



ECAS conference
“GETTING EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INITIATIVES STARTED”
Delegation of Saxony Anhalt to the EU
Boulevard Saint Michel 80 Brussels
17 March 2011
09:00 -18:00

In terms of article 11, paragraph 4 of the Lisbon Treaty, “Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.”

The conference will be a first opportunity to examine in detail the regulation which has been adopted by the Council on 14 February 2011.

The approved regulation states that a further 12 months is necessary to set up the procedures for verifying signatures before the regulation comes into force. 2011 is likely to be a year of preparation. The aim of the event will be therefore not just to review the regulation but also to assist users and potential users to prepare for initiatives which should be open for signatures in early 2012.

After a plenary session and debate on the new regulation, participants will divide into 4 groups which will run parallel and then report back to a final plenary session.

ECAS will prepare a background discussion document. There will be interpretation in German.

200 Participants are expected to attend the conference.

GETTING CITIZENS INITIATIVES STARTED

Morning session

09.00

Welcoming session

Chair:

- Tony Venables – Director, ECAS

Keynote speakers:

- Holger Hövelmann – Minister of the Interior of Saxony-Anhalt
- Diana Wallis MEP – Vice-President of the European Parliament, Rapporteur on ECI

09.30

Opening Plenary Session: Now we have the regulation, does it live up to expectations?

Keynote Speakers:

- Jens Nymand Christensen- Director, Better Regulation and Institutional Matters, Secretariat General, EC
- Bruno Kaufmann – President, Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe
- Alain Lamassoure – MEP, Rapporteur on ECI
- Gerald Häfner – MEP, Rapporteur on ECI

Questions for debate: What judgments on the results of the negotiation? What is the scope of the Citizens' Initiative? What is needed to make a success of Citizens' Initiatives?

11.00

Press conference - Coffee Break.

11.30

First Panel: Legal framework. How user-friendly will the regulation be?

Panel:

- Carsten Berg –Director of ECI-Campaign, Democracy International

- Mário Tenreiro – Head of Unit ,Institutional Issues, Secretary General, European Commission
- Lorenzo Consoli – International Press Association
- Marc Pecsteen – Director European Affairs, Office of the Minister for Development Cooperation, in charge of European Affairs Belgian Presidency of the EU
- Paolo Ponzano – Research Fellow, European University Institute

Questions for debate: What improved during the negotiations to make the regulation more user-friendly? What went in the opposite direction? To what extent will the requirements for collecting signatures be seen as a deterrent? How serious are other conditions such as restrictions on who can sign; the minimum number of countries and the time frame for collecting signatures? What remains to be done in 2011 before the regulation comes into force?

12.30

Second Panel: Practical implications of the ECI. What is the verdict on the regulation from the standpoint of those who have launched European or national initiatives?

Panel:

- Michaela Glöckler – Organiser of the Initiative for Applied Anthroposophy, Action Eliant
- Alexander Alvaro – MEP, Organiser of the One-Seat Campaign
- Erzsebet Foldesi– Vice president of EDF, Organiser of the European Disability Forum Initiative, European Disability Forum
- Marco Contiero, EU Policy Director, Greenpeace, Organiser of the “1 million voices for a GE-free future” Initiative

Questions for debate: Of the more than 20 European initiatives tried earlier, only 4 passed the 1 million signature threshold. How difficult does the regulation make it to collect the necessary signatures? What can be learned from European experimentation and different national experiences? What type of support should be offered to the organisers? How do those planning or repeating European initiatives work under the regulation?

13.30 – 15.00

LUNCH BREAK AT THE DELEGATION OF SAXONY- ANHALT

Afternoon Session

15.00 PARALLEL WORKSHOPS

The participants will divide into 4 groups:

Group I: European citizens' initiatives and EU competence

Chair:

- Stephane Carrara – Université Paris 1

Commentators:

- Rodolphe Munoz – Lecturer, University of Liege
- Monique Goyens – Director, European Consumers' Organisation (tbc)

This group will examine the question of what is meant in article 11 within the framework of the powers of the Commission, taking specific examples from policy fields such as environment, social policy or internal market.

Questions for debate: Could article 11 be used for demands which go beyond the current Treaties and require a revision? In borderline cases how to make a Citizens' Initiative as eligible and acceptable as possible? How to deal with instances where the proposal is indeed within the competence of the Commission, but the track record shows that it is reluctant to act? Also, legal acts take the form of regulations, directives or decisions. What legislative procedures apply to different legal instruments?

Group II: European campaigns for launching a successful Citizens' Initiatives

Chair:

- Gerry Salole – Chief Executive, European Foundation Centre

Commentators:

- Andrea Albertazzi - CGIL Brussels Office
- Marco Contiero - EU Policy Director, Greenpeace

Questions for debate: An issue might be within EU competence, but how easy will it be to collect 1 million signatures, especially for organisations which do not have a strong readymade European network? To what extent are the conditions in the regulation an incentive for European campaigning or a deterrent? How to find partners and spread the issue across borders? Where to find support in the EU Institutions and with outside bodies? How to contribute to awareness raising? What is the importance of online VS offline campaigning?

Group III: European and national rules to meet the conditions for a successful initiative

Chair:

- Bruno Kaufmann- President, Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe

Commentators:

- Carsten Berg – Director of ECI-Campaign, Democracy International
- Assya Kavrakova – Director, Open Society Institute

Questions for debate: This group will examine with the participation of experts the do's and don'ts of signature collection both face-to-face and online. What will be the likely pitfalls of the requirements for the collection, verification and authentication procedures which still have to be put in place at member state level? What about on-line collection of signatures and meeting requirements such as data protection? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using specialised service providers in petitioning, signature collection? What is the division of tasks between national collection and European organisations?

Group IV: Long term impact of ECI

Chair:

- Andrew Duff, MEP

Commentators:

- Piotr Maciej Kaczyński –Research Fellow, CEPS
- Janice Thomson – EU Public Engagement Advisor, Involve

- Johannes Pichler - chair professor for Development of European Law, University of Graz

Questions for debate: This group will examine with the participation of protagonists for institutional reform within the institutions and academics what could be the longer term impact of ECI. Is this the instrument to achieve the European public sphere or just one element of it? How then should it be combined with other techniques of citizen participation such as juries or consensus conferences? What will be the longer term impact on EU decision making? Will the ECI just be an add-on and an exception to what is “normal” or will it make the EU institutions as a whole much more sensitive to citizen concerns and movements in public opinion?

16.45 Coffee Break

17.00 Plenary Session

Chairs:

- Tony Venables – Director, ECAS
- Carsten Berg – Director of ECI-Campaign, Democracy International

Brief reports and recommendations from the four groups

Keynote speaker

- Andreas Gross – Member of the Swiss Parliament, Committees for political institutions, security and foreign affairs: The potential of ECI to contribute to European democracy

General discussion

Conclusion by the Chairs on the highlights from the day and issues which still need to be explored.

18.00 Conference ends

RECEPTION AND DRINKS FOR PARTICIPANTS

