

# I'M GOING EUROPEAN

## PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE ECI

### What is our ECI advocating for?

**The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "I'm going European"** demands that every child in the EU have a right to knowledge of the EU and their European rights, and that every person have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience what Europe has to offer. A European law will guarantee such a right by placing **an obligation on all EU 27 Member States to add a European dimension to their civic education**, just as European Citizenship complements and in no case replaces national citizenship. The ECI calls for an expansion of European citizenship education both within and out of school so that European Citizenship becomes a citizenship for all, and not just the few. The law demanded should be seen against a background where the performance across and within educational systems is highly variable so that only a relatively privileged section of the population may benefit, even though citizenship education is obligatory in all European democracies.

A number of resolutions by the European Parliament, as well as statements by civil society such as the NECE declaration and conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe, have drawn attention to the need for far more priority to be given to European citizenship education. An ECI is a way to popularise and give a clear focus to these demands. Even if the ECI succeeds and a new European right is established, it will take time and resources to enforce. This is why the demand for a European law should include **an obligation to monitor its application to drive up standards**.

The ECI also demands that whilst placing obligations on Member States, the Commission should set the example to back it up with other measures including:

- introducing a European citizenship education clause in appropriate legislation on freedom of movement or the transition to a greener and more digital economy and society;
- drawing up a statute on European Citizenship as a model for teaching;
- incentive measures for teacher training and the creation of a centre of excellence.

In [its decision of 8 November 2023](#), **the Commission accepted that all these demands** were within its legal competence. This means that the ECI has already scored a success before collecting a single signature. Why is there such a gap between numerous resolutions in favour of European citizenship education, and at best limited and variable practice on the ground? It is because activities which add a European dimension to civic education are seen to exist in

a legal twilight zone – education being a policy in national competence, where the EU role is limited to encouraging cooperation. The proposal for the ECI sets a precedent for action to take European citizenship education out of the shadows.

This is because of the choice of an article in the EU Treaties which has never been used before in this way: **Article 25 TFEU on Union Citizenship**. This shows that whilst changes to the Treaties are necessary in areas such as education, it is not true that nothing can be done without such change. The “I’m going European” ECI would bring about serious change and a **Europe of more equal opportunity and participatory democracy**.

The Citizens’ Committee is aware that despite this breakthrough, there will still be a need for further explanation of the ECI and the relationship between national and European citizenship education. For example, there should be no question of the EU imposing a single model of European citizenship education on the Member States. The legislation should be enabling, leaving national authorities latitude to decide how to achieve the objective of a European citizenship education for all. This gives rise inevitably to further considerations and in particular how to ensure that quality is not sacrificed to quantity and that EU backing with incentives is sufficiently attractive to drive up standards.

The thinking behind the ECI is that European Citizenship for all will appear irrelevant unless it is accompanied by an opportunity for everyone to experience what Europe has to offer – a version of Erasmus for all. This in turn gives rise to questions of cost which should be analysed. There is also the issue of overburdening teachers when there are staff shortages and significant pressures on the educational system.

If the aims are clear, they can be achieved in very different ways both within and outside the educational system. Should European civic education be delivered as a stand-alone subject or be linked to others across the curriculum, for example? The open-ended and innovative nature of this ECI does though create advantages. It can be a strength rather than a weakness that the ECI requires further explanation. In order to sustain the campaign for signature collection over one year, milestones are necessary, and they can be marked at regular intervals by publishing new arguments and evidence to support the ECI. Furthermore, advocacy for the aims of the ECI should not depend only on the quantity of signatures – the quality of the argument should matter. There is a chance for example that the new European Parliament after the June elections could decide to turn the ECI into an initiative of its own.

The biggest advantage of the enabling rather than prescriptive approach is that it allows anyone involved or motivated by European citizenship education to set their own campaigns in support of the ECI, whether by adapting the message to their own country or region or linking it to a specific societal challenge.

## Preparation for the ECI signature collection launch-the European campaign

A launch date for the signature collection has to be agreed in spring next year. The Citizens' Committee is likely to go for the **maximum amount of 6 months preparation** allowed before signature collection launch, which the Commission states is 8 May 2024. The advantage of this date is that it entails a **Europe Day launch (Thursday 9 May 2024)**. It is also a month ahead of European elections being held from 6-9 June. The ECIT Foundation and the Citizens' Committee are in a good position to produce a press pack and action kit for the launch. The choice of legal basis and the framing of the ECI took over a year and built on earlier work done by the ECIT Foundation for NECE (Networking European Civic Education). There have therefore been several versions of the ECI itself, and [an FAQ](#) and [research paper](#) which can be updated for the action kit.

