers was to move beyond superficial accounts of user engagement with e-participation, and produce an assessment of usage patterns informed by a theoretical understanding of issues affecting such engagement. Here, the concept of self-efficacy was drawn upon to measure users' perception of their ability to completing a task relating to computer-based systems or democratic engagement.

### **3.2 Data Collection Tools**

The evaluation utilised data relating to a variety of actors, via a number of different data collection tools.

#### **3.2.1 Baseline Data**

Baseline data is derived from a questionnaire deployed across the pilot sites. The questionnaire collected data relating to demographics, current online activity (private activities and civic/social activities), computer self efficacy (levels of confidence in dealing with computer-based applications), current democratic activity and future expectations.

The baseline data provides the context for the project and allows an assessment to be made of the impacts arising from the system. This is done by comparing aggregate data from the baseline with aggregate data collected in subsequent surveys

#### **3.2.2 Installation Questionnaires**

This measures the rate at which the application is installed at each cluster, and any technical issues, problems or requirements arising.

#### **3.2.3 User Questionnaires**

Online questionnaires linked via notification emails sent to petitioners and signatories, generated by the system during key interaction points. Questionnaires collected data at the following points:

- From Petitioners on submission of the petition
- From Signatories on signing a petition
- From Petitioners on the completion (closure) of a petition

#### **3.2.4 System-Generated Data**

This includes application data and web logs. Logs and database records generated directly by the EuroPetition application used to measure the operation of the system.

Some of the important statistics that can be extracted for each site include:

- Number of users accessing different areas of the site
- Numbers submitting and signing petitions

- The pattern of support for individual petitions
- Usage patterns over time
- For registered users, the potential to assess activity with regard to demographic data provided previously

An important issue in analysing the system-generated data is tracking the time element: gaps and delays could potentially impact upon user perceptions of the process and of the EuroPetition service.

### 3.2.5 Qualitative Data Collection

- 1. Workshops and Focus Groups** used at different points in the project, at the early stage to establish typical usage and test scenarios and to investigate expectations, at mid-stage to pilot and refine questionnaires, and at later stages to investigate user experiences and perceptions. Workshops and focus groups were also used as a tool to obtain feedback from stakeholders.
- 2. Citizen/User Panels, Questionnaires and Semi-Structured Interviews** Combining questionnaires with observation enables broad and unconstrained evaluation of the platform. Semi-structured interviews are also appropriate for stakeholders who cannot be brought together for workshops and focus groups because of geographical or time considerations – elected representatives, for instance.

### 3.3 Linking Tools, Actors and Purpose

Table 3 illustrates how the data collection tools relate to specific actors to collect data in the optimal way in order to inform the research objectives.

**Table 3 Tools, Actors, Purpose**

Data Collection Tool	Collects data from	When	Purpose
1. Baseline data questionnaire	Potential system users	Set-up	Establish baseline levels of interaction, demographics, expectations and experience
2. Application installation questionnaire	Technical staff at pilot sites	Set-up	Measure installation across clusters and identifies problems and issues requiring intervention and support
3. System usage data	Visitors to the websites; viewers, petitioners and signatories	System Live	To show aggregate pattern of use of the sites
4. Market survey and pricing questionnaire (Ideally including mass survey of LAs in target markets)	Potential adopters of the EuroPetition platform	System Live	Establish market demand and test cost and platform preferences
5. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups	Participating officers and members	Final Data collection phase	To establish: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expectations/Experiences</li> <li>SWOT</li> <li>Financial assumptions and cost benefit analysis</li> <li>Customer service satisfaction</li> </ol>
6. Online Questionnaires for system users	Petitioners: on submission and finalisation of petition Signatories: after signing petition	System Live	To explore experience, perceptions, expectations and motivations for submitting/signing a petition
7. Focus groups and workshops	Citizens Signatories Petitioners	Final Data collection phase	To explore perceptions of the system process and outcomes

### 3.4 Relationship between Data and Objectives

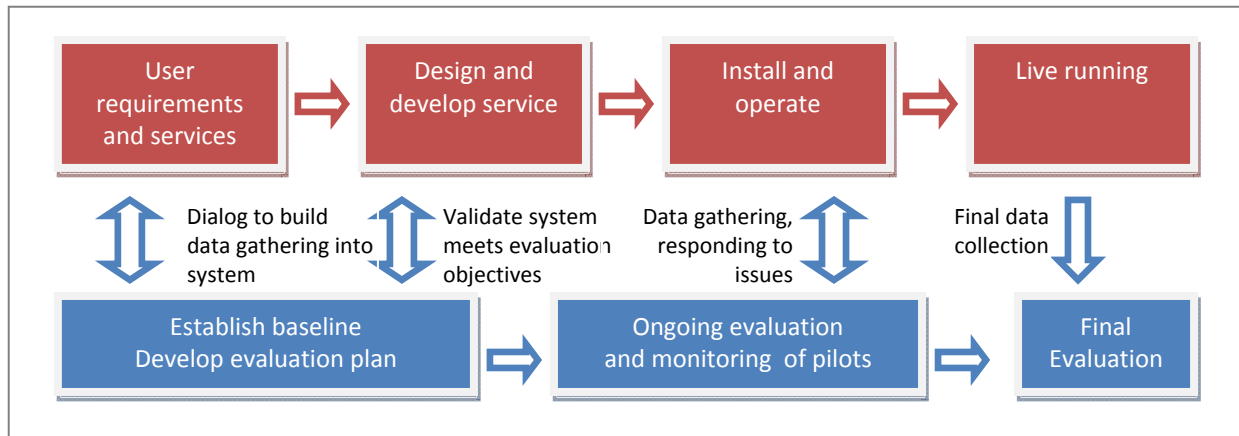
**Table 4 Relationship between Objectives and Methods**

Objective	Method
1. To work with potential system users (local authority and citizens) to <b>establish the most appropriate factors to investigate</b> in order to evaluate the system against the baseline, project objectives and targets	<p>Discussion with project partners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish user and technical acceptance criteria to demonstrate that the application is locally operational</li> <li>- Establish baseline indicators, and methods for measurement of impact, locally, regionally and at EU level</li> <li>- Establish organisational acceptance criteria (including installation and ongoing costs, fit with strategies etc)</li> </ul> <p>Collection of Baseline Data via questionnaire</p>
2. <b>Evaluation of the operational EuroPetition service Pilot Trials</b> in 5 varied clusters of Legislative Authority contexts, countries and languages against the project objectives and targets.	<p>Measure extent to which user and technical acceptance criteria have been met via Application Installation Questionnaire</p> <p>Monitoring and analysis of system usage date</p> <p>Analysis of system user online questionnaire</p> <p>Workshops and focus groups with citizens, users and non-users</p>
3. <b>To assess the experience and learn the lessons</b> of the EuroPetition system, actors and procedures (what does and does not work, and why) during the pilot trials at local, crossborder and European level, in preparation for subsequent market roll-out of the service to other European countries.	<p>Analysis of system usage data</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participating offices and members</p> <p>Analysis of system user online questionnaires</p> <p>Markey survey and pricing questionnaire</p>
4. To <b>evaluate the legislative participation impact</b> of EuroPetition, including its political impact and effect on policy-making processes, its impact on cross-border cooperation between citizens, and its relationship to wider aspects of e-governance.	<p>Analysis of system usage data</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participating offices and members</p>
5. To <b>test the assumptions of the Initial Viability Plan</b> (D2.3.1) as a key input to the EuroPetition Sustainability Plan (D2.3.2) in WP2.3.	<p>Assessment of viability plan with regards to pattern of experience as evident from all data collection</p>
6. To <b>establish further contextual issues that will need to be addressed</b> in implementing EuroPetition in different legislative, constitutional, political and linguistic environments beyond the pilot trial instances.	<p>Desktop research</p> <p>Project process assessment</p>

## 4 Execution of the Research Plan

### 4.1 Overview

The diagram below illustrates the planned relationship between system development and evaluation activities; it was designed to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances.



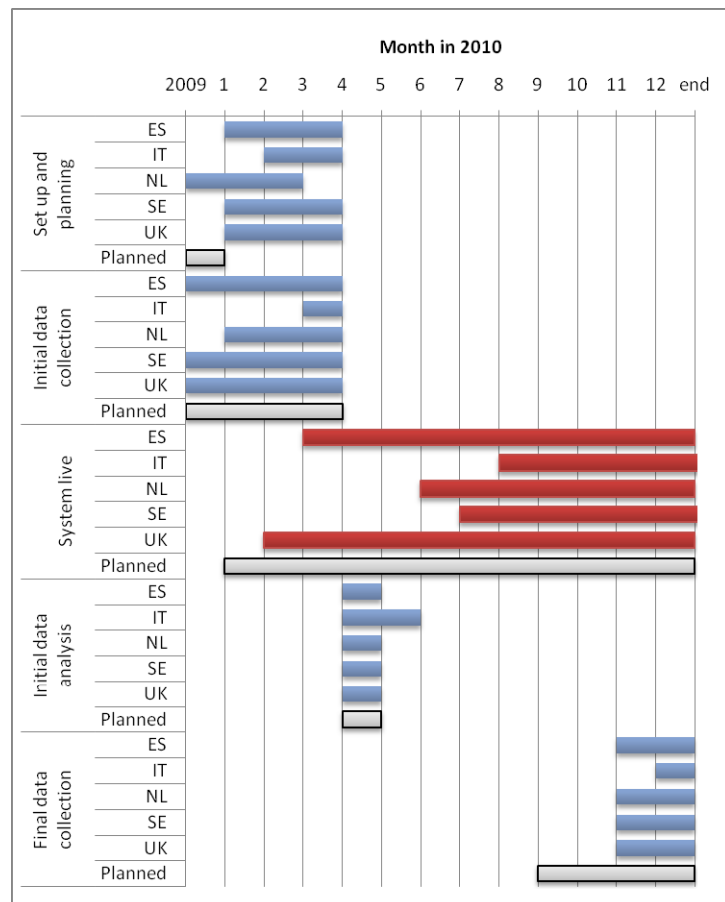
**Figure 1 Relationship between system development and evaluation activities**

The evaluation plan (D2.1.1) called for evaluation work to take place over five phases.

- Phase one: set up – defining the data to be collected and the instruments to use. This was carried out by a combination of discussion, offline and online, with project stakeholders.
- Phase two: Data collection – information from online questionnaires to establish a picture of the potential users of the system in the 5 regions.
- Phase three: Analysis of initial data and feedback on initial variability plan
- Phase four: Final data collection
- Phase five: Final analysis

The chart to the right summarises progress at each cluster in comparison with the original plans.

