



# European Passport to Active Citizenship



*European Economic and Social Committee*

# Welcome to the European Union (EU), the world's premier transnational and participatory democracy!

As an EU citizen you have the right to influence the rules which apply to more than 500 million people across 28 Member States. You may now say: that is great, but how can I make my voice heard in practice? This publication by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) answers that question directly, it's a starter kit for active citizenship and participatory democracy in Europe.

The EESC's "European Passport to Active Citizenship" links individual citizens, civil society organisations and their ideas with EU institutions and continent-wide decision-making. It offers quick guides, factsheets, backgrounds, pathfinders, navigators and toolkits for the various tools of participation, including a briefing on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) – the new and potentially very powerful mechanism of transnational, direct and digital people power established a few years ago.

The key idea of this publication is to assist and guide you in making your voice heard

by asking yourself some basic questions first: Is it a genuinely EU matter you want to address – or might it be advisable to start at the local level instead? And if going European with your idea, what is the most efficient and successful way to make it happen? A simple letter to your Member of the European Parliament may suffice – or maybe you should petition the European Parliament? Or why not join a civil society organisation or even a political party and run for office yourself?

This small booklet (which is available in 23 languages) is designed to assist you with timing (when should you become active?), teams (whom should you join forces with?) and tools (which available participatory instrument should you use?) when it comes to active citizenship and participatory democracy in the European Union.

It's your voice! It's your Europe! It's your Passport to Active Citizenship!

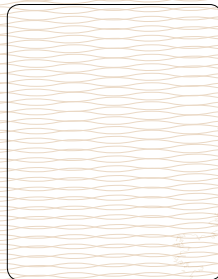


4			<b>MY CITIZENSHIPS</b> Personal Information Page
5			<b>QUICKGUIDE</b> To Active European Citizenship
8			<b>NAVIGATOR</b> To Local, Regional, National and Transnational People Power
10			<b>MY SAY IN EUROPE</b> Welcome to The Big Stage
12			<b>HOW TO GET IT RIGHT</b> Your Idea, Issue, Moment, Team and Tool
14			<b>EUROPEAN ISSUES</b> From Agriculture to Research
16			<b>PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT</b> Complaint, Advise, Consultation, Initiative and Other Ways
19			<b>ECI GUIDE</b> How to use the European Citizens' Initiative
28			<b>TRANSNATIONAL BRIDGE</b> The European Economic and Social Committee
30			<b>SUPPORT CENTRE</b> Civil Society and Citizens Media



# MY CITIZENSHIPS

## Personal Information Page



This **European Passport to Active Citizenship** belongs to

(Name)

(Contact Info)

### I am an eligible citizen of (tick if applicable)

- ☐ The municipality of .....
- ☐ The district/region/province of ..... (country name)
- ☐ The European Union
- ☐ ..... (other political entity)
- ☐ ..... (other political entity)

Unsure about your own citizen status? Check your (travel) passport or national ID card or consult with an information officer in your hometown. For further assistance in using this publication, contact [citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu).

And do not forget; the status of eligible citizen empowers you to use certain participatory (and other) rights in order to make your voice heard. This publication offers an initial guide to these tools. It focuses on the European Union level, but there are a few references and hints about local, regional and national opportunities for active citizenship.

Learn more about your rights, opportunities and levels of influence on the following pages.

# QUICKGUIDE

## To Active European Citizenship



### 1. Here are your main rights

The "EU citizenship" status offers four sections of political rights and freedoms:

- to move, reside and work freely within EU territory
- to be protected by the diplomatic authorities of any Member State when outside the EU
- **to vote and stand for election at the local and EU level in any Member State**
- **to participate in the legislative process of the EU by for example petitioning the European Parliament and organising/ supporting a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)**

### 2. A little bit of history

Remember 1 November 1993? On that day, the citizens of all Member States achieved a new legal status as "citizens of the European Union". On that day, the (economic) "European Community" was replaced by the (political) "European Union". This was and still is a worldwide and historic first – no other citizens across the globe enjoy transnational rights to participate actively in the shaping of legislation across nation states. The formal introduction of EU citizenship was preceded by a gradual activation of rights and duties for the citizens of Member States, including freedom of movement (since 1957) and direct voting rights in European Parliament elections (since 1979).

### 3. Not yet an EU Citizen?

There is only one way you can become a citizen of the European Union. You need to be or become an eligible citizen of one of the (currently) 28 Member States. In other words, there is no way to get this status without being a citizen of one of the Member States. This means that EU citizenship complements local, regional and national citizenship – but never replaces it. However, national citizenship legislation across the EU is very varied, including voting ages (in Austria this is set at 16 instead of 18), limitations on dual citizenship (in some Member States this is linked to origin) and even multiple options (Danish citizens living in the Faroe Islands can choose to have EU citizenship).



# Activate your EU Citizenship now!

## Become informed!

You may know it already. The European Union is a quite complex legal and political system. What's important however is that you have the right to know exactly what is going on. You can ask for and receive information about basically everything happening within the Union. You also have the legal right of "access to documents" of all EU institutions. These rights are enshrined in the "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" (Art. 42) and the "Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union" (Art. 15).