When it comes to the broader campaign, the advice received so far from the ECI forum clearly makes sense: **connect the ECI to the European election campaign** generally and more specifically propose to a coalition of European associations to insert it into projects already funded by the Commission and European Parliament and other donors in the run-up to the elections. There is a chance of making the link, which is often advocated, but rarely realised, between ECIs and the European elections. Could some parties/candidates take up the ECI especially to attract young voters? It is possible, but bringing about such ownership of the ECI by parties and politicians will require extensive advocacy and communication work. Most advice about ECIs stresses the importance of impact with the launch to build momentum. A first opportunity to put forward this proposal and get support for the ECI will be [the event on European Citizenship as an issue for the elections which will be held on 24 January](#). In turn this event should lead to the organisation of a European symbolic vote which should be held in front of the European Parliament and online on 26 April – the results of which should be announced on 9 May 2024 when the ECI "I'm going European" will be launched.

The aim should be a **press launch event in Brussels and in a minimum of 7 other cities** in countries targeted for reaching the thresholds of signatures required for a valid ECI, and at least some activity linked to Europe Day events in as many other EU countries as possible. Certainly, the timing coinciding with the European elections campaign helps. This proposed strategy should clearly **distinguish between the pre- and the post-election period**. The first period leading up to the launch of signature collection can be more European in character whilst starting the creation of national coalitions, whereas the emphasis of the 12 months of signature collection should be on setting up and supporting national campaigns.

## The broader campaign over 12 months of signature collection – the national campaigns

This ECI has potentially a **wide-ranging appeal towards different audiences**, for example:

- all those involved with education and Europe, youth exchanges, life-long learning. A more specialised level towards **civic educators** in and out of school, who see the potential value because this ECI has been registered and breaks new ground legally, by adding a bigger European dimension to their work.
- **school, university and civil society networks** already delivering European citizenship education projects (e.g. the European Parliament Ambassador School programme), and which could use the ECI as an opportunity to promote their activity as an example of what should be done on a wider scale. This group are also aware of the gap between rhetoric in favour of European citizenship education and implementation;
- **European Civil Society organisations** which, without necessarily carrying out activities in the area of civic education, see its value for bringing about a more democratic Europe. Such organisations come together in the ECI community or in promoting European participatory democracy more generally, European citizenship or the EU itself.

**Campaigning for an ECI is a reality check:** if the ECI succeeds in collecting signatures, one might estimate that **80% will come from the first group, 15% from the second and 5% from the third.**

Because of the wide potential appeal of the ECI which should be made in any case to attract signatures, it makes sense to offer a choice of 3 different ways people can become involved as organisations or individual volunteers in their own country and as part of a broader European network:



### i. **Setting up a youth volunteer task force**

To get started, the Citizens' Committee will need to put together a dedicated **group of 5-7 young Europeans**. The main requirement will be the ability to guarantee a certain number of **voluntary hours input per week**, starting a month to six weeks ahead of the 9 May 2024 launch. It will be possible to attract students looking for **part-time work experience** for which helping an ECI is a particularly valuable example of multi-tasking. A group of volunteers can function well, provided there is leadership and fair sharing of tasks.

Different qualifications are required: fundraising, expertise on civic education in a European dimension, written and oral communication skills, knowledge of the civil society scene across different Member States for coalition building and advocacy towards the EU.

Our suggestion would be to advertise and set up a task force of Erasmus students on the lines of the 'Voters Without Borders' team which did achieve a high output and level of advocacy towards the EU. The main conditions to be

met are to have **permanent support for such a group, good working conditions and access to training**. There should be a full-time coordinator for the year of signature collection and a part-time communications officer. It is worth considering whether an organisation would be willing to loan a staff member with professional experience to support the task force and strategy for the ECI for the year of signature collection. Could such a task force have a multiplier effect? There are many who would like to get involved but without necessarily joining a Brussels-based European task force, but rather by being active in their own place of residence.



## ii. **Building a coalition of organisations**

ECIT is organising a **launch event for the ECI on 24 January 2024** in Brussels and online. This means setting up a panel of European associations (i.e. Lifelong Learning Platform; Citizens Take Over Europe, European Youth Forum, etc). The **aim** should be to **create an operational team of European partners**. In turn, this could be a model for setting up a partnership of organisations in different countries. **A questionnaire should be sent out to potential national partners** asking whether they can support the ECI and if so by what means. How many signatures do they estimate to collect, starting with actions on the day of the launch? Which countries to concentrate on? It is too early to reach a conclusion other than try all countries. Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that there has been recent mobilisation of the teaching profession (i.e. Poland and Hungary) which might be tapped into to get support for the ECI. Germany should certainly be on the list since it is from here that funding should come. Belgium should certainly be on the list because of the introduction of votes at 16 for the 2024 European elections. Austria should be targeted as the first country to lower the age for voting with a high level of support for European citizenship education. Romania is another possibility. Cooperation with networks such as NECE will be important to reach a large number of organisations. Successful ECIs often have extensive coalitions, which in turn have to be motivated and kept going. On the basis of replies to the questionnaire a first more detailed strategy for the ECI can be put forward. The aim should be to have a coalition of around 200 organisations.



