

Open letter to EU institutions: preserve ECI organisers' freedom of choice for online collection tools!

Brussels, 24 October 2018

Dear Members of the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission,

You are currently in interinstitutional negotiation on the revision of the regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). We think that this represents a huge opportunity to increase the accessibility and user-friendliness of this instrument.

However, we are aware that the Council is proposing to remove from the regulation the option for ECI organisers to set up and use an 'individual online collection system' (iOCS). We believe that this would be a big mistake, as it would undermine a key pillar of the ECI: its digital dimension.

If the current Council position were to prevail in the negotiations, future ECI organisers would have no choice but to use the Commission-run centralised online collection system (cOCS). **With this open letter, we, online campaigning and ECI experts, call upon the Council of the EU to reconsider its position on the issue of iOCS, and we call upon the European Parliament and the European Commission to make the preservation of the freedom and right to use iOCS a *sine qua non* in the negotiations on the revision.**

'OpenECI' is an iOCS and it is currently the only alternative to the Commission's OCS. It is a software developed *by* ECI organisers and *for* ECI organisers and it is being used by 50% of the ECIs currently open.

'OpenECI' was initially developed because the Commission's OCS had technical issues, was not user-friendly and did not allow flexibility for organisers to integrate additional functions. The Commission, since then, has certainly improved its OCS over the years, also due to learning from 'OpenECI'.

However, this has not reduced the demand for OpenECI as an important alternative to the Commission's OCS and **we believe it is of critical importance for the future of the ECI that organisers maintain the *freedom and right* to choose between the use of the Commission's OCS or the use of an alternative software, like 'OpenECI'.**¹

¹ 67% of the over 5000 respondents to the online public consultation of mid-2017 stated that they want to maintain the option for iOCS, in addition to the Commission's permanent offer of cOCS. See European Commission, Factual summary of the contributions received in the context of the open public consultation on the revision of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the European Citizens' Initiative, p. 3. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/files/Factual_summary_en.pdf

If the EU institutions want the ECI to become more widely used and more campaigner-friendly, it should not eliminate the possibility for citizens and civil society organisations to create and use an iOCS like ‘OpenECI’. The investment and efforts in the development and perfecting of this alternative software in the past years has made this iOCS increasingly popular among ECI organisers. **Banning iOCS would not only erase OpenECI, create uncertainty for future ECI organisers and stop a fruitful process of mutual learning, it would also undermine the possibility for civil society to further invest in the ECI’s digital dimension.**

We count on you to take your collective responsibility because only together we can make the ECI work!

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Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, President of UniVerde Foundation
Bruno Kaufmann, Director of International Cooperation of European Democracy Foundation
Carsten Berg, Director of The ECI Campaign
Daniela Bozhinova, Chairperson of Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens’ Initiatives
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This open letter was initiated by The ECI Campaign in collaboration with Democracy International and Mehr Demokratie. For more information, please contact Maarten de Groot (maarten@citizens-initiative.eu or +31 6 40 59 56 47).