The "Europe Direct" service will answer your question about the EU - in your own language [Internet: <http://europa.eu/eurodirect/>, Tel: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (daytime service)]. You should get an initial answer within three working days, or you can use the instant chat service. The service also includes free postal delivery of (certain) EU publications. However, when it comes to practical problem-solving, a specific discussion on EU policies or legal advice, the "Europe Direct" service will have to guide you further.

Read more  
about other  
available tools in the  
"My Say in Europe"  
section of this  
publication.

## Get consulted!

As the rules and laws of the European Union have a great impact on our daily lives, it is important to know that the public decision-making process in the EU is legally required to be open and responsive. For this reason, the EU institutions are obliged to "maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue" (Lisbon Treaty Art. 11.2.) and to "carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent" (Lisbon Treaty Art. 11.3).

The "Your Voice in Europe" service is an official "single access point" to ongoing consultations and public discussions related to European policy-making processes: <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice>. Upon registration you can even sign up for email notifications and be invited to participate in formal consultation processes.

## Participate!

The European Union is a modern representative democracy, in which the public exerts an influence both indirectly (via parliament) and directly (via participation). The fundamental charters, treaties and laws of the EU comply with Article 21 of the Universal Charter of Human Rights, which stipulates that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country..." and, for the first time in world history, bring this principle to the transnational level.

In other words: you have all the rights and are most welcome to participate actively in the EU policy-making process, for example by joining/participating in a political party represented in the European Parliament [[www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)] or by petitioning the EP [[www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.petiport.europarl.europa.eu)]. The (currently) most powerful tool for participatory democracy in the EU is the European Citizens' Initiative [<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>] which allows you to set the agenda of the European Union!



## NAVIGATOR

To Local, Regional, National  
and Transnational People Power

### Hello, Madam/Mister Super-Citizen!

Life is not written in stone! It is up to you, your friends and all of us to make our voices heard – and to make your town, province, country, Europe and the world a (somewhat at least) better place. Here we go!

#### My place: municipal level

Your home town is probably the most important place when it comes to active citizenship and participatory democracy. While your municipality may be the lowest level of state authority, it is where important issues such as waste management, local infrastructure, or sometimes even primary education and social welfare services are governed. Moreover, the municipal level is closely intertwined with legislative levels at the national and European level – and plays a key role in implementing various rules and laws.

There are almost 90 000 local democracies across the European Union, many of them responsible for a huge share of overall tax collection and applying various kinds of participatory rights to their own citizens, including indirect (via political parties and local parliaments) and direct (initiatives and referendums) channels.

#### My region: provincial level

In between your municipality and your country, you have (in at least 25 out of 28 Member States) one or several levels of regional government structures. Currently, there are 1636 such regional democracies across the EU. In some federated Member States, the provinces enjoy considerable sovereignty, including constitutions of their own, far-reaching legislative powers and comprehensive tax incomes – while in other EU Member States, provinces/regions mainly fulfil (unelected) administrative roles.

Check with an information officer in your local administration about what, how and when you can best make an impact.

For more information check with the Committee of the Regions ([www.cor.europa.eu](http://www.cor.europa.eu)), which is the European Union's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives.

Depending on the status of your province/region, you may enjoy more or less extensive rights to political participation including indirect (via political parties and local parliaments) and direct (initiatives and referendums) channels.

#### My country: national level

The Member States are the single most important level of governance within the European Union, in terms of political and legal powers and control of public funds. For this reason, your citizenship in one (or sometimes several) Member State(s) is crucial to your ability to make your voice heard and to have an impact on the public decision-making process.

For an overview and details on participatory opportunities at the national level, visit the "Direct Democracy Navigator" (<http://direct-democracy-navigator.org>) or check with the information services of your national parliament.

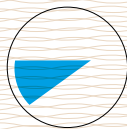
The availability of participatory political rights at the national level varies considerably between the 28 Member States. While all countries have electoral rights including universal suffrage and the right to stand as a candidate in a national election, about two thirds of the countries also allow citizens to make their own proposals through petitions and initiatives – and (in a smaller number of countries) to have a say on substantive issues through the referendum process.

#### My Europe: transnational level

The European Union is the world's first transnational democracy. As an EU citizen, you enjoy comprehensive opportunities to make your voice heard, by voting and/or being a candidate for the EU Parliament or by having a more direct say through the petition (directed to the Parliament) and the initiative (directed to the Commission) process. And there is more to it!

As an EU citizen, you can run for the EU Parliament (next election in May 2019). Read More on page 16





## MY SAY IN EUROPE

### Welcome to The Big Stage

#### Welcome to the big stage of European politics

European governance matters more than ever. What is decided on the EU level has huge implications for our daily lives at the local, regional and national level. Together we agree in the EU on matters such as free trade agreements with other countries, how to conserve our marine resources or which rules shall be applied to ensure free and fair economic competition.



These are issues on which the EU – based on its treaties – has exclusive competence. And there are many other policy areas where the EU can regulate – and shares competences with the Member States. Such areas include social cohesion, the environment, consumer protection, energy, transport and public health – to name just a few.

As the EU is a modern representative democracy with a complex system of shared powers and specialized institutions it is not always easy for individual EU citizens to identify, assess and influence the policy-making process at the right moment with the most efficient tool.