One significant impact on the evaluation plan was the delay in the system going live in most clusters. In many cases, although technical issues played a role, the groundwork needed to get politicians and municipal organisations to commit was underestimated – this is touched on later in the report



**Figure 2 Timeline of project activity**

Consequently, the initial analysis phase was restricted to collection and analysis of data from baseline and application installation questionnaires.

‘System live’ is the date of the first live petition being recorded; within the Spanish and English cluster, some of the cities did not launch their first petition until later in 2010. Activity data was automatically collected by the system when it went live: here ‘final data collection’ refers to the process of obtaining the data for analysis, organising and running focus groups and stakeholder interviews and carrying out the subsequent evaluation work.

The baseline questionnaire was designed to gather contact details for later engagement in the project. However the clusters had difficulty in getting non-signatories involved in the focus groups and workshops at the final data collection phase, leading to a restriction in scope in the data available to the evaluation.

The remainder of this section follows the evaluation objectives listed in Table 4 above and summarises how they were met. The evaluation results follow in section 6.

## 4.2 Approach and factors to investigate

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was chosen as the underpinning motivation behind the evaluation process, as it broadens the analysis beyond perceived outcomes and gives prominence to the concept of *self-efficacy* – defined as beliefs about one’s ability to perform a specific behaviour. Expectations of positive outcomes of behaviour are meaningless if we doubt our capacity to successfully execute the behaviour at all; conversely, previous bad experiences can create a self-reinforcing cycle of expectations of negative outcomes. It follows that coaching and encouragement can be as important to acceptance as the application interface or a marketing campaign.

Previous studies of e-petitioning focussed on the technical and institutional perspectives and the perspectives offered by a social-cognitive approach give us a motivation to start adding social aspects to the evaluation: firstly, by allowing us to judge the efficacy-related factors behind the decision to use the e-petitioning system to participate in a democratic process. Secondly, to identify the impact on fairness of the system as perceived by petitioners of (a) any delays between stages in the process and (b) the role of council officers, particularly at the crucial initial stage of initiating the petition.

The evaluation plan (D2.1.1) created a research model of the petition process identified a number of research questions which are addressed in this report.

### **Finding: Issues gathering research data from third party systems**

The project encountered unexpected issues with the interpretation of Data Protection regulations from the *petities.nl* collected signatures but then refused to allow contact with participants for follow-up work despite earlier understandings. This led to limitations in the data that could be gathered from the Netherlands.

## 4.3 Operation of the Pilot Trials

During the piloting process the evaluators remained engaged with the pilots and towards the end of the project, Public-i supplied system data from the operation of the EuroPetition system; this was used as the basis for the analyses of activity contained in Section 6.

## 4.4 Assessing the experience, learning lessons

It became clear that the project would benefit from a formative approach to evaluation and an Interim Evaluation Report (summarised in Section 5 below) was delivered to the project team to

act as a first pass for learning lessons in time to be used to improve project outcomes. The conclusions to this report complete the process.

#### **4.5 Legislative participation impact**

The citizen focus groups and stakeholders were asked to identify examples of (potential) impacts of petitions on the municipality or legislatures' procedures.

#### **4.6 Review of initial viability plan**

D2.1.1 included planning for a review of the assumptions in the Initial Viability Plan (D2.3.1). These were addressed by the evaluation process under acceptability and uptake.

#### **4.7 Further contextual issues**

As part of the evaluation process, developments in relevant areas were monitored through desk research including reviews of the annual reports issued by the Petitions Committee of the European Parliaments<sup>6</sup>, and attendance and presentation of papers at practitioner and academic conferences. Additional work was carried out as appropriate, and the results are described in this report.

The biggest impact on the evaluation process came through the EuroPetition project's active engagement with the drafting of the ECI Regulation, and the general debate around the ECI. This is described in Section 7 below.

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<sup>6</sup> The reports can be downloaded from the Parliament's website via [www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/reportsCom.do?language=EN&body=PETI](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/reportsCom.do?language=EN&body=PETI)



## **5 Interim / formative Evaluation report**

As the project progressed, it was recognised that an interim report would help the project partners to plan their operation of the live system. An Interim Evaluation Report was therefore delivered to the project team at the Vicenza Project Meeting. The purpose of this formative report was to point out areas for improvement out in time for meaningful actions to be taken in response, highlighting areas of success but also points for improvement.

Reference was made to the Commission Interim Review carried out in Brussels, in February 2010 as it gave a useful third party viewpoint on project progress, and perceived challenges.

In addition, the report covered:

- A review carried out for MOMENTUM in early 2010 which confirmed the project's alignment with the EU's i2020 agenda. It identified potential issues with accessibility and clarity on processes which were addressed by the project.
- Acceptance questionnaire feedback which highlighted some areas where the installation, configuration and staff training processes could be improved.
- A narrative analysis from the baseline survey data, for an understanding of the potential user base of the EuroPetition service. It showed the potential for mobile internet, and variations in reported self-efficacy between individuals and countries. Responses to the question on petitioning the European Parliament showed low awareness on what is possible, implying the need to be flexible about ultimate target of submitted petitions.

As a result of this work, the developers and cluster leaders were able to identify areas where the EuroPetition package could be improved.

## 6 Evaluation Findings

This section is structured to correspond to the evaluation findings as set out in the Description of Work. They are:

- First, that the EuroPetition platform does address use of e-petitions in the Legislative decision making processes and meets the eParticipation needs of local government in various contexts at local, regional, national and European level
- Second, that the assumptions in the initial viability plan (D2.3.1) are reasonable to sustain the service in the various contexts.
- Third, that the service can be delivered in multiple contexts and languages across Europe on an interoperable operational basis.
- Fourth, that alternative solutions and services are accommodated
- Fifth, the legislative participation impact of EuroPetition, including its political impact and affect on policy-making processes, its impact on cross-border cooperation between citizens, and its relationship to wider aspects of e-governance
- Sixth, a user engagement report covering the participation of all user groups: Citizens, Politicians and Institutions, involvement of new users, multicultural and multilingual issues and improvement of decision-making processes.

This section highlights the major recommendations where appropriate. The recommendations are limited to emphasising key points with wider implications for the Euro-petitioning. More detailed recommendations have been communicated directly to the partners.

findings from the evaluation process, and makes

### 6.1 Meeting local government e-participation needs

There is now considerable experience in the operation of e-petitions within the local government; Figure 4 on the right (reproduced from D2.1.1) shows a common understanding of the process., showing the important of the role of local government officers in supporting petitioners.

**Finding: Factors behind engagement by local authorities and the need for ownership by local decision makers**

A service like EuroPetition can only be offered once local administrative support has been established. The experiences have been different in each of the clusters. In Spain there has

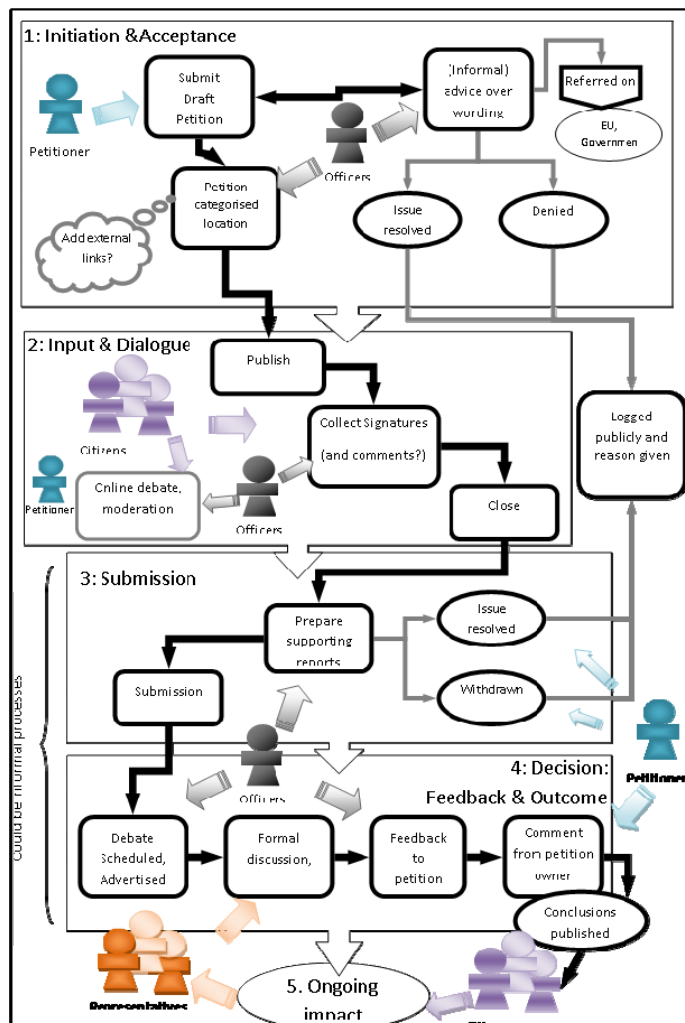


Figure 3 e-Petition process overview

been a positive reaction from the municipalities involved; this is probably due to effective championing of the service by I2BC, leading to engagement by politicians from an early stage, while I2BC's role as provider of a third party service was seen as giving assurance of neutrality by Spanish citizens. . The experience of NESTOR with Vicenza shows how long it can take to create this support. As noted above, the time taken led to some delays in the initial running of the service; on the other hand, it did mean that the service was genuinely integrated into the cluster members practice once it went live.

**Finding: The need for clear support by councils**

Once engagement has been established, it needs to be demonstrated through long term promotion of petitioning by the clusters or municipalities. This was demonstrated during the project by the success where this did happen:

- Offline campaign (eg in the city newspaper) by Malmö City encouraged take of the system, and broadened participation – for instance leading to involvement by school children
- Tweeting and Facebook links are seen as good way to market individual petitions – as was demonstrated by individual petitions. On the other hand, having a Facebook presence for the EuroPetition sites was not seen as essential<sup>7</sup>.

Interestingly, in Spain, focus groups showed that there was a support for the operation of the petitioning process to be seen as independent from interference or manipulation from local authorities.

**Finding: The need for transparency and clarity of process**

The (local) petitioning process is generally perceived as clear for both petitioners and signatories, though there were areas where the guidance provided on the site could be improved. However, expectations do need to be managed: for instance, for petitioners and signatories it can be several months between signing a petition, submitting it and any action being taken by the relevant authorities.

As well as setting realistic expectations at the time of signing or raising a petition, there is a need ensure that signatories are 'kept in the loop' as the petition progresses. In particular, this would require that they are sent regular updates during the signature collection phase – which can last over six months. It is recognised that there is a tension between keeping signatories updated and the need to not spam them with unnecessary messages.

