

The European Citizens' Initiative and the Promise of Participatory Democracy
Report of 16 June 2015 Conference
by The ECI Campaign

BACKGROUND

On 16 June 2015, the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Council General Secretariat and The ECI Campaign organised a half-day conference in the press room of the Council's Justus Lipsius building. Entitled "The European Citizens' Initiative and the Promise of Participatory Democracy", it brought together stakeholders from EU institutions, Member States and civil society to reflect on the first three years of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and how it might be improved.



1. Conference Opening. Photo: The ECI Campaign

The ECI was created by the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 11.4). The world's first tool of transnational participatory and digital democracy, the ECI allows one million EU citizens to invite the Commission to submit a proposal for a legal act to implement the Treaties.

Between 1 April 2012 and 16 June 2015, 51 ECIs were officially submitted and 31 registered by the Commission.¹ Forty-six ECI citizens' committees were formed and over six million EU citizens signed an ECI. However, only three ECIs succeeded. In 2014, ECI use crashed. Currently, only three ECIs are ongoing and few signatures are being collected. ECI use is at a standstill.

¹ The ECI Unconditional Basic Income was declared inadmissible and then reworded, resubmitted and registered. The ECIs Single Communications Tariff Act, Let me vote, End Ecocide in Europe and European Initiative for Media Pluralism were registered, withdrawn and re-registered to gain more time. In total, 46 separate ECI campaigns have submitted proposals to the Commission, of which 27 have been allowed to gather signatures.

The Regulation 211/2011 implementing the ECI is up for its first triennial review. The Commission presented a report to the European Parliament and the Council on its application. Both institutions are now preparing their responses. This conference was designed to provide additional input for this process.

This conference drew tremendous popular interest, attracting 180 in-person and 460 online attenders. The conference hashtag #ecipromise was used in 360 tweets. This showed that, despite a sharp decline in usage, there is still tremendous interest in the ECI and its promise of participatory democracy.

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report organises points expressed during the conference by how they relate to four fundamental questions on the ECI and its future. Points are illustrated by relevant quotes from speakers and audience members.

- 1) What is the ECI's purpose and potential?
- 2) What challenges have ECI users encountered?
- 3) How might the ECI be simplified and improved?
- 4) How might more ECI campaigns be launched and citizens involved?

Please see the appendices for the conference conclusions, the conference programme and online resources.

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

I. What is the ECI's purpose and potential?

As the world's first tool for transnational direct participatory and digital democracy, the ECI is a novelty. Formally, it is an agenda setting tool that invites the Commission to consider a proposal for a legal act. The current and future impact of the ECI is a subject of debate.

Throughout the conference, three broad goals were expressed for the ECI:

- 1) Facilitate dialogue between citizens and decision makers
- 2) Provoke a political response that can lead to changes in EU policy
- 3) Prompt a legislative proposal

Stakeholders expressed differing ideals and aspirations for the ECI's future, alongside varied assessments of the ECI's effectiveness.

ECI as a dialogue tool

All speakers saw value in the ECI's ability to support pan-European dialogue between citizens and decision-makers. ECIs have helped to raise awareness of issues and start political discussions at EU level. ECI campaigners also noted how they have helped to build

EU identity and educate citizens about how EU politics works.

“Organisers like us are not EU experts, we are not lobbyists, but we aren’t children either... The most interesting parts for me of the ECI were that I learned so much about EU politics.” – Stanislas Jourdan, ECI Unconditional Basic Income.

“I see how high the frustration of people must be when they see they can’t achieve what they want. But they should not forget that they’ve contributed to the creation of a European public space.” – Anne-Marie Sigmund, EESC

While all expressed the view that these are laudable goals, there was clear disagreement as to whether they are sufficient to bridge the gap between citizens and institutions. Council and Commission representatives tended to believe they were. European Parliament and civil society representatives clearly did not agree.



“Is the ECI a success? (Yes) if you look at how many citizens participated and ECIs led to a public debate, increased consciousness and awareness at European level of a particular issue.” - Bernd Martenczuk, European Commission

“If there are only political discussions, you may as well read newspapers.” - György Schöpflin, European Parliament

2. Bernd Martenczuk, Inga Reine, Gyorgy Schopflin. Photo: Consilium

ECI as a political and legal tool

Representatives from the European Parliament and civil society insisted that ECIs must have a concrete impact on EU legislation. Some went further, to argue that ECIs with significant support, even those with just 100,000 signatures, also deserve a formal political response. In this view, the ECI is a vehicle for citizens to start the EU policy-making process.

