Testimony by Dénes András Nagy
Organiser, Minority Safepack European citizens' initiative

So, what were the main lessons learnt when it comes to our European citizens' initiative? Let me single out three.

Number one: ensure that you go way above 1 million signatures! Over the course of the Minority Safepack campaign we managed to gather more than 1.3 million signatures; however, remember: once you finish the campaign you have to submit the signatures for verification to the national authorities in each and every single Member State, which means that in this case it's possible that some signatures you collected are not valid. Somebody might have written their name wrong, might have missed out a number on their passport, and as a consequence of that, that signature will not be verified. So, in the end, in comparison to 1.3 million signatures we only had 1,128,385 signatures that were verified. So, you can see that we lost a great amount of signatures. Therefore, do not stop! Once you reach 1 million continue going, keep collecting statements of support!

The second lesson learnt relates to the thresholds in the Member States. Do not gather signatures only in seven EU Member States! Here's the reason why: if you consider Austria, where we were really doing well in the campaign, we didn't manage to meet the threshold, even though we expected the threshold to be passed. And the reason for that is just a fact of life: that the document that you need to sign a European citizens' initiative in Austria is not generally with people in their day to day life, so many people came up to us and said "I want to sign it, but I left that document at home" and they never came back, unfortunately. So, do not focus your campaign only on seven EU Member States, make sure that you're targeting more! That way, if for any reason during the campaign one of the Member States where you really expected to pass the threshold doesn't come through, you have other Member States where you can still succeed. And this is what we did: so, in the end we managed to pass the threshold in 11 EU Member States; however, once you gather that threshold amount, do not stop! Let me give you an example: in Slovenia the threshold is 5640 signatures, and we managed to collect that much; however, you have to submit the signatures for verification to the competent Member State authorities, so if you just stop at that amount what the threshold is, perhaps that might be the reason why your European citizens' initiative fails, since after verification you might lose a few signatures, and in order to avoid that, make sure you go away above the threshold amount and collect the signatures in more than seven EU Member States.

The third lesson that we learned during the campaign is multilingualism. You have in the European Union 24 official languages and going beyond this, there are 60 regional or minority languages spoken by 50 million EU Member State citizens. So, tap into that rich linguistic heritage that we have within our European Union. What we did during our campaign was, we were targeting people in their languages and we saw that they resonated much better due to the fact that, as a Hungarian, I saw a Facebook ad in Hungarian or on Twitter as a speaker of Ladin which is a community of 41,000 speakers, you saw a post in Ladin, not just in Italian, that really catches someone's eye. So, you know that for the new European Citizens' Initiative system you have the ability to send messages in the languages that people signed it in, do use that feature, I would have loved if we had had that with

our team during the campaign. Unfortunately, when we were doing it, we had to do it old-school, so we built up followers on our social media accounts, and again here: use the fact, that in different Member States different platforms are the ones that people use. Twitter might be popular in one Member State, Facebook might be in another Member State, perhaps Instagram might be the right tool to use for a particular Member State, always keep that in mind and speak the language of your audience, so: use their language, write to them as you think they would receive that message in a positive way and always try to make sure that you talk to people, involve them and that's why I think the European Citizens' Initiative Forum, if we would have had it during the campaign, would have been a great boost to us, we could have asked people for help, we could have asked them to translate certain texts into their respective languages, we could have asked for support, whether it's legal, or ideas on how to make sure that we succeed in certain Member States, it really would have helped if we had had that Forum, so I'm really, really happy that now we have it, and I would love to discuss your initiative with you there, on the European Commission's new European Citizens' Initiative Forum.