**Recommendation:** During the collection phase, petitioners should be reminded (eg monthly) to send a brief update to the signatories. Alternatively, the system could automatically send an update to confirm that the petition is still live, with an update on the number of signatures collected. Further updates during the political action phase (which can take several months or more) are also important

It was felt that group affiliations (eg Greenpeace or political) should be made transparent, through inviting the petitioner to make it clear if they are petitioning on their own behalf, or for a wider group or campaign.

**Finding: Privacy and the collection and use of signature data**

One issue characteristic of the EU context is data protection and worries over the management of signature data were raised by focus groups – such as how long the data will be retained, and who

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<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with Panagiotopoulos et al (2010) where the evidence is that Facebook 'clicktivism' does not lead to real political engagement.

would monitor and use it. The current user interface (UI) led to questions on why so much data was being collected, and Public-i are now in the process of redesigning the UI to avoid this issue.

There is general agreement that only basic information of the signatures should be shown publicly. Although some feel that e-petitions require a full identity infrastructure (such as provided by the Spanish government, or by banks in many countries, this was balanced by privacy concerns, and also a feeling that for petitions, a small number of fraudulent or fake signatures should not be seen as an issue (remembering that the importance of 'pure' petitions does not depend on the number of signatures they receive).

A number of possible technical improvements came up during user testing and have now been incorporated in the application roadmap.

## 6.2 Viability and sustainability

### Finding: Limited budgets

The initial viability plan assumptions would appear to be reasonable, have been validated by stakeholder management, and incorporated into the sustainability plan. However, it is clear that in the current climate some municipalities would find it difficult to justify funding the EU features of the EuroPetition service in particular out of their core budgets.

The stakeholders were asked to rank items in the initial SWOT analysis from D2.3.1. Table 5 shows the elements that were thought most important by the stakeholders and is reflected in the final Sustainability plan, D2.3.2, along with detailed comments from the stakeholders.

**Table 5 Key SWOT elements**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Provision of a range of e-petitioning and eParticipation Web 2.0 interactive process tools for citizens under one brand name and access point in each Local Authority area.</b>	Reliance on Citizens having access to ICT
<b>Low cost structure</b>	Reliance on Local Authorities to promote and operate the EuroPetition service on the ground.
<b>Multi-lingual options are available</b>	Lack of access to local distribution networks
<b>Public-i platform system proven to be market leader in winning tenders, 100% renewal on existing client base</b>	Need to develop and validate a common pan-European e-petitioning service to meet different regional requirements and contexts.
<b>Market-leading Partnership established with 5 excellent clusters involving 17 leading Local Authorities and 7.9 potential citizen users</b>	Ratification of Lisbon Treaty and the Citizen Initiatives process led to delays beyond the life of the project.
Open Source e-petitions software combined with proprietary advantage and know-how	
Expanding European customer base for Public-i eParticipation platform, European User Group and Business Partners Network market presence across Europe.	
Lack of competitors for provision of complete eParticipation services	
Rapid change possible for adapting to market requirements and new Web 2.0 services and e-petitioning requirements and opportunities.	

Opportunities	Threats
Deployment of service to all 27 EU Member States who have common EuroPetitioning and eParticipation requirements	Substitute technology/ products may be developed
National Initiatives in some Member States to promote e-petitioning.	Big difference in detailed legislative processes make localisation more demanding.
Growth in the importance of EU legislation and the European Parliament in the lives of all EU citizens.	Lack of funding in identified marketplace
Growth of the Internet, Web 2.0 and its use for provision of information and online engagement	Lack of awareness and interest by citizens in the European Parliament's activities in general
Government policy requirements throughout Europe to provide greater online services for citizens	
Established and proven technology platform and e-petitions open source engine	
Growth of citizens using internet for information, communication and interaction, lifestyle and social events	

Stakeholder feedback from project partners obtained during the evaluation process has been incorporated into the final sustainability plan and is reflected in this report.

### 6.3 Use in multiple contexts across Europe

The functionality of the service has been well demonstrated, both technically in that the service has been successfully installed and configured for five different countries and languages and operationally during the time that the service was run by each cluster. The findings of the stakeholder and petitioner focus groups support this.

The underlying system database was reviewed for objective evidence to support this<sup>8</sup> and the key results are now summarised, starting with an overview of the time taken between submission and approval of petitions.

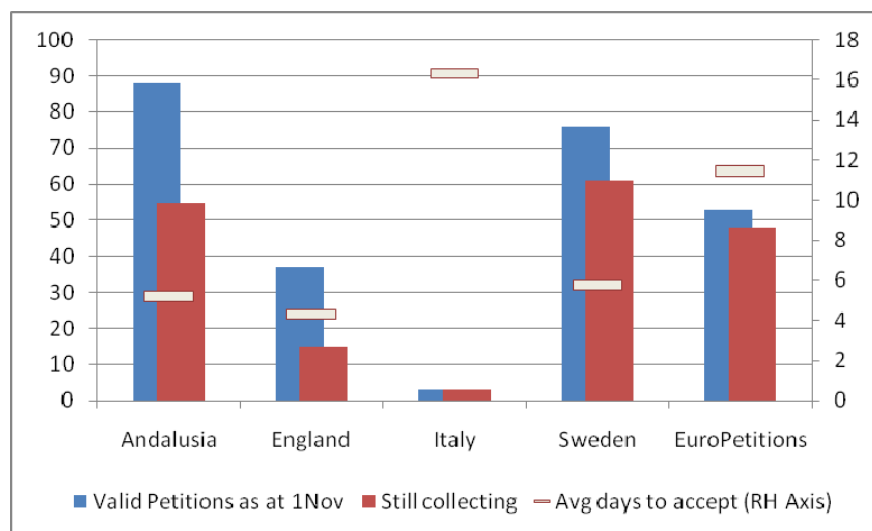


Figure 4 Total petitions and time to accept

<sup>8</sup> The data as at 1 November was used as the basis for analysis. For the sake of consistency, only petitions submitted from 1 April 2010 are considered in this analysis.

Local petitions generally took a short time (less than a week) to be accepted. EuroPetitions have taken longer because of the need to communicate with the Petitions Committee secretariat to get informal feedback. (Italy's sample is too small to be significant)

The next graph summarises all petitions by their target, allowing the popularity of EuroPetitions themes to be compared against locally targeted petitions<sup>9</sup> and showing that the system was able to attract a number of trans-European-themed petitions which is comparable to more local petitions:

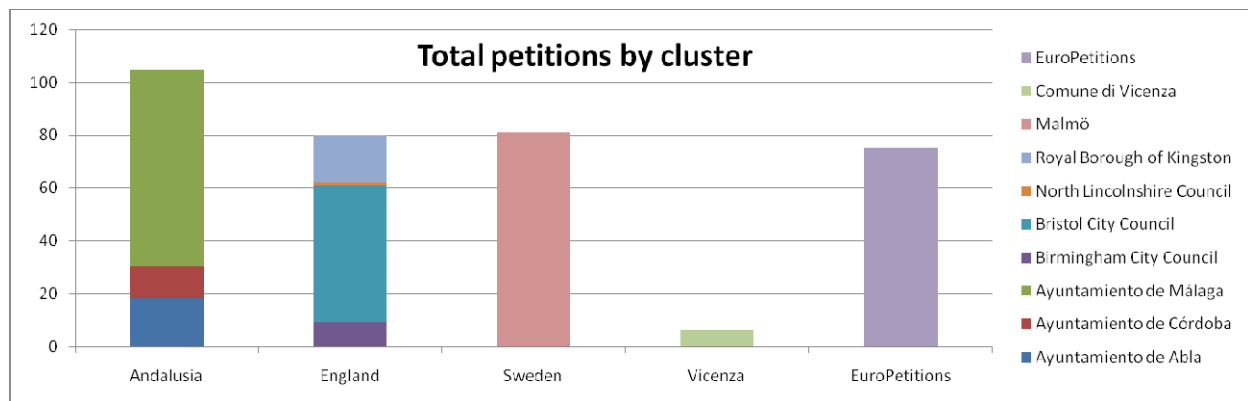


Figure 5 Total petitions submitted in the period - by target cluster

### 6.3.1 EuroPetitions

This section focuses on EuroPetitions themselves – that is petitions aimed for consideration by the European Parliament.

The figures below summarise the final statistics for the EuroPetition project till end of year 23 December 2010. The figures include all local and EuroPetition which are also closed or waiting submission.

Table 6 EuroPetition statistics at end 2010

Cluster	Registered Users	Total User Visits	Totals		EuroPetition Signatures		Start date
			Local Petitions	EuroPetitions	Total	Highest	
Sweden	122	30,558	n/a	26	697	220	Mar 10
Spain	294	40,666	104	28	293	83	Dec 09
Netherlands*	10	4,650	n/a	2	327	310	May 10
Italy	30	11,355	3	1	46	46	Dec 09
UK	2,120	287,517**	102	6	29	11	
Bristol	1,643	203,623	53	3	15	10	Jan 10
North Lincs	55	12,704	3	2	12	11	Dec 09
Kingston	254	31,137	27	1	2	2	Mar 10
Birmingham	168	40,053	19	0	0	0	Dec 09
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,576</b>	<b>374,746</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1,392</b>	<b>310</b>	

\* Includes signatures from Petities.nl

\*\* The high number of UK local users reflects the operation of established e-petitioning system.

In the period, the database shows that 74 EuroPetitions were proposed, of which 63 went on to become live and were ready for submission at the close of the project.