“The object of the (ECI) exercise is to change EU law because that was the radical, original dimension that the ECI was supposed to bring about. That there is to be another body -- citizens -- that can initiate legislation in the European Union.” - - György Schöpflin, European Parliament

“It has to lead to concrete impact. It has to impact politics. There cannot be an engagement of citizens if there’s no impact that comes out of it. We should strongly oblige the institutions to respond to ECIs.” – Sophie Hatzfeldt, Democracy International

Some Council and Commission representatives suggested that ECIs could result in valuable responses without in fact changing legislation. Highlighting the value of “political debate”, they suggested expanding dialogue between ECI organisers and institutions beyond the formal procedures outlined in the Regulation. At the same time, a Commission representative described the ECI in formal legal terms as a tool to change EU law. That no ECI has yet done so is a reflection of the small sample of three successful ECIs.

“The legislative proposal in itself should not be the aim. There could always be other means. Have we succeeded in raising up the issues? Has it led to a fully substantial follow-up?” – Inga Reine, Acting Chair of Council’s ECI working group

“There is no doubt that the ultimate objective of any ECI and in fact also the criteria for its admissibility is that it can lead to a legislative proposal...If a few years down the road, no single initiative has resulted in that, we may ask ourselves questions.” - Bernd Martenczuk, European Commission

II. What challenges have ECI users encountered?

The ECI Regulation was drafted unusually quickly and without the benefit of experience with any comparable transnational instruments. Therefore, it is no surprise that the ECI’s implementing rules have presented multiple challenges for users. Anyone with experience using the ECI, whether as a campaigner or a Commission or Member State administrator, described its procedures as “unnecessarily complex”. Furthermore, these procedures do not seem to be proportional to the ECI’s actual impact as a non-binding agenda-setting tool. Listed below are some of the most problematic issues.

“To encourage participatory democracy, we all agree there is an issue of complexity. I hope and expect this message comes through in reports from (all the institutions).” – Carmen Preising, European Commission

Some admissibility decisions seem unfair

Nearly 40% of all ECIs have been refused registration for failing the legal admissibility check. There were clear disagreements as to whether these decisions have been fair and impartial.

The Commission representative insisted that all registration decisions were based only on legal criteria. Campaigners doubted this view and pointed out the Commission’s conflict of interest as the institution that ultimately must react to successful ECIs. They also questioned the rejection of all but one ECI requiring treaty amendment. The Ombudsman’s representative suggested that many rejections stemmed from poor knowledge of EU policy while also noting that the Commission has not always clearly explained the reasons for its decisions.

“The Commission has a narrow and strange interpretation of what ECI is admissible...There is a part in that answer that is highly political. The Commission is judge and jury.” – Stanislas Jourdan, ECI Unconditional Basic Income

“On the admissibility check, we can argue whether it is necessary or not and if the dimension and timing are correct...I can reassure you that there is no political consideration whatsoever at the registration phase.” – Carmen Preising, European Commission

Personal data requirements differ by country and can be excessive

It was clear that a major challenge for organisers is excessive and differing personal data requirements. This results in 28 different support forms. Some data requirements, like birth date and ID number, have dissuaded up to half of potential ECI supporters from completing a support form. Furthermore, to citizens, they seem out of proportion to the ECI’s impact as a non-binding agenda-setting tool. Worse still, for some EU citizens who have taken advantage of their right of free movement and settled in another Member State, these rules have meant the denial of a fundamental right of citizenship given to them in the Treaties.

“The Commission proposed a uniform form. If you look at the jungle we have today...you need a PhD to understand where to sign!” – Carmen Preising, European Commission

“People are afraid of identity theft. It’s very difficult to explain to people why all this data is needed. In some countries more data is needed than for national initiatives...We only collected 45% of (signatures from) those who clicked on “sign now”. This is a huge loss for democracy!” – Prisca Merz, ECI End Ecocide

Member State representatives from Germany and Austria insisted that they only collect data necessary to verify citizenship. However, an audience member noted that other countries collect data they never use.

