

“ADOPT AN MEP”

A PLEDGE CAMPAIGN TO TARGET EUROPEAN DECISION MAKERS ON CETA/TTIP



VERSION 11/12/2015

OUTLINE

The aim of this action is to mobilize European citizens on a massive scale in order to increase pressure on the relevant decision makers to reject TTIP and CETA in the Council, the European Parliament or in national parliaments.

INSPIRATION

The Stop TTIP ECI has already taken European citizen engagement to a quantitative level never seen before and has led to public debates on CETA and TTIP in many EU member states.

In terms of political impact, there are a few role model campaigns on European level that succeeded to influence EU decision making through a large scale mobilization of citizens, organized civil society and less powerful industry representations with creative employment of online campaigning tools:

- Campaign against software patents in the EU in 2005
- Stop ACTA in 2011-12
- “Water is a human right” ECI in 2012-14

Our aspiration with this campaign now is to combine the outreach scale of our ECI with the engagement level (and with the impact) of these successful campaigns, resulting in an entirely new quality and quantity of interaction between European citizens and decision makers – thus opening up new dimensions of the European public sphere and taking European democracy to a new level.

POLITICAL SITUATION

Even though neither CETA nor TTIP are likely to be voted on in the next six months, we have to **ensure that our elected representatives don't forget this is an issue of great concern to their constituents**. This is particularly important for CETA as many Members of the European Parliament and national parliaments – as well as many member state governments – have not yet been forced to position themselves (the EP resolution was only on TTIP and there hasn't been any debate on CETA in this legislature yet). It might also be useful to pay attention to national parliaments because they can and should put pressure onto their government (or more specifically: their trade ministers) with regards to their position in the European Council vote and will eventually have to ratify the agreements.

We will brand the campaign as **a follow-up action to the ECI**. We can also use the text of the ECI signature collection that 3.3 million people have signed as a basis for addressing MEPs and demand from them to answer to these millions of their voters. In the ECI text, we mention ISDS, regulatory cooperation, lowering of standards and the deregulation of public services as critical issues in TTIP and CETA. We could for instance ask MEPs to tell us whether they'll vote for or against a CETA even though they contain ISDS and regulatory cooperation and will lower standards and deregulate public services.

Such a framing helps signatories of the ECI to see the connection between their signature and the new activities. We can emphasise that we have a **huge number of supporters** for this position in our back and raise awareness for the continuation of the signature collection (get more people to sign because we actually continue using the number to put pressure on MEPs; signature collection gets a new purpose/relevance within the campaign).

Getting MEPs to make up their mind on CETA as well as their detailed answers to our topical questions can be also used to pressure member state governments and the Commission to push for renegotiation further points with Canada apart from ISDS.

The possibility to address the Council members through the tool will be included. How and when they will be contacted will also be decided at a later stage, but the tool should be programmed in such a way to make it possible.

In view of the extensive resource needs for setup and maintenance, we will not include the possibility of targeting national and regional MPs in the central campaign tool, but develop it in a way that allows for local deployment by national coalitions or individual NGOs.

STRATEGY

When starting to plan this campaign, the first problem that came up was: **What kind of questions** should citizens put to their representatives?

Demanding a clear positioning – i.e. asking for a definitive yes or no to CETA – could have several advantages. It would not allow any ambiguity in the MEPs' answers. It can be a problem if the question does not demand a clear answer as this makes it easier for politicians to explain why they voted differently in the end (e.g. certain things then did no longer apply). Clarity is important for a pledge campaign.

On the other hand, asking for a clear yes or no could mean that many MEPs will not engage. The campaign could end up with pledges from the 'usual suspect' MEPs (those from the left and the Greens), and others would either say they support CETA or not take part at all.

However, the aim should be to engage politicians from the other political families, with a strong focus on those who have not yet positioned themselves publicly. If a less clear answer is accepted the tool could also serve to facilitate a discussion about CETA. A clear answer could be demanded, but there would also have to be room for politicians to explain their position if we want as many as possible to respond.

Therefore, the Working Group suggests combining both approaches, i.e. engaging MEPs/MPs through asking a number of open questions first and then get them to pledge – reflecting their positions – in a second step.