<sup>9</sup> Malmö uses the e-Petitioner service for local petitions too. The graph does not show the large number of Netherlands-only petitions submitted to petities.nl

The figures for the EuroPetitions awaiting submission are as follows:

**Table 7 EuroPetitions awaiting submission**

Country, topics and link	Signatures	Petitioner	Closing Date
<b>Sweden</b>			
<b>Returnable cans and bottles</b> <a href="http://www.europaforslag.se/e-petition_core/community/petition/877">www.europaforslag.se/e-petition_core/community/petition/877</a>	12	Magnus Gustavsson	30-Nov-10
<b>Scrutinise the closed meetings of those in power</b> <a href="http://e-petition.sweden.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/view/Bilderberg">e-petition.sweden.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/view/Bilderberg</a>	220	Eric Johnson	31-Dec-10
<b>Ban against corporal punishment of children</b> <a href="http://e-petition.sweden.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1535">e-petition.sweden.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1535</a>	109	Carina Nilsson	31-Dec-10
<b>Spain</b>			
<b>Modification of divorce laws</b> <sup>10</sup> <a href="http://www.europetitionandalucia.es/e-petition_core/view/Divorcio">www.europetitionandalucia.es/e-petition_core/view/Divorcio</a>	83	Francisco Jose Rodriguez	27-Sep-10
<b>Construction of a sewage treatment facility in Nerja</b> <a href="http://www.europetitionandalucia.es/e-petition_core/view/depuradoramunicipaldenerja">www.europetitionandalucia.es/e-petition_core/view/depuradoramunicipaldenerja</a>	19	Antonio Manuel Alvarez Martin	30-Sep-10
<b>Holland</b>			
<b>Night trains in Europe</b> <a href="http://www.europetition.nl/e-petition_core/community/petition/864">www.europetition.nl/e-petition_core/community/petition/864</a>	17	Stefan de Vries	11-Dec-10
<b>(International) Child abduction and compliance to access arrangements</b> <a href="http://www.europetition.nl/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1618">www.europetition.nl/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1618</a>	310	Sylvia A. Schuurung	01-Jul-11
<b>Italy</b>			
<b>I want to know exactly what I am eating</b> <a href="http://www.europetition.it/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1538">www.europetition.it/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1538</a>	46	Maurizio Talamo	23-Dec-10
<b>North Lincs (UK)</b>			
<b>Online Consultation at the EU</b> <a href="http://e-petition.northlincs.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/community/petition/945">e-petition.northlincs.public-i.tv/e-petition_core/community/petition/945</a>	1	John Glover	22-Sep-10
<b>Bristol (UK)</b>			
<b>Ban Mosquito Acoustic Dispersal Devices</b> <a href="http://e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/petition/1008">e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/petition/1008</a>	2	Kevin O'Malley	03-Dec-10
<b>EU Broadband Guarantee</b> <a href="http://e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/petition/900">e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/petition/900</a>	10	Kevin O'Malley	15-Oct-10
<b>Free/Fair Wireless Internet (wi-fi) Connectivity</b> <a href="http://e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1575">e-petitions.bristol.gov.uk/e-petition_core/community/europetition/1575</a>	11	Miles James Ellis	31-Dec-10

Figure 6 below looks at where their signatures are coming from in relation to the country in which the petitioner is based<sup>11</sup>:

<sup>10</sup> Already submitted to the European Parliament

<sup>11</sup> As noted above, the detailed analysis was carried out using data as at 1 November 2010



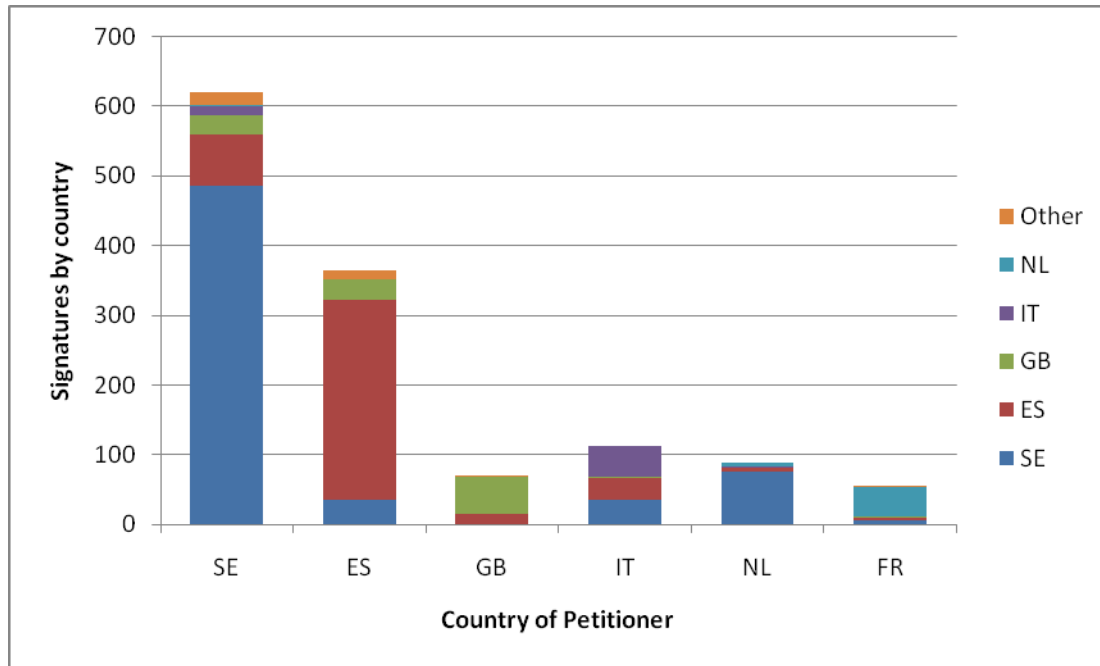


Figure 6 Uptake of EuroPetitions by country

The number of cross-border signatures that have been gathered demonstrates that EuroPetition does provide a tool that has potential for supporting a Europe-wide political space.

**Finding: Cross-border nature of EuroPetitions demonstrated**

Although national bias would be expected it is gratifying to note that petitioners and signatories from outside the clusters are being attracted to the system. Not only are people from other countries such as France and Germany signing (and even submitting) petitions; the database shows similar variation within nations – for instance, drawing signatories from Madrid in Spain, and Scotland and Wales in the UK. The number of UK based signatures turning up in Swedish and Spanish petitions illustrates the inherently borderless nature of e-petitions and the opportunities that are opened up by offering petitions in multiple languages.

The next chart shows the pattern of signature gathering for EuroPetitions, showing a general increase over time, and the impact that focussed campaigns can have on signatures gained.

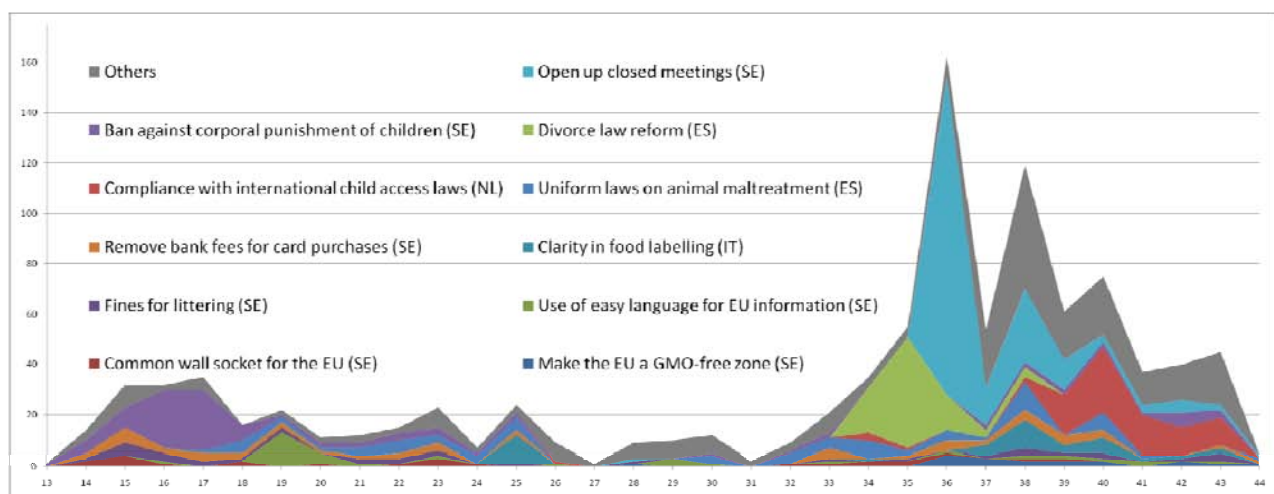


Figure 7 Patterns of EuroPetition signatures



There is a noticeable spike in signatures in Week 38 (mid September 2010) for the ‘Scrutinise the closed meetings of those in power’ (‘Granska makthavarnas stängda möten’) EuroPetition. It has been established that this was because the petitioner organised a Facebook campaign on the subject<sup>12</sup>

### 6.3.2 Signature frequencies and the timing of petitions

One research question was whether there is an optimum time for closing a petition. The next two graphs show the pattern of signature collection, counting days from submission of petition (ideally, it would be from date the petition went live but for technical reasons, this was not possible). One caveat: many of the petitions were still open, so it may be that there are other late surges to come that cannot be taken into account here.

Note that a single local petition in Bristol (relating to the local football ground) generated over 20 000 signatures in a very short time. The vertical axis on graph below has been cropped so as to keep the other petition targets visible.

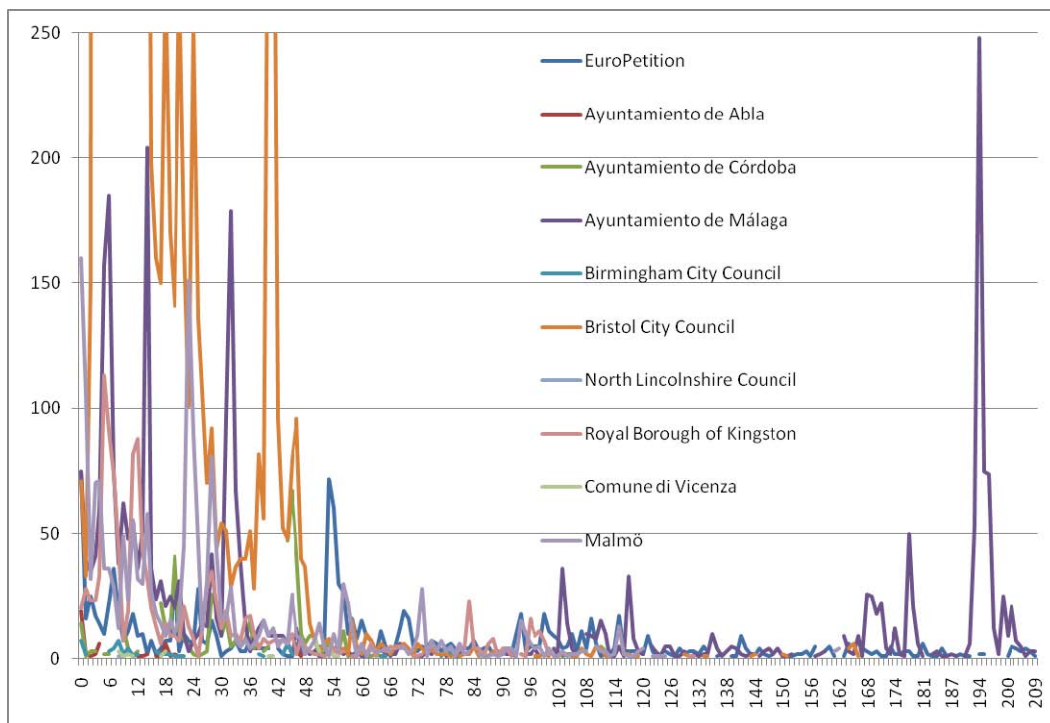


Figure 8 Signatures counts by days after submitted

Looking at the cumulative figures in the next chart,

<sup>12</sup> [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=152737644745636](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=152737644745636)

