
12. European Initiative for Media Pluralism

Alessandro Valera

Editor's summary: This ECI was created by a coalition of journalists, unions and free press advocates to pressure the EU to address threats to media pluralism in Europe such as concentration of media ownership and political control of media. National campaign coordinators both monitor violations of media freedom and promote the ECI. Personal data requirements are particularly problematic for this ECI devoted to freedom of expression. Low public awareness of the ECI and rules prohibiting the use of modern online campaigning techniques and platforms add further challenges. This ECI was withdrawn after 10 months and re-launched in August 2013.

The ECI *European Initiative on Media Pluralism* (EIMP) aims to pressure the European institutions to better monitor media pluralism and freedom of expression across the EU, ensuring minimum standards on freedom of information, independence of supervisory bodies and conflicts of interest. It also aims at establishing clearer rules to avoid media concentration, online censorship and to safeguard the independence of media (especially public media) from politics.

National coordinators manage country-specific campaigns and monitor media freedom

National coordinators are responsible for leading the EIMP ECI campaign in their country. Importantly, they also provide news and information to all the other national coordinators on media freedom violations in their countries.

In certain countries, such as Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria, in which issues of media concentration are or have been at the centre of the political discussion, the campaign is mostly about outside intervention in domestic matters. In other countries, solidarity across EU countries is the main driver of involvement in the ECI. Supporters wish to avoid their country's media suffering in the future from problems affecting other countries now.

In certain countries, such as Italy, where there is a tradition of citizen involvement in signature campaigns for referendums, our campaign has mostly used paper signature collection. In northern and eastern countries, the campaign has mostly collected signatures online.

Requirements to support an ECI far outweigh potential benefits

The main challenge for our campaign is that very few people have ever heard about the ECI as a tool. Once they hear about it, they are not very inspired to act as the Commission is asking a lot in exchange for little. There is no certainty that the proposal will be approved. The Commission's decision on how to act could be politically arbitrary. Yet, at the same time, large amounts of personal data are required to support an ECI.

For a campaign about freedom of speech, in particular, the government requirement for so much personal data is seen as a big intrusion. Also, the online signature collection system is not user-friendly. It is impossible to use large campaigning platforms such as Change.org or Avaaz.org as citizens can only sign on the Commission's website.

Public awareness campaign for ECI and modern online campaigning tools needed

First of all, we would recommend that the Commission invest considerable funds to advertise the ECI as a tool to the general public – e.g. through TV and web commercials, advertising on billboards, etc.

It would also be crucial to allow signatures to be collected on portals and platforms other than the Commission's own. The impossibility of automatically storing the email address of the signatory is a huge disservice to ECI campaigns, as well as to citizens wishing to remain informed.

The amount of personal data required to support an ECI, especially the official ID numbers required in most countries, should be reduced. We are aware that member states decide on this, but the Commission should impose guidelines.

Alessandro Valera is the campaign coordinator and a member of the citizens' committee of the ECI European Initiative for Media Pluralism. www.mediainitiative.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

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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

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