



PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE (ECI)

Asking the European Commission to make proposals for a full-scale, inclusive European citizenship

Why an ECI on European citizenship?

In terms of Article 11 of the Treaty of Lisbon and the regulation putting it into effect, over 1 million citizens from at least 7 Member States of EU 28 can sign an initiative asking the European Commission to make a legislative proposal. As made clear by the paper on ECIs by Peter Téglás published on the ECIT website, this is not an easy instrument to use with all but three out of over 40 initiatives either being refused or failing to collect the necessary signatures. Moreover, even if successful, an ECI is an agenda-setting instrument which cannot force the Commission to act. Would the Commission really though turn down an initiative on European citizenship?

This first-ever instrument for transnational deliberative as opposed to direct democracy is well suited to broad cross-cutting issues such as European citizenship, where the objective is not an immediate short-term and specific result, so much as a more long-term fundamental change. ECIs should foster grassroots networking and discussion across Europe. In the case of Union citizenship, this is important because so far, since its inclusion in the Maastricht Treaty a generation ago, there has been no Europe-wide debate on what it is and means. European citizenship has been a top-down affair. An ECI could change that perspective radically.

What demands would be made to the Commission?

The Court of Justice of the European Union, in a series of landmark judgements from Martinez Sala (C-85/96) to Ruiz Zambrano (C-34/09), has made Union citizenship a fundamental status. Why therefore has not more been done by the other European Institutions to develop a full-scale, inclusive citizenship across borders? What else can hold Europe together and stem the rising tide of nationalism, which can so easily spill over into intolerance, racism and other human rights abuses? It is high time the Commission dealt more effectively with European citizenship as such and had a clear mandate to do so.



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The Commission should be invited to make proposals for a more holistic approach to European citizenship in terms of Article 25 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This Article requires the Commission to make a report every three years. To prepare the report scheduled for 2019, the Commission should carry out an opinion poll and a Europe-wide participatory process to find out what people themselves think about this first modern transnational citizenship and what they recommend for its future. The resulting recommendations should be considered by a convention organised by the Commission and composed of civil society activists, academics and policy makers.

The scope and limits of European citizenship have to be made clear. On the one hand, it should in no way replace national citizenship. On the other hand, to make European citizenship clearer and more popular, its scattered pieces should be brought together as ECIT has done in the attached guidelines on European citizens' rights, involvement and trust. Three E's underscore the guidelines and the demand to the Commission:

- **E**nforce European citizens' rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights more effectively in particular to guarantee equal treatment and protection against all forms of discrimination;
- **E**nable the creation of infrastructure across all Member States for a European public sphere to emerge where citizen participation becomes a pillar of the EU decision-making process;
- **E**nlarge access to European citizenship so that everyone has an entitlement to become an Erasmus student at some point in his or her life.

What could be the follow-up to this proposal?

The regulation and the Commission's guide to ECIs make the process clear of forming the citizens' committee and registering the initiative. But given the difficulties of achieving a successful ECI, this process should not be embarked upon without a good year's preparation. If enough can be done to fundraise and put the necessary delivery mechanism and coalition in place, what are the chances of collecting enough signatures? There could be support from organisers of ECIs on aspects of European citizenship such as "Let me vote" or Fraternité 2020 and those calling for a more social Europe. Moreover, this proposal can be considered as a follow-up to the European Year of Citizens Alliance (EYCA) which brought together the main national and European associations for the 2013 Year of Citizens. The support is there – up to us to mobilise!

If you are interested and want to become involved, please contact us at ECIT.

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