Digital tools are not user-friendly

Campaigners, Member State technologists and digital engagement experts all expressed frustration with the online collection system (OCS). It takes too long to use, excludes people with disabilities, is not mobile device or social-media friendly, lacks functions campaigners need and cannot evolve as technology evolves. Importantly, these problems stem from the implementing Regulation 1179/2011 which dictates unnecessary technical complexity and prevents the kind of user-centred design that is standard in the digital engagement field.

“We help organisers get through the security jungle of certification...We have an implementation act that is too harsh on the security level.” – Gilles Feith, CTIE Luxembourg

“For anybody who works with digital and network technology, (there’s) utter confusion at not using user-centred design...it can really unlock people’s participation.” – Catherine Howe, digital engagement expert

Importantly, the Regulation prevents the collection of supporters' emails which eliminates any possibility of two-way dialogue between citizens and institutions.

“The OCS is about collecting signatures, it’s not about campaigning...We can’t collect the email addresses of those who support our ECI proposal. We can’t reply to our supporters about the outcome. We collected only 1% of the emails (of our ECI’s two million supporters).”
– Xavier Dutoit, ECI Right to Water

The Regulation creates unnecessary hurdles for ECI organisers

Speakers described other campaigning hurdles imposed by the current Regulation:

- Campaigns in practice have **less than 12 months** to collect signatures. The signature collection period starts at registration, even though campaigns need at least two months from that time just to prepare.
- Citizens' committee members are **personally liable** for all their campaigns' activities.
- Citizens' committees lack the **legal status** necessary to fundraise and conduct organisational business.

Campaigns also need better access to funding, as well as technical and legal support.

Fortunately, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) now provides translation.

Responses to successful ECIs have been inadequate

The Commission's responses to the three successful ECIs have clearly not met their organisers' expectations. None has resulted in a legislative proposal. The response to one is even being challenged before the European Court of Justice. It is still too easy for citizens' concerns expressed via the ECI to be ignored by those in power.

III. How might the ECI be simplified and improved?

Given widespread agreement that the legal framework for the ECI is too complex and that this complexity is weakening the ECI overall, much of the conference was devoted to discussing ways to simplify it and make its procedures more user-friendly and proportional to its impact. Fortunately, most contributions proved that this is indeed possible. Several concrete proposals were already well-developed and need only a formal revision of the legal framework to be implemented.

Start with awareness-raising and education

Representatives of the Council and Commission suggested first improving the ECI within the current legislative framework. The most important task cited is to **raise awareness** among citizens, both of the ECI instrument itself and EU policies it can cover. Better **education and**

guidance to campaigners, for example in drafting ECI text, could decrease the number of ECIs refused registration.

“(The ECI) is a difficult instrument to operate. We have given a new tool, the Rubik’s cube or Kalashnikov, to a small child and we need to understand how to operate it...We see the need to improve awareness and to improve knowledge of the scope and procedures.” – Inga Reine, Acting Chair of Council’s ECI working group

“A lot can be done within the current framework. We shouldn’t make the excuse that we have to revise the Regulation before we can make other improvements.” – Carmen Preising, European Commission

A legal advice service on ECIs is now offered via Europe Direct, although little used. The EESC has offered to create an “ECI help desk” in cooperation with ECAS. A “one-stop shop” in every Member State dedicated to assisting ECI organisers has also been suggested by Parliament.

Revise the Regulation

It was clear, however, that the ECI’s most troublesome complexities and challenges come from the ECI Regulation itself. Therefore, the only way to ever meaningfully simplify and improve the ECI is to revise the ECI Regulation.

“For simplification, what is needed is a revision of the Regulation. The issues are really about the Regulation and not the implementation.” – Tina Nilsson, European Ombudsman’s Office

“The base problem is the implementation act that ties our hands. To allow us to be a lot more creative, let’s change this.” – Gilles Feith, CTIE Luxembourg

“We are doing what we can to simplify under the current Regulation framework. We have been active within our limits.” – Carmen Preising, European Commission

“Once we complete this discussion (on how to use the tool better), I think we will see the need to change the Regulation. It’s unavoidable.” – Inga Reine, Acting Chair of Council’s ECI working group

The preface to the Regulation provides guidelines that ECI rules should be clear, simple, user-friendly and proportional to the nature of the ECI so as to encourage participatory democracy. The Regulation also requires a triennial review to ensure that these principles are respected in practice. Clearly, in the current Regulation they are not. Below are specific reform suggestions to ensure they are. Many require a change to the Regulation.



