

---

## **8. Do not count Education Spending as Part of the Deficit! Education is an Investment!**

Panos Papadopoulos

*Editor's summary: This ECI was initiated by a Greek think-tank to safeguard education funding in EU-imposed national austerity budgets. It also sought to use the ECI to heal worrisome divisions between citizens in northern and southern Europe. After careful research, it crafted language for its ECI which was accepted for registration. But it then lost two months of signature collection time due to OSC glitches. When this article was written, signature collection had just begun.*

### **An ECI to shield education from austerity budget cuts**

The *Do not Count Education Spending as Part of the Deficit! Education is an Investment!* ECI aims to make education a priority both in the EU and in each member state at a time when inequalities are emerging within societies due to the current severe financial crisis. Specifically, this ECI proposes to exclude from the calculation of each country's public spending deficit that part of government education spending that is below the Eurozone average for the last 5 years.

### **Quality education needed to avoid a new "lost generation"**

Youth hold the key to Europe's future dynamism and prosperity. As Nobel Prize winner Christopher Pissarides said in support of our ECI: *"Economic crises come and go but young people get just one chance to learn the skills that will get them a job and help them embark on a successful career."*

Young people have been hit particularly hard by the financial crisis. Youth unemployment rates in Europe stood at 23.5% in the first quarter of 2013. In some countries, half of young people who want to work are unemployed. This has a profound impact on individuals, as well as on society and the economy.

To avoid a "lost generation", a group of people from seven different European countries (Greece, Romania, Germany, France, Cyprus, Portugal, Bulgaria) with the support of *DIKTIO: Network for reform in Greece and Europe*, a Greek think tank with a European orientation, worked together to create this ECI. It aims to combat inequality by providing equal opportunities for education and training to all young people in Europe. It seeks to ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructure and tools for high quality education in Europe in times of crisis. Through investment in education, it hopes to enhance and safeguard growth, development and democratic institutions and ensure the employability of younger generations. It also supports the EU policy Horizon 2020 for research and innovation.

### **Active citizenship to heal divisions within Europe**

We decided to use the ECI to promote our idea because we believe it contains exactly what is missing now from the public dialogue in Europe. Change in Europe can only be carried out by citizens who participate, react, propose and act. The ECI is a "bottom-up" tool that gives everybody the possibility to change things in their lives. It also offers the ideal way to deal with common pan-European problems that affect both richer and poorer countries.

Current divisions between northern and southern Europe and the resurgence of national stereotypes harken back to the darkest times on our continent. The ECI provides a great chance for people from different countries to work together for a common purpose. Thanks to the ECI, we have started collaborating with NGOs, think tanks and organisations throughout Europe.

### **Official EU information on the ECI is helpful**

The information on the official webpage of the ECI is well organised and helpful. The first contact with this portal quickly conveys the necessary information to understand if an ECI idea can be transformed into an ECI campaign, to see previous ECIs and get new ideas. We were also greatly helped by the DIKTIO think-tank, which gave us resources, ideas and assistance for carrying out our ECI.

### **Crafting ECI wording and campaign communications were challenging**

The first challenge we faced was crafting our proposal. We didn't want an initiative that asked for something vague. We spent a lot of time collecting data and surveys to document our initiative. In this task, we were advised by several university professors. Nobel Laureate economist Christopher A. Pissarides and eminent Greek academic Helene Glykatzi Ahrweiler agreed to be ambassadors for our ECI.

Another big challenge was the creation of our ECI's website ([www.invest-in-education.eu](http://www.invest-in-education.eu)). We knew that nowadays a campaign needs a well-designed website and a successful social media campaign. Our Facebook page ([Invest in Education](https://www.facebook.com/InvestInEducation)) and Twitter account ([@Invest-in-Edu](https://twitter.com/Invest-in-Edu)) are key for the campaign's success.

### **Two precious months lost due to dysfunctional online collection system**

The biggest challenge we encountered, however, was the certification of our online collection system (OCS) for signatures. Both reviewing our documents and initializing our OCS required daily contact with the Commission, which was not always possible. As a result, a precious two months were lost from our 12-month signature collection period! We are now in the beginning stages of signature collection.

### **Commission needs to raise public awareness of the ECI instrument**

What would be really helpful is the appointment of one person from the official ECI team at the European Commission to assist each ECI campaign on a weekly basis. Moreover, it would be useful if the European Commission could launch a communications and awareness campaign to all EU countries in order to familiarize citizens with the idea of the ECI.

*Panos Papadopoulos is part of the ECI Do not count Education Spending as Part of the Deficit! Education is an Investment! [www.invest-in-education.eu](http://www.invest-in-education.eu)*

---

The text in this file is a part of the book:

**AN ECI THAT WORKS!**  
**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

2014, The ECI Campaign, Alfter (Germany)

This book contains contributions from 16 ECIs,  
14 analytic and prospective contributions, and two interviews.

You may order the book by email: [contact@citizens-initiative.eu](mailto:contact@citizens-initiative.eu)

© 2014 The ECI Campaign, Olsdorf 80, 53347 Alfter, Germany  
[www.citizens-initiative.eu](http://www.citizens-initiative.eu)

All rights reserved.

Without prior permission in writing from The ECI Campaign it is prohibited to:

- change this file, add or remove anything or include its contents or parts of it into any other publication or download package;
- use, print, store or share this file, its contents or parts of it in relation with any commercial purpose.

Quotes shall refer to the original printed book edition.

Although all weblinks in this file were checked before publishing, there is no guarantee that they still lead to the intended target. For all weblinks, The ECI Campaign refuses any responsibility for the contents they lead to as well as for the danger that they might harm your system, data or privacy.