Another fundamental question is: **How do we get politicians to respond?**

We would pose a (small) number of questions, initially to MEPs that aim to force them to clarify their position on TTIP and CETA. In order to get MEPs to answer, we'd ask our supporters to write emails, letters but also call their MEP's office, visit them and when they do, to document it (photo/video or write a short personal summary). Documentation would be uploaded to our website, shared in social media and used for follow-up visits and other interactions with the MEP. Further possibilities include asking people to "adopt" or "watch" a certain MEP in their vicinity and ensure to monitor this MEP's position on our questions. If MEPs don't want to answer, citizens could organise appointed Twitter storms, call-ins and even sit-ins in front of the MEP's office. There'd be plenty of scope for escalation and people would be empowered to demand their elected representatives to take a stance on this important issue. There's also the option of encouraging interaction between the MEPs and citizens in some way.

STRUCTURE

The campaign would be divided into **two phases**: One where debate, dialogue and education are the key elements of the campaign and a second when we demand that MEPs, and possibly also MPs and governments to position themselves concretely with regards to their voting behavior.

STAGE 1: BUILDING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Building up direct, **issue-based links between citizens and MEPs** through a campaign website that allows citizens to **ask questions on CETA/TTIP to representatives** they can most relate to (based on geography and policy interest), to **evaluate the answers** and to **share stories** about their advocacy activities and experience. The software should facilitate various levels of interaction - from sending questions via e-mail or twitter to organising actual meetings with politicians on CETA/TTIP - and allow customised embedding in partner organisations' websites.

In this initial phase of the campaign, the political situation is that CETA is not likely to be debated yet in the EP and re-negotiations might take place with Canada. In this situation, MEPs will be very reluctant to make a clear pledge how they will vote as they can always say that they want to see the final text first (to some extent this is understandable). Our aim is therefore to engage MEPs in a dialogue on CETA (and TTIP) and also try to educate them, e.g. by reminding them that ISDS is not the only critical issue. We will remind them that demands they have had with regards to TTIP (in the TTIP resolution and in public statements they have made) are not met in CETA.

In this phase, MEPs would have the opportunity to both answer to more open questions relating directly to the committees or political groups they're a member of (they are more likely to react to topics that they are working on and have expertise in). The more open questions (e.g. "You voted in the TTIP resolution that the power of parliaments mustn't be restricted. Yet, in CETA a Joint Committee on regulatory cooperation would be able to take binding decisions without involving parliaments. Would this be a reason for you to reject the CETA agreement?") could be targeted to MEPs' core areas, e.g.:

- Members of AGRI: ask about impact on food & agriculture
- Members of the S&D: Labour standards, public services
- All: Regulatory cooperation & ISDS
- Etc.

In order to focus on MEPs that have no clear position yet on CETA, we should also give them the opportunity to clarify their voting intention (i.e. "I will support/reject CETA [in its present form]") already in this campaign phase. That can help to avoid engaging only with representatives who are already opposed to CETA/TTIP and who have a record of interacting intensively with citizens anyway.

One of the most important elements in this phase is keeping citizens on board by:

- Allowing them to rate MEPs/MPs answers
- Offering various communication channels to their MEPs/MPs
- Asking them to report back on their experience including the use of rich media content (photos, videos), and to build communities through storytelling and local alliances
- Informing them about new political developments (e.g. EP debates and votes on relevant dossiers)
- Enabling and encouraging them to connect with each other offline (e.g. organizing meetings with MEPs/MPs)

STAGE 2: URGENT ACTION AGAINST CETA RATIFICATION

Based on these activities and the potential of interested citizens, the second stage would focus on raising pressure on MEPs, MPs and governments by pushing them to **pledge not to ratify CETA/TTIP** (at least in its present form) - when these question is being put on the table.

At some point, a final text for the CETA agreement will be presented and either a schedule for the ratification will be announced or the beginning of the ratification process. At this point, the campaign's emphasis will shift from education and dialogue to getting politicians to say clearly how they will vote in the EP. Those MEPs that have not pledged yet in the first part of the campaign will be urged to decide. Hence, the more open questions will no longer be asked as it's time to make a commitment.

In this stage, we will be able to capitalise on the potential of committed citizens and organisations we brought together in the first campaign phase and ask them for "urgent action" to prevent ratification of CETA.

As for the formulation of the pledge in stage 2, the Working Group suggest: **"Do you pledge to oppose CETA?"**, with "Yes" being the only answer possible, but allowing the option of "I disagree with CETA in its current form" during phase 1.