3. Sabine Eckart, Tina Nilsson, Prisca Merz, Stan Jourdan, Carmen Preising. Photo: Consilium

Change the legal admissibility check: outsource, clarify & explain, delay or remove

A variety of solutions were offered for changing the legal admissibility check to both increase the percentage of ECIs registered and remove any risk that decisions are politically motivated.

- **Outsource legal admissibility decisions to a neutral entity**, perhaps within another EU institution. This could remove any potential conflict of interest within the Commission.
- **Provide better explanations** to campaigners whose ECIs are rejected and guidance to reword them. The Commission, however, can only provide limited suggestions and cannot write ECI texts.
- **Register only part of an initiative** if some of its demands fall outside of EU competence.
- **Remove the legal admissibility check entirely, make it purely advisory, or delay it** until after an ECI has demonstrated popular support. One suggestion is to revisit the Commission's original proposal for a legal admissibility check after an ECI had collected 300,000 signatures.
- **Clarify the legal framework** governing legal admissibility decisions. This includes specifically indicating within the Regulation whether ECIs may require **treaty amendment**.

“We are in a crisis and some of the solutions to our collective problems are outside the current framework...If we say we cannot revise the Treaty we cannot evolve.” – Stanislas Jourdan, ECI Unconditional Basic Income

Simplify and harmonise personal data requirements

The Commission already asks Member States to simplify their personal data requirements and support forms. This has led to some simplification, but also some more complexity. Importantly, it has not restored this fundamental right of citizenship to all EU citizens living outside their country of nationality. Furthermore, although many Member States only collect the data they need to verify citizenship, some countries collect data they never use. Clearly, **a new approach to solving this problem is needed.**

“In the expert group, we are positively and constantly encouraged to think about simplification...The diversity comes from the EU itself...I think it may be impossible to come up with a uniform collecting form...What we can do is look for further simplification and provide all guidance and support to organisers.” – Sabine Eckart, German Federal Ministry of the Interior

Several potential solutions were suggested that could be used as a starting place to consider new ways to verify that an ECI supporter is an EU citizen. These include:

- Allow **qualified electronic signatures** as they become widespread. This is not an immediate possibility. It also will not solve the problem of data requirements for paper forms and raises issues of digital exclusion.
- Collect personal data from a **random sample** of ECI supporters only during the verification phase.
- Create an **EU citizens’ card and number** where citizens provide personal data once and then use that number to support different ECIs.
- Reconsider using a **single support form**, as originally proposed by the Commission.

Some administrative challenges related to signature *verification* could be improved. For instance, a **single collection point** could be provided to collect signatures from all 28 Member States. Member States can also take advantage of **software for signature verification** on both paper and online forms developed by countries such as Luxembourg.

Simplify the technical OCS rules

The Commission Implementing Regulation No. 1179/2011 laying down the technical specifications for the online collections system (OCS) pursuant to Regulation 211/2011 needs to be dramatically simplified. It must support user-centred design practices that are

standard in the digital industry and online public engagement platforms. It also needs to provide freedom to civic technologists, both inside and outside of government, to design OCSs and related software that use new technologies that are constantly being invented.

“If we don’t make the ECI digitally relevant...relevant for the way that we use technology in the current day...it is unlikely to succeed.” – Catherine Howe, digital engagement expert

“We need to use participatory democracy for developing the systems.” – Gilles Feith, CTIE Luxembourg

“When we develop this software, we need a lot of freedom to do this and not lots of technical requirements that create obstacles. Technology is changing all the time. The requirements should be as a-technical as possible and open to whatever way we want to design it.” – Reinder Rustema, petities.nl



4. Catherine Howe, Gilles Feith, Madara Peipina, Xavier Dutoit. Photo: Consilium

Specific digital solutions to consider include:

- Mandate the use of **participatory design** processes for the official OCS software. It still has not been made sufficiently accessible to people with disabilities, usable on mobile devices or interconnected with ECI organisers’ own IT platforms (via API).

“We’ve been promised access to (the OCS) code for three years...We don’t know what is coming and we do not have enough involvement in the process.” – Xavier Dutoit, ECI Right to Water

“(Our e-petition tool) is extremely user-friendly. It was built for people by e-commerce experts.” – Madara Peipina, ManaBalss.lv

- Allow the **collection of emails** by campaigners to inform ECI supporters of the ECI's outcome and involve them in related political dialogue.

