

Highlights of the CoR-EESC Joint Conference Debates

"European Citizens' Initiative – Time to act!" (30 March 2012)

NB. This is not an exhaustive coverage of the conference debates, and does not replace speeches, which are available [here](#).

1. **Potential organisers identified the need for technical and legal support.** The existing structures (e.g. Europe Direct Centres) would need to build up expertise.
 - There could also be room for **a dedicated independent helpdesk**, which could offer impartial and independent information and advice to initiators.
2. **Representatives of some organisations claimed that support might be necessary to operate European Citizens' Initiatives.**
 - Support and advice should be given to initiators: organised civil society, small organisations and individual citizens, and no possible EU funding to single initiatives.
 - Coordinate ECI initiatives with the European elections to allow for funding through synergies
3. **The successful implementation of the ECI regulation requires a partnership approach, multi-level governance and multi-actor cooperation.**
 - a. All actors and all levels of governance should be involved in the process.
 - b. It is a good idea to explore complementarities between the roles (e.g. cooperation between CoR and EESC).
 - c. There is a need to create *spaces/ fora* where all the different stakeholders can meaningfully interact.
 - d. Coordination should be improved between the different European and national institutions.
 - e. Coordination and cooperation should be improved with academia.
 - f. "Decentralised" hearings at the local level, maybe organised in cooperation by an EESC and CoR member, could be instrumental in engaging citizens at the grassroots and listening to their concerns.
4. **Awareness still needs to be raised and information should be disseminated about the ECI.**
 - a. There is a need to make good use of decentralized resources, i.e. civil society and local authority communication channels.

- b. Communication should be as close to the citizen and as direct as possible, CoR and EESC members should communicate actively.
- c. An effective communication campaign should be based on a partnership between all institutions, also in view of the European Year of Citizenship 2013.

5. **Multi-level governance in practice: promoting citizens' participation at all levels**

- a. National, regional and local governments should be encouraged to adopt and use similar tools and should consult citizens and their associations in policy making.
- b. This can contribute to renewing confidence in the EU and bridging the gap between the EU and its citizens.

6. **Ensure a dynamic follow-up so that we can immediately learn from "precedents", attempts and successes**

- a. EU institutions need to coordinate their response and involvement in the ECI in an open and transparent manner, highlighting different and complementary roles.
- b. The decisions on the admissibility of ECI's or on their evaluation should be transparent.
- c. At the same time there is a need to have patience and trust in this new tool, and realistic expectations of the European legislative process.
- d. The institutions should monitor the ECI process from its initiation to the end of the process. **One of the ways to do it is to hold a European Citizens' Initiative Day, jointly organized by the EESC and CoR. The idea was supported by both EESC and CoR presidents.** This could be an occasion to take stock of the experiences and lessons learnt from the operation of the ECI, reflect on possible future improvements to the legislative framework, while at the same time promoting the instrument and raising awareness.