**First we need to become familiar with the various ways we, the citizens, elect and task various institutions and stakeholders when it comes to EU-wide decision making:**

1. Twice every five years we elect our parliaments in the **national capital** and in the **European Union**. Here you have an opportunity to become a candidate yourself and run for office.

– The election of the **national parliament** is critical to the EU decision-making process; as it influences the composition of the national government (and in many cases also the head of state). The national government itself is part of the **European Council**, one of the most important EU institutions. But the national parliament also has a say when it comes to the EU legislative process

– The election of the **European Parliament** (EP) is one of the most direct and powerful means of public influence at the EU level. That is because over the years the powers of the EP within the EU law-making process have been greatly increased – and are now in many ways equal to those of the European Council (made up of Member State governments).

2. It must also be said that the direct elections to the national and the European parliaments have many indirect consequences: for example, national governments and the European Parliament are instrumental in forming the **European Commission**. This is the executive body of the EU, which is responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions and managing day-to-day business. Even the composition of

other EU institutions, including the judicial branch, the Ombudsman and the advisory European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), is shaped by the decisions made by Europeans during elections.

3. The European Union is not a purely indirect democracy; it is a modern representative democracy based on **day-to-day participation by EU citizens**. This fundamental principle enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) has huge consequences for the functioning of the European Union. In short, EU citizens are not just on the big stage of European politics on election day – the same applies every day! For this reason, the EU has established (and is still establishing) a comprehensive toolbox of participatory instruments, which links citizens, institutions, policy-making processes and decisions.

4. While you have the right to participate on a day-to-day basis in EU affairs, most of us will not have the time, know-how and resources to do so. It is therefore very important to choose the best time, the best partners and the best instrument to make your voice heard in an efficient and sustainable way. In order to do so, you may want to choose between a more permanent role on this stage (for example as an elected official, an employee or a civil society representative) or a more **issue-driven** approach – which in 99 out of 100 cases may be the only way to reconcile your role as an active EU citizen with all your other roles in public, private and professional life.



## HOW TO GET IT RIGHT

Your Idea, Issue, Moment, Team and Tool

### So you have a great idea.

#### Now it's time for your initial Q&A!

European citizens, it is up to you now! You may have a great idea about changing Europe – or maybe just a small problem with setting up a business across the border. You may want to launch a major campaign against an existing EU law – or just complain about an EU official. There are 1001 reasons to become an active EU citizen, but just a few key questions you need some good answers to before going live.



### Your issue: a European one?

The European Union deals with many things. Some may say, too many – other believe, too few. But independently of that important discussion, the EU does have a rather clear list of policy issues (based on its treaties and agreed by all Member States) that it deals with, either as exclusive, shared or supporting competences. So when you initially come up with an issue of any kind, check the possible European nature of your idea/concern. It may turn out to be an issue more efficiently dealt with at the local, regional or national level instead.

### Your moment: the right time to get active?

Timing is critical when it comes to successfully making your voice heard. You can come too early and nobody will notice – or may be far too late and the decisions are already made (or just in the final steps). But in between there is a big window of opportunities to become active. For example, if you want to launch a rather new idea, it will take a lot of patience and resources to get attention and a response, but you are relatively free to choose the right time for action. However, if you want to influence ongoing public discussions at the EU level on a certain issue, you need to check what stage it has reached in the (legislative) process. EUR-LEX is a very useful public website [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu>] for this job. Choosing your moment also has implications for the kind of partners you need and which participatory instrument you opt for.

### Your team: collective action ahead?

Addressing a European issue at the European level will in most cases require a solid partnership with other citizens and/or civil society organisations. The simple reason for this is that you need to convince many others first (both other EU citizens, but also in elected bodies and EU institutions) before you can make an impact. However, sometimes even strong and committed individual action can make a difference: this is especially the case when you are the victim of maladministration, if you see your rights infringed or if you are simply able to pinpoint an issue of concern for the general public. On the other hand, it may be a really good idea to reach out as far and transnationally as possible as your issue/proposal/idea will be met with greater interest and respect by EU institutions if there is a truly European team of active citizens behind it – in the case of the European Citizens' Initiative for instance there is even a requirement that your organising team needs to be composed of at least seven EU citizens from at least seven different EU Member States.

### Your tool: which form of participation?

Choosing the best available participatory instrument for your issue will be critical for success. Most tools are designed to be handled by several citizens together (or even civil society organisations) but can also be used by individual citizens, such as launching a complaint to the Ombudsman, addressing a cross-border issue with the online problem solving network SOLVIT or petitioning the EU Parliament. Other participatory instruments however require collective action from the outset – such as the European Citizens' Initiative. What makes things easier is the very fact that in most cases participatory projects at the EU level can be managed online – so, while you can make your voice heard without buying stamps, you may need to travel at some point – maybe to Brussels to meet with an institutional representative or to a village across the border, where you have supporting partners.

Assessing these questions and choosing answers carefully may take precious time. However, as you are about to change the European Union – a transnational political community of more than 500 million people – the quality of your preparatory steps will be critical to success. So, take care – and get active!





