

PRESS RELEASE
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One step forward, two steps back?

In 2010 the European Union took a decisive step forward with regard to animal welfare by adopting the European Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. The European Union might now take several steps back if the European Commission accepts the claim by the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Stop Vivisection" to annul this Directive and ban all animal research.

Despite the progress made in developing alternative methods, the use of animals in research is still needed. Human and animal health very much depend on it. It is important, therefore, to abide by a regulatory framework with high standards of animal welfare protection to ensure that human and animal health, as well as animal welfare are safeguarded. That is what the European Union did in 2010, by adopting one of the world's most advanced instruments with regard to animal welfare standards: Directive 2010/63/EU.

The European Directive represents an essential step forward in raising the animal welfare standards in Europe. Animals may be used in research only where no viable alternative method is available, and when used, the replacement, reduction and refinement of the use of animals (the so-called principle of the "3Rs") should guide their use. Although still at an early stage of its implementation, this Directive is an important development towards the right direction.

The ECI not only wants to annul the Directive but also seeks to fully ban animal research. The annulment of the Directive would lamentably put Europe back to the situation before 2010, when lower standards for animal welfare existed. The ban on animal research would simply put Europe off its game with regard to biomedical research. Researchers would then be forced to find new places to undertake their research (countries or regions that, almost certainly, will have lower animal welfare standards than those existing now in Europe). The end result would be disastrous for Europe: the progress made in the past few years would be wiped out and Europe would find itself worse off than before the adoption of the Directive. As LERU's Secretary-General, Prof Kurt Deketelaere, states: "The consequences for human and animal health and high-quality research, if this ECI were to go ahead, are simply devastating".

On June 3, the European Commission will respond to the ECI "Stop Vivisection". LERU -together with more than 160 organisations- has signed up to [The Wellcome Trust statement](#) and calls on the European Commission to reject this ECI, to support Directive 2010/63/EU and to maintain the effort undertaken to raise animal welfare standards and to advance research for the improvement of human and animal health.

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About LERU

The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is an association of twenty-one leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research.

Founded in 2002, LERU advocates education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience. LERU regularly publishes a variety of papers and reports which make high-level policy statements, provide in-depth analyses and make concrete recommendations for policymakers, universities, researchers and other stakeholders.

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