The petition itself is at [http://www.europaforslag.se/epetition\\_core/view/Bilderberg](http://www.europaforslag.se/epetition_core/view/Bilderberg)

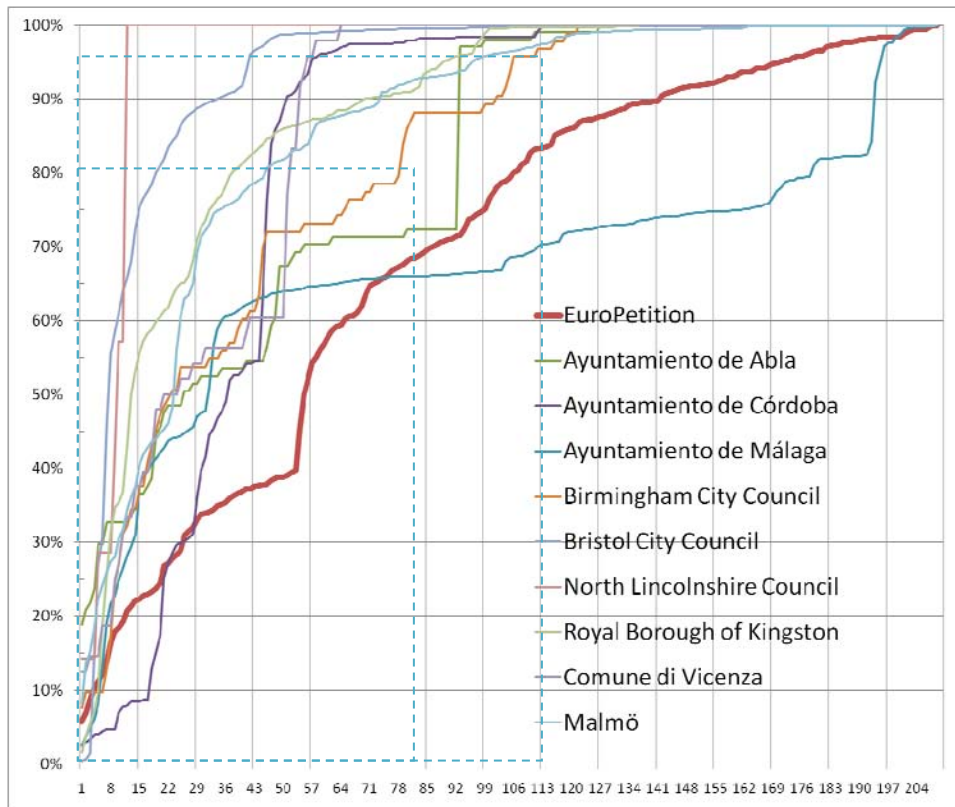


Figure 9 Cumulative signature counts

**Finding: Petitions can generally be closed after 100 days**

It can be seen that generally, 80% of signatures are collected in less than 95 days, and 95% in less than 110 – giving useful guidance for petitioners.

The two exceptions are EuroPetitions (which would be expected given the inherent multi-centred, multi-campaign approach) and Málaga, where one petition (‘MÁLAGA: Metro en el Parque Tecnológico de Andalucía (PTA)’) had a surge in signatures some 6 months after its launch in April 2010. From discussion with the lead petitioner it is likely that the surges directly reflect offline campaigning and patterns in Press interest. This goes to confirm shows the impact of offline and parallel campaigns in keeping a petition active beyond the typical norm of 3-4 months, and also the potential for providing weekly signature data to petitioners so they can get positive feedback from their campaigning work.

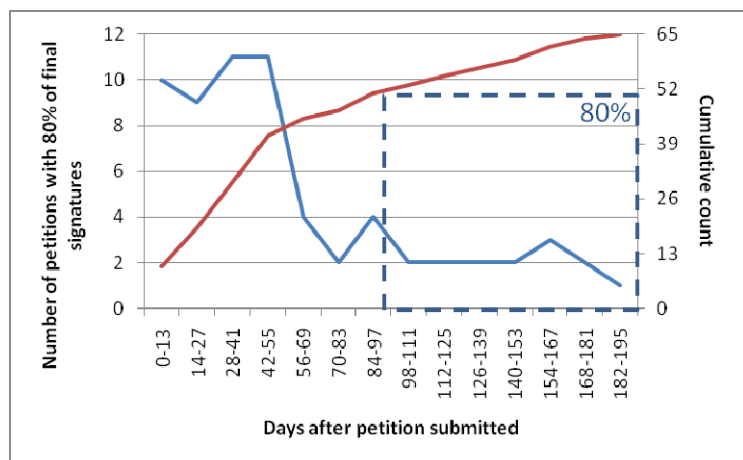


Figure 10 Days for petitions to be 80% complete

The cluster-by-cluster figure disguises a wide variation in the speed of signature collection by individual petitions, but a review of the length of time it takes for individual petitions to achieve 80% of their final count shows that 80% of petitions reach 80% of their final signatures in less than 100 days.

**Recommendation:** Petitioners should be given advice reflecting the finding that 100 days is generally sufficiently long for a petition to be open, and also be given access to figures on signature numbers to give them feedback on the success of any associated campaigns.

## 6.4 Accommodation of alternative solutions

### **Finding: Integration with third party system**

With its relationship with *petities.nl*, the project has demonstrated a model for working with existing national (or regional) services, and has established the potential of, and the constraints around, creating an automated link between the services. As noted above, there are lessons to be learned in planning to have access to data for later research (and management) analysis.

Focus groups showed that there is no great demand for full integration with existing social networking services like Facebook or Twitter – though individual petitioners have used them for marketing purposes. The parallel CitizenScape project also experimented with e-petition widgets<sup>13</sup> but demand proved low. The developers chose to not prioritise it, as other issues came up; on the other hand following user demand, an (iPhone) smart phone app is currently being developed.

Although the project scope of work did not include development of an API, there is potential for automated integration with third party systems through the implementation of an API<sup>14</sup>:

**Recommendation:** Resources and motivations need to be found to develop APIs for sharing data, supporting functionality. Any sharing should comply with emerging open data standards.

## 6.5 Wider and European impact

### 6.5.1 Impact of the service

In the timescale of this project the live running of the service, there has been little measurable impact on legislation, local or European, and realistically, none would be expected.

The citizen focus groups and the user questionnaires both confirm that there is a general lack of awareness of the role and powers of the European Parliament and its petition committee, which was often also shared by the municipality offering the EuroPetition service. Other than that, many of the points raised earlier in this section also apply in the European context.

### **Finding: Influence on decision making**

The Spanish experience provides examples where local petition campaigns have made an impact on political decision making, and more broadly, the introduction of the petitioning process is seen as increasing transparency in the political process.

In the UK cluster, the English legislation on the status of e-petitions has also had an impact, but the new UK Government has indicated that it will not enforce the requirements on local e-petitioning by Local Authorities. But the process is operating effectively. For example, Bristol have just had their first local e-petition that has gone through the whole process to Council consideration.

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<sup>13</sup> A widget is an element of online content that draws its content from one system and can be independently placed on another web page.

<sup>14</sup> Application Programming Interface == a mechanism through which separate web applications can share data and exploit each other's functionality.

The focus groups reflected that interest is mostly with local issues, and the lack of a place for central government in the current EuroPetition model is an obvious gap.

At the European level, the project has demonstrated that it has potential to provide a positive impact on the operation of the Petition Committee by providing a chance for an early redirection of the half of petitions that are eventually dismissed by the Committee as being out of scope: The EuroPetition process pre-filtered 56% potential of the EP Petition Committee petitions that are not appropriate. The first EuroPetitions for submission to the EP as the project closed.

**Finding: Publicity and communicating the relationship between local and Euro-petitions**

We have different experiences of clustering arrangements to compare:

- Swedish: Single separate EuroPetition site (Europaforslag.se). Administratively successful, but feedback from focus groups is that there is a need to make EuroPetitions visible also on the municipal sites.
- English: Attempts to run EuroPetitions from the council websites encountered resistance from local political leadership as they felt they did not have ownership of the process, even when the EuroPetitions were offered on a separate page on their website.
- Spain: A single site offering four channels: three local municipalities, plus Euro-petitions, operated by I2BC as a neutral third party.
- Netherlands: Operated through a link to separately operated national petitioning site (petities.nl)

All these models worked technically, and this gives an indication of the system's flexibility.

From a municipality's perspective, the local petitions are within their scope but the European ones are not, and there was some feeling that it there were political risks in appearing to support a process that is not controlled by them, for instance, meaning that citizens could be confused by the different timescales involved, with a perceived reputational risk for the local authorities.

Local Authorities can be involved in the awareness process of escalating a petition from local, to national or Europe as appropriate, or identifying appropriate target(s) for the petition when it is submitted. Mixing these very different levels is not easy: the answer would probably involve both having a cluster-level EuroPetitions site, with feeds from EuroPetition-branded areas on local government's e-democracy pages.

**Recommendation:** This is an area for further consideration and which will probably require flexibility to meet local requirements. A possible default model could be to have both a mix of both a EuroPetition-branded area on municipal e-participation pages to draw the citizens in, and a national or regional cluster actually operating the EuroPetition service, to highlight to citizens the difference between municipal and European level e-petitions, and providing a centre of expertise.

It has emerged that clearer commitments are needed from partners in terms of speed of response to suggestions of appropriate EuroPetitions, organising translations etc. One option has been to consider SLAs between national clusters, though as sanctions for non-compliance are limited, it may be more straightforward to have agreed (measurable) targets and a process for following up if a target has not been met.

**Recommendation:** The role of clusters and Trans EU campaigns needs to include supporting links between petitioners in different clusters

**Recommendation:** There is a need for new EuroPetition partners to sign up to a clear code of conduct which covers response times and (anonymised) data sharing for reporting signature counts.

In summary, there is a consensus that there is a need to clearly differentiate the local and European Petitions, and the length of Euro-process means more effort is needed on communication to keep the citizen engaged with the process.

