European Citizens' Initiative Helpdesk
at the European Economic and Social Committee
THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INITIATIVE: 
the first transnational tool for participatory democracy

Introduced on 1 April 2012 by the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) is the most welcome instrument for participatory democracy in the European Union. By collecting at least 1 million signatures from at least a quarter of the EU Member States (now seven), citizens have the right to call directly on the European Commission to propose a legal act. The ECI is thus a powerful tool for taking an active part in policy making at the EU level. The ECI can influence the EU agenda.

Article 11 para. 4 Treaty of the European Union (TEU):

“Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.”

The exact implementing rules are set out in the Regulation 211/2011¹.

¹ Official Journal of the European Union, L 65, 11 March 2011
THE EESC AND THE ECI: natural friends

The concept of “civil dialogue” is enshrined in the Treaty, requiring all institutions to maintain open, transparent and regular interaction with civil society. The EESC plays a central role in these processes, being the bridge between civil society organisations and EU institutions and providing a forum for consultation and information in which they can exchange views and express their opinions.

The EESC is responsible for facilitating and supporting all channels of dialogue and communication between the general public and the EU institutions. To that end, it has established a liaison group with European civil society organisations and networks² and an ECI ad hoc group to focus on the ECI. With respect to the ECI, and in addition to informing interested members of the public and civil society organisations, the Committee acts as:

– **facilitator** of Citizens’ Initiatives under preparation, enabling those involved to network and possibly to meet;

– **mentor**, issuing recommendations and opinions to assist the Commission in evaluating a successful initiative and at any stage in its follow-up.

The Committee also sees itself as a great advocate of public participation in general and supports all instruments promoting active citizenship.

**EESC opinions on the ECI**

- **EESC opinion on Participatory Democracy and the Citizens’ Initiative³** / March 2010
- **EESC opinion on the European Citizens’ Initiative⁴** / July 2010
- **EESC own-initiative opinion on the European Citizens’ Initiative (review)⁵** / July 2016

---

³ Official Journal of the European Union, C 354, 28 December 2010
⁴ Official Journal of the European Union, C 44, 11 February 2011
THE ECI HELPDESK: What the EESC does for ECI organisers

ECI ad hoc Group
The ECI Group was set up to provide political guidance on the ECI and monitor developments in this area. Since then, it has adopted several recommendations on how the EESC can help reinforce and develop the ECI and proposed several services that the EESC now offers to all ECI stakeholders.

Translation of ECI descriptions
An ECI can be registered in any of the 24 official languages of the EU, but it is up to the organisers to provide the texts in the other 23 languages. After the initial registration, the organisers will be able to upload further language versions of the proposed initiative. Since October 2014, the EESC has offered a translation service for the ECI 800-character descriptions. In practice, after the ECI has been validated by the European Commission, the original text can be sent to citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu with a list of the desired target languages. The organisers can choose any EU language except Gaelic.

The ECI Day
Since 2012, each April the EESC has organised a conference called “The ECI DAY” to discuss the latest developments in ECI policy. It is also meant to facilitate networking and make civil society proposals for necessary improvements and simplifications in the ECI set up. The ECI Day is now an important meeting place and platform where registered and future ECI organisers and stakeholders can exchange information, best practices and experiences and present their ECIs and activities to the public.

For more information, please see the “Events” section of the ECI page: www.eesc.europa.eu/eci.
ECI database
The EESC has launched an online ECI database with the aim of providing a free-of-charge digital library with a wide range of documents, concentrating mainly on academic research on the ECI. The database is available to all registered users and enables researchers to make their work known to the European public. Authors of ECI-related papers are welcome to upload their work after a simple registration and to share it with members of the public interested in improving their understanding of the ECI instrument.

ECIdocs database: www.eesc.europa.eu/ecidocs

Networking opportunities
The EESC can invite ECI organisers to its plenary sessions and/or section meetings (in line with internal rules laying out the general criteria) in order to give them the opportunity to meet EESC members and network with their organisations. Presentations to EESC members are also an excellent occasion to gather views and opinions on the proposed initiative and prepare for the questions that may be asked by members of the public during the campaign.

Moreover, ECI organisers may request a partnership with the EESC for events they organise to promote the initiative. If a partnership is accepted, the organisers will be able to use one of the EESC’s conference rooms free of charge. The EESC will also guarantee a welcome and/or speech by one of its members, who is an expert in the field.

More information on partnerships with the EESC:
Communication and information activities

The EESC has produced two publications to explain in detail the various tools available to EU citizens who wish to voice their ideas and concerns formally: “Your Guide to the European Citizens’ Initiative” and the “European Passport to Active Citizenship”. Both publications, which are regularly updated, are available at www.eesc.europa.eu/eci in the section “Related documents”.

EESC members are also involved in various “going local” activities where they talk about the ECI and explain its role in involving the general public in policy making. Where possible, the EESC may propose a speaker at an external event to cover the subject of the ECI and citizen-related issues.

Advice to ECI organisers

All present and future organisers may contact the EESC at its functional mailbox citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu for advice on various organisational aspects of the ECI and where to seek assistance. The EESC is working with the ECI Support Centre and The Association for the ECI to coordinate ECI services and optimise the exchange of information for the benefit of all ECI organisers and stakeholders.
PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Official information on the ECI
European Commission ECI Registry: http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative
EESC’s page on the ECI, including publications: www.eesc.europa.eu/eci

EESC partner organisations on the ECI
The Association for the ECI: http://www.citizens-initiative.eu/
The ECI Support Centre: http://ecas.org/services/eci-support-centre/

Contact:
European Economic and Social Committee
Unit for Relations with Civil Society and Forward Studies
Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel – Belgique/België
Email: citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu