

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ECIT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Held on Wednesday 27 November

Present:

Suzana Carp
Julian Culp
Kalypso Nicolaïdis
Alvaro Oleart
Nora Siklodi
Tony Venables
Gosia Wochowska

Apologies:

Dora Kostakopoulou

Zoom host:

Alicia Cleary -Venables

The meeting opened on Zoom at 12 pm and lasted until 2 pm moderated by Tony Venables.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Gosia Wochowska explained that as a CERV evaluator she could not participate in the discussion of item 1.1 "Call for proposals: Three -year partnership agreements." Tony Venables suggested moving this item to the end of the meeting as a new point 3, so that Gosia could attend the meeting up to that point and then leave when it was discussed. This was agreed. Since applying for a CERV operating grant would be a priority between now and the deadline of 4 February, it was also agreed that Gosia should step down from the Board for that period. To avoid any possible conflict of interest, she should not be involved in any way at all with the application.

1. FUNDRAISING AND GENERAL STRATEGY

1.1 STUDY OUTLINE: THE ROLE OF THE EU IN FURTHERING EU CITIZENSHIP

It was explained to the Board that following a more academic proposal by Nora Siklodi and correspondence with the research department of the European Parliament, the new version

was for a more policy- oriented study, hopefully to be commissioned by AFCO. In the last legislature, this committee had proposed a comprehensive agenda for EU Citizenship. If the study was accepted, the research could run in parallel to the Cross-Party Group of MEPs. ECIT hoped to hear whether or not the study would go ahead now that the hearings of Commissioners were over.

To carry out such a study, good access to policy-makers would be essential, and there should be a strong emphasis on interviews. It was also suggested that the points raised by Latham and Watkins in relation to the correspondence with the Commission on the unsatisfactory legal situation governing voting rights could be examined further in the context of the study.

Another example of the unsatisfactory legal situation governing European political rights was discrimination between nationals and EU citizens when it came to standing as a candidate in European elections. The appeal by Suzana Carp who could not participate in the campaign in Belgium was being heard by the Council of State and could be referred to the European Court of Justice.

It was agreed that these points should be brought to the attention to the Parliament's research department.

1.2 FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

The Board approved the approach to fundraising. This was comprehensive, covering all forms of potential support ranging from institutional partnership to projects, and ways ECIT could raise its own revenue. The overall strategy was backed up by a table of potential funders which should be kept up to date. There was also a leaflet about ECIT. This should be put on the organisation's website. A short version should be posted on partner search platforms (i.e. for the CERV and Erasmus+ programmes). The Board considered that whilst fundraising was on the right track, more should be done, and a fundraiser recruited as soon as the necessary budget was available.

Tony Venables mentioned upcoming deadlines and additions to the table. He thanked Gosia Wochowska who had helped define the approach.

1.3 ACCOUNTS

It was pointed out to the Board that ECIT made a healthy surplus in 2021, a smaller one in 2022 and broke even in 2023 by including in-kind contributions. Currently the organisation was waiting for two final payments from NOTE and MobileCIT.

The full payment from MobileCIT could not however be guaranteed. The project had proved difficult not so much for ECIT whose role was event organisation, as for the other partners responsible for communication and advocacy.

The accounts were approved.

2. CURRENT ACTIVITIES

2.1 RELAUNCH OF THE CROSS-PARTY GROUP OF MEPs ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

In 2023, the Group had been funded by Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNF).

The aim for 2025 was to have each of the four meetings supported by one of the pro-EU German political foundations, but this could take time because there was no Federal budget, and elections were scheduled for February. It was agreed that Tony Venables and Suzana Carp should apply for new badges and visit the European Parliament probably in Strasbourg in January or February. In order to start setting up the group and engaging with MEPs, the ECIT entry on the transparency register should be updated.

