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## 11. Trust Young People

Sylvia Yvonne Kaufmann

*Dr. Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann is a former vice-president of the European Parliament and rapporteur for the 2009 European Parliament resolution on the ECI. She was also a member of the European Convention on the Future of Europe where the ECI began. In this article she advocates dropping the age of ECI support to 16 in order to better involve youth in shaping the future of Europe.*

Happy Birthday European Citizens' Initiative and many happy returns on your second birthday! Two years of extremely varied experiences with the ECI make it a suitable occasion to reflect on the future of this still very young political tool. Naturally enough, we should first of all be looking towards 2015, when the Commission will present its first report on the application of the ECI directive to the Council and the European Parliament.

For me, the "young" label is key, not only because the need remains to ensure that as many people as possible actually get to know about the ECI. But above all, it is about making better use of the opportunities and possibilities of the ECI. I believe that the EU should make a much stronger effort to reach young people in particular, in order to get them on board for democracy at the EU level as early as possible. Those young EU citizens who are still in education are the ones who are most highly motivated when it concerns their future in our common Europe and about they themselves being actively involved in shaping that future.

Many of the first ECIs dealt with issues directly related to the lives of young people in the EU, addressing questions about education and employment – such as *Fraternité 2020*, *European Education for All* and *Teach for Youth*. Although these ECIs did not succeed in securing the required 1 million statements of support, they did, nonetheless, address issues which certainly affect the futures of very many young people. It is extremely regrettable that – with the exception of young Austrians – these young people are so far prevented from signing ECIs.

That's why I believe the rules on the minimum age for signing ECIs are and remain a problem. There is little prospect of achieving an EU-wide lowering of the voting age for EU elections to 16. But tying the minimum age for signing an ECI to the voting age for EU elections is something that must be changed. Signing an ECI has quite different legal consequences than exercising voting rights. I remain convinced that in future there should be a uniform EU-wide minimum age for signing an ECI – and that age should be 16.

This would be good for the image of the EU. It would be very innovative and would send a very strong signal of trust especially towards young people in the European Union. Younger people are often especially interested in European issues. If they were allowed to take part in ECIs, they would surely be motivated to involve themselves in European affairs.

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