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## 10. Teach for Youth – Upgrade to ERASMUS 2.0

Jean-Sébastien Marre

*Editors' summary: This ECI was launched as a classroom project by European Affairs students with extremely limited resources and networks. It quickly encountered significant problems with the on-line signature collection system, causing it to lose a quarter of its signature collection time. Nonetheless, it continues as an independent citizens' initiative, to test if this approach can work. Its goal is to reduce inequality in education, enhance European identity, and reduce youth unemployment by creating a pan-EU teacher corps of recent university graduates.*

### **Can the ECI help bridge the EU “democracy gap”?**

Our European Citizens' Initiative, *Teach for Youth – Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0*, is the outcome of an experimental class we took at l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) in early 2013. This class was created by Dr. Imola Streho, director of the Master in European Affairs, and Professor Marc Germanangue. Both were keenly interested in the ECI as a way to overcome the often mentioned EU “democracy gap”. The overall goal of the class was to find out whether ordinary European citizens could draft a proposal for an ECI, have it registered by the European Commission and eventually run a successful campaign at the EU level.

As students of European Affairs, my fellow students and I have a genuine interest in everything related to Europe and mostly think of ourselves as “true Europeans”. We thus saw this class and its purpose as a great way to show our commitment to making the EU something more than a technocratic institutional structure.

### **A new EU programme to reduce educational inequality**

To enhance efficiency, the class was divided into several groups of five to six students, each with a specific idea for an ECI. *Teach for Youth* emerged from the “Education in Europe” group. It was inspired by the work of *Teach for America* and *Teach for All* in trying to reduce domestic educational inequality, respectively in the USA and in several other countries worldwide. We thought that the EU could provide the right scale for a similar programme.

Building on the success over the last two decades of the Erasmus programme in enabling more interactions among European students, we developed *Teach for Youth – Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0* as a European Commission-run programme that would seek to eliminate educational inequity within the EU. It would attract highly motivated and high achieving recent EU university graduates and postgraduates to teach for one to two years in urban and rural low income and high need communities throughout the EU. It would also help recent university graduates enter the job market. The cross-cultural exchanges would enhance European identity.

We knew that the ECI was the right tool to raise awareness of these issues, as well as to advance our agenda. We thus submitted our proposal to the Commission and it was officially registered on 17 June 2013. Then a whole new phase started, with several challenges and difficulties.

### **Online collection system problems stalled campaign for three months**

The most challenging problem we have faced thus far was the official approval of our online collection system (OCS) for signatures. For security, practical and financial reasons, we decided to have our OCS hosted on Commission servers in Luxembourg. In order to ensure the best protection of EU citizens' privacy, each OCS needs to comply with numerous rules and regulations, which requires IT expertise we did not completely master. Fortunately, we were helped during the entire process by both the ECI department of the European Commission and authorities in Luxembourg. Finally, our OCS was officially certified and launched on 13 September 2013.

Unfortunately, the whole OCS approval process took almost three months out of the twelve we have to collect the required million signatures. Consequently, our campaign lost a crucial amount of time during which we could have collected more signatures!

### **Functioning online collection system must be guaranteed to future ECIs**

We recommend that, in the future, a fully operational IT package, including a pre-certified OCS, should be given to the representative of every ECI registered by the European Commission. That way, the campaigns would not lose any time unnecessarily. In addition, it would allow any EU citizen with a great ECI proposal to carry it out without needing technical expertise.

Fortunately, the ECI department of the European Commission was very helpful and supportive. We are also thankful to our professors and fellow students who have supported and provided us with great recommendations, as well as the numerous EU citizens who have been genuinely interested in our ECI and contacted us to contribute and help us reach our objectives.

### **Continuing as an independent citizen effort to test if can succeed**

Obviously, gathering one million signatures across the EU in less than twelve months (actually nine for our ECI) is *very* difficult, despite all our efforts and our supporters. We still have six months to reach this goal. We are confident that, with the help of every EU citizen, non-profit organisation, company, government and news media interested in the EU, a positive outcome will result from our *Teach for Youth* campaign. Nevertheless, we are also aware that, given our choice to be a *true* ECI run by *genuine* citizens, it will require a lot of work to achieve our objective.

We are not pursuing any vested interests through the *Teach for Youth* ECI and our endeavours are neither backed nor funded by any organisation, lobby or institution. The purpose of the experimental class was explicitly to figure out whether ordinary EU citizens could successfully register, run and manage to gather one million signatures through an ECI. We have decided to stick with this approach.

Hopefully, if we are successful, we will see the emergence in future years of a “generation *Teach for Youth*” succeeding the “generation *Erasmus*” and embodying the pan-European ideal and identity that are at the core of an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe.

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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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14 analytic and prospective contributions, and two interviews.

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

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