**Finding: Institutional support from the European Parliament**

The EuroPetition model assumes that there is a process of informal feedback near the beginning of a petition's life, where someone with knowledge of the legal requirements on the wording of a petition submitted by a citizen can be addressed. This requires engagement with the petitioner much earlier on in the process than is the case with traditional paper-based petitions, with later payoff in the quality of the submitted petitions (and ensuring that petitioners do not put a lot of effort into petitions that are then immediately rejected).

It can be argued that a weakness in the project structure was that it did not start with a commitment from the EP to provide feedback to petitioners at the start of the process, and although an informal feedback arrangement was put in place for the duration of the project, the Committee was not willing to extend this past project completion. We have found that Local Authorities can be the trusted third party for Europetitions, but there is no incentive for them to do so, without assurance of support from the target of these petitions, the EP Petition Committee.

An additional issue was that the span of the project across EU-elections in June 2009 meant that two different Petitions Committees were involved with the project.

The result was that the MEPs and the secretariat on the Petitions Committee did not engage actively with the project. An area where the further work is required for the success of the EuroPetition service is therefore institutional support from the European Parliament.

If the Parliament itself is not able or willing to engage with this process, an option is to use EuropeDirect, SOLVIT or local officers as alternative, but we cannot avoid the basic fact that there needs to be acceptance of responsibility for the process by the target institution, the European Parliament.

**Recommendation:** Future success needs consistent buy-in by the EP as an institution, which needs commitment from the Secretariat as well as MEPs, or some other way (such as appropriate Experts) to ensure that petitioners are supported in wording the petition correctly, or identifying more appropriate targets for their action (cognisant of the fact that around half of submitted petitions are rejected as not appropriate for the EP. The clear benefit for the Committee will be the reduced number of irrelevant or out of scope petitions they have to reject (currently over 50%).

**Finding: Relationship to online petitions system required by the EP's rules**

In its 2009 report, the Petitions Committee identified the need for a user-friendly interactive portal, which would also explain voting procedures and responsibilities. The portal would have a multi-stage template for petitions, and offer alternative routes for redress at EU and national

level (Paragraph 29). It also noted that procedural Rule 202 includes a requirement that “An electronic register shall be set up in which citizens may lend or withdraw support to the petitioner, appending their own electronic signature to petitions which have been declared admissible and entered in the register. (para 4 of Rule 202)”

**Recommendation:** It is noted that EuroPetition meets this specification. A mechanism for formally communicating this fact to the Petitions Committee should be found.

### 6.5.2 Impact of the project

As part of the proactive approach taken to evaluation, the project itself has engaged with policy formation over the two years it has been in operation. In addition to the presentation of findings to conferences and the practitioner community, two areas in particular are should be mentioned.

1. **Engagement with the process of drafting the Regulation covering the European Citizens Initiative.** This is covered in Section 7 below.
2. **Establishing a draft data standard for exchanging e-petition data.** During 2010, and as part of the lead up to the planned widespread implementation of e-petitions in England, the project<sup>15</sup> worked towards creating flexible XML data definition that could be used to support interoperability of and data exchange between different petitioning systems, with the support for open monitoring and comparison of petitions independently of which application they were being hosted on. As a result of our engagement, we were able to make sure that the standard would supported multilingual operation and be suitable for EuroPetitions.

## 6.6 User Engagement

### 6.6.1 User participation

An online Baseline Survey was run by the project partners in the period up to April 2010. The Baseline Questionnaire gave a good understanding of the sort of users who would be exposed to EuroPetitions: they are generally users of the councils’ websites or people who are otherwise engaged enough with the council to be recipient of mailouts. Looking at reported educational level, a large majority of respondents have a University degree - making them slightly atypical of the population. These findings are in agreement with other research on citizen engagement with petitions and online systems - see for instance Carman (2010) on petitions and Rose & Sanford (2007) on research into online users of e-participation systems.

Figure 11 shows that most people access use Home or Work as their primary internet access route, with home by far the dominant route:

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<sup>15</sup> In particular, Edinburgh Napier University, Public-i and Particitech (the English cluster coordinator). The resulting definition can be downloaded from the project website via [europetition.eu/epetition-data-standards](http://europetition.eu/epetition-data-standards)



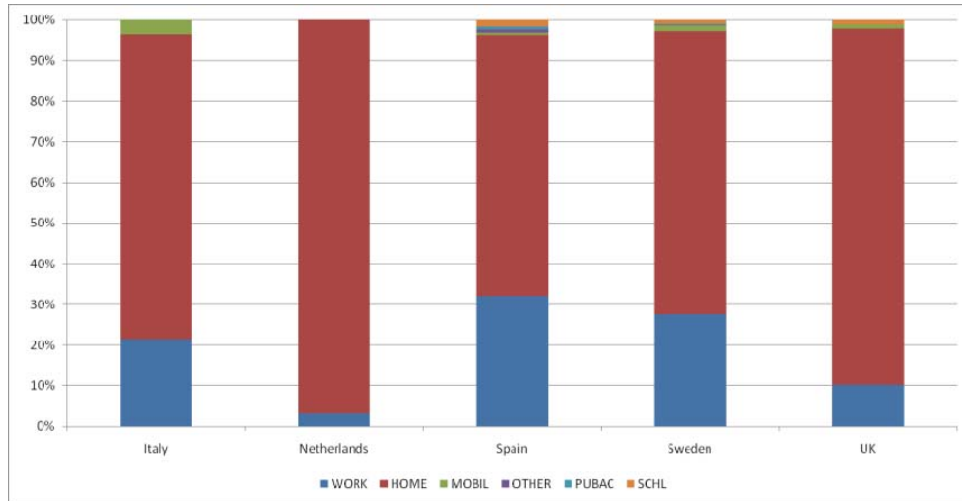


Figure 11 Primary internet access routes

Mobile internet access is a strong alternative choice. The graph below shows that although few people use mobile technology as their primary route to the internet, it does form a strong secondary or tertiary route:

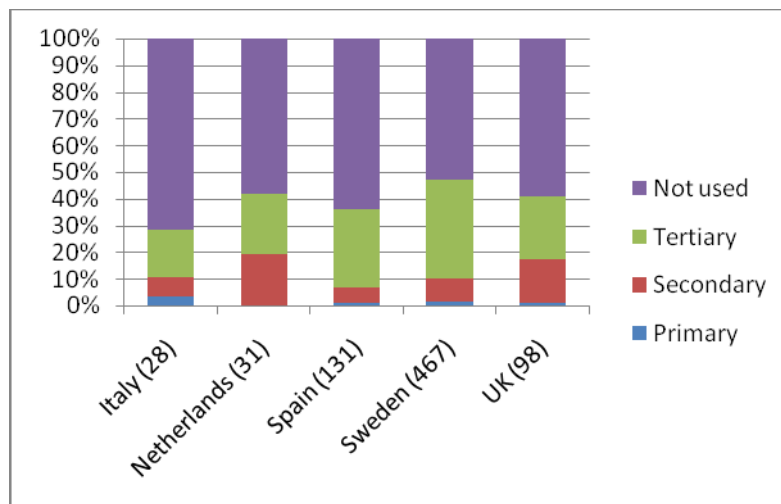
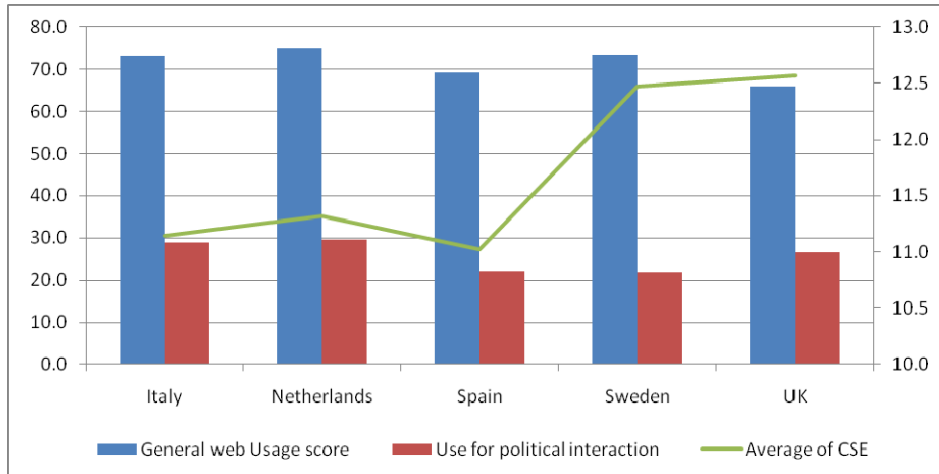


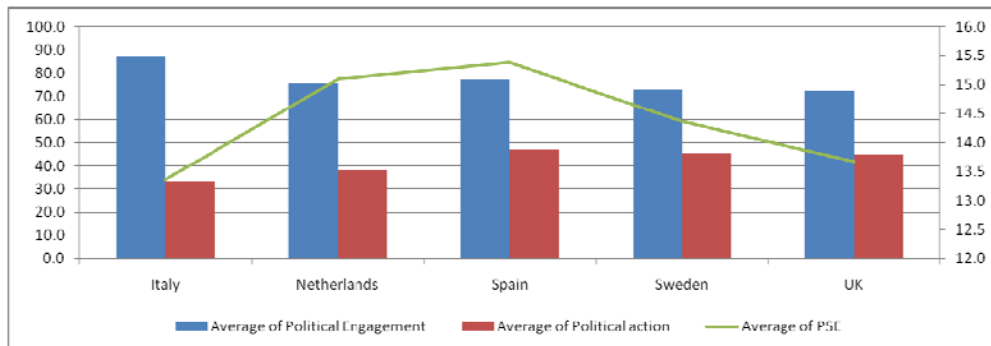
Figure 12 Role of mobile computing in internet access

Home and Work are the normal secondary (alternative route), but mobile access although not a primary route is the leading alternative to home and work access – ahead of public access points (in Libraries etc), and well ahead of internet cafes.

Policy wise, it shows that applications like EuroPetition need to be preparing for a world of mobile access to e-participation – with all that means in terms of using smaller screens and different forms of interaction. As noted above, Public-i are exploring this development through an experimental an iPhone app.



Political feelings varied between countries but this is likely to simply reflect different stages in the political cycle and the relative popularity of the government in place amongst the respondents.

