



**european
citizens' initiative**



***democracy
international***

The European Citizens' Initiative

What is Democracy International?

Democracy International (DI) is a global coalition of individual citizens and non-governmental organisations promoting direct and participatory democracy. Its primary goal is to encourage the development and use of well-designed initiative and referendum tools as a complement to representative democracy. DI members thus seek to expand collective self-determination at all levels of government: local, regional, national and transnational. At the same time DI and its member organisations advise citizens on how to conduct successful citizens' initiatives at regional, national and transnational levels.



What is the ECI Campaign of Democracy International?

The ECI Campaign, created and run by Democracy International, successfully worked for the inclusion of the European Citizen's Initiative (ECI) in the draft EU Constitution and later the revised Treaty on European Union (Lisbon Treaty). It then actively lobbied for citizen-friendly rules governing its use. It currently monitors the implementation of the ECI and provides guidance to groups and individuals on using the ECI.

What is the ECI?

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy in world history. As outlined in article 11.4 of the Treaty on European Union, it gives citizens the right to directly engage in setting the legislative agenda for the EU. Once signatures supporting a policy proposal have been collected and verified from at least one million citizens of several EU member states, the European Commission is obliged to consider that proposal. It can, but is not required to, respond by proposing new legislation. The ECI is therefore not a decision-making instrument. The first ECI may be registered on 1 April 2012. The specific legal procedures for launching an ECI are set out in EU regulation 211/2011 .



Who can launch an ECI?

If you want to start an ECI, you can't just begin by collecting signatures. You must first form a citizens' committee and then register your ECI with the European Commission. A citizens' committee is a group of at least seven citizens from at least seven different EU member states, one of whom will serve as contact person in dealings with the European Commission. It is designed to ensure the quality and seriousness of citizens' initiatives.

What topics are admissible for an ECI?

The European Commission will check if the ECI is admissible, then register and publish it on a Commission-run website. If the Commission refuses to register an ECI, the organisers may appeal the decision to the European Court of Justice.

Organisers must indicate to which treaty article their ECI relates. However, even if this is incorrect, the ECI may still be admissible. The European Commission maintains that initiatives requiring an amendment to the EU treaties are not admissible, although this is still subject to legal debate.

The Commission may legally only refuse to register ECIs which manifestly:

- fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers
- are abusive, frivolous or vexatious
- are contrary to the democratic values of the Union

Legal Admissibility

Citizens' initiatives which manifestly fall outside the legal competence of the European Commission or the EU in general will not be registered. From the Commission's point of view initiatives which would change the Treaties are also not admissible.

A citizens' initiative is registered if...

"...the proposed initiative does not manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties".
(Art. 4, Regulations on the citizens' initiative)



Admissible:

- Environmental and consumer protection (with some exceptions)
- Minimum wage
- EU international trade policy
- Data protection



Not admissible:

- Education system
- Social security systems
- Prohibition of abortion
- European security and defence policy



Fundamental democratic values

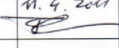
The European Commission will refuse registration if an initiative is manifestly contrary to the democratic values of the European Union. This prevents extremists from launching an ECI and publishing their views on the Commission's website. Article 2 of the EU Treaty lists the values:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.” (Art. 2 Treaty on the European Union)

What are the rules for signature collection?

When the organisers of the ECI have received confirmation of their registration and their initiative has been published, they can start collecting signatures. They have 12 months to collect 1 million valid signatures.

- Any EU citizen who is eligible to vote in European elections can sign an ECI.
- Signatures can be collected in all official EU languages; the signature forms will contain a translation into each language of the wording of the initiative .
- To support an ECI, usually the name, address, date and place of birth, nationality and signature is sufficient. However, many countries require the personal identification number as well.