# EUROPEAN ISSUES

From Agriculture to Research

## European issues matter: Including at the local, regional and national levels

The possible impact of EU legislation on national, regional and local policies is the subject of stormy debate. Research offers all kind of results depending on the chosen method – still underlining that in certain areas such as environmental protection or financial regulations, decisions made at the EU level have a heavy impact on all other levels of government as well. In other words: what happens in the EU is vital for every European citizen – at all levels. And in order to make your voice heard it is crucial to understand which European issues are decided by whom.

According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, Title 1) there are three different kinds of EU competences available: exclusive (the EU decides alone), shared (the EU decides together with the Member States), and supportive (the EU assists the Member States). Based on these powers, certain policies are shaped by implementing acts, regulations, directives, legislation or simply institutional decisions without any formal impact on legislation. Furthermore, there are decisions made by the Parliament, the Courts, advisory bodies such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and others with various kinds of driving forces, impacts and consequences – not least for other levels of governance. Again, while not easy to identify at all times, European issues matter and they include the following:

### Exclusive EU issues

- customs union;
- the establishing of the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market;
- monetary policy for the Member States whose currency is the euro;
- the conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy;
- common commercial policy;
- conclusion of an international agreement when its conclusion is provided for in a legislative act.



### Shared EU issues

- internal market;
- social policy, for the aspects defined in this Treaty;
- economic, social and territorial cohesion;
- agriculture and fisheries, excluding the conservation of marine biological resources;
- environment;
- consumer protection;
- transport;
- trans-European networks;
- energy;
- area of freedom, security and justice;
- common safety concerns in public health matters, for the aspects defined in this Treaty;
- research, technological development and space.

### Supportive and coordinating EU issues

- economic policies;
- employment policies;
- social policies;
- protection and improvement of human health;
- industry;
- culture;
- tourism;
- education, vocational training, youth and sport;
- civil protection;
- administrative cooperation.

Based on this list (and its foundation in the EU treaties) you may tailor your action to the relevant competence (exclusive, shared or supportive) and consider complementary action at national (or other) level in the case of shared/supportive EU issues. Proposals for action which lie outside this comprehensive list of European issues may have great problems in being deemed admissible in the first place by the EU institution to which you want to direct your idea.

**A first overview on relevant issues including treaty references can be found here**  
[\[http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/competences\]](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/competences)





# PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT

Complaint, Advise, Consultation,  
Initiative and Other Ways

## The transnational participation toolbox: spoiled for choices?

Ever since the European Union became more than just another intergovernmental body, where representatives from national governments gather to make decisions behind closed doors, proposals for participatory tools have been put forward, practical mechanisms have been introduced and existing ones revised to make active EU citizenship and participatory democracy at the transnational level more than a nice idea: an everyday practice.



So, when becoming active as an EU citizen and going transnational with your own idea/concern/proposal, please carefully assess the available participatory instruments in the toolbox first. Here are the most important ones to date:

### Complaint

If you are not happy with an EU-related measure you can lodge a formal complaint with the European Ombudsman, who offers an online form in the 24 official treaty languages. Important: this channel is open not only to EU citizens but to all residents across the European Union including businesses, associations and other bodies registered within the EU.

[www.ombudsman.europa.eu](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu)

### Problem advise

If you, as an EU citizen or business, face obstacles in another country because a public authority isn't doing what is required under EU law... then you can approach the SOLVIT problem solving mechanism provided by the EU Commission. This online service in 24 languages handles problems with a cross-border element that occurred due to the improper application of EU law by public authorities within the EU Member States.

<http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

### Consumer Power

If for example you have a problem with your rights as a consumer or are seeking compensation for damages, you should approach the European Consumer Service Network to address issues of faulty products or services in any of 30 countries (EU28 plus Norway and Iceland)

<http://ec.europa.eu/consumers>

### Education and work

If you are looking for a job or education opportunities across Europe, there is a service in all official languages called EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal, which offers tools both for jobseekers and employers (and in spring 2015 featured no less than 161 000 vacancies and 142 000 CVs)

<http://ec.europa.eu/eures>

### Consultations

When preparing a new policy or policy change, the European Commission very often launches a public consultation on the issue at stake. This is a great opportunity to get your voice into the official process at an early stage. You can register to be notified when a consultation regarding an issue of interest to you is launched.

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice>

### Interactions

In addition to formal channels, all EU institutions, bodies and agencies are now using social media to inform, consult, discuss and interact with interested EU citizens and others. For an overview of available channels, go to:

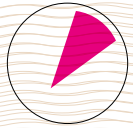
<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/discussions>

### Indirect action

There are several EU institutions designed to help you as a citizen to make your voice heard at the EU level. These institutions include the European Parliament (and your Member of the European Parliament), the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. For an overview, go to:

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/usefullinks>

In addition, indirect public action is of course also available through civil society organisations or political parties at the local, regional and national level which deal with EU-related issues.



### The European Citizens' Initiative

## Petition

is one of the fundamental rights of European citizens: any citizen, acting individually or jointly with others, may at any time exercise his right of petition to the European Parliament under Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Important: this right includes all residents of the EU as well as associations and companies with headquarters within the Union.

The petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter.

[www.petiport.euoparl.europa.eu](http://www.petiport.euoparl.europa.eu)

## Citizens' Initiative

European Citizens' Initiative allows 1 million citizens from at least a quarter of the EU Member States to ask the European Commission to propose legislation in areas that fall within its competence. The organisers of a citizens' initiative – a citizens' committee composed of at least seven EU citizens, resident in at least seven different Member States – have one year to gather the necessary support.

