



12 Reasons

Why Europe Needs “An ECI That Works”

ECI campaigners have seen the potential of the ECI to bring real benefits for Europe. They've witnessed cross-border distrust evaporate and new co-operations emerge. They've listened to ordinary people intelligently debating EU policy. They've seen local politicians adopt new rules because they were promoted via this EU instrument.

But the ECI we now have can never fulfil its true potential. Without significant reform, it will probably no longer even be used. If the ECI fails, it is Europe itself that loses the most. Here are **12 reasons why Europe needs “An ECI That Works”** and what it might do.

1. The European project is in trouble and citizens feel unheard. The percentage of citizens who hold a positive image of the EU has been trending downward for the past decade – from a high of 52% in 2007 to a low of 30% in 2013 (Eurobarometer, QA9). The EU is not just failing to deliver outcomes citizens want, but citizens feel unheard. For the past decade, over half of Europeans do not think that their voice counts in the EU (Eurobarometer, D72.1). Citizens will accept difficult policy decisions if they believe they are made in a fair and transparent manner. But EU policy-making remains opaque and closed to citizens.

An ECI That Works opens EU policy-making up to direct citizen involvement. This helps politicians to address what really matters to people's everyday lives. It also increases the likelihood that even tough decisions will be accepted.

2. Europeans can only complain about EU policy. They cannot directly influence the EU policy agenda. In recent years, more citizens have petitioned the European Parliament to complain about EU policy than ever before. However, they cannot ask for new policies or propose novel solutions to complex challenges.

An ECI That Works allows citizens to influence the EU's policy agenda by “pushing the start button” on EU legislation. It also helps to spread fresh perspectives and new ideas that could help solve some of the EU's most pressing problems.

3. Once every five years is not often enough for citizens to express their views on the EU. Five years of accumulated frustration can be expressed in blunt and destabilising ways via European Parliament elections. In the 2014 EP elections, Eurosceptic and far-right parties gained and centrists lost many seats. The European Conservatives and Reformists party group is now the third largest in the European Parliament.

An ECI That Works provides an ongoing “safety valve” or release mechanism through which citizens can express their wishes for EU policy - without destabilising the entire policy-making system.

4. Younger Europeans demand a say on issues, not just to select representatives. Soon the majority of EU citizens will have come of political age after the Cold War. Compared to their predecessors, they are better educated and more globally connected and demand a greater say in policies that affect their lives. They are thus more likely to use direct, issue-specific methods to influence public policies, such as petitions (Q3, Flash Eurobarometer 373). Governments at local, regional and national levels are responding with e-petition websites, citizens' initiatives and other forms of participatory democracy.

An ECI That Works allows EU citizens to express their views on specific issues, not just choose between party platforms. It thus helps involve younger Europeans (aged under 45) in the EU and ensure that it serves their needs.

5. Technology is transforming how citizens relate to government and one another, but the EU isn't taking advantage of this. Technology is facilitating new forms of participatory democracy where citizens share ideas and concerns online and governments react quickly and transparently. Yet the EU remains stuck in an older era of top-down, one-way communications. Modern citizens are not content to elect representatives and then sit passively on the side-lines.

An ECI That Works contains an online component that supports two-way conversations between citizens and EU policy-makers. By connecting online ECI support to social media and EU institutions' online services – such as live streaming of hearings - it can dramatically expand the EU's capacity to interact with citizens.

6. Brussels decision-making is dominated by powerful lobbies and insiders. The needs of financial institutions, corporations and large Member States can be over-represented. The voices of ordinary people are rarely heard. For example, the Corporate European Observatory noted that 92% of lobbying on the TTIP trade partnership was from private interests vs. 4% from public interests.

An ECI That Works helps to level the playing field and provide opportunities for groups without connections in Brussels to be heard by decision-makers.

7. Women's voices and concerns can be drowned out in traditional EU policy-making. Women are less likely than men to engage in direct forms of policy advocacy such as contacting an elected representative or taking part in a public debate. However, they are just as likely as men to sign a petition (Q3, Flash Eurobarometer 373).

An ECI That Works provides an easily accessible way for women to share their concerns at EU level. Many ECIs have been led by women and/or addressed issues of particular concern to women - such as female entrepreneurship, education, animal rights and the environment.

8. The Commission can appear oblivious to citizens' concerns. The Commission is unelected and therefore not directly accountable to citizens. Some Commission decisions that were contrary to popular will have prompted accusations that EU decision-making is undemocratic and have provided fuel for anti-EU political movements.

An ECI That Works demonstrates to citizens that the Commission is open to citizens' ideas and popular debate. It recognises popular will by responding to successful ECIs with concrete actions, including policy proposals decided via normal EU democratic procedures.

9. There is no true "European public space" and no way to create one. Europeans are deeply interconnected economically, environmentally and culturally. However, without common public spaces for dialogue and debate, parochial concerns and regional jealousies can undermine political will for common action.

An ECI That Works helps to create common European public spaces and spread awareness of what Europeans share. This can help build a European identity and counterbalance forces that demonise other EU countries or promote radical nationalism.

10. Citizens can have unrealistic expectations of the EU. They may, for example, expect action in an area with limited EU competence. This is often based on limited knowledge of EU competences and processes.

An ECI That Works demonstrates to citizens how the EU works by addressing an issue of concern to them. They can see clearly what is and isn't an EU competence. An ECI might even lead to popular calls for expanding some areas of EU competency.

11. The EU is “out there”, not “right here” where people live. The EU is often described as far away, in Brussels or Strasbourg. In fact, the EU's impact is felt throughout the continent. This can enhance popular impressions of its irrelevance or potential threat.

An ECI That Works brings the EU into people's everyday lives. They sign ECIs on their home computers or in community gathering places. They hear about ECIs from friends and family. To get support, ECI campaigners translate EU policy into practical outcomes in people's lives.

12. The EU is often portrayed as a negative force undermining national well-being as opposed to being a positive force for good. In the popular press, the EU is sometimes blamed for cuts in social or educational spending or for restricting product choice. Rarely is it credited with improving local or national policies that protect or support ordinary people.

An ECI That Works can impact local and regional policy, as well as European policy. Ideas from one part of the EU can spread throughout the continent via an ECI. The prestige of an EU instrument can help convince local politicians of the value of new policy solutions.

What does “An ECI That Works” look like?

The ECI we currently have does not work. It does not work for EU citizens. It does not work for a European Union whose goal is peace and prosperity for all its residents. If Europe is to have the ECI that it needs, the rules governing the ECI need to be significantly reformed. To learn how, see [12 Recommendations to Build an ECI That Works](#) at www.citizens-initiative.eu.

For an insight into the ECI's potential, read the stories of early ECI campaigns in An ECI that Works! at www.ecithatworks.org.



The ECI Campaign (www.citizens-initiative.eu) is an independent non-profit organisation working for the successful introduction and implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative right.

www.citizens-initiative.eu