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**EESC President: "Only by increasing its impact will the ECI be able to reconnect the EU with its citizens"**

**The 10th edition of ECI Day, dedicated to the European Citizens' Initiative, took place exceptionally online and over two days. EESC president Christa Schweng, European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová and European Parliament Vice-President Pedro Silva Pereira took part in the opening session, assessing the state of this unique instrument of participatory democracy.**

Over the years, ECI Day has raised the profile of the European Citizens' Initiative and played an important role in keeping it high on the EU's institutional agenda. This became evident four years ago, [when Commissioner Timmermans, following EESC advice, announced a review of the ECI regulation](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/eci-day-2017-commissioner-timmermans-follows-eesc-advice-and-announces-review-eci-regulation-autumn-2017), which took effect in 2020.

In her introductory remarks, **Christa Schweng** stressed that one key feature of every participatory process is its impact: "The lack of impact can create disenchantment, disengagement and frustration among citizens". She added: "It is only by increasing its impact that the ECI will become a strong tool, able to reconnect the EU with its citizens".

So far, only six initiatives have managed to reach the required signature thresholds since 2012 and their impact has been quite limited and late. However, there are reasons for optimism because 2021 saw the first two pieces of legislation inspired by ECIs take effect. One is the **Drinking Water Directive**, which was influenced by the **Right2Water initiative**; another is the so-called **Transparency Regulation**, which is a follow-up to the **Ban glyphosate initiative** and is designed to increase the transparency and quality of studies used in the scientific assessment of substances.

In her video message, **Věra Jourová** drew attention to the changes and improvements introduced by the new ECI Regulation, which entered into force in January 2020. These include a simplified procedure, the online collaborative platform ECI Forum, as well as reduced data requirements. She then explained that the real impact of ECI initiatives goes beyond legislative follow-up: "Even initiatives that do not reach the final formal steps of the process can also generate multiple impacts", she said. "From the moment citizens start an ECI, they bring the issue they care about into the public space. And this generates awareness and effects."

**Pedro Silva Pereira** affirmed that the European Parliament was still leading the debate on how to raise awareness about the ECI and how to improve the way it works: "It is important to ensure that if an initiative manages to reach the final stage, it must be taken seriously into consideration and addressed properly".

**Making the ECI a more powerful tool**

The first part of ECI Day, on 3 June, was a full day of debates on the ECI instrument, focusing on aspects key to making the ECI a more powerful tool and strengthening participatory democracy at EU level. Former organisers of ECIs took part in the debate. In the afternoon, break-out sessions focused on the ECI's geography of success; how to raise funds for an initiative; lessons learned from ECI case law; how to campaign online; and the ECI's place in the participation infrastructure of the EU. The full programme is available [here](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/eci-day-2021/programme).

The second day of the event spotlights ongoing initiatives, and will include the ECI Forum. Organisers will be given the floor to present their initiatives and will meet journalists from several EU countries. The event features the following initiatives:

* [Save bees and farmers ! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment](http://www.savebeesandfarmers.eu/)
* [Civil society initiative for a ban on biometric mass surveillance practices](https://reclaimyourface.eu/)
* [Freedom to share](http://www.freesharing.eu/)
* [VOTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, Full Political Rights for EU Citizens.](https://eci.ec.europa.eu/013/public/?lg=en)
* [Civil Servant Exchange Program (CSEP)](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000002_en)
* [Start Unconditional Basic Incomes (UBI) throughout the EU](https://eci.ec.europa.eu/014/public/?lg=en)
* [Right to Cure](https://eci.ec.europa.eu/015/public/?lg=en)
* [Stop Finning – Stop the trade](https://eci.ec.europa.eu/012/public/?lg=en)
* [StopGlobalWarming.eu – A price for carbon to fight climate change](http://stopglobalwarming.eu/)
* [Green Garden Roof Tops](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000003_en)

**Background**

Since the ECI was launched in 2012, the EESC has organised the annual ECI Day conference, a high-profile event recognised by the EU institutions at which updates are presented and analysed and networking between stakeholders takes place. Since its inception, civil society organisations have played a crucial role in making ECI Day a meeting-point for EU and national decision-makers, campaigners, citizens and civil society actors. The EESC, as the home of European civil society, supports the ECI tool, which is enshrined in Article 11 TEU.

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[VIDEO: The EESC from the inside](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/avdb/video/eesc-inside)

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee has 329 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union.*

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