Signatures must be certified by the competent authorities in each Member State and can be collected online. Organisers of successful initiatives will participate in a hearing at the European Parliament. The Commission will have three months to examine the initiative and decide how to act on it.

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>

When considering a tool for your action, please also try to assess the type of action you intend to undertake: do you want to get something new onto the EU agenda? Or on the contrary maybe you want to stop something? Possibly you intend to improve an existing role? Or why not use one of the tools as a bargaining chip complementing other forms of action you are involved in? You see, there are many ways to become an active EU citizen and in the following section you can read more about the newest and coolest kid on the block: the European Citizens' Initiative.

## The European Citizens' Initiative: A first step towards transnational direct democracy

It has been called "the biggest innovation of transnational democracy" since the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament more than 35 years ago: the European Citizens' Initiative. Since 2012, the citizens of the European Union have the same right as a majority in the European Parliament and the Member States: to set the political agenda for a whole continent.

## Here are the key facts about the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

- In order to be politically considered by the EU Commission, an ECI has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens within one year of registration, from at least seven of the 28 Member States. A minimum number of signatories is required in each of those seven Member States.
- An ECI is possible in any field where the Commission has the power to propose legislation, for example the environment, agriculture, transport, public health or international trade.
- In order to launch a citizens' initiative, citizens must form a "citizens' committee" composed of at least seven EU citizens resident in at least seven different Member States. The members of the citizens' committee must be EU citizens.
- An initiative can be supported by all EU citizens old enough to vote in the European Parliament elections (18 except in Austria, where the voting age is 16). To give their support to an initiative, citizens have to fill in a specific statement of support form provided by the organisers, on paper or online.
- Within three months of receiving a successful ECI, the Commission will meet with the organisers, and the organisers can present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament and the Commission will adopt a formal response. If the Commission decides to put forward a legislative proposal, the normal legislative procedure kicks off.



While the formal right to initiate pan-European legislation remains with the European Commission alone, the European Citizens' Initiative constitutes a pre-legislative instrument for agenda setting. Interestingly, the ECI is also an entry door to the future of participatory politics: it's more direct, more transnational and more digital than anything before.



This is the reason why the ECI is not just another petition right, but is more of an everyday citizens' activation right regarding the next issues to be put on the agenda of the European institutions. Since 2012, more than 50 ECIs have been filed with the European Commission, who refused to register 20 of them because — according to the Commission — they did not fulfil all formal requirements. Five of the rejected ECIs have subsequently appealed this decision to the European Court of Justice.

The European Citizens' Initiative is based on a legal framework involving the EU Treaties, secondary European law and national legislation. While the various national regulations regarding the certification of online-gathering systems and the verification of statements of support can be found at the Official Registry, the most important European legal documents include:

- Foundation: "Lisbon Treaty", Title II, Provisions on Democratic Principles, Art. 11.4. in consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Union C83
- Regulation: "European Citizens' Initiative Law", Regulation (EU) No 211/2011
- Implementation: "Support Declaration", Interinstitutional file: 2010/0074 (COD)  
     "E-collection", (EU) No 1179/2011  
     "Simplification I", (EU) No 887/2013

**Important Notice:** according to the EU law, a first official review of ECI practice is carried out three years after the introduction of the initial procedure, which means in 2015/2016. This process, which may result in changes and reforms to the existing process, is documented in the Official Registry [<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>] and other related information channels [see also last section in this publication].

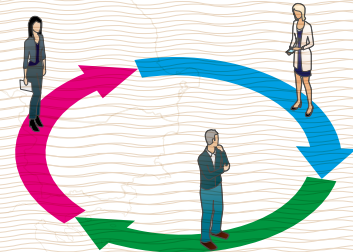
## The European Citizens' Initiative: Many ways to take action

**The European Citizens' Initiative is sometimes compared to a Swiss army knife, a smartly designed, adaptable multifunctional tool. As the ECI is available to more than 400 million EU citizens across 28 Member States (and across the world, if you happen to live outside the EU as an EU citizen), it is hard to predict its long-term impact on government and democracy in Europe.**

What we already know however, is how the first 50 ECIs have used, shaped and to some extent brought the initial set of ECI rules into question [see also next sections]. We also know that the ECI process recognises at least three possible roles of active citizenship: **organisers, supporters and observers.**

**As organiser(s)**, you are at the very heart of the process, as you are in charge of all key steps foreseen in the ECI regulation. You are also the responsible representative vis-à-vis the institutions, your supporters and the whole of Europe. For this reason, you need a great deal of careful consideration, patience, commitment and intensive communication and public relations work.

**As a supporter** of an ECI you are asked to share a certain European cause as one of at least one million people in no less than seven Member States. Your main role: to become a signatory of an ECI, which means that you fill in a "statement of support" on paper or electronically. Please make sure that you are signing a validated and formally registered initiative.



Finally, **as an observer** you may be curious to see what the ECI is about, want to understand it and possibly be able to offer interesting insights and comments to organisers, media, researchers and the EU.