## iii. **Creating a corps of individual “ambassadors” for the ECI**

This group could include **influencers, politicians, experts and writers**. These would be individuals **who can advocate for the ECI at events and in other ways**. Most would probably have a background in civic education and Europe. They should have **professional or academic experience** of the issues raised by the ECI and would not (unlike the youth task force) need support. Ideally, ambassadors should feel able to act autonomously and choose their occasion in writing or orally to promote the ECI, encourage signatures and other forms of support. The exception would be in answer to appeals for everyone involved

with the ECI to promote signatures on the day of the launch and other occasions when acting simultaneously could make an impact. They could also be asked to recruit other ambassadors and provide advice about contacts and sources of funding. There are already offers of help going in that direction and more will emerge in the process of exploring sources of support and funding for the ECI. Successful ECIs depend on a large number of volunteers. The **aim** should be to have in place a group of at least **50 ambassadors by the time of the launch of the signature collection. There are 8 so far.**

### Fundraising

The main immediate objective is to secure funding. Possibly **the most valuable member of the task force would be a fundraiser working on a pro bono basis.** ECIT has a useful list of foundations and some experience with European funds. The most urgent need is for a small **start-up fund for the preparatory period leading up to the launch of signature collection.** Once signature collection starts, an attractive formula is to **appeal for individual donations** which could be doubled by a major donor providing a guarantee to that effect - i.e. a target of 50k in small amounts and matched donations to therefore reach 100k. The advantage of this approach is that it combines fundraising with gaining popular support. Some funders might be prepared to **provide funds for a task force of young people, others for the general aims of the ECI and still others focussing on a specific aspect or the need for raising the profile of the ECI in a particular country to support civic education.** The sources of funding and support are potentially as wide-ranging as the coalition.

Getting resources in place might start with applications to support the task force of young people. The value of working to prepare for an ECI is rightly seen quite widely as a valuable and advanced form of training to become an active European citizen. The emphasis here should be on the group of young people themselves rather than the ECI as such (i.e. European team-work and the learning of new skills and training such as use of AI tools, better targeted social media promotion, etc.). It would be worth approaching the European Parliament office for relations with youth organisations and some foundations – especially those in Germany specialised in this approach. Cross-border programmes such as the Polish-German youth office, Franco-German youth fund or Franco-German citizens fund are also potential supporters. The **CERV programme** and its regranting possibilities have been mentioned. Erasmus plus programmes are another possibility.

The remainder of 2023 should be spent in exploring all aspects of preparing the ECI for the launch on 9 May 2024 and the year of signature collection until 9 May 2025. On the basis of the exploratory work, a schedule and a budget can be put forward. To do so at this stage would be to create a highly theoretical strategy, which would not bear much relation to the real situation. Nevertheless, **first building blocks** can be suggested for these two items:

→ **First schedule for the run-up and launch of the ECI.**

The attempt could be made to give a main theme to the activities of each quarter, even though they may well overlap.

**First Quarter (January – March 2024)**

Run-up to launch preparations and recruitment of youth task force:

- obtaining resources
- advocating for the ECI with EU and national authorities (i.e. ECIT event on 24 January, ECI Day 2024 on 5 March and the symbolic European vote on 26 April)
- linking the ECI to civil society projects in the run-up to the elections and the political campaign
- website development (updating FAQ and background research)

**Second Quarter (April – June 2024)**

Training of task force and preparations for the launch linking to the European elections

- preparation of the action kit for launch events
- start database of contacts for the coalition of organisations
- questionnaire to organisations
- press list of EU accredited journalists and specialised media
- detailed arrangements for launch of signature collection in Brussels, other cities and EU-wide
- advocacy to link the ECI to the elections

**Third Quarter (July – September 2024)**

Supporting and spreading national campaigns

- development of a detailed strategy on the basis of replies to the questionnaire and fundraising efforts
- country-by-country setting up or consolidation of national coalitions (7 Member States)
- plans for varying degree of activity in the other 20 Member States
- publication of a report on the costs and benefits of the ECI

**Fourth Quarter (October – December 2024)**

- advocacy towards the new EU legislature
- publication of a model for the European law demanded by the ECI
- support for national campaigns to collect signatures
- use of the ECIT Annual Event to bring everyone together to assess progress (31 October 2024)
- update of July strategy with detailed plan for the fifth and sixth quarterly periods in 2025 and the remaining period of signature collection until 9 May 2025.

