

The new provision of the Lisbon Treaty on the Citizens' Initiative (art.11 par. 4), opens up new prospects for citizens' participation, having the potential of triggering a real cross-border debate on European policy issues.

Following a public consultation with civil society organisations, the European Commission presented its proposal on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 and **the Council on 14<sup>th</sup> June agreed on [a draft ECI regulation](#) which next will be negotiated with Parliament.**

The Council proposed to lower the number of signatures required for the admissibility check from 300,000 to 100,000 and to retain the requirement of signatories to an ECI to provide personal ID card numbers in all countries except for a small number of countries where this is against national data protection laws and/or cultural traditions. (Finland, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Slovakia, Ireland and Denmark).

At a briefing meeting on the ECI on 29<sup>th</sup> June organised by the European Policy Centre (EPC), different personalities directly involved in the process of making the ECI operational expressed their views.

Zita Gurmai MEP (S&D) underlined the importance of establishing clear rights and duties when using the ECI. In addition, she pointed out that setting common European standards for the ECI is the best solution in terms of clarity and fairness.

Together with Alain LAMASSOURE MEP (PPE, FR), she is one of the rapporteurs in charge of preparing a [working document for the AFCO](#) (constitutional affairs committee) meeting on 12 July where also the rapporteurs from the Committee of Regions and Economic and Social Committee will be present.

Janis A. Emmanoulidis, Senior Policy Analyst at the EPC, gave an overview on potential benefits and risks the ECI may imply, which are fleshed out in [his policy brief of June 2010](#).

To begin with the benefits, the ECI gives the possibility to citizens to push the not only the legislative button but also the political one, as it could trigger a genuinely European debate. As for the risks, there is concern for what he called "the tyranny of minorities", namely the possibility that groups such as NGOs, trade unions, political parties or lobby groups could use the tool to force minority issues to the top of the agenda. Will the ECI truly reflect the majority? In addition, Mr Emmanoulidis added that the ECI could be a source of frustration in case of negative or unsatisfactory response from the Commission. In fact, the Commission is due to give "serious consideration" to every initiative but it is free to determine the nature of its response (legislative proposal, non-binding opinion or recommendation).

Nicolaus Van der Pas (Former Director General for Employment and social affairs, EC), commenting on this point, stressed the need to integrate the other European institutions in the process. In particular, the Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee could prove to be important arenas for debate.

As underlined by Gerald Häfner, Coordinator of the Greens/EFA Group in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, we do not have a real example of citizens' initiative at European level, since the tools for citizens' participation already existing in some countries (Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy) differ greatly one from the other.

The most important aspect to bear in mind for having a successful citizens' initiative is therefore promoting an effective dialogue and not the decision in the end. "The way is part of the aim", Mr Häfner said.