**As an active organiser, supporter or observer, there are more aspects to think about before starting, signing or commenting. The key question is: what does a certain ECI want to achieve? What is your goal?**

Do you want to propose something new to Europe? Or is it your idea to remove and abolish a certain EU policy? Many things, however, are not simply black or white, good or bad: they may just need a fix. So you could be mostly interested in changing parts of a law in the EU as well. You may also want to use your ECI as a bargaining chip to back up an already ongoing legislative process. Or do you see your forthcoming ECI campaign as a catalyst for creating a broad transnational network or alliance? Probably you are after all just interested in generating some real PR for your issue or organisation by using the ECI as a canvassing tool? It is up to you!

**There are many ways to take action with an ECI – which you can use as:**

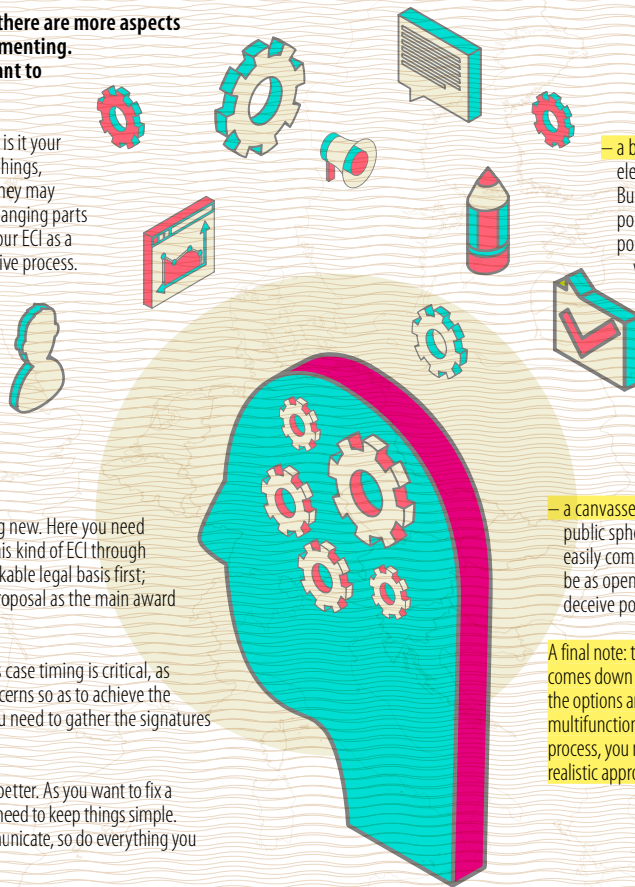
- **an accelerator** in order to get the EU to do something new. Here you need to be very patient as it will take a long time to see this kind of ECI through to the end; you need to find an appropriate and workable legal basis first; and you need to see the public debate about your proposal as the main award for your efforts.
- **a brake** to stop the EU from doing something. In this case timing is critical, as you need to find the right moment to raise your concerns so as to achieve the maximum effect and support, which means that you need to gather the signatures swiftly.
- **a valve** with the aim of making current EU legislation better. As you want to fix a certain problem by changing specific legislation, you need to keep things simple. Valve ECIs tend to be over-complex and hard to communicate, so do everything you can to stick to the main gist.

– **a bargaining chip** by using the ECI process as an additional element in an attempt to influence European policy making. But before you start such an ECI assess your influence and political power independently of the initiative and check the possible additional benefits. Be clear about your intentions vis-à-vis supporters and be aware of the withdrawal option of an ECI and its timely use.

– **a catalyst** to build broad alliances and networks across Europe. This is an especially appropriate option when you see your initiative as an element of a longer strategy to bring people across Europe together and/or to prepare a European election campaign.

– **a canvasser** to make yourself and/or your group better known in the public sphere. In this case, you need first to identify a suitable and easily communicable substantive issue for your ECI. You should also be as open as possible about your goals to ensure that you do not deceive potential supporters.

A final note: the ECI offers many opportunities but in the end it all comes down to your own understanding and capacities when assessing the options and limitations of an ECI. By becoming aware of the multifunctional capabilities of this new transnational and participatory process, you may be able to develop realistic expectations and thereby a realistic approach to your strategy and behaviour.



## The European Citizens' Initiative: Agenda setting in ten steps

**Considering launching your own ECI? It will take you at least a couple of years, probably even more (and quite a lot in terms of resources) to make it happen. But if you are smart and careful, the process will offer you new insights and teach you many new lessons – and (hopefully) enable you to make a difference for Europe. Here are the main ten steps to expect during the ECI process:**

### Step 1: Idea

You have an idea, project or concern which can be translated into European policy making. Check first whether there are any other, possibly simpler and more accessible tools available to make your voice heard on this issue. If you opt for the ECI, go to step 2.

### Step 2: Knowledge

The European Citizens' Initiative is a process involving many legal and political implications. Learn everything about the options and limitations of the process when it comes to promoting your own future initiative. Try to evaluate: is it worth the effort? If you believe that it is, then continue to step 3.

### Step 3: Goals

Another important checkpoint before taking the first formal steps. What do you want to achieve with your initiative and what can you realistically hope to achieve? Define the aim, scope and specific function of your initiative. Keep it as simple as possible for everybody.

### Step 4: Design

The wording and explanation of your initial proposal must be comprehensible in many different languages and even more political cultures across Europe. Like most organisers, you may want to use an online collection system: now is the time to set it up – and to use all available support.