## Conclusions

Reports back shared by the Citizens' Committee members show that there is support for this ECI which is one of the most ambitious ever put forward. If everyone had a right to be educated about their European rights and the EU, European democracy would be that much more participatory, and millions more would be able to benefit from what Europe has to offer. If the campaign for the ECI takes off, it could lead to more attention on citizenship education which is increasingly important in an unpredictable and insecure world.

At the same time, the same reports show that there is scepticism about the ECI instrument which after more than 10 years is still insufficiently known. 107 ECIs have been registered and only 10 have reached the 1 million signature threshold. Previous ECIs relating to educational policies and Europe have not made the breakthrough in signatures. Even successful ECIs do not necessarily lead to follow-up by the Commission and new legislation. In the case of the ECI "End the Cage Age", the Commission first stated that it would implement the demands and then went back on its word. For individual ECI organisers, the fact that there is something of a crisis of confidence in the general instrument is worrying.

Against this background, the Citizens' Committee has agreed to keep an open mind about whether to go ahead with the ECI. It would be a pity to have to withdraw the ECI, but this may be necessary unless sufficient funding and support can be found in the run-up to the launch of signature collection on 9 May 2024. The current period is favourable for launching this ECI which can be linked to the European elections.

An outline budget is attached. This is a tough target, but it is still not enough. The budget focusses on the European campaign and does not include the resources needed for partner organisations to run the campaign in at least 7 Member States where thresholds have to be reached to make the 1 million valid. The rough estimate that the true cost of an ECI is 1 Euro per signature remains valid.

The ECIT Foundation is raising this issue and the urgency of finding support for the ECI for a particular reason. Over the long period leading up to the registration of the ECI, there was uncertainty as to whether the Commission would accept the legal basis and allow even a single signature to be collected. There was therefore no basis on which to plan and fundraise for the campaign to launch the ECI and collect signatures. As stressed in the introduction, the fact that the Commission has accepted to register the ECI is a breakthrough. It comes as a surprise and the clock is now ticking!

*If you or your organisation are interested, please contact us at [info@ecit-foundation.eu](mailto:info@ecit-foundation.eu).  
You can also [make a donation](#), which however small will be extremely valuable!*



# I'M GOING EUROPEAN

## ANNEX: INDICATIVE BUDGET FOR THE ECI



The following is a first rough estimate of costs of running this ECI at the European level. This budget does not include the costs for campaigning at the national level. In this estimate, a distinction is made between the start-up period from 1 January until 9 May 2024 when signature collection should be launched, and the 12-month period of signature collection from the launch date until 9 May 2025.

PHASE ONE: Start-up period (1 January – 9 May 2024)	
Tasks and activities	Estimated cost (€)
Coordination and set-up of the campaign (voluntary work by ECIT)	0
Communications Officer (monthly retainer of €400/month for 4 months)	1 600
Fundraising (part-time voluntary activity)	0
Updating website contents (revision of the Statute, FAQ and research paper)	1 000
Support the ECI at run-up events (e.g. 24/01 event, 05/03 ECI Day, 26/04 symbolic vote)	500
Promotional material (flyers, posters, etc.)	600
Creation of a database (volunteers, partner organisations, influencers, media, etc.)	1 500
Recruitment of Coordinator and task force (voluntary work and paid support)	750
Action kit for the launch (design and printing of 250 hard copies)	3 000
Invitations and on-site costs for the launch in Brussels and 6 other cities	4 500
<b>SUBTOTAL (Phase 1)</b>	<b>13 450</b>
PHASE TWO: Campaign for signature collection (9 May 2024 – 9 May 2025)	
Tasks and activities	Estimated cost (€)
<b>Staff, interns and volunteers:</b>	
Full-time Coordinator (one-year employee contract)	63 000
Communications Officer	35 000
Administrative support (fundraising, HR and finance – part-time)	7 200
Youth task force (5 Erasmus students on circa €500 each per month)	30 000
Employment costs (tax and social secretariat)	15 000
<b>Communication:</b>	
Website updating	800
Social media promotion and advertising	6 000
Monthly Coalition meetings and newsletter	2 400
Updating strategy and action kit	750
New research and output (costs Erasmus for all, model draft law)	3 000
Overheads (office space and miscellaneous expenses @10%)	16 300
<b>SUBTOTAL (Phase 2)</b>	<b>179 450</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>192 900</b>