“We collect emails and give feedback to users. So people get feedback to let them know what’s happening with their vote. If not, they lose interest.” - Madara Peipina, ManaBalss.lv

- Ensure that user-friendly and campaigner-friendly **independent OCS software** like openeci.eu can pass the ECI's security rules.
- Allow the use of **qualified electronic signatures**, whilst realising that this is not an immediate solution. The EU legal framework for using eIDs for online commerce is fast developing. However, there still are big national differences in their use and acceptance. One alternative is to allow related national technologies, such as Mana Balss' use of internet banking authorisations to verify Latvian citizenship.

“eIDAS is the Schengen of tomorrow. When we make that work, we make the digital market work. If it works for the digital market, it will work for democracy.” – Gilles Feith, CTIE Luxembourg

“I'd like digital signatures if they existed already...(But) I don't want to use my campaign to convince people to register somewhere (to get the eID).” – Xavier Dutoit, ECI Right to Water

Eliminate unnecessary campaigning hurdles in the Regulation

A few simple changes to the Regulation could eliminate several unnecessary hurdles for campaigners. Importantly, these are points on which all stakeholders agree:

- Give campaigns a **full 12 months** to collect signatures. This could be done by letting campaigns choose their own start date. As of now it begins at registration.
- Eliminate **personal liability** for citizens' committee members.
- Create a **legal status** for citizens' committees to allow fundraising and other internal organisational functions.

Ensure that ECIs have a meaningful political and legal impact

Stakeholders proposed different ways to ensure that the ECI has a meaningful impact, depending on their vision of the ECI's purpose and potential.

- **The Commission needs to be clearer, more transparent and honest** in all of its communications with ECI organisers. This includes better explaining the reasons for

their response to a successful ECI.

“It is easier to have a constructive dialogue after a well-explained ‘no’ than a woolly ‘maybe’...telling the truth behind the decisions...that you’re very clear and transparent about the political position taken.” – Tina Nilsson, European Ombudsman’s Office

- To ensure a fair and neutral public hearing, give responsibility for the public hearing to a neutral committee in Parliament, such as the Petitions or Constitutional Affairs committee. The Commission wishes to include outside stakeholders in hearings, as was done for the Stop Vivisection hearing. ECI organisers do not. A neutral committee could mediate such differences of opinion.
- To the degree possible, provide structures and procedures that ensure that ECIs can and do lead to legislative proposals.

“We have a very clear legal framework on how the initiatives will be treated by parliament if successful - this inspires citizens to participate as they know it can result in legislative change...they can’t just brush it off or sweep it under the carpet and say they will look at it later or next year.” – Madara Peipina, ManaBalss.lv

- The Commission and Council are also keen to consider how to **continue political discussions** beyond the formal ECI process. That way ECIs can continue to influence the EU political process and eventually change policy.
- The Parliament would like to develop procedures by which even **“unsuccessful” ECIs that attract significant support can impact the political debate** at EU level. Currently, the EESC gives the floor to ECIs that have collected significant support and the petitions committee organised hearings. This could be expanded.

“Even ECIs that don’t make it, they’re still a political act...If it’s 100,000 that’s a lot of people. Nevertheless they’re doing something political and we should recognize that.” György Schöpflin, European Parliament

IV. How might more ECI campaigns be launched and citizens involved?

Many speakers considered it a great success that, since 2012, 46 ECI citizens’ committees formed and over six million EU citizens signed one of 27 registered ECIs. But, at the same time, many were deeply concerned that ECI use has declined dramatically since 2013. It has now virtually stopped. While it is normal for a new instrument like the ECI to experience some decline in use, the current situation seems to indicate more fundamental problems than simply a wearing off of the ECI’s novelty.

“It is normal for the number of submissions to decline. We now see a trough and need to think about why and some areas of possible improvement.” – Bernd Martenczuk, European Commission

“There is a de-facto boycott of the ECI.” – Stan Jourdan, ECI Unconditional Basic Income

Tools and procedures must be simpler and user-friendly

Making the ECI’s tools and procedures simpler for both citizens and campaigners to use could help to increase the number of citizens engaged by the ECI. They must also be proportional to the ECI’s impact. While some minor changes can be made now, significant simplification will require a revision of the Regulation.