FULL FIRST NAME	FAMILY NAME	PERMANENT RESIDENCE (street, number, postal code, city, country)	DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH	NATIONALITY	DATE & SIGNATURE
Florian	Kollmann	Reinhartstr. 44a, 58455 Witten, D	14.05.89 Witten	D	11.4.2011 

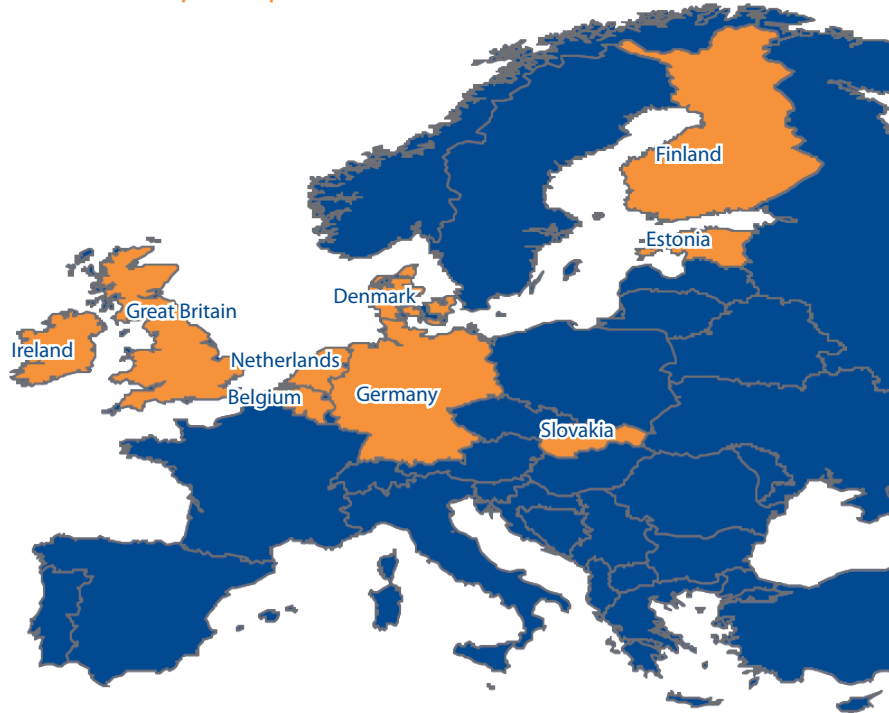


When is an ECI successful?

An ECI is successful if one million validated signatures were collected in not more than 12 months. Furthermore, national signature quotas equal to 750 times the number of MEPs must be reached in at least seven different member states. Quotas vary from 3750 in Malta to 74,250 in Germany (see table).

Once they have reached the signature collection target, the ECI's organisers must submit the signatures to the relevant competent authority in each EU member state for validation. Member state have three months to validate signatures and send the organisers a certificate which states the number of valid signatures. Since probably not all signatures will be declared valid an initiative should collect more than the necessary signatures. Having obtained the certificates, the organisers can submit the ECI to the Commission.

Countries which don't require a personal identification number.



National signature quotas

Austria	12,750
Belgium	16,500
Bulgaria	12,750
Cyprus	4500
Czech Republic	16,500
Denmark	9750
Estonia	4500
Finland	9750
France	54,000
Germany	74,250
Greece	16,500
Hungary	16,500
Ireland	9000
Italy	54,000

Latvia	6000
Lithuania	9000
Luxembourg	4500
Malta	3750
Netherlands	18,750
Poland	37,500
Portugal	16,500
Romania	24,750
Slovakia	9750
Slovenia	5250
Sweden	13,500
Spain	37,500
United Kingdom	54,000

An aerial photograph of a city street grid, likely in a European city, is shown in the top right corner. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The streets are clearly visible, and some buildings are discernible. The blue overlay is a gradient, fading from the top right towards the bottom left, where the text is located.

What happens to a successful ECI?

Although the European Commission is not obliged to propose a legal act after every successful ECI, there is a political follow-up. The initiators of an ECI have the right to present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament in the presence of the European Commission. They have the possibility to discuss their initiative directly with the Commission and with members of the European Parliament. Finally, the Commission will decide whether or not it will propose a legal act. This decision has to be made and published by the Commission not more than three months after the submission of the ECI.



