



SALZBURG MANIFESTO 2012

For a free and fair European Citizens Initiative

There is a Europe beyond the crisis of its economy and currency – and beyond fear. There is a Europe which pioneers democracy by strengthening the participatory rights of its citizens. Since April 1 this year one million people across the European Union have the right to propose transnational legal initiatives, “European Citizens Initiatives” (ECI). This first direct, transnational and digital process - which allows for gathering signatures on the internet in addition to traditional paper collections - is a highly encouraging implementation of the most recent EU Treaty. This puts indirect and direct democracy on equal footing as complementary parts of a modern representative democracy.

By Europe Day 2012, the first ECIs have been registered and are now open for signature collection. This new democratic territory, allowing more than 350 million people across 27 countries to have an impact on political decision-making on a daily basis. In this perspective, Europe is on the right track and makes history. The first ECIs are dealing with such different issues as the right to water, the development of sustainable energy sources instead of nuclear power and the possibility to extend voting rights across a whole region of the world.

The ECI not only provides for comprehensive agenda setting rights for citizens but also creates a new transnational communication channel, which potentially will be able to overcome the lack of legitimacy and trust when it comes to EU politics. We, meeting at the ECI Summit on May 2-3 in Salzburg, are however very concerned about key players on the European level - especially the EU Commission - are waiting to see what will happen. Lacking a proper strategy and not providing resources to make the ECI more known, most Europeans are still unaware of the new right and hence not able to have equal access to this form of transnational participation. This failure may risk the credibility of using this new instrument and undermine the idea of European democracy.

Therefore, it is now time to act, not only for those citizens already engaged in ECIs-in-the-making or interested supporters but also for all those institutions and organizations, which are concerned about the success of this new historic instrument. The 2012 ECI Summit is calling for much more effort to enable free and fair European Citizens’ Initiatives by investing in a broad information campaign to raise awareness across Europe. Education and training programmes for officials and civil society representatives and the establishment of a supportive infrastructure to contribute to a more playing level field are also essential. In order to honour the commitments in the Lisbon Treaty *we urge the European commission to increase the staffing of the ECI team in the Secretariat General and to elaborate and implement a proper strategy for information, education and support.*

We especially call upon our co-hosting partners in the EU, *the Economic and Social Committee as well as the Committee of Regions to fulfill their role as bridge-builders between the institutions and the citizens/regions-communities and implement their earlier commitments as for example established in Art. 1.6 of the EESC Opinion (CES465/2010) to create a central helpdesk-functionality for all those organizations out on the ground to assist organisers, supporters and observers in the ECI-process.*

The ECI is a reality now - it’s our common responsibility to make this a lasting achievement for democratic success.

Salzburg, on Europe Day, May 9, 2012

For more information about the 2012 European Citizens’ Initiative Summit contact the „ECI Back Office“ at the Austrian Institute for European Legal Policy (www.legalpolicy.eu, +43 662 84 39 80). An updated guide to the ECI is available at www.europeancitizensinitiative.eu.