



12 Ways to Build a European Citizens' Initiative That Works!

In 2012 the European Union launched the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), the first tool for transnational participatory and digital democracy in world history. EU leaders declared that it would be a powerful new democratic instrument that will change how the EU is run. In practice, the ECI's burdensome procedures have dissuaded many potential users. With few new ECIs being registered and over 20 ECI campaigns complaining of massive flaws in the ECI rules, this new democratic instrument is under threat. In 2015, the ECI will be up for official review. Join us in telling the European Commission, Council and Parliament: **"Tear down the walls blocking participatory democracy: eliminate restrictive ECI rules!"**

Specifically, we ask them to:

1. Make the registration procedure less restrictive.

Nearly half of proposed ECIs have been declared "legally inadmissible" by the Commission and refused registration – sometimes due to rigid legal interpretations and political pressure. To ensure its legitimacy and engage citizens, ECI topics should not be so strictly limited.

2. Allow ECIs that require treaty amendments to implement.

Many topics important to citizens require changing EU treaties. The Commission may propose treaty changes on its own initiative. So ECIs should be able to ask it to do so.

3. Ensure that the Commission takes successful ECIs seriously.

None of the first successful ECIs have led to concrete policy proposals. Yet campaigners will only use the ECI if they are likely to impact policy. The Commission should therefore always strive to respond to successful ECIs with concrete actions, including legislative proposals.

4. Simplify and harmonise personal data requirements and procedures.

Each Member State determines the personal data its nationals and residents must provide, forms to use and data protection procedures to follow. The result is a nightmare for campaigners. Furthermore, EU citizens living outside their country of nationality often cannot support an ECI. Member States should strive to use common forms, data protection rules and personal data requirements limited to name, address and nationality. A single EU-wide coordinating body could simplify signature verification.

5. Eliminate ID number requirements.

Many potential supporters have refused to sign an ECI when asked to share ID numbers. The European Data Protection Supervisor determined that it was not necessary to collect ID numbers, yet 18 countries still require them. Some never use the ID numbers they collect.

6. Redesign the online signature collection system.

Significant and persistent online signature collection problems have led every ECI campaign to lose signatures and collection time. The software needs to be redesigned from scratch with the participation of campaigners, stakeholders and civic IT specialists. It must be user-friendly, accessible to people with disabilities, allow for electronic signatures, incorporate online campaigning best practices, respect data protection regulations and facilitate safe data sharing with national authorities. In addition, the technical regulation should be simplified and all ECIs given the option of using Commission hosting services.

7. Allow the collection of e-mail addresses within the ECI support form and permit ECI organisers to contact signatories.

ECI campaigns do not have access to the email addresses of their ECI's signatories. This limits the ECI's ability to mobilise Europeans and facilitate transnational debate. To allow two-way communication, email addresses need to be collected within the ECI support form.

8. Let ECI campaigns choose their own start date.

An ECI's 12 month signature collection period begins the day the Commission registers it, within two months of its submission. Without a known start date, campaign planning and media outreach are challenging. Campaigns should be allowed to choose their own launch date, within six months following registration.

9. Lower the age of ECI support to 16.

The same age limits apply to the ECI as to EU elections. But the ECI only proposes, but does not directly impact, policy. Many ECI topics are relevant to youth, helping to engage them in European public affairs. The Austrian model allowing 16-17 year old ECI supporters should be expanded to all Member States.

10. Offer an ECI support infrastructure with legal advice, translation and funding.

Most grassroots ECI campaigns struggle to fund needed legal advice, translation services and campaigning guidance. As a democratic tool, the ECI is a public good that should benefit from a public infrastructure for practical and financial support.

11. Provide a legal status to protect citizens' committee members and allow fundraising.

ECIs need a European legal status that shields citizens' committee members from personal liability and allows for more efficient and transparent management of finances.

12. Increase public and media awareness of the ECI.

Public awareness of the ECI is so low that campaigns must educate the public about both the ECI and their topic. The ECI thus needs to be promoted as an official EU instrument to raise public awareness and overcome citizen distrust of sharing required personal data.

The ECI Campaign is an independent non-profit working for the successful introduction and implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative right.

www.citizens-initiative.eu