NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Europeans launch campaign to declare life starts at conception

Alessandro Speciale | Jan. 16, 2013
Vatican City

Anti-abortion groups from 20 different countries have launched a petition to ask the European Parliament to recognize that life begins at conception.

The "One of Us" initiative is the first of its kind in Europe and represents a larger effort to forge a cohesive continental anti-abortion movement.

According to the petition's website, "One of Us" has "greater political potential than any other initiative that has been undertaken so far to protect the dignity of the person and life from conception at a European scale."

"At the foundation of this challenge is the idea that abortion is not inevitable," wrote *Avvenire*, the newspaper of the Italian Catholic Bishops' Conference, presenting the initiative Jan. 7.

The petition aims to collect 1 million signatures in at least seven of the 27 countries of the European Union by November, forcing the Strasbourg, France-based European Parliament to schedule a debate on the issue.

Still, anti-abortion groups recognize that the European Union doesn't have the power to address abortion issues, which are regulated by each member state. In most European countries, with the exception of Ireland and Malta, abortion within the first trimester is generally legal.

The "One of Us" petition, even if successful and passed into law by the European Parliament, would not lead to the outright ban of abortion across Europe. It would, however, block funding from the European Union for activities that entail the destruction of embryos, such as stem cell research.

Nevertheless, organizers -- led largely by independent Catholic groups -- say that they hope the initiative will lead to "political change" on abortion, because of the "need to respect the wish of so many European citizens."

Moreover, if the petition were to be turned into law, "jurisdiction at the European Court of Human Rights, where many bioethical cases are pending, could be positively influenced."

Last year, the Strasbourg-based court ruled against a patent application involving a human embryo, which activists consider a landmark case.

The ruling, in declaring a patent application invalid, implicitly recognized that an embryo is a form of "human life." If the "One of Us" petition were to be approved, anti-abortion activists would have more recourse to the court.

According to the petition's organizers, "if a consensus will be achieved among 1 million citizens or more, a concrete ethical standard could be established across Europe" for the protection of human life, "no matter how young."

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-31 13:36*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/europeans-launch-campaign-declare-life-starts-conception