Public hearing in
on decides whether



13 month 0



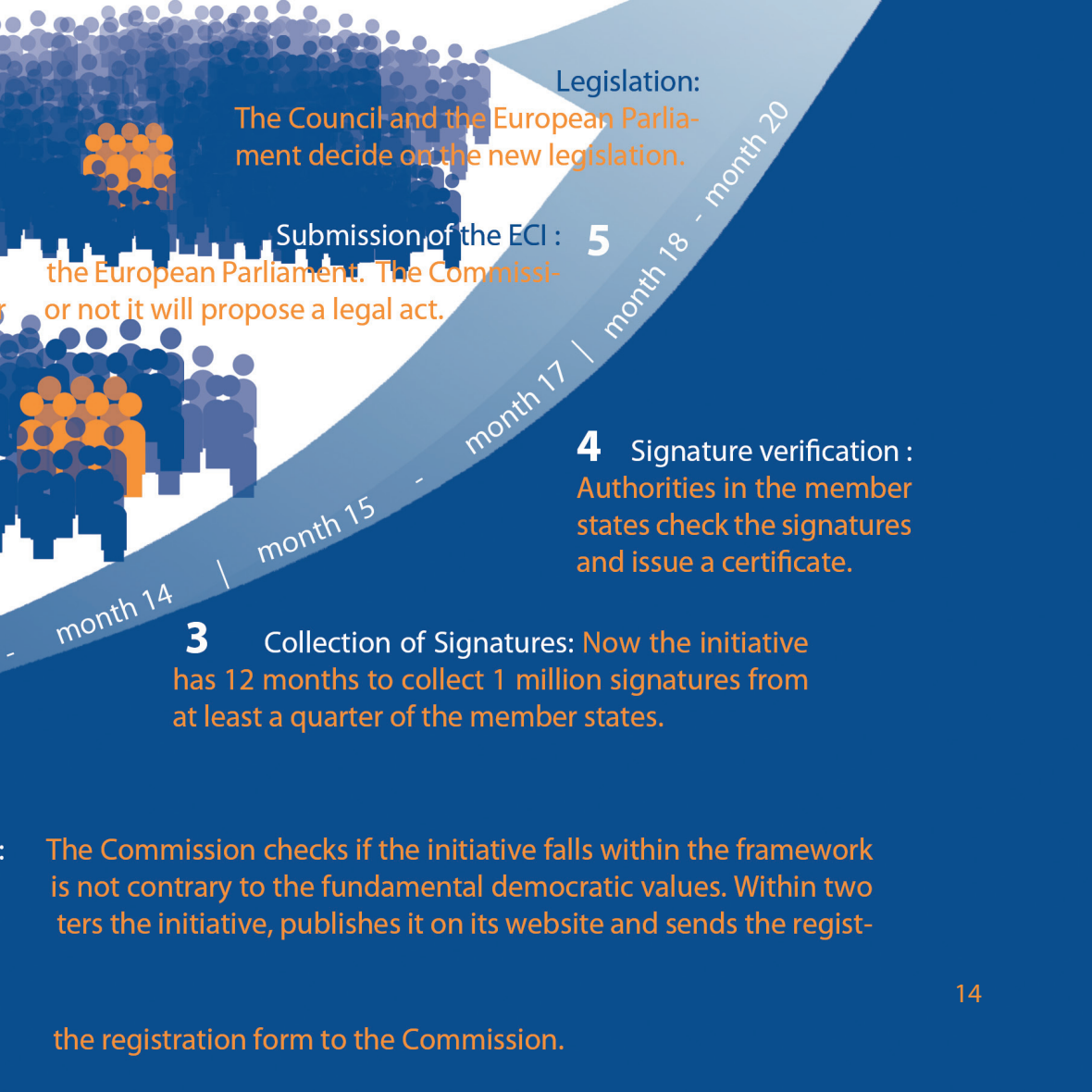
month 2



month 3

2 Check by the Commission:
of the Commission's power and
months the Commission regis-
tration confirmation.

1 Registration: Seven people from seven countries submit



Legislation:

The Council and the European Parliament decide on the new legislation.

Submission of the ECI : 5

the European Parliament. The Commission or not it will propose a legal act.

