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## **The European Citizens' Initiative: a new sphere of EU politics?**

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### **Abstract**

EU public policy is notoriously technical and consensus orientated, and dialogue between political institutions and interest groups enhance tendencies for inward looking and elite politics. The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) seems to offer an opportunity to remedy these structural defects. We examine the entire set of more than sixty signature collection campaigns stimulated by the ECI for the degree of contention and type of campaign they bring to EU politics. A key feature of a majority of campaigns involves a diversity of origin, both by territory and campaign source. We record the diverse ways in which the ECI has been utilised by campaigners, noting how campaigns have largely been introduced by a markedly different set of activists than professionalised EU lobbyists, many newly mobilised by a direct participation device, and which may require EU lobby organisations to engage with new forms of campaigning. A key finding is that campaigns originating from sponsors already well linked to EU politics were less likely to be of a contentious nature than those from other sources.

**Keywords:** European Citizens' Initiative; conflictual and consensual politics; interest groups and social movements.

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## Introduction

Political systems are widely held to require conflict as a condition for popular engagement. A core difficulty of EU politics involves its inward looking and elite nature, arising from a search for consensus on issues with substantial technical content (Neshkova, 2014). The 2002-3 Convention to draft a new Constitutional Treaty for Europe introduced a new device aimed at addressing such structural problems in the form of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). The ECI is a mechanism in which one million member state citizens can invite the European Commission to submit a legislative proposal on a topic within the scope of its competencies. It is the world's first transnational participatory mechanism, made possible by the way in which the internet allows citizens to solve collective action problems and thus a means for new agendas and actors to be brought to EU politics. EU institutions have acclaimed it as 'one of the most visible and concrete expressions of the innovations brought by the (2009) Lisbon Treaty' (Council of the European Union 2010:1), 'a new tool allowing citizens to participate in shaping EU policy' (European Parliament, 2014) which the responsible Vice-President of the European Commission (Šefčovič) hopes will 'stimulate lively cross-border debates' (European Commission, 2013: p.1). Commissioner Šefčovič particularly emphasized the ECI's distinction from EU traditions of dialogue with interest groups and the like, warning that the measure should not be 'hijacked by lobbyists' (Mason, 2012) while his EP counterpart chimed similarly that it 'is not for NGOs, but for all citizens' (EurActiv, 2011). Ahead of the ECI's first institutional review in 2015 we assess the extent to which the measure really has introduced a new dimension to EU politics. We do so by analysing the full set of more than campaigns thus far and the extent to which they have introduced new elements of contentiousness, diversity of topics, and new actors to EU politics. We assess in detail the political opportunities created by ECI procedures and their diverse use apparent from the 40 registration applications for new initiatives since its official commencement in April 2012. We also draw upon our earlier analysis of 21 unofficial 'pilot' campaigns immediately preceding the scheme's formal operationalization (Bouza Garcia, 2012; Bouza Garcia and del Rio Villar, 2012; Greenwood, 2012), as these help to build a picture of the way in which the concept of direct participation has stimulated patterns of mobilization and contention, as well as the ways in which the rules operationalizing the ECI might have influenced its use. To inform our judgment we used a varied mixture of primary and secondary evidence, ranging from official sources to campaign websites as well as our own networks and interactions with the organisers of initiatives and well-placed observers from the inception of the scheme to the present day.

## **The features of the ECI: constraints and new political opportunities**

The secondary legislation operationalising the ECI, Regulation 211 of 2011, introduced to it a number of key features. As a way of emphasising the distinction of the measure from lobby organisations, each initiative must be hosted by a Citizens' Committee (CC) comprised of seven citizens from seven different EU member states who are responsible for compliance with the requirements of the scheme. A critical juncture involves a choice made by the committee of the legal basis for the European Commission to act in the way requested, requiring citation of specific articles from the Treaty on European Union. Seventeen registration requests have been refused on this basis, resulting from a mixture of bureaucratic interpretation by the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, a lack of Treaty knowledge on the part of campaigners but also some degree of tactical use of the ECI mechanism by them. Submitting an application for registration is not procedurally onerous, and by itself a source of free publicity in that the outcome in each case is published on the European Commission's ECI web site. Rejection opens its own political opportunities, with two separate pending cases already seeking to annul Commission decisions in the European Court of Justice; the European Ombudsman has recently opened an 'own initiative' general enquiry into ECI procedures. Another reaction to rejection has involved downgrading the status of a policy request upon the Commission with a newly lodged application for registration, because registered initiatives have a permanent presence on the ECI web site with onward links to campaign sites, irrespective of whether an initiative is subsequently withdrawn by campaigners. Later, we show how this latter facility has been used in tactical ways by campaigners, either by withdrawing an initiative before collecting any signatures if sufficient publicity is achieved, or when coupled with re-registration as a means to extend the exposure for a cause showing little sign of attracting sufficient support. In any event, navigating subsequent procedures are demanding, starting first with detailed certification requirements for IT systems to gather signatures online (accounting for an estimated 90% of all collected; Berg, 2013), and to process the data of signatories. Each signature has to be accompanied by verifiable information, including in all cases a permanent address and a date and place of birth, and almost two-thirds of member states also require a passport or a national identity number to accompany signatures.

