

LETTER TO THE ECI TEAM IN THE COMMISSION

8 April 2024

Subject: Temporary withdrawal of the ECI “I’m going European”

Dear ECI team,

I am writing to let you know that the citizens’ committee has decided by a majority to withdraw this ECI so that further preparatory work can be done before it is resubmitted in a new form and with a new title. We have reached this conclusion with difficulty and out of respect both for the ECI instrument in general and for our own ECI in particular which potentially could succeed and be positively transformative for everyone in Europe.

“I’m going European” is asking for a right for all to European citizenship education. A European law would add a European dimension to civic education in and out of school, combined with a possibility for everyone to benefit from an Erasmus at some time during their life. This ambitious proposal to make European citizenship a citizenship of equal opportunity would be backed by incentives: a statute, teacher training and a centre of excellence.

We are though still some way from being able to achieve a successful ECI to back these demands for the following reasons:

- i) The ECI and its legal basis needs more explanation. It is a significant and welcome step forward that the Commission has accepted to register the ECI. This is the first time that it has been shown that it is possible for the EU to legislate in the area of citizenship education without revising the Treaties. The ECI is though on uncharted territory based on a Treaty article (Article 25 TFEU), which has never been used to propose European legislation. Inevitably, our ECI has met with some scepticism and concern that the EU would seek to impose a model of civic education on Member States and already overburdened teachers. Others are concerned that a statutory instrument would be unworkable. We have clearly further work to do to show what such a European law would look like and how it would work in practice. This is particularly important in a climate in which there is also scepticism about ECIs in general.
- ii) More time is needed for fundraising and coalition building. Since we did not expect the ECI to be registered -the Commission decision came as a surprise- we could not carry out the necessary fundraising and coalition-building in advance. That process is now much more possible and realistic. We have estimated costs and requirements for creating a multi-sectoral coalition and consulted the forum set up to advise ECI organisers. In the absence of more pro-active support and start-up funding for ECIs that process takes more time than the six months

allowed between registration of an ECI and the launch of signature collection. Funding and an EU wide coalition need to be prepared at least a year before the launch and in place before it is open for signatures. Once an ECI starts -in our case it would have been 8 May 2024 - there is insufficient time to build a strategy and most funding is likely to come too late, since only 12 months are allowed for signature collection.

- iii) The public appeal of the ECI needs improving. More has to be done to improve the popular appeal of the ECI. At ECI day on 5 March doubts about the title were expressed. The ECI could have a wide appeal because it proposes that everyone in the EU should receive an entitlement currently reserved to a few. It is possible therefore to appeal for signatures both on grounds of self-interest and idealism. Further research and fact-finding are necessary to be able to frame that appeal effectively. In this connection, we are reassured that most of the information required to improve the communication strategy can be found on the European Education Area and in the analysis of the projects already carried out for European citizenship education.

We will be back very soon with a proposal to register a new version of the ECI. In the meantime, explaining our reasons for withdrawal may help other ECI organisers. A period of practical preparation is essential before an ECI is launched. This case may also help policy makers in the Institutions to find ways to support this ground-breaking transnational agenda-setting instrument more effectively,

Yours sincerely,

Anthony David Venables,

Representative of the Citizens' Committee