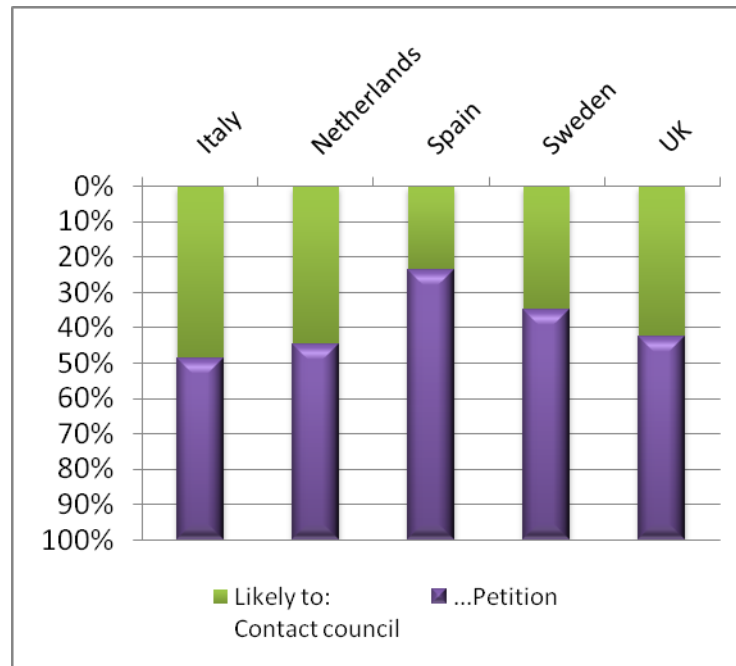


More generally, almost all respondents use the internet more than once a week and active users of the internet are also likely to sign petitions. Of them:

- Half have contacted their council more than once
- Over half are ‘very likely’ to sign a petition, even if they don’t make a habit of contacting the council

Returning to the question “if there was an issue that you felt strongly about, how likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?”, even for the active users of council websites that were surveyed here, petitions are preferred for making a statement – over acting as an individual and contacting the council directly on an issue that concerns them:





**Finding: Importance for the citizens of a clean and clear conclusion to the project**

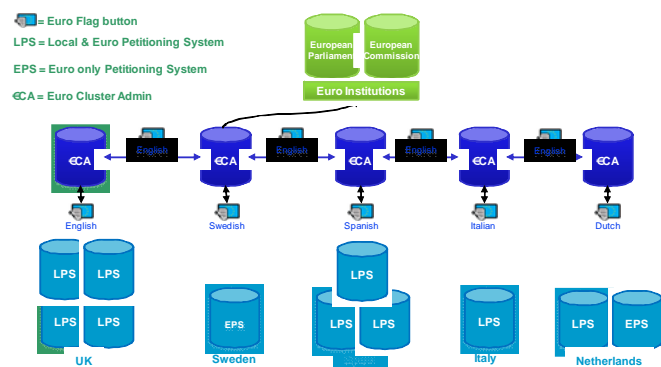
Finally, we feel it important to highlight the fact that the project needs to leave a positive experience behind. Many signatories and petitioners have used EuroPetition as an experiment to see if the political process is responsive, particularly at the EU level. There is a general attitude of “hoping for, but not expecting” (to quote the Swedish focus group) some form of response; this and other e-participation projects need to address this.

**Recommendation:** There should be clear communication to all participants (petitioners, signatories and survey respondents, using the email contact details they have provided) to explain what will happen now that the project is completed, particularly how they will be informed of continuing progress with any petitions they have signed..

**6.6.2 Multilingual issues**

It is generally accepted that the European Union Petition has a particular challenge in supporting multiple languages in its political process<sup>16</sup>.

Feedback from focus groups indicates that the multilingual process designed for EuroPetition has worked well, though attention has to be paid to making sure that the translations are of an adequate quality before the petitions go public. This is particularly an issue with English as it is used as a working language by administrators who may not be native speakers.



**Figure 13 Management of multiple languages within EuroPetition**

<sup>16</sup> See for instance Kraus (2005)

There are also potential benefits for creating or supporting a forum where petition organisers in different clusters (and languages) can share ideas. The recommendation above on the role of clusters in supporting links between local activists is relevant here

### **6.6.3 Improvement in decision making process**

As noted above, the clearest evidence from Spain of improvements in the local decision process by petitions, raising the profile of campaigns around public spaces and public transport in Málaga, including positive press coverage and political support.

At EU level, the data is mixed to say the least, and there is no evidence that the Petitions Committee processes have improved or even changed as a result of this project.

In addition, although the opportunity to contact the European Parliament was welcomed by citizens in principal, surveys and focus groups responses show a continuing low awareness on what is possible. Comments cover many items that are a national responsibility, such as health and education, animal rights, or areas that cannot be addressed through petitions (or the ECI) such as the structure of Lisbon Treaty, roles and costs of MEPs. This implies need to be flexible about the ultimate targets of submitted petitions and the need for associated education and support – both for citizens, and the service providers.

## 7 European Citizen Initiative drafting process

One of the biggest impacts of the evaluation process came through the EuroPetition project's active engagement with the drafting of data standards for e-petitions and the ECI Regulation, and in the general debate around the ECI.

The European Citizens' Initiative<sup>17</sup> (ECI) is an instrument created under the Lisbon Treaty which allows EU citizens who are entitled to vote at European elections can organise and/or support an ECI. Supporting an ECI will require tougher verification of identity than signing a petition.

The ECI will allow at least one million citizens from at least one third of EU Member States to invite the European Commission to bring forward legislative proposals in areas where the Commission has the power to do so. The Implementation Procedural Rules Regulation was finalised in December 2010 and will become operational in 2012

From the EuroPetition project perspective, the ECI provides an opportunity to create a user-friendly system that works closely with the Parliament and the Commission. The challenge is to make it easier to interact with the EU institutions.

The ECI requirement for an open source application has potential for opening up the community at the European level; especially in conjunction with the developing open standards for e-petitions described above.

There remains much of confusion about ECIs, even amongst the professionals, as concluded in the report from EuroPetitions Final Dissemination Event<sup>18</sup>:

“For such a learned audience in the area of eParticipation and democracy, it was surprising that most of the EuroPetition Workshop's audience had not known of people's right to petition the European Parliament and were somewhat hazy about the European Citizens Initiatives (ECI). There is a major work of awareness required to inform citizens of their rights and use of these very important democratic instruments for all EU citizens”

As a project, EuroPetition have been involved, both by direct discussions with the responsible Commission officials, and through submissions through groups such as the ECI Board and the ECI campaign<sup>19</sup>, as well as general education and discussion through blogging and presentation at practitioner groups such as PEP-NET etc to create a common understanding of the implication for system requirements of the Regulation as it was drafted.

Our work included the visualisation of the ECI process (highlighting areas of complexity) and the security implications of the draft Regulation – as illustrated by the diagrams on the next two pages.

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<sup>17</sup> More information can be obtained via [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat\\_general/citizens\\_initiative/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/citizens_initiative/index_en.htm)

<sup>18</sup> At the PDF conference, Barcelona, October 2010

<sup>19</sup> For instance through PEP-NET ([www.pep-net.eu](http://www.pep-net.eu)) and the ECI Board

