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### 3. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

As President of the European Parliament, I am glad to contribute to this publication at a time when we are seeing potentially two tectonic shifts from a democratic point of view at EU level.

Who would have thought at the time the *Treaty of Lisbon* entered into force that we would this year see the nomination of top candidates for President of the Commission by no less than five political families at European level and also not one but several successful European Citizens' Initiatives?

There is no zero-sum game between representative and participatory democracy. As the *Treaty of Lisbon* rightly underlines, they are complementary and both shifts mentioned earlier are mutually reinforcing. A European Commission, I hope, with renewed legitimation will be in a strong position to respond to the will of the citizens expressed through the European Parliament but also directly by means of concrete Citizen's Initiatives.

It is this concrete element which I find particularly appealing. Citizens from a significant number of member states form an alliance on a concrete topic, have a genuinely Europe-wide debate and take the message to the Commission; they take centre-stage and present their initiative at a hearing at the European Parliament. I am glad that the first such hearing has now successfully taken place, on 17 February, to present the *Right to Water* initiative and debate it with parliamentarians.

It is no coincidence that the European Parliament has always been a strong supporter of the Initiative. Parliamentarians, including those key members who contribute to the present publication, came to the correct conclusion that such direct involvement of citizens is not a threat to their work as representatives, but rather enhances the quality and intensity of that dialogue. During the law-making process they made every effort to make the Initiative as user-friendly as possible. It is no secret that not all institutions saw eye to eye on every issue – and *Regulation 211/2011* is the product of these tensions.

I welcome the fact that you now take stock of the developments in the last few years, of the modest practical experience gained, and try to make the Initiative more appealing, more accessible and try to do away with the teething problems experienced by the initiative committees. It is too early to judge yet whether the ECI instrument is a success, and the way in which the European Commission responds to the first Initiatives will be particularly important in this respect, as will any follow-up or reactions to this response. Let me be clear, there will sometimes be frontal disagreement over an initiative. This is only normal. But if there is such disagreement, let it take the form of a dialogue, an exchange of views, rather than a confrontation from which the democratic framework itself comes out as the loser.

Now we need to go further in removing any unnecessary obstacles in the way of those citizens who are keen to get an Initiative off the ground. Who are keen to address the imbalance between corporate lobbying and the priorities of citizens. Who are keen to start a discussion with like-minded friends across borders. We have created great expectations with the *Treaty of Lisbon*, and it is now upon us all to fulfil them.

*Martin Schulz is President of the European Parliament.*

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**Learning from the first two years of the European Citizens' Initiative**

**Edited by** Carsten Berg and Janice Thomson

**Prefaces by** Maroš Šefčovič, Martin Schulz and Dimitris Kourkoulas

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