### Step 5: Registration

This is a huge hurdle for many organisers. You need to get in touch with the Commission services as soon as possible in order to ensure that your proposal is formulated accessibly. It can be done if you really want to! Then it is time to officially file your ECI online and to wait for the Commission to carry out its admissibility check within a two-month period. During this time, set up your Online Collection System, so you are ready in time.

### Step 6: Signature Gathering

Your best and hardest time is now, when you have to convince more than one million Europeans in at least seven different countries in less than a year. This effort needs to be prepared well ahead by creating a pan-European network of supporting partners across Europe.

### Step 7: Dialogue

Without communication, you will have no supporters; dialogue with all possible friends and even sceptics will be critical for the lasting success of your initiative. So, complement your signature gathering activities by reaching out via (social) media and at public events.

### Step 8: Thresholds

Dozens of requirements and hurdles have to be dealt with before you can finally submit your initiative with all the required certifications to the EU Commission. This requires a solid and well-prepared management team for your initiative. Silly mistakes will generate high additional costs, delays and frustrations.

### Step 9: Communication

Submitting your ECI is just the beginning of another important chapter: communication on an official EU topic, which will bring you onto the political centre stage. After being acknowledged as a successful initiative, new doors will open to you: in formal talks with the Commission and at a public hearing at the European Parliament. It will be your great opportunity to convince even more people – and possibly the right people!

### Step 10: Conclusions

The end of an exhausting, but hopefully empowering exercise. Do not forget to do the back-office work, the documentation and evaluation – in order to learn (and share) the conclusions drawn. And as more than 50 ECIs have been filed since 2012 there is a lot to learn from them already.



## The European Citizens' Initiative: Or – how to make a difference



### Carpe Diem: Stop TTIP

Monitoring the ongoing talks between the EU and the US and Canada on a free trade agreement in the summer of 2014, social movements across Europe put two proposals to the EU: stop the negotiations on TTIP and not ratify CETA. The ECI organisers said that the main reason for this was "investor-state dispute settlement", which "poses a threat to democracy and the rule of law". While the ECI was refused by the EU Commission and consequently taken to Court by the organisers, the campaign took the growing momentum of public debate and launched a so-called "self-organised" ECI, shadowing the requirements of the formal ECI process and gathering more than 1.5 million statements of support within a year – with most support coming from the original EU Member States: Germany, France and the Benelux countries.

*[stop-ttip.org](http://stop-ttip.org)*



### Protect the Animals: Stop Vivisection

Animal protection issues are traditionally gathering a lot of citizen support. In the US, the main animal protection organisation, called the „Humane Society“ is often called the most succesful initiative proponent. In the EU, a similar move gathered momentum in 2012-13 with 1,173,130 validated statements of support proposing new EU legislation making animal testing in medical research basically illegal. This ECI was submitted to the European Commission in March 2015.

*[www.stopvivisection.eu](http://www.stopvivisection.eu)*



### Pro-Life Movement: One of Us

"The embryo is a human being, it is a baby conceived and still unborn; it is not reasonable to kill him in order to obtain stem cells". With this fundamental argument and a proposal for new restrictive EU legislation on stem cell research, the organisers of the "One of Us" initiative managed to use the ECI process as a strong campaign tool. More than other ECI organisers, they gathered considerable support on paper forms and finally managed to get more support than any other initiative so far. However, their proposal got very little response from the EU Commission, which angered the organisers and made them appeal to the European Court against the Commission's non-action.

*[www.oneofus.eu](http://www.oneofus.eu)*



### Against privatisation: Right2Water

It was one of the first registered ECIs in history, and it made it (almost) all the way to the top. The Right2Water initiative, launched primarily by European trade unions, was based on the international right to free access to drinking water and quality sanitation and linked this to EU discussion on allowing private investors to buy and sell water resources across the Union. As the ECI developed, the debate got much public attention and gathered almost a million signatures within days, putting the new online signature collection system to a real test. Finally reaching the EU Commission as provided for under the ECI law, this EU institution welcomed the initiative but did not opt for new legislation.

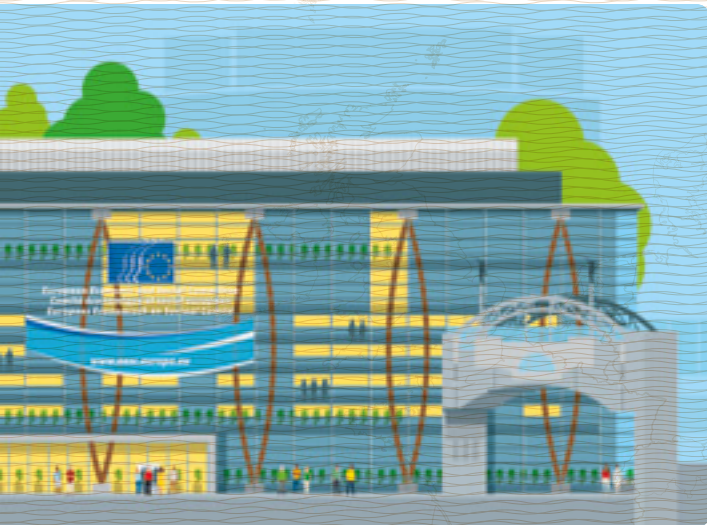
*[www.right2water.eu](http://www.right2water.eu)*





# TRANSNATIONAL BRIDGE

## The European Economic and Social Committee



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is one of the oldest EU institutions, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The Committee is composed of 353 appointed members from all EU Member States, representing employers, workers and a third group representing various activities such as farmers, consumer groups and professional organisations.

