European Citizens' Initiative

"999, 997 more and we’re laughing..."

European Citizens' Initiative

What’s the idea?
A European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is a kind of a participatory democracy. Citizens try to gain influence on the agenda of EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament) by strengthening issues of people's concern within the EU. Citizens may contribute to develop an EU political strategy by proposing a legislation act of the European Commission. A European Citizens' Initiative needs support from 1 million persons from 7 of the 28 member states and a minimum of participation in each of these 7 countries.

How to start an initiative?
These are the steps to create an ECI:

1. You need an idea. What shall be changed regarding the EU politics? Do you wish to have more social cohesion, animal protection, less surveillance, equal internet
access, another political strategy of the European Central Bank, another agricultural policy, or others?

2. Set up a citizens' committee. A ECI can only be initiated by a so-called citizens' committee which consists of at least 7 EU citizens with the right to vote and staying in at least 7 different EU countries. The committee represents the ECI and manages the whole process.

3. Register your ECI. The organisers are requested to provide information at the EU website [http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/how-to-register](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/how-to-register). The Commission will then register their initiative within **2 months**.

But there are some conditions:
- the citizens' committee has been formed and the contact persons designated
- the proposed initiative does not manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties
- the proposed initiative is not manifestly abusive, frivolous or vexatious, and
- the proposed initiative is not manifestly contrary to the EU values as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.


4. Build an online collection system. If you wish to gain support (signatures) via the internet, you have to establish an appropriate tool. It shall fit the security and technical requirements of the Commission to ensure that the data will be securely collected and stored in the online tool.

Start then the certification procedure of our online collection system. More information and a list of national authorities where you can get your online tool certified, may you find here: [http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/authorities-online-systems](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/authorities-online-systems)
The competent national authority has **1 month** to decide if the technical conditions including the rules referring to data protection are fulfilled.

5. Collect support online and/or on paper. You can start to invite citizens signing your ECI on a specific form. At the end, 1 million citizens from 7 member states should support your request in order to have a chance being successfully. You have **12 months** to achieve this goal.

See here the requested minimum number of signatories per member state: [http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/signatories](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/signatories)

6. Ask the national authorities in each member state where citizens participated to certify the number of valid statements of support (signatures). The national authorities have **3 months**
for the verification procedure.

7. After the ECI organisers have received the verification from the competent national authorities showing that the required number of support statements has been reached, they submit the ECI to the European Commission.

8. Getting in touch with the European Commission and the European Parliament. If your ECI was successfully, the organisers will have the opportunity to meet representatives of the Commission and to explain their concerns in detail. Furthermore, they present their ECI at a public hearing of the European Parliament. The European Commission is obliged to respond to the ECI within 3 months.

Attention: A European Citizens' Initiative is not a referendum! The European Commission is not obliged to bring the ECI's issue into a legislative proposal. However, commissioners might decide to do so and submit the legislative draft to either the European Parliament or the European Council. If accepted, it becomes law.


**Advantages of a ECI**

A ECI may have different positive effects, particularly if is is successfully. It strengthen elements of direct democracy instead of an indirect one (parliamentarian or presidential democracy). The idea is to make citizens' voices heard, in the European Parliament and the Commission. Moreover, an ECI allows to raise citizens' attention referring to a political issue all over the European Union, to provoke debates and to connect people acting for an European public sphere. An ECI is also a great opportunity to build bridges between initiatives, organisations and associations, to create networks and therefore to bring the European idea alive from the bottom up of societies.
Disadvantages of a ECI
A ECI seems to be a referendum, but indeed it is not. In case of a successful initiative, the organisers shall be received by the European Commission and will have the opportunity to present their idea, aims and objectives in a public hearing of the European Parliament. The EC is not obliged to implement the initiative's content into EU legislation. The Commission has only to be concerned with the ECI's theme, that's the duty.
In some member states is the identity card number of each person requested who wishes to sign the ECI. In some countries is such a specific and sensitive information not necessary, among them Germany. It is argued that it provides a burden for citizens to participate.
Several organisations claim for a longer period of collecting signatures (18 month instead of 12). The number of countries which need to get involved shall be reduced from 7 to 5.

The relatively new possibility of a ECI will be evaluated by the European Commission in 2015 and probably modified.

Film by European Parliament: ECI – made to fail?
http://www.europarl.tv.europa.eu/de/player.aspx?pid=ae8dc39c-1b45-4d17-8469-a47900b21668

Further information: ECI guide provided by the European Commission, in all EU languages available: http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome

Examples of European Citizens’ Initiatives

1. Successful initiative
„Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!“
Website: http://right2water.eu
Film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fQcDDF0f4c

Content:
„The EU legislation should require governments to ensure and to provide all citizens with sufficient and clean drinking water and sanitation. […] We urge that: 1. The EU institutions and Member States be obliged to ensure that all inhabitants enjoy the right to water and sanitation. 2. Water supply and management of water resources not be subject to ‘internal market rules’ and that water services are excluded from liberalisation. 3. The EU increases its efforts to achieve universal access to water and sanitation."

Answer:
The European Commission considered the Right2Water Initiative as the first one which have met the requirements regarding an ECI. More than 1.6 million citizens supported the initiative, the minimum number has been reached in 13 member
states. The organisers have been received by the European Commission on 17th February 2014 and took the opportunity to present their initiative in a public hearing of the European Parliament. But the European Commission did not implement a new European legislation ensure access to clear water and sanitation, but started consultations to improve it.

2. Failed initiative:
„Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) – Exploring a pathway towards emancipatory welfare conditions in the EU“

Website:  http://www.basicincomeinitiative.eu
Film:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UifIPnDaCVA

Content:
„Main objectives: In the long run the objective is to offer to each person in the EU the unconditional right as an individual, to having his/her material needs met to ensure a life of dignity as stated by the EU treaties, and to empower participation in society supported by the introduction of the UBI. In the short term, initiatives such as "pilot-studies" (Art 156 TFEU) and examination of different models of UBI (EP resolution 2010/2039(INI) §44) should be promoted by the EU.“

Reason of failure: insufficient support

3. Registration rejected initiative: „Stop TTIP“

Website:  https://stop-ttip.org/

Film from the EU Parliament TV:  http://www.europarl.tv.europa.eu/de/player.aspx?pid=8b6b302c-750d-4286-89fa-a46e00d2cbb5
Film from attac:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4OQKeekSD6s
Film about the expected effects made by monitor/public TV:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnOTyQjV4I4 (in English)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ySQ5ff857g (in German)

Content:
„Main objectives: We want to prevent TTIP and CETA because they include several critical issues such as investor-state dispute settlement and rules on regulatory cooperation that pose a threat to democracy and the rule of law. We want to prevent employment, social, environmental, privacy and consumer standards from being lowered and public services (such as water) and cultural assets from being deregulated in non-transparent negotiations. The ECI supports an alternative trade and investment policy in the EU.“
Reason for refusal:
The European Commission regarded the initiative as being manifestly outside the framework of its competency to implement legislation of the EU in terms of this matter.

Consequences:
The initiative therefore started a self-organised ECI collecting the signatures. It has already got the support of more than 1.25 million European citizens (January 2015).