4 Signature verification :
Authorities in the member states check the signatures and issue a certificate.

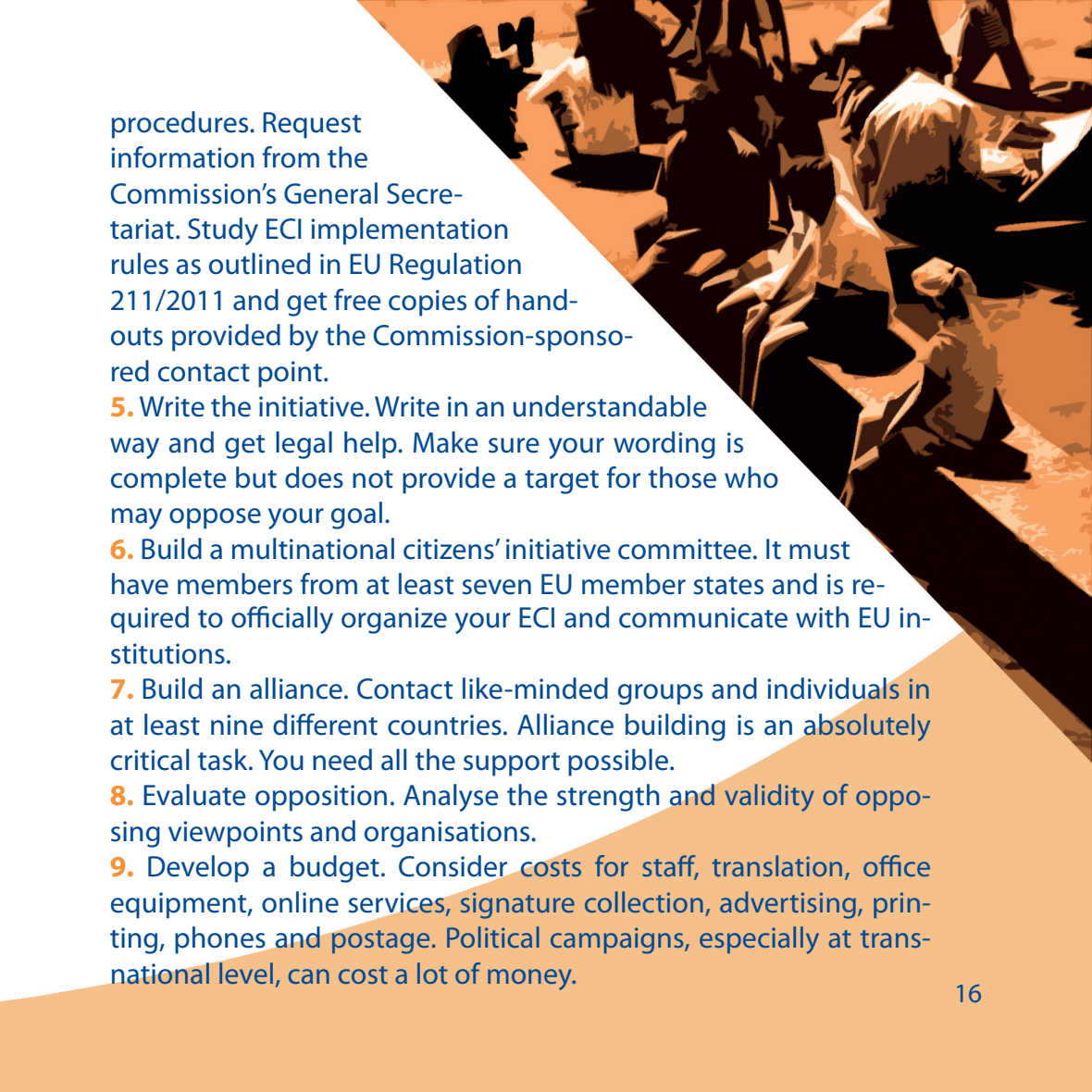
3 Collection of Signatures: Now the initiative has 12 months to collect 1 million signatures from at least a quarter of the member states.

The Commission checks if the initiative falls within the framework is not contrary to the fundamental democratic values. Within two years the initiative, publishes it on its website and sends the registration form to the Commission.

How does one prepare to launch an ECI?

If you or your organisation are serious about organising an ECI, you will need assistance and should calculate at least half a year to prepare your campaign and another full year to collect signatures. We suggest that you consider the following aspects before launching an ECI.

1. Identify and develop your idea as much as possible.
2. Verify legality. Check whether or not EU law allows for the type of legislation you propose. Explore political reception of your idea, ideally with those who are familiar with how your policy area has been handled in the past by the EU institutions.
3. Consider alternatives. Compare all available alternatives for reaching your goal. Choose the instrument which best suits your goal. It may not be the ECI.
4. Research ECI

A group of people, mostly women, are sitting on the floor in a circle, engaged in a discussion or meeting. They are in a room with a patterned carpet and some furniture visible in the background. The lighting is warm and the overall atmosphere is collaborative.

procedures. Request information from the Commission's General Secretariat. Study ECI implementation rules as outlined in EU Regulation 211/2011 and get free copies of hand-outs provided by the Commission-sponsored contact point.