[This decision needs to be reconsidered, as we also need the information if some MEPs are already sure to support ratification.]

Should the TTIP negotiations come to a conclusion and a ratification procedure initiated, the campaign structure and tools can be easily adjusted to target that.

CAMPAIGN DESIGN

WHAT WOULD THE CAMPAIGN TOOL LOOK LIKE?

The online campaign tool has to enable and ensure:

- Low barriers for citizens, i.e.:
 - Reducing the number of options for decisions (e.g. which MEP to contact, which question to ask)
 - Consecutive presentation of possible involvement steps, from low-barrier activities ("click here to ask this MEP this question") to higher levels of engagement (reporting back, organising meetings).
- Follow-up mechanisms to keep citizens active over a longer period of time
- Community building
- Using results to put public pressure on decision makers ("name and shame", etc), e.g. by listing:
 - MEPs whose answers got the most positive vs. the most negative ratings
 - MEPs who answer quickly vs. those who keep ignoring citizens' requests
 - Political groups and national delegations of MEPs with the above criteria (to increase peer pressure within the groups/delegations)

Keeping this in mind, the campaign would be presented to citizens:

On the stop-ttip.org website

On the main campaign homepage:

- Key visual for the pledge campaign.
- Next to that photos of one or more local MEPs are displayed (in a hierarchical way, putting rather undecided MEPs on the top) with some basic information:
 - Name, party affiliation, country

- Colour coding to indicate the MEP's current position on TTIP/ CETA
- Responsiveness to questions, rating of answers by citizens
- A well visible search tool to allow users looking up other MEPs based on country, constituency, party affiliation and topics. Short tutorial to help if needed.

When clicking on one of the MEP's names, the supporter is forwarded to this MEP's profile page. **The profile page** includes the following sections:

- Basic information: name, political party, political group in EP, country, committee memberships, constituency, office address in the constituency and in Brussels/Strasbourg
- Position on TTIP & CETA: voting behaviour on key points of the TTIP resolution; public statements they have made on the issue so far (this would be crowd-sourced, i.e. people would have the opportunity to send us hints)
- Pre-formulated questions we posed to them and whether/how they have answered
- Various ways to interact with MEP: Twitter, Facebook, email, telephone and letter
- Standard texts for Tweets, FB messages, email texts and letters would vary according to the MEP's position (e.g. Thank you messages for MEPs who have pledged to support the campaign, messages demanding answers from those who haven't responded yet).
- A tutorial (text, video, animation) to give people ideas and show them how it's done. Encourage supporters to tell MEPs how they're personally affected (i.e. help them to formulate this narrative).
- "Adopt this MEP" button. If clicked, people can give us their email address (and potentially other details), so we can keep them up-to-date with 'their' MEP's position and ask them to keep interacting with this person.
- Interactivity log: Chance for supporters of the campaign to post emails, letters, and other reactions they received in response from MEPs. They can also report from meetings or phone calls with their MEP and can upload videos or audio files documenting these interactions. This area requires a moderator (labour intensive).
- Ideally: Some way of allowing people to connect to each other in their local constituency. This would facilitate collaboration on larger and more difficult undertakings such as organising a public debate with their MEP, visiting their office or organising other public actions and events. Ideally, the next TTIP/CETA European action day would see a large number of such activities on the same day (during MEPs' constituency week).
- The supporter would continue to receive ideas via email how to interact with their MEP under watch. They'd also be kept informed about any political developments on TTIP and CETA.

To be able to start the campaign as planned – but also to keep interest of supporters up through a potentially longer time period – we would start with a basic feature set (MEP profiles with contact information, pledge status, preformulated questions and answers, standard social media action tools) and add new functions gradually. These will be announced in newsletters, mail alerts to users of the site, and via social media as they become available.

In order to avoid annoying MEPs who support our cause, those who pledge to oppose the ratification would be given the choice of answering the questions anyway or having the function to send them questions disabled.

The questions to MEPs would be formulated to enable "Yes/No/Undecided" answers. However, they will also have the option to explain their choice in an open statement.

