



European Citizens' Initiative: time to act!

Perspectives from civil society and local/regional authorities

Brussels, 30 March 2012

**Joint Conference of the
European Economic and Social Committee and the
Committee of the Regions**

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is one of the major innovations of the Treaty of Lisbon, aimed at increasing direct democracy in the EU. The initiative enables one million EU citizens, who are nationals of at least one quarter of the Member States, to call directly on the European Commission to propose a legal act in an area within the competences of the EU.

The regulation on the citizens' initiative was agreed to by the European Parliament and the Council in late 2010 and it was published in the official journal on 11 March 2011. The regulation will enter into force on 1 April 2012, from which moment onward citizens may start organising initiatives at first by registering them with the European Commission. The European Commission has also adopted an implementing regulation setting down the technical specifications for the online collection systems for statements of support and has designed open-source software for its operation.

The launch of the ECI is a unique opportunity for the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, as formal representatives of civil society and public authorities at the local and regional level, to discuss the concept of participatory democracy. It also raises a number of issues about the role for both committees and its members, in stimulating, monitoring and reacting on citizens' initiatives, and on its position between civil society and the European policy makers.

**All background information and conference presentations
are available on:**

www.eesc.europa.eu/eci
www.cor.europa.eu/eci

European Citizens' Initiative: time to act!

Brussels, 30 March 2012

Programme

Interpretation from EN/FR/DE/IT/ES/EL into EN/FR/DE

All sessions are moderated by **Christophe Leclercq**, publisher Euractiv

9.00 - 9.30: Welcome and registration

9.30 - 11.15: Opening session

We are on the eve of the official start of the ECI. The opening session will evaluate if the EU is ready to implement this new participatory instrument. What is the state of play on the European Commission's, on the member states' and other authorities' and on civil society's side? How much can the ECI learn from past experience at local level in the field of civil participation?

Welcome speeches

- **Mercedes Bresso**, President of the Committee of the Regions
- **Staffan Nilsson**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee
- **Georgios Papastamkos**, Vice-President of the European Parliament
- **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the European Commission, Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Administration

Participatory democracy and citizen's participation

Discussion on what civil society and local authorities have been doing at community level and the exploration of possible links with strengthening political participation and forging a sense of citizenship

- Case studies of participatory democracy in Europe
 - **Lela Bencharif**, Vice-President in charge of participatory democracy, Region of Rhone-Alpes, France
 - **Alessandra Mirabile**, member of the "Fraternité 2020" Citizens' Committee, Italy
 - **Bruno Kaufmann**, President of the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe, Falun, Sweden
- Debate with the panel and the audience

11.15 – 11.30: Coffee break

11.30 – 13.00: Policy debate

The CoR and the EESC have a role to play in the implementation of the ECI in terms of communication. As privileged intermediaries between the European institutions and the actors in the field they can give impulse to ECI promotion and accessibility. Some examples of initiatives of awareness-raising at local level (EESC members' local initiatives) will be given during the first part of this session. But the role of both Committees can and must go beyond communication. This issue will be the topic of an interactive policy debate.

Promoting the ECI in the member states

- **Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso**, President of the Murcia Region, Spain, and First Vice-President of the CoR, presenting the Murcian case study "debatejoven.eu"
- **Maureen O'Neill**, Director Faith in Older People, United Kingdom, EESC Member, reporting back from national events organised in March

Policy debate: "What role for the CoR and the EESC in the European Citizens' Initiative?"

- **Sonia Masini**, President of the Province of Reggio Emilia, Italy, CoR rapporteur for the ECI
- **Anne-Marie Sigmund**, Austria, EESC rapporteur for the ECI, EU Adviser at the Federal Committee of Liberal Professions
- **Gerald Häfner**, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur for the ECI (tbc)
- **Erminia Mazzoni**, Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Committee on Petitions (tbc)
- **Margaritis Schinas**, Deputy Head, Bureau of European Policy Advisers, European Commission

Closing remarks

- **Anna Maria Darmanin**, EESC Vice-President for Communication, Council Member of the Malta Workers' Union
- **Luc Van den Brande**, Chairman of the Flemish-European Liaison Agency, Belgium, Chairman of the CoR CIVEX Commission

13.00 – 14.00: Networking lunch

Venue

All sessions will take place in room JDE 62, on the 6th floor of the Jacques Delors Building (rue Belliard 99-101, 1040 Brussels).

At the end of the joint conference a networking lunch is offered in Atrium 6, next to the conference room.

Webstreaming and Twitter

The conference will be webstreamed, allowing stakeholders outside Brussels to follow the event; the videosource will be embedded on the conference websites.

During the conference feedback and questions will be collected on Twitter, and used to stir debates (please use #eci to share your messages or to follow the feed).

More information

EU Institutions:

- European Economic and Social Committee: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/eci>
- Committee of the Regions: <http://www.cor.europa.eu/eci>
- European Citizens' Initiative – Official register European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>
- Regulation on the Citizens' Initiative: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu> (regulation Nr 211/2011)

Conference projects:

- Stakeholders platform Initiative.eu (Euractiv): <http://www.initiative.eu/>
- Participatory democracy Rhône-Alpes: <http://www.rhonealpes.fr/reset/all/91-rendez-vous-citoyens.htm>
- Fraternité 2020: <http://www.fraternite2020.eu/>
- Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe: <http://www.iri-europe.org>
- Murcia Youth Contest "Debate Joven": <http://debatejoven.eu>