Once an initiative is fully registered, campaigns have twelve months to reach the threshold of one million signatures from at least seven member states, with weighted minimum thresholds according to the size of each country. The short time period for collecting signatures has been a major point of contention in the design of the procedures, with a steady steam pressure from a variety of sources for a longer timescale. This was a point on which the European Parliament gave way during institutional negotiations in order to preserve its key demand, the right to a public hearing in the EP, a goal achieved against some resistance from the Commission and Council. Member states are given a three month period to verify signatures collected in their jurisdiction,

following which the CC formally submits the initiative to the European Commission and arrangements are made for the hearing (*in situ*, and webcast) in the European Parliament within three months. After the debate the European Commission must publish what course of action it intends to take and provide accompanying justification for its decisions. This significant accountability requirement makes the ECI compare favourably with EU consultation standards in which feedback mechanisms carry no legal force, resulting in patchy implementation (Quittkat, 2011). It is also a point in which the ECI differs from a much weaker instrument providing a right to petition the European Parliament, established by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Additional features of difference are that a petition may be sent to the EP by just a single individual, or by an organisation, and has no specific points of leverage on the European Commission. At least one ECI registration request has its origins as a petition, but most of the topics introduced under the ECI mechanism are fresh to EU institutions.

The ECI has been categorised as ‘a mechanism of *participatory democracy* which is fully subordinated to the political will of the representatives that could approve, alter or reject the citizens’ proposals’ (Cuesta López 2012: 256; original emphasis). In this key respect the ECI is different from direct initiatives in use in some of the American states in which a law becomes immediately binding (although in the USA there are also indirect initiatives which require intervening consideration by a state legislature) (Smith and Tolbert, 2004). Signatories of a European Citizens’ initiative have no provision to change a decision of the institutions or to call for a referendum. It is therefore an agenda-setting measure, similar in legal effect to the powers of the European Parliament and Council of Ministers to request the European Commission to introduce a legislative act. Whilst sceptics have been quick to draw attention to the limited formal powers of the ECI relative to those found elsewhere (Smith 2012, Baéz Leguga 2013), citizens’ initiative mechanisms rarely result in legislation; in Spain, for instance, only one initiative out of more than sixty has been turned into law (Cuesta 2008, Smith 2009). Whilst there is evidence from long-standing use of the device in California (Allswang, 2000) and other American states (Smith and Tolbert, 2004) that citizens initiatives with law making effects can become ‘hijacked by lobbyists’ (Damore, 2012), the agenda-setting character of the ECI may be a source of its wider appeal. This is because it offers opportunities to those with alternative paradigms to raise contention against political systems and with policy styles likely to interest the public by promoting political debates around polarised issues. The ECI, together with its complaint mechanisms, helps to solve a conundrum for social movements by providing institutionalised access while allowing them to avoid legitimising a political system whose core values they contest, and to continue protest activities against it (Della Porta, 2007; Ruzza, 2011).

From these broader opportunities it can be expected that the ECI is likely to facilitate new entrants to the EU political arena who bring diverse agendas not catered for by dialogue with lobby groups

in which the latter have to operate within constraints set by political institutions. Citizens' initiatives are by nature a form of mobilisation of grassroots supporters requiring a stronger mobilisation of citizens, and forms of public communication 'to stimulate lively cross-border debates', than those typically arising from traditional interactions between political institutions and interest groups. The ECI may itself attract organisations more willing to mobilise citizens than to participate in institutionalised consultations, and those who are attracted by the concept of online campaigning in particular. It may introduce a degree of competition for the attention of EU institutions between different kinds of players using different collective action mechanisms. A staple of social movement theory is the concept of incumbents and challengers (Gamson, 1975) which, applied to the context of the ECI, foresees a range of outcomes in which elements of competition, settled accommodation, and new forms of coalitions might feature. The ECI may force EU lobby organisations to make the active involvement of citizens a more central part of their activism, particularly if new initiatives independently emerge in their own field of activities.