5. Write the initiative. Write in an understandable way and get legal help. Make sure your wording is complete but does not provide a target for those who may oppose your goal.

6. Build a multinational citizens' initiative committee. It must have members from at least seven EU member states and is required to officially organize your ECI and communicate with EU institutions.

7. Build an alliance. Contact like-minded groups and individuals in at least nine different countries. Alliance building is an absolutely critical task. You need all the support possible.

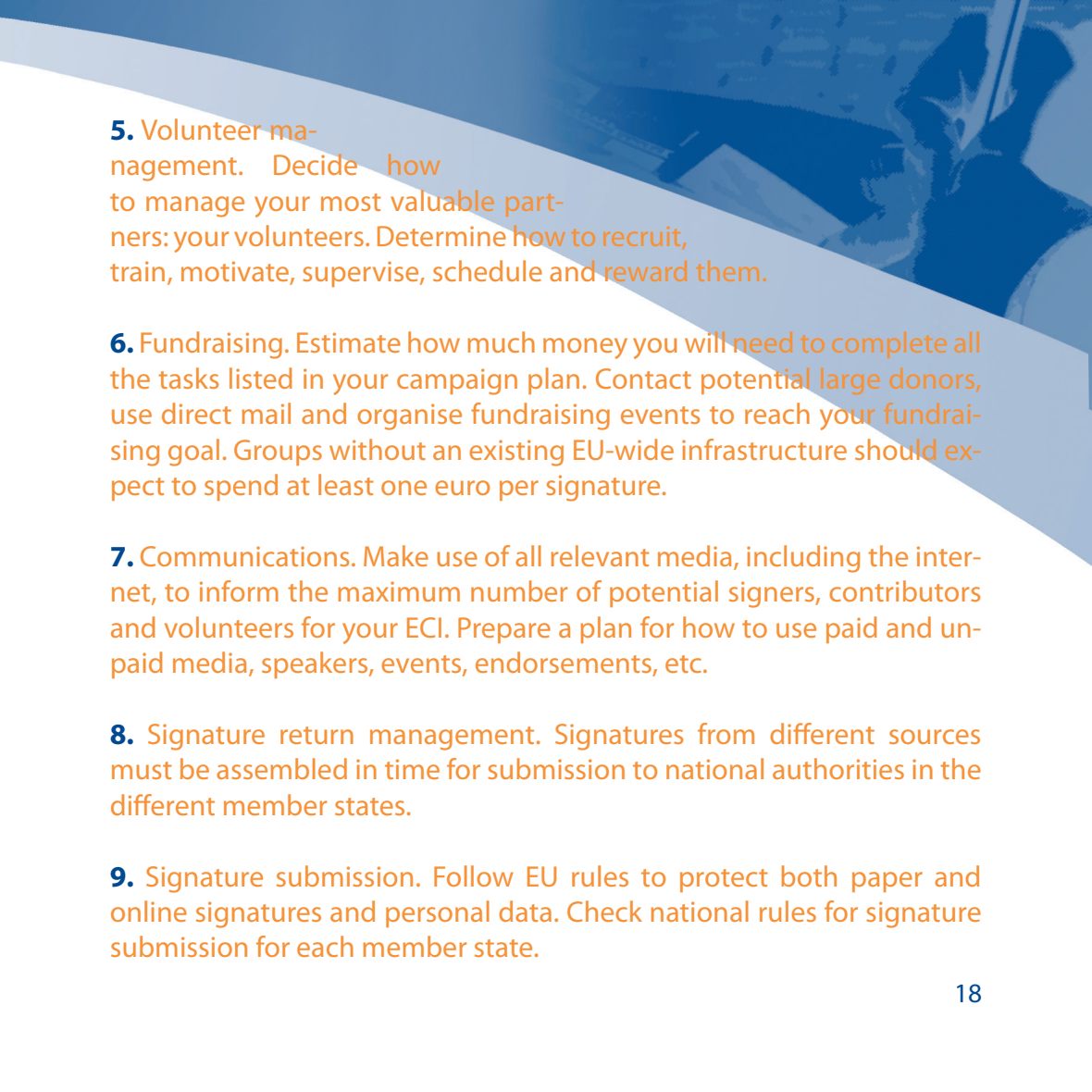
8. Evaluate opposition. Analyse the strength and validity of opposing viewpoints and organisations.

