

Strasbourg, 2 July 2018

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

On 20 June 2018, the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (AFCO) voted on the amendments and the legislative report on the proposal for an updated regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).¹ With this vote, the majority in AFCO decided to completely disregard the emergency call addressed at the European Parliament, coming from a united front of more than 70 civil society organisations (including all 5 successful ECIs), to take more responsibility for the ECI by means of debate and vote in plenary on every single successful ECI before the Commission reply. This appeal was expressed in our open letter sent to AFCO members on 11 June.² Today, at the start of this important plenary session in Strasbourg, we are once again united in our call to you to withhold the mandate to be given to the European Parliament negotiating team to enter into interinstitutional negotiations until your legislative report contains an explicit commitment of the European Parliament to significantly increase its structural involvement in the follow-up to successful ECIs.³

The European Citizens' Initiative is the world's first-ever instrument for transnational, participatory and digitally facilitated democracy which formally allows 1 million EU citizens to directly participate in the process of agenda-setting within the European Union. While this sounds great in theory, the ECI practice over the first six years has demonstrated that the ECI, if not properly regulated and implemented, is more likely to lead to disillusionment and Euroscepticism than that it leads to the empowerment of European citizens to 'have their say'. One of the lessons drawn by all 5 successful ECIs and more than 65 civil society organisations⁴, the European Ombudsman⁵, the European Economic and Social Committee⁶,

¹ Find the legislative report on the proposal for a regulation on the ECI as adopted by the Constitutional Affairs Committee (20.6.2018) here: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bREPORT%2bA8-2018-0226%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>

² Joint open letter to the European Parliament: make the ECI work! (8.6.2018). Available at: <http://www.citizens-initiative.eu/open-letter-european-parliament-make-the-eci-work/>

³ We reiterate our call, expressed in our original open letter (see footnote 2), for a debate and vote in plenary on every single successful ECI before the Commission adopts its formal response, while recognising that amendment 68 of the Petitions Committee Opinion comes reasonably close to our demand. Opinion Petitions Committee on the proposal for a regulation on the ECI (18.5.2018). Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARL&mode=XML&language=EN&reference=PE615.473&secondRef=02>. See amendment 68, p. 38.

⁴ See footnote 2.

⁵ Letter from the European Ombudsman to the President of the European Commission containing suggestions for improvement of the European Citizens Initiative procedure (11.7.2017). Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/correspondence.faces/en/81311/html.bookmark>. See recommendation 6.

⁶ Opinion European Economic and Social Committee (14.3.2018). Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/regulation-european-citizens-initiative-sub-committee>. See recommendation 1.5.4, p. 4.

the Committee of the Regions⁷ and the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament⁸, is that the ECI needs a stronger involvement of the European Parliament in the follow-up to successful ECIs, despite the fact that the formal right of initiative remains with the Commission. While this need for a stronger and structural involvement of the EP in the follow-up to successful ECIs is expressed loud and clear, the adopted AFCO report fails to give (potential) ECI organisers any reassurance that the European Parliament will be more concerned with their potentially successful initiative in the future than they have been in the past.

The fact that this modest request to the Parliament - but crucially important part of the ECI reform - is completely ignored by the majority in AFCO is a blow for civil society whose support for the ECI was already fragile, to say the very least. A further increase in frustration and scepticism about this instrument will cause the ECI to become increasingly ignored by civil society. While we are convinced that the ECI cannot be saved without the commitment and active involvement of the European Parliament, the ECI is completely doomed without the support of organised civil society. The AFCO vote does not only undermine the ECI itself - preventing it from becoming anything more than a “democratic decoration”⁹ - it also further undermines the confidence among civil society and citizens that the European Union is responsive to their voices and concerns.

It is for all the above-mentioned reasons that we are united in our call upon you, as our directly elected representatives, to take your responsibility, to vote according to your conscience and to withhold the mandate to be given to the EP negotiating team to enter into interinstitutional negotiations until your legislative report contains an explicit commitment of the European Parliament to significantly increase its structural involvement in the follow-up to successful ECIs.¹⁰

United in our belief in the potential of the ECI for European democracy, we count on you during your vote(s) in plenary!

