

Summit 2011

VIENNA DECLARATION

ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

Europe has to become stronger – but it cannot do so without engaging the strength of its citizens. That is why we are proud and pleased about the new participatory citizens' right: the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

This is the effective means for overcoming nationalism in Europe. Citizens can finally get to “Brussels” by a direct route. They will be active partners in the shaping of the process of European integration and EU policy making.

From April 1, 2012 EU citizens will be able to take the initiative together.

The new instrument of the European Citizens' Initiative – set out in Article 11.4 of the Lisbon Treaty and EU Regulation 211/2011 – means that all those citizens who are entitled to take part in EU elections will be placed on an equal footing with the EU Parliament and the Council of the European Union in respect of their right to propose a draft law to the EU Commission.

This is an important first step towards a modern representative democracy at the European level. It has great potential to improve the framework conditions for future democratic involvement; to introduce supplementary provisions; and to generate further tools for transnational citizen participation.

At the 2011 Vienna European Citizens' Initiative Summit, experts and representatives from civil society and the worlds of politics, administration, academia and economics focused their attention on the final steps towards the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative and called

1. upon the **Member States of the European Union** to create citizen-friendly provisions for the implementation of the ECI. In their capacity as the competent authorities for certifying the “statements of support” (signatures) collected both online and in paper form, the Member States have an obligation to facilitate access to the new instrument for all eligible voters and avoid creating unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles;
2. upon the **European Commission** and other EU bodies – in particular the **Parliament**, the **European Economic and Social Committee** and the **Council of the Regions** – to play their part in making it possible for the European Citizens' Initiative to be properly and constructively used, by adopting wide-ranging information, training and assistance provisions – including targeted assistance with translation, and

measures to ensure that comprehensive information on the ECI and its use is made available in a timely fashion before the official launch next year;

3. upon **Civil Society Organisations** to take care with their preparation and use of the ECI, including comparing notes among themselves, so that duplication of effort in the support and launching of ECIs can, if possible, be prevented; also that care is taken, where possible, to advise, accompany and support potential initiative organisers in the preparation and pursuit of their initiative proposals;
4. and expressed the hope that the strong involvement from the **Austrian side** in the whole development process of the ECI will be continued. That involvement included the input from offices of the Austrian government in the constitution-drafting process, in the elaboration of the Regulation and in the current implementation process in the Member States. Particularly welcome are the efforts to establish in Vienna an ECI Office to support all ECI actors.

In order to contribute to the final implementation and the initial public information campaign in the best possible way, the 2011 Summit proposed the establishment of an ad-hoc roundtable conference with all official key players to be established before summer 2011. Within this framework, member state representatives, EU institutions and experts will have the opportunity to inform each other and share different national practices and strategies for implementing the ECI regulation.

The Summit also discussed additional forms of citizen participation set out in the Lisbon Treaty and which are about to be implemented. These include mechanisms for debate and consultation. Attention should also be given to examining how the citizens' new agenda-setting instrument can be complemented by a co-decision making right at the European level in the form of a transnational and EU-wide referendum procedure.

The European Citizens' Initiative brings into effect a new transnational principle of democracy. The ECI process opens up for the very first time the possibility of a participatory praxis which is direct, transnational and digital. On Europe Day 2011 the experts from twenty countries assembled at the Vienna Summit call upon the European Institutions, the EU Member States and civil-society actors to make the best of this historic opportunity and play their part in ensuring that the democratisation of European Democracy can continue to be energetically pursued!

For more information:

www.legalpolicy.eu, www.iri-europe.org, www.europeancitizensinitiative.info
www.citizens-initiative.eu, www.ecas-citizens.eu

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