“If you give a simple easy tool to use, people are enthusiastic about taking part in the decision-making process.” - Madara Peipina, ManaBalss.lv

“We need to put end-users in the middle of the process...If citizens are ultimately responsible for its success, how can institutions design a tool for them?” – Elisa Bruno, ECAS

“There is no time to waste. We need a revision of the ECI regulation. Some say we need to learn first. We know enough to have a really good serious revision.” – Heike Aghte, ECI 30km/Making Streets Liveable

The ECI must have real policy impact

The fact that no ECI has led to a legislative proposal is discouraging potential ECI campaigners from using the tool. While all stakeholders lauded the ECI’s benefits of creating dialogue and building EU identity, this is not a sufficient “prize” for campaigners. ECIs must impact EU policy or the tool will not be used.

“(The ECI) should have a legislative outcome. If it only has a political outcome, a political debate, that is not going to launch the process to reconnect the citizens with the European Union.” - György Schöpflin, European Parliament

“People will engage if it has strong consequences.” Erwin Mayer, Democracy International

EU leaders and institutions must take ECIs seriously

Within civil society, there is a perception that EU leaders praise the ECI publicly, but privately do not take it seriously. Furthermore, many believe that the Commission has not been honest and transparent in its decisions on registration or its responses to successful ECIs. If the ECI is to be used, citizen trust in the instrument must be restored.

“Tell the citizens the truth. Only then can you have an open debate and gain the citizens’ trust -- because citizens are not stupid.” – Tina Nilsson, European Ombudsman’s Office

“Take it seriously...Now that there’s a tool it seems like we’re still afraid to use it. Otherwise this frustration would fuel mistrust. We all know that’s not what Europe needs currently.” – Alexandrina Najmowicz, European Civic Forum

Move from transaction to relationship

An important backdrop to the conference, and the ECI itself, is the EU’s crisis of democracy and a need to restore trust between citizens and leaders. The ECI could be an important tool in this process. However, if it is ever to do so, it must evolve from a one-time transaction to become part of an ongoing relationship between EU citizens and institutions. This is where the real potential of the ECI to fulfil the promise of participatory democracy lies.

“The people who win races aim for the place after the finishing line. I don’t think that getting the ECI right is the end of the journey in terms of getting participation right for the European Union...The ECI has the potential to create a more participatory relationship between citizens and the Union.” – Catherine Howe, digital engagement expert

“The ECI is the most important direct participatory tool in Europe...The ECI should live. It should matter, gain weight and force.” – Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Latvian Parliamentary State Secretary for EU Affairs



5. Summary conclusions. Photo: Consilium

Appendix 1: Conference Conclusions

“The European Citizens’ Initiative and the Promise of Participatory Democracy” Joint Conclusions of Organisers*

On 16 June 2015, the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Council General Secretariat and The ECI Campaign brought together stakeholders from EU institutions, Member States and civil society to reflect on the future of the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI).

Stakeholders expressed deep concern that ECI use has declined dramatically since 2013 and that no ECI has led to a legislative proposal. All agreed that the ECI is unnecessarily complex. Clearly, significant changes to ECI procedures are urgently needed if citizen confidence in the ECI is to be restored and it is to fulfil its promise of participatory democracy.

Any ECI reform must support the ECI’s true purpose. For politicians and civil society representatives, this is to provoke a political response that can result in concrete policy change. For all stakeholders, equally important is the facilitation of a pan-European dialogue between citizens and decision-makers.

Any ECI reform should lead to greater **awareness, simplification, accessibility** and **proportionality**.

- **Awareness** of the ECI instrument itself and the EU policies it can influence should be expanded.
- All rules should be **proportional** to the ECI’s limited agenda-setting impact.
- Rules and procedures should become **simpler** – e.g., IT standards.
- The ECI should be made more **accessible** to all EU citizens – regardless of place of residence, disability and resources.

Several specific ECI improvements were suggested. Some can be implemented now. Others require changing the Regulation. Below is a summary.

To increase the number of new ECIs registered:

- Provide more rigorous legal reasoning when ECIs are rejected.
- Transfer admissibility decisions from the Commission to a neutral entity.

- Remove the legal admissibility check at registration or delay it until after an ECI has demonstrated popular support.
- Clarify the legal framework guiding ECI decisions, including a consistent position toward Treaty amendment.