9. Develop a budget. Consider costs for staff, translation, office equipment, online services, signature collection, advertising, printing, phones and postage. Political campaigns, especially at transnational level, can cost a lot of money.

What should an ECI campaign include?

If having considered the significant amount of work required to organise a successful ECI, you decide to launch the ECI, it's time to develop plans for:

- 1. Signature collection support.** Up to 20% of signatures could be invalidated by national authorities due to incomplete information. Plan to collect at least 1,250,000 signatures. Find supporters to commit to collect a certain number of signatures over a specific period of time.
- 2. Online signature collection.** Determine the software needed for online collection in order to meet both legal requirements and your campaign's needs. Embed your online signature collection in a broader online campaign which includes social media.
- 3. Paper signature collection.** Determine how many signature forms and in which languages you need for distribution to organizations and volunteers.
- 4. Organisation.** Identify and assign key tasks and responsibilities within your ECI committee, as well as among paid and volunteer staff. Create clear job descriptions.

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- 5. Volunteer management.** Decide how to manage your most valuable partners: your volunteers. Determine how to recruit, train, motivate, supervise, schedule and reward them.
 - 6. Fundraising.** Estimate how much money you will need to complete all the tasks listed in your campaign plan. Contact potential large donors, use direct mail and organise fundraising events to reach your fundraising goal. Groups without an existing EU-wide infrastructure should expect to spend at least one euro per signature.
 - 7. Communications.** Make use of all relevant media, including the internet, to inform the maximum number of potential signers, contributors and volunteers for your ECI. Prepare a plan for how to use paid and unpaid media, speakers, events, endorsements, etc.
 - 8. Signature return management.** Signatures from different sources must be assembled in time for submission to national authorities in the different member states.
 - 9. Signature submission.** Follow EU rules to protect both paper and online signatures and personal data. Check national rules for signature submission for each member state.

What are alternatives to the ECI?

It is important that you compare all available alternatives for reaching your goal and choose the EU instrument which best suits your goal. The ECI is only appropriate when new EU legislation is required. In other situations, you might wish to consider the following.

1. Lodge a complaint with the EU Ombudsman

If your issue involves mal-administration by EU institutions or their staff then you may lodge a complaint with the European Ombudsman. The office offers an online complaint form in all 23 official EU languages.

www.ombudsman.europa.eu

2. Petition the European Parliament

If your issue is related to an area where the European Union is already active and that action (or inaction) directly effects you then you might consider petitioning the European Parliament. Any individual residing in the EU, regardless of age or citizenship, has the right to petition the European Parliament. This can be done by online form or letter.

www.europarl.europa.eu

3. Lodge a complaint with Solvit

If your issue involves a cross-border problem stemming from the misapplication of EU law by national authorities then you could contact the free problem resolution service Solvit.

<http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

4. Submit a response to a policy consultation

Before the European Commission starts to develop legal proposals it often organises open public consultations and hearings. The public may contribute, in writing, to many of these consultations. To see which consultations are currently open visit Your Voice in Europe.

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/>

5. Talk to your Member of European Parliament (MEP)

You may directly contact the elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from your constituency at any time, either in their national office, Brussels or Strasbourg offices. For specific contact information see the European Parliament website.

www.europarl.europa.eu

What will Democracy International do next to support the ECI?

Democracy International considers the ECI as only the first step towards more direct citizen involvement and not as an end in itself. Its ECI Campaign will therefore monitor the implementation of the ECI to ensure that the ECI lives up to its potential. It will also work to remove burdensome restrictions when the ECI regulation is officially reviewed in 2015. Specifically, it will work to: Simplify the signature form and eliminate ID number requirements. Eighteen member states will ask their citizens for personal identification numbers when signing an ECI. Such intrusive personal data requirements are frequently unnecessary, may deter supporters and raise privacy concerns.

Extend the time limit for signature collection from 12 to 18-24 months. The proposed 12 months to collect one million signatures are too short for ECIs coordinated by smaller organisations without a huge budget or for issues that are not yet well known or understood by the general public.

Allow ECIs which propose treaty amendments. The Commission has stated it will not register ECIs which propose amendments to EU treaties. However, the law on this issue is unclear and open to challenge by the European Court of Justice.

Provide adequate practical support to ECI organisers. ECI organisers should have access to free and comprehensive information on how to conduct an ECI, legal advice and translation assistance. It is not clear if the information services promised by the Commission will be adequate.



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