
4. Initiatives for Change

Henri Malosse

Henri Malosse, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), outlines his institution's efforts to make the ECI more accessible to citizens' groups – from providing meeting space for ECI campaigns and organising an annual "ECI Day" to publishing ECI guides and advocating for a comprehensive inter-institutional ECI support infrastructure.

All big changes start with an idea, one born of observation or simply a feeling of dissatisfaction combined with a strong conviction that things can be improved and that progress is possible. The history of mankind is indelibly marked by great leaps into new eras inspired by individual, community or institutional action. Over the more than 50 years of its existence, the *European Economic and Social Committee* (EESC) has accompanied all kinds of European initiatives pushing for more justice, more freedom, or greater wellbeing. We know that in order to fully meet the need for a better Europe at different levels, be it civil society, national or supranational government and/or individual citizens, it is vital that we have the right communication channels and tools adapted to each of them.

The EESC in Clear and Determined Support of ECI

Europe today is a place of shrinking distances between people and endless possibilities for communication, allowing for a quick and easy exchange of ideas. And yet, in this broad context of being "just a tweet away", there is still some static on the line connecting individual members of the public to the EU institutions. This is where the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) comes in very handy. From the very beginning, the EESC and its members have pushed strongly for a tool that allows the public to take action to oblige the institutions to take a stand and justify their position. At the same time, we felt that such a tool should help the European public to build up communities beyond their national borders that are strongly rooted in shared ideas and needs. Now that such a tool exists, the EESC is prepared to work to make sure that it is put to good use and steadily improved.

Providing Physical Meeting Space for ECIs

The EESC is first and foremost an institution and a place where all initiatives are always welcome. Since the very launch of the ECI in 2012, we have held an annual *ECI Day* exclusively dedicated to the practical and legal aspects of the instrument and aimed at bringing together ECI campaigners and the people in the institutions dealing with their initiatives. Over the course of the year, we keep in touch with all ECI organisers by offering them our rooms and equipment for meetings, workshops and panels. This is extremely important for forging networks across Europe and finding like-minded organisations and people. Experience shows that this cannot be achieved online only and requires enormous effort and engagement on the part of campaigners.

Working for the Revision of the ECI rules by 2015

The EESC will continue to facilitate networking between the ECIs and will seek to extend its role as a bridge between individual citizens, civil society and the EU institutions by supporting emerging and ongoing ECIs. As an EU institution, we wish to remain neutral. Our logistical support expresses

our political commitment to assisting all kinds of citizens' involvement and our desire to support the emergence of transnational communities, as we believe that this will make Europe stronger. Therefore, since May 2013, we have invited ECI campaigners to our plenary sessions to hear about their experiences, but also about the difficulties and challenges stemming from an ECI regulation that imposes many conditions, so that we are better placed to advise other EU institutions on the adjustments and changes needed (in view of the revision of the ECI regulation in 2015).

Working for an Inter-institutional ECI Support Network

So far the EESC has issued two opinions specifically concerning ECIs (in March and July 2010) and addressing the Commission's initial proposal on how the ECI should be organised. Some of the recommendations still stand, such as those on the options for financing campaigns and on increasing assistance from the institutions for the translation of summaries of initiatives. We are not giving up on them. On the contrary, we have just set up an ECI ad hoc group of six members that will deal specifically with the unresolved issues and difficulties that we have learnt about from organisers. The first issues to be discussed are the ECI helpdesk, specific ECI-related opinions providing a broader context and background for ongoing initiatives, as well as cooperation between EU institutions to create a genuinely inter-institutional ECI support network.

The EESC as the Loudspeaker for Future ECI Development

What the ECI needs now is more publicity and an effective information campaign to make it easier for individual members of the public to get involved. Understanding is a prerequisite for commitment. That is why we in the EESC have produced an ECI brochure that can be viewed on our website and requested from citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu by email. We are now also collecting practical experiences from the first completed ECIs and are planning to publish a guide on the "dos and don'ts" to help future ECI organisers.

A modern Europe requires modern governance and the direct involvement of the electorate in the work of their representatives. The EESC is and wishes to remain the loudspeaker for each and every one of these individual voices.

Henri Malosse is President of the Economic and Social Committee. www.eesc.europa.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

© 2014 The ECI Campaign, Olsdorf 80, 53347 Alfter, Germany
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.