To engage more citizens and increase the number of successful ECIs:

- Provide better legal, technical and translation assistance to ECI organisers.
- Permit the collection and sharing of signatories' email addresses with ECI campaigns to facilitate ongoing dialogue and engagement.
- Reduce and harmonise personal data requirements. Adopt a single signature collection form.
- Give campaigns a full 12 months to collect signatures – e.g., by allowing them to choose their own start date.
- Offer citizens' committees a legal status to shield members from liability.

To support digital public engagement via the ECI:

- Simplify technical IT requirements to allow digital tools to evolve in tandem with technical changes and be developed by citizen technologists.
- Allow the future use of eID digital signatures.

To ensure that ECIs lead to a political response and policy change:

- Hold a proper political debate on all ECIs with significant popular support – not only successful initiatives.
- Require a stronger and clearer political response to successful ECIs.

**Joint conclusions agreed to by The ECI Campaign and the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Council General Secretariat provided event support, but takes no position on content.*

Appendix 2: Conference Programme

The European Citizens' Initiative and the Promise of Participatory Democracy

Tuesday, 16 June 2015, 9:00 - 13:00

Justus Lipsius building – Brussels, Belgium

9:00 – 9:10 Welcome

Zanda KALNIŅA – LUKAŠEVICA, Parliamentary State Secretary for EU Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia

9:10 – 9:55 How might the ECI better fulfil its promise of participatory democracy?

Moderator: **Carsten BERG**, The ECI Campaign

Bernd MARTENCZUK, Member of the Cabinet of Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans.

György SCHÖPFLIN, Member of European Parliament and ECI Rapporteur for the AFCD committee.

Inga REINE, Current Chair of the Working party on General Affairs in respect of the ECI.

10:00 – 11:00 Making the ECI Work for All. How to simplify? Which topics? What impact?

Moderator: **Bruno KAUFMANN**, IRI Europe

Tina NILSSON, Office of the European Ombudsman. Where does the ECI most need simplification? How to determine topics and impact?

Carmen PREISING, Head of Unit, European Commission Secretariat General Unit C4 – Work Programme and Stakeholder Consultation. What does simplification mean for the Commission? How to improve registration and response?

Sabine ECKART, German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Member of the Expert Group on the ECI. What does simplification mean for Member States?

Stan JOURDAN, ECI Unconditional Basic Income and **Prisca MERZ**, ECI End Ecocide. What does simplification mean for ECI campaigners? What is the effect of limiting topics? What impact do campaigners require to use the ECI?

11:00 – 11:20 BREAK

11:25 – 12:20 Participatory and Digital Democracy: the ECI's new paradigm for EU public involvement

Moderator: **Catherine HOWE**, Capita

Madara PEIPINA, ManaBalss.lv (My Voice Latvia). What the ECI can learn from an NGO-run national government online platform for citizen-institution dialogue.

Gilles FEITH, CTIE (Centre des Technologies de l'Information de l'Etat), Luxembourg. Examples of and ideas for new user-friendly digital tools developed by the Luxembourg government to support the ECI.

Xavier DUTOIT, IT specialist for the ECI Right to Water. What the ECI needs to function as an effective online participatory democracy tool

12:25 – 12:55 What could be next for the ECI?

Moderator: **Janice THOMSON**, The ECI Campaign

Anne-Marie SIGMUND, EESC (European Economic and Social Committee). Ideas from ECI Day 2015. Key themes from EESC events and reflections on the ECI.

A summary discussion of key conference ideas for improving the ECI presented by representatives of event partner civil society organisations:

- o **Heike AGHTE**, The ECI Campaign
- o **Elisa BRUNO**, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)
- o **Sophie HATZFELDT**, Democracy International
- o **Alexandrina NAJMOWICZ**, European Civic Forum

12:55 – 13:00 Closing

Inga REINE, Latvian Presidency.

Appendix 3: Online resources

Video recording:

<http://video.consilium.europa.eu/webcast.aspx?ticket=775-982-15850>

Pictures:

<http://tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu/photo/conference-on-the-european-citizens-initiative-and-the-promise-of-part-3910#/gallery/0>

Twitter:

#ecipromise was the conference hashtag

Storify of tweets:

<https://storify.com/ECInow/the-european-citizens-initiative-and-the-promise-o>