With its focus as an advisory body on social and democratic issues, the EESC's role has been strengthened recently, becoming the key bridge "between European civil society and the EU institutions". In other words, the EESC is now an important support infrastructure for active citizenship and participatory democracy.

This role is primarily expressed in the proactive work performed by the 353 members across Europe vis-à-vis social partners, civil society and schools. When issuing opinions on new EU legislation on participatory democracy (primarily Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty), the EESC has taken a proactive stand, making the European Citizens' Initiative as accessible and user-friendly as possible.

Early on, the EESC published an ECI user's guide in 23 languages; this is now followed up by this publication, offering citizens across Europe an entry point and guidance on making their voices heard in an efficient and sustained way.

## There are more ways in which the EESC can support you:

### ECI Day

Spring Time for European people power! Together with key civil society organisations across Europe, every April the EESC organises a gathering of active citizens and stakeholders, reviewing and renewing the participatory process established by the ECI.

[www.eesc.europa.eu/eciday2015](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/eciday2015)

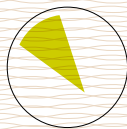
### Lost in Translation?

It is a major challenge for everybody becoming active in the European policy-making process, established institutions and active citizens alike: to communicate your ideas to all EU citizens – in their own language. When it comes to the ECI, the EESC now offers a new and unique service for registered Citizens' Initiatives by translating their formal registration texts into the other EU languages, for free. [citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:citizensinitiative@eesc.europa.eu)

### More information

Together with the non-governmental ECI Support Centre (see next section), the EESC has established a unique online information resource on ECI key facts and practical experiences. This resource lists all available materials (research, legal assessments, articles and publications) and explains how to access them.

<http://xteam.eesc.europa.eu/sites/eci-db>



## SUPPORT CENTRE

Civil Society and Citizens Media

### Support is all around You just have to use it

As an active EU citizen you are quite literally not alone. There are more than 400 million more of you. Nor are you alone when it comes to getting governmental and civil society support for making your voice heard. Among the many resources available, we recommend the following transnational support, guidance and media across Europe.

#### European Citizens' Initiative

- The ECI Support Centre is a joint initiative run by the European Citizen Action Service, Democracy International and Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe. The Centre provides newsletter updates, tailor-made advice, research and analysis, and access to the ECI Knowledge Data Base.

**[www.ecas.org/civic-engagement/eci-support-centre](http://www.ecas.org/civic-engagement/eci-support-centre)**

[elisa.bruno@ecas.org](mailto:elisa.bruno@ecas.org)

- The ECI Campaign is an organisation working exclusively for the successful introduction and implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative, and offers information resources as well as campaigning support.

**[www.citizens-initiative.eu/about/the-eci-campaign](http://www.citizens-initiative.eu/about/the-eci-campaign)**

[berg@citizens-initiative.eu](mailto:berg@citizens-initiative.eu)

#### Participatory Democracy

- The Research Centre for Active Citizenship and Participatory Democracy at the University of Wuppertal gathers and analyses data on procedures and practice in modern direct democracy. It offers advice, training and teaching and hosts online resources such as the Direct Democracy Navigator.

**[www.direct-democracy-navigator.org](http://www.direct-democracy-navigator.org)**

[editor@direct-democracy-navigator.org](mailto:editor@direct-democracy-navigator.org)

- A growing number of governmental entities across Europe are investing in the establishment of support infrastructures for active citizenship and participatory democracy, offering guidance to how to make your voice heard. A new network of regional and local governments has been established

**[www.beteiligungportal-bw.de/network-participation](http://www.beteiligungportal-bw.de/network-participation)**

[Fabian.Reidinger@stm.bwl.de](mailto:Fabian.Reidinger@stm.bwl.de)

#### Citizens and journalism

- Euractiv links active European citizenship with professional online journalism and offers stories, opinions, analysis and background about everything going on politically across Europe – in three languages: English, French and German.

**[www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)**

[fondeur@euractiv.com](mailto:fondeur@euractiv.com)

- "People. Participation. Power" is the motto of the "Direct Democracy Media Platform" of Swissinfo.ch, the international service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company, offering news, opinions and background to active citizenship and participatory democracy globally – in ten languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Arab, Russian, Chinese, Portuguese, Italian and Japanese.

**[www.swissinfo.ch/directdemocracy](http://www.swissinfo.ch/directdemocracy)**

[amr.huber@swissinfo.ch](mailto:amr.huber@swissinfo.ch)

## Notes



This Passport has been conceptualized and written by Bruno Kaufmann a democracy reporter, political scientist and chairman of the election commission in Falun, Sweden, the first municipality in Europe to publish a local Democracy Passport in 2013.

<http://falun.se/democracy>  
<http://people2power.info>  
<http://iri-europe.org>

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IRI Initiative and  
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***European Economic and Social Committee***

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