ON A SUPPORTING ORGANISATION'S WEBSITE

In principle, the supporter's experience would be the same as the entire interaction would happen within a widget that Stop TTIP would provide to supporting organisations. So initially, people will have the chance to

choose their MEP – with a preselection based on the partner organisations’ geographic and topical focus. Then, they would have all the possibilities to interact with those MEPs (and possibly MPs) like on the main campaign website – however, partners will be able to restrict the list of possible questions to those areas they are especially interested in.

Requirements for the widget:

- It should be as easy to embed as the PoliCAT widget (short html code).
- It must change its size according to the space it has on the website where it is embedded.
- The supporting organisation will have the opportunity to apply for data ownership of the data gathered via their widget, which allows them to stay in touch with their supporters.
- In order for Stop TTIP to send reminders and updates on the campaign (so people keep tending to their adopted MEP), the campaign tool should also be able to contact supporters that have signed up via a partner organisation’s website. However, these people would not receive the monthly Stop TTIP newsletter and could also not be contacted by the central campaign office in any other form.

TRANSLATION

The profiles, questions as well as the answers of the MEPs will be available in English and the language(s) of their constituency.

The central campaign website would be built in the eight languages already used on stop-ttip.org. National coordinations that need other language versions would be encouraged and supported to set up their localisation on their own website. Widgets would be made available in all EU languages.

It would also be useful to have a short summary of what CETA and TTIP is on the website, to give people a short overview. This, as well as the ECI text, should be available in all EU languages.

The translations of the website, widgets and the initial set of questions to MEPs will be provided by professional translation agencies, financed from the central campaign’s budget. Beyond that, we will need the full support of national campaigns, partner organisations and their volunteers to take care of the translations and moderation of MEPs’ answers and citizens’ contributions.

MODERATION

MEPs’ answers and citizens’ contributions need to be moderated. To facilitate the latter, a “report this” function could be added to the stories sent in. Both have to be limited in length.

Abusive content (e.g. inciting, racist, xenophobic, anti-democratic or otherwise incompatible with the spirit of the campaign) would be moderated. Moderation will be done using the four-eyes-principle: If a moderator in charge of a given language considers a contribution unacceptable, a member of the campaign coordination office will have to approve this decision.

If a contribution is moderated, the author will receive a request to reformulate or to withdraw it.

Repeated need to moderate contributions from a particular author can lead to blocking his/her answers altogether or, in case of MEPs, removing them from the campaign tool altogether.

Criteria for moderation and decisions to moderate contributions have to be documented on the campaign website and all other installations/widgets in a perfectly transparent way.

BLOCKING

The Working Group discussed also the question, **if it is necessary to exclude certain MEPs from the far right** that are openly hostile to democracy and basic European values from the campaign. Some partners found it crucial that they are not giving these political forces any room to propagate their views while others had trouble to find the proper arguments and criteria to filter out some of the elected representatives who will all be asked to vote on the agreements.

[Suggested solution needs still to be agreed upon in the WG.]

It was agreed that in any case, the reasons for filtering should be communicated on all campaign websites in a transparent manner.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ONLINE TOOL

The campaign coordination office is currently evaluating which existing software solutions could be built upon in order to avoid lengthy and expensive development needs.

So far, the following tools and campaigns have been contacted:

- **Greenpeace Austria** used a tool last year to contact local MPs on TTIP
- **WeMove.EU** considers expanding an existing software for contacting MPs into a transnational and multilanguage campaigning tool
- **Voxelbrain** is the agency that developed Campact's Krautbuster software and has also tools that can be used for community building and event organisation
- **Abgeordnetenwatch.de** has vast experience in allowing citizens to ask German MEPs and MPs open questions and motivate those to answer
- **Parltrack** is an open source tool that scraps information on MEPs, their functions and their legislative activities from the EP's website and shares them via API

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER 2015

- Finalising the concept proposal within the working group and sharing it with the campaign partners for feedback
- Discussing possible development needs and ideas with software developers and organisations who have experience with similar tools
- Drafting the budget

JANUARY 2016

- Preparing campaign plan based on feedback from partner organisations
- Finalising specification for the software/website
- New coordination group decides on final campaign concept and budget

JANUARY-MARCH 2016

- Development and testing of the software
- Compilation of MEP database
- Website redesign
- Final formulation of questions

MARCH 2016

- Launch of the campaign with MEPs (staged launch is possible, e.g. starting with selected countries and/or languages)