The ECIs supporting this open letter are:

1. First-ever successful ECI Right2Water
2. One of us
3. Stop Vivisection
4. Minority SafePack - one million signatures for diversity in Europe
5. Fraternité 2020 – Mobility. Progress. Europe
6. Central public online collection platform for the European Citizen Initiative

⁷ Opinion Committee of the Regions on the proposal for a regulation on the ECI (23.3.2018). Available at: [https://dm.cor.europa.eu/CORDocumentSearch/Pages/redresults.aspx?k=\(documenttype:AC\)\(documentnumber:4989\)\(documentyear:2017\)\(documentlanguage:EN\)](https://dm.cor.europa.eu/CORDocumentSearch/Pages/redresults.aspx?k=(documenttype:AC)(documentnumber:4989)(documentyear:2017)(documentlanguage:EN)). See amendment 6, pp. 6-7.

⁸ Opinion Petitions Committee on the proposal for a regulation on the ECI (18.5.2018). Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARL&mode=XML&language=EN&reference=PE615.473&secondRef=02>. See amendment 68, p. 38.

⁹ Quote from Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman, during ECI Day on 11 April 2018.

¹⁰ See footnote 3 for the specification of our position.

7. ONE MILLION SIGNATURES FOR “A EUROPE OF SOLIDARITY”
8. End Ecocide in Europe: A Citizens’ Initiative to give the Earth Rights
9. 30 km/h - making the streets liveable!
10. European Free Vaping Initiative
11. PEOPLE 4 SOIL
12. More than education - Shaping active and responsible citizens
13. Retaining European Citizenship
14. We are a welcoming Europe, let us help!

The civil society organisations supporting this open letter are:

1. AEGEE / European Students’ Forum
2. Arbeitskreis Europa/Welt
3. ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana) – Italy
4. Asociatia Pro Democratia – Pro Democracy Association (APD)
5. Association for Optimization of Justice and Administration (SOPA), Bulgaria
6. Austrian Society for European Politics (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, ÖGfE)
7. Berliner Wassertisch
8. Bionic Locomotor Foundation
9. Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens' Initiatives
10. Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)
11. Civil Society Development Foundation Romania
12. Compassion in World Farming
13. Culture Action Europe
14. Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25 Belgium)
15. Democracy International
16. Democracy Without Borders
17. Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR) – German League for Nature and Environment
18. EUGENT - Europäische Gesellschaft für Entschleunigung gUG - European Association for Deceleration
19. European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)
20. European Association for the defence of Human Rights (AEDH)
21. European Citizens' Rights, Involvement and Trust (ECIT)
22. European Civic Forum
23. European Democracy Foundation
24. European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)
25. European House, Hungary
26. European Institute Foundation (EI)
27. European Large Families Confederation
28. European Youth Forum
29. Food & Water Europe
30. Foundation for Public Participation - ManaBalss.lv, Latvia
31. G1000
32. Humane Society International/Europe

33. Hungarian Peace Association
34. Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe
35. Initiativ fir Demokratie-Erweiterung a.s.b.l. Letzebuerg
36. Institute of Public Affairs (ISP), Poland
37. Issues Without Borders
38. La ligue de l'enseignement
39. Legambiente, Italy
40. Lifelong Learning Platform
41. MAZSIKE
42. Meer Democratie
43. Mehr Demokratie e.V.
44. Migration Policy Group
45. National Network for Civil Society Germany (BBE)
46. Nature's Rights
47. Netwerk Democratie
48. New Europeans
49. NIOK Foundation (Nonprofit Information and Training Centre), Hungary
50. Nyt Europa
51. Open Ministry (Avoim ministeriö), Finland
52. openPetition gGmbH
53. people2power.info
54. Sapientia Hungariae Alapítvány
55. Solidar
56. Stichting Petities.nl, the Netherlands
57. Swiss Democracy Foundation
58. The ECI Campaign
59. The Good Lobby
60. Volonteuroppe
61. We are Europe! e.V.
62. WeCitizens
63. WeMove.EU
64. WWF European Policy Office
65. Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

This joint open letter is an initiative of The ECI Campaign (citizens-initiative.eu) and Democracy International. It has been supported and co-signed by 14 ECIs and 65 civil society organisations. For more information, please contact Maarten de Groot (maarten@citizens-initiative.eu, +31640595647) or Daniela Vancic (vancic@democracy-international.org, +4922031802881).