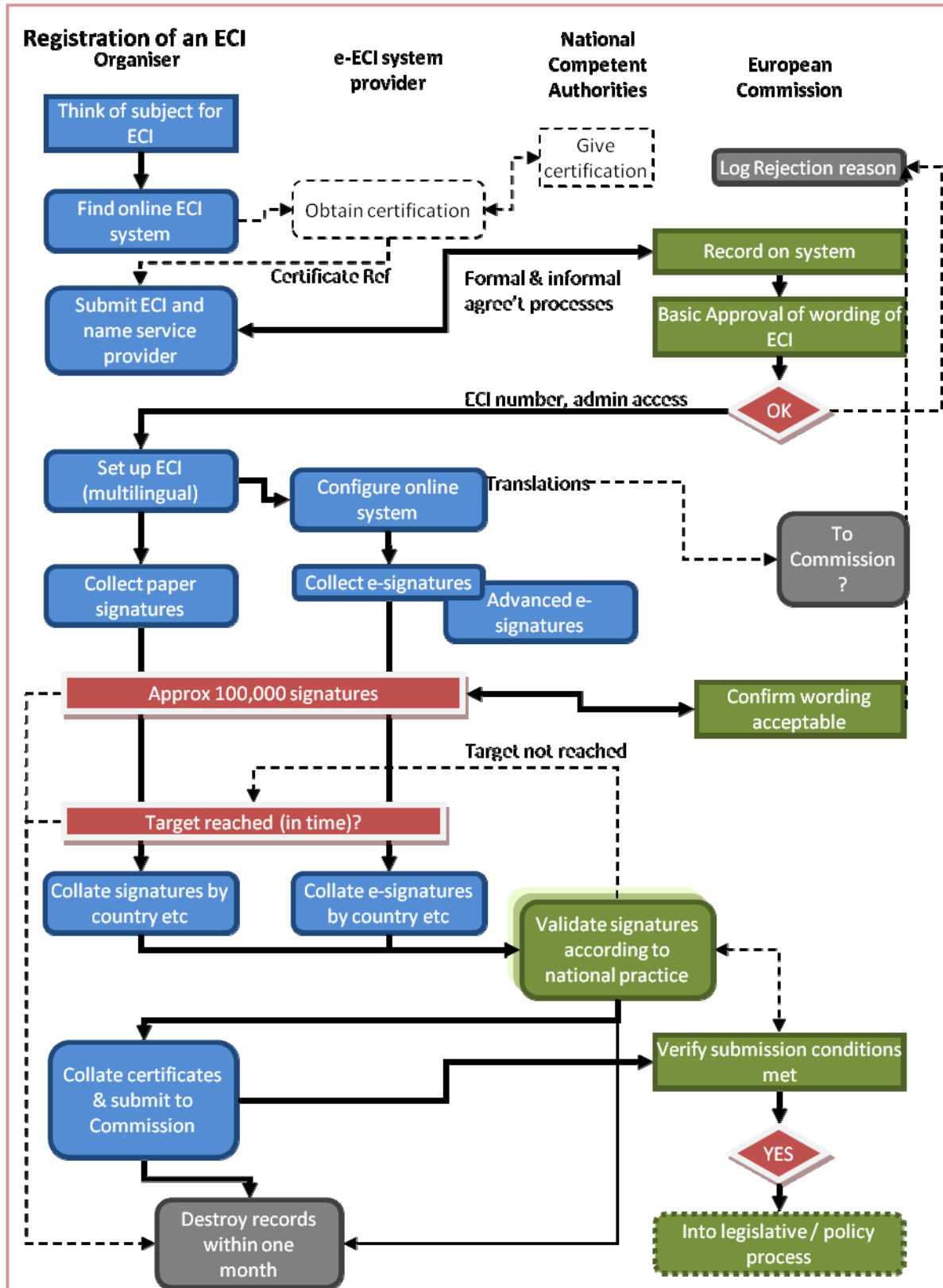


Figure 14 ECI Flows envisaged by the draft Regulation

### ECI: Securing the route from signature to validation

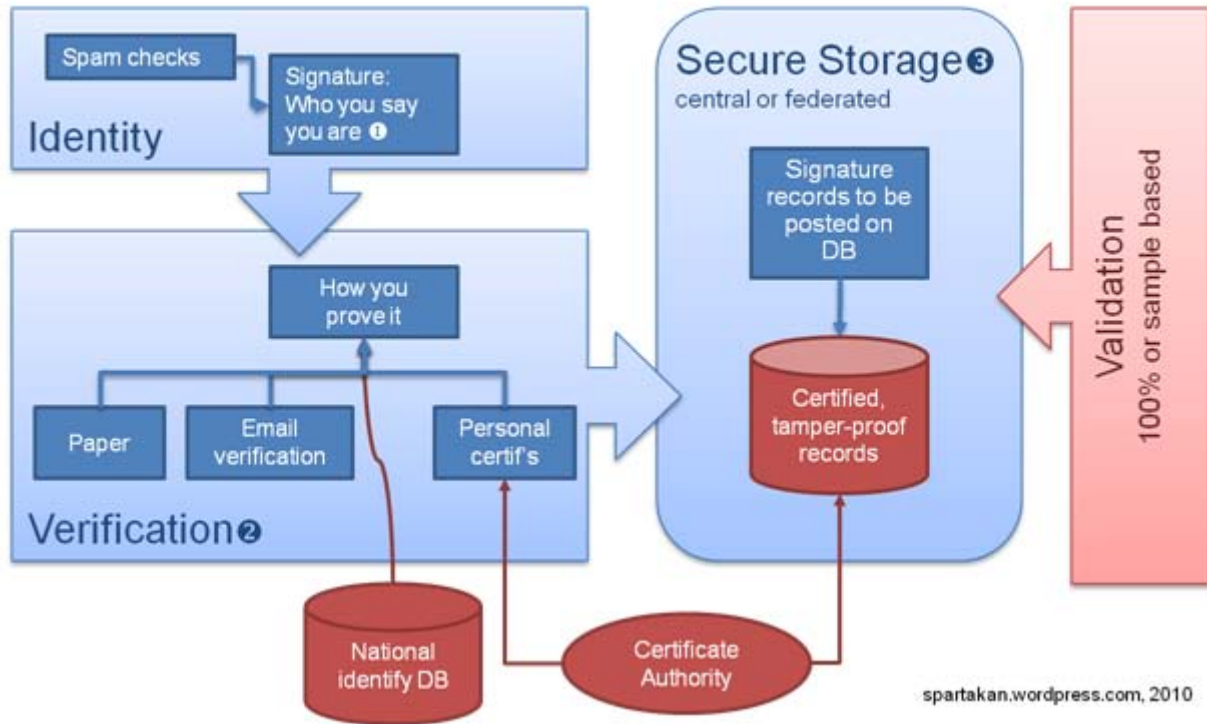


Figure 15 Security concepts underlying the ECI process

## 8 Conclusion

In EuroPetition, the European Parliament Petitions Committee has the opportunity to reduce their workload by preventing the submission of invalid petitions and taking advantage of local government to support the petitioning process. At the same time the process can support subsidiarity, increase transparency and citizen engagement. However, this can only happen if the Petitions Committee (ie the MEPs and the Secretariat) takes ownership of the process (and ensures provision of local support), and recognises the gains that it can make by proactively engaging with the petitioners at the beginning of the petition cycle to ensure that concerned citizens the petitions that it does have to formally respond to are within scope and clearly worded. The Scottish (and German) Parliament has shown that this can be done without restricting the citizen's ultimate right to petition.

The positive engagement with defining data standards for e-petitions and the process of defining the ECI presents an opportunity for the EuroPetition service, as it could be adapted to support the ECI process with relatively minor modifications.

Overall, it can be concluded that the EuroPetition project has met and in many cases exceeded its objectives. It has demonstrated that it is possible to promote the concept of e-petitions to widen and further understand citizen participation in contexts such as Spain where the petitioning concept is new. It has also demonstrated the proof of concept of a pan-European multilingual e-petitioning eParticipation service which can help citizens forge connections with the European Parliament, reducing the democratic deficit across the EU.

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## Project documents

For convenience, a list of project reports is reproduced from the DOW (Description of Work):

Del. No <sup>20</sup>	Deliverable title	Dissemination level <sup>21</sup>	Delivery date <sup>22</sup>
<b>D3.1</b>	Project Handbook & www.europetition.eu website	PU	3
<b>D2.2.1</b>	EuroPetition Dissemination Strategy	PP	3
<i>D1.1.1</i>	<i>EuroPetition User, PETI &amp; Commission Requirements</i>	<i>PU</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>D2.1.1</b>	<b>Evaluation Criteria &amp; Pilot Trials Monitoring Plan</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>D2.3.1</i>	<i>Initial Viability Plan for Sustainable Operation</i>	<i>PP</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>D1.2.1</i>	<i>EuroPetition First Prototype &amp; System Technical Specification</i>	<i>PU</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>D1.2.2</b>	EuroPetition System running.	PP	9
<b>D3.3</b>	Interim Project Progress Report	CO	12
<b>D2.1.2</b>	<b>EuroPetition Monitoring &amp; Evaluation Report</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>D2.3.2</i>	<i>Final EuroPetition Viability Plan for Sustainable Operation</i>	<i>PP</i>	<i>24</i>
<b>D3.4</b>	Final Report	PU	24
<i>D3.2.1-4</i>	<i>Half-yearly Monitoring Reports</i>	<i>CO</i>	<i>6,12,18,24</i>

The evaluation process would be expected to have a direct input to the items in *italic*

<sup>20</sup> Deliverable numbers in order of delivery dates

<sup>21</sup> Dissemination level is indicated as follows:

**PU** = Public

**PP** = Restricted to other participants in the eParticipation preparatory action (including the Commission Services).

**RE** = Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services).

**CO** = Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services).

<sup>22</sup> Month in which the deliverables will be available. Month 1 marking the start date of the project (January 2009), and all delivery dates being relative to this start date.



## ANNEXES

### Data Collection

These elements were required to support the evaluation work.

Element	Delivered by NAP <sup>23</sup>	Delivery of data
1. Baseline data	Baseline questionnaire to establish citizen engagement	Pilot sites
2. Application installation	Acceptance checklist (in conjunction with PI)	Pilot Sites
3. Viewership and website behaviour statistics, including use of Web2.0 tools	Agreed data content, and delivery mechanism	PI
4. Market survey and pricing questionnaire (Ideally including mass survey of LAs in target markets)	Survey form (ideally online, possibly supported by mailout)	Pilot sites, MAC
5. Semi-structured interviews with participating officers and members looking at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Expectations/Experiences</li> <li>b. SWOT</li> <li>c. Financial assumptions and cost benefit analysis</li> <li>d. Customer service satisfaction</li> </ul>	Guidelines, suggested questions for SSI	Pilot sites, MAC/PI
6. (Online) Questionnaires for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petitioners: on submission and finalisation of petition</li> <li>• Citizens: after signing petition/participating in debate</li> </ul>	Online questionnaire (with local translations supplied by regional partners, including integration of links into application)	Online questionnaire: PI Paper based: Pilot sites
7. Focus groups with citizens and petitioners	Focus group guidelines and data collection mechanism/ documents	Pilot sites

<sup>23</sup> Will be developed in conjunction with other project members

## **Feedback on technical aspects of the draft ECI Regulation**

*Article 6 of the draft Regulation specified the online collection system. This annex reproduces the submission on this made by the EuroPetition project.*

### **Paragraph 2: Copies of certificates**

It would be best if it the certificate could be in electronic form.

The most straightforward method would be for there to be a HTTPS-secured page *hosted by the Commission* which confirmed the title and URL of the official website for the ECI campaign. The campaign could then link to it prove that it is officially recognised.

Otherwise it would be simple for a fake ECI campaign to merely post a webpage on its site claiming that it's an official campaign. It's like posting a 'Trust-e' graphic on a e-payment's page: easy to do, difficult to prevent and confusing to the consumer/citizen.

### **Paragraph 2: Open source software**

It is debatable whether the Commission should provide software, since there would then be an implicit commitment to maintain it.

If there is to be a Commission-sponsored application:

First, the timetable is unrealistic – the technical standard is only required by the six month deadline too, making it difficult to ensure that the application complies with the Commission's own standard; second, the procurement process adds its own delays. We therefore think a more flexible timetable is needed – perhaps requiring a commitment and funds from the Commission to implement **and maintain** an open source reference application that conforms to the technical standard as it develops.

Finally, the EUPL ([www.osor.eu/eupl](http://www.osor.eu/eupl)) and OSOR.eu should be explicitly specified to support Commission policy towards open source applications, and prevent any argument about what an open source license is and where the code should be made available.

### **Paragraph 3: Certification of online systems**

It would be much more straightforward if it was permissible to use a system that has already been certified. (Many online systems will be configured to support multiple ECIs across languages and countries)

### **Paragraph 4: Required technical features**

It would be much more straightforward if it was permissible to use a system that has already been certified. (Many online systems will be configured to support multiple ECIs across languages and countries)

We would have preferred to see explicit mention of compliance with the Data Protection Directive and its successors, unless that is considered inherent in this Regulation.

### **Paragraph 4: Proof that citizen has only signed once**

This is virtually impossible to prove, as people can use multiple email and residential addresses. In fact the best way to prove it would be to require the universal use of national identity numbers, something that has been argued by many people would be a bad idea.

It may be then that the original wording makes more sense, supported by a (statistical/sample based) process to give assurance that duplicate (and fake) signatures do not affect whether the ECI has crossed the threshold.

An alternative wording would be to say

**“b. It is *possible* to verify the fact that a person has submitted only one statement”**

### **Statements of support**

We hope that in practise this will mean that the required data can be extracted in a structured (XML) form for reuse, rather than thousands of PDFs which are very difficult to electronically process. Can this be made explicit?

### **Paragraph 5: Establishment of standard**

This is a short period, but probably achievable if the Commission move quickly to find the stakeholders to involve in the process.

We would suggest that the work carried out in England last year<sup>24</sup> to define data standards for recording petition and their signatures would be the best starting point. We have attached a copy of the standard in Annex B of this document.

Ideally the technical specification would evolve and be defined by the practitioners as the system matures. So the Commission should be required to build flexibility into the specification and allow for regular updates and stakeholder involvement in their definition

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<sup>24</sup> And referred to elsewhere in this report