2.2 THE ECI "TEACH ME EUROPE"

It was recalled that at the last meeting of the Board held on 3 July with the participation of Daniela Vancic from the ECI Forum, the new version of the ECI was discussed. The main theme of that discussion was that the new ECI could only succeed in getting enough signatures by setting up at least 7 national campaigns where the thresholds for signatures could be met. Under such a strategy, the role of ECIT would be one of coordination. An application would be made with ALDA to the Civic Innovation Fund (deadline 9 December 2024). If this succeeds, ECIT could set up a website and prepare the shared materials for the ECI, whilst ALDA could identify the wider network in at least 7 countries. At least a year of preparation would be needed. The new text of the ECI was an improvement, but there was still further work to be done to give it more popular appeal and explain how the new European right would be applied. Legal issues needed to be examined in more depth, probably with the help of Carsten Berg and the ECI Campaign. It was suggested that the ECI should be registered by the Citizens' Committee in June which would leave 6 months to prepare for simultaneous European and national launches for signature collection in January 2026. Then there would be one year to collect over 1 million signatures.

Kalypso Nicolaïdis suggested bringing together the ECI on European political civic education with the Democracy Odyssey (DO) which had now chosen as its theme the crisis in democracy. She was glad to hear that the text of the ECI was not yet final and would only be unchangeable once registered. To appeal to citizens and motivate them to sign a different approach was needed, avoiding legal references for example. This was particularly important for this ECI which was not about a particular single issue but European Citizenship for all, which could appear an abstraction. Even though this was probably the most transformative and political of all ECIs, a way to motivate the public to sign still had to be invented. The ECI could be shaped by the citizens in the DO and put forward as one result of their work which was due to be concluded in June, so the timing was perfect. She urged that the new text should be shared on as a Google Doc, so changes could be proposed.

Bringing the ECI close to the DO could be discussed further around 6 December when Kalypso would be in Brussels with the colleagues involved. Tony Venables said that he would be available and had already planned a meeting with ALDA for that date. It was agreed that the Board should be kept informed of the results.

Another immediate task is to check on the membership of the citizens' committee which has more than 7 members including most of the Board and some additional partners as follows:

- Tony Venables, representative with Suzana Carp, substitute (Belgium)
- Julian Waldbauer and Kim Kellner (Austria)
- Julian Culp (France)
- Gosia Wochowska (Germany)
- Miklos Barabas (Hungary)
- Carla Donohue (Ireland)
- Kalypso Nicolaidis (Italy)
- Gatis Pavils (Latvia)
- Alicja Pacewicz (Poland)

ECIT needed to check whether the membership of the committee would stay the same or change whilst adding additional countries (in particular Spain was mentioned)

It was agreed that the next Board meeting together with the other members of the Citizens' Committee and close partners should be held in February and devoted entirely to planning the launch of the new ECI. A paper should be prepared by ECIT outlining the responsibilities of the Citizens' Committee, the strategy and milestones for setting up national campaigns and its own role as coordinator and common resource, depending on the fundraising.

2.3 RESPONSE OF THE EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN ON CONSULTATION ON THE CITIZENSHIP REPORT

The European Ombudsman had rejected the complaint and sided with the Commission which was not under a legal obligation to consult on the tri-annual Citizenship Report prepared under Article 25 (TFEU). Nevertheless, the Ombudsman had urged the Commission to consult on future reports as good administrative practice. ECIT should ask for the correspondence with the Commission, if necessary under the access to documents regulation. The Board was surprised by the decision which showed the Commission's reluctance to accept any interference with its prerogatives, even when that involved citizen participation.

3. CALL FOR PROPOSALS : THREE- YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Doubts about applying for a CERV grant were expressed notably by Suzana Carp on the grounds that it was time-consuming and ECIT had failed in the past. Tony Venables nevertheless advocated for applying since securing a stable source of basic core funding for 3 years would allow ECIT to develop. The Board had several questions :

- Would it be better to apply for a grant under 60.0000 euros?
- Should ECIT apply on its own or with partners?

The need to have access to expert advice was stressed. Tony Venables explained that in the absence of a CERV contact point for Belgium, he had been in touch with Philippe Ternes,

representing the contact point for Luxembourg and would raise with him the questions put by the Board. He would report back before the end of the year, and also propose dates for the next meeting in February focussed on the strategy for the ECI "Teach Me Europe".