A key issue surrounds the response of established movements to the ECI in that these have the potential to bridge the sphere of popular mobilisation with other traditions of institutionalised advocacy. Running a full signature collection campaign carries risk for established organisations in demonstrating a lack of support for a cherished cause, magnified by external regulation coupled with public observation; a section of the ECI web site lists expired campaigns which attracted insufficient support. *Greenpeace* and *Friends of the Earth* (FoE) experimented with the ECI concept through unofficial 'pilot' campaigns with mixed success, and FoE submitted an application to register an initiative on a topic ('*My Voice Against Nuclear Power*') which carried a high chance of refusal on the grounds of incompatibility with EU Treaty competencies on atomic energy. A notable feature of the *Greenpeace* and FoE campaigns is that the users were branch offices in countries where referenda are commonplace, rather than their EU policy offices whose work is focused on institutionalised advocacy. The Director of the *Greenpeace European unit* highlighted the chasm between the two worlds of collective action in commentating that

*'With the current Commission, a million euro spent on lobbyists gets you further than a million signatures, regrettably.....we do not rule out starting another ECI but the effort involved is significant, and can be a distraction from keeping up with and countering industry lobbyists* (Jorgo Riss, correspondence, 14.6.2013).

Most EU NGOs are confederated, i.e. associations of (national, or other European) associations, and mainly located in close proximity to EU institutions. They prioritise use of their resources on institutionalised advocacy, incentivised by established systems for expert dialogue with EU institutions, and difficulties presented by alternative strategies of mobilising a large contingent

around the detail of policy issues often high in technical content. These factors make them a separate group of political actors from the direct democracy activists which mobilised around the ECI. This distinction is clearly evident in the response from one of the leading EU NGOs to the 2010 public consultation on how to operationalise the ECI. The *Platform of European Social NGOs* ('Social Platform') pointedly ignored the ECI in its response, using the opportunity instead to call upon the European Commission to further institutionalise existing mechanisms of discussion with EU NGOs into a 'civil dialogue', linked to recognition criteria closely resembling itself (Social Platform, 2010). This kind of 'jockeying for position' is foreseen by frameworks of incumbents and challengers used in analysis of social movements, involving a variety of opportunities, threats, and outcomes (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011). Their metaphor also seems to help explain the *European Disability Forum's* (EDF) use of the concept in 2008. Its Director reflected that its pilot unofficial campaign *1 million4Disability*, which achieved its target of 1.4 million signatures,

*was beneficial to EDF in terms of recognition by the EU institutions as a very representative organization which was able to mobilise such a large number of its members and citizens.'*  
(Carlotta Besozzi, correspondence, 14.6.2013).

Most of the six EU lobby organisations which tried out the concept of a signature collection campaign in an unofficial format have not followed up their pilot experiences by introducing an ECI registration request via a Citizens' Committee. This is open to interpretation in a number of ways, but suggests some degree of experimentation, positioning, and use of the device for campaign building at a time when there were no institutional deterrents against leading an initiative. We discuss use of the mechanism during the unofficial phase in further detail at a later stage in this article. The resource intensive rules of the official ECI relative to its benefits may also have deterred its usage among the 'usual suspects'; the Director of the Greenpeace European Office seemed to have this in mind in commenting that

*I do not rate it very highly as a point of leverage on the big legislative issues that Greenpeace usually fights on...the outcome from an ECI depends on the goodwill of the Commission.*  
(Jorgo Riss, correspondence, 14.6.2013).

The ECI has nonetheless strengthened the position of EU NGOs well placed to deploy direct democracy concepts, most notably in the case of the European Citizens' Action Service (ECAS), whose discourse has always made it stand out from other EU lobby organisations in the way it places direct democracy mechanisms at centre-stage. It has therefore been well placed to provide political and practical assistance to EU institutions and to campaigners in the establishment and use of the ECI.



Citizens' Committees frequently seek to make a virtue of their distinction from professionalized lobby organisations. It can be expected that CCs bring a diverse range of agendas to new political opportunities, ranging from new discourses and contestation through to opportunities to develop and institutionalise campaigns and build their own organisations, as well as aspirations to build a personal profile and network of contacts, or just to try out an interesting new concept. We assess the ECI on the basis of all the alerts thus far established, and in particular whether there is evidence that it has brought new actors and forms of contention to the EU stage, and how campaigns reflect opportunities and constraints of the scheme. There is sufficient information available to make informed judgements by these criteria in a way which reasonably characterises what the ECI currently brings to EU politics. The requirement for Citizens' Committees brings some degree of methodological constraint in seeking to trace the extent of linkage between the individual members of these committees and other supporters. One means is that Citizens' Committees are required to declare 'sources of support and funding,' which are listed in a dedicated section of the entries for registered ECIs on the official website. Whilst the declarations seem to us to be incomplete in a number of cases, the range of primary and secondary sources identified in our introduction provides a breadth and depth sufficient to avoid missing a significant set of evidence or a major campaign sponsor. In similar spirit, we acknowledge that classifying campaigns by the contention they introduce to EU politics raises issues of definition and degree. In assessing contention we placed more emphasis upon the nature of the topic introduced, rather than the source or style of the campaign, which may have the effect of understating contention. We generally treated topics which fall outside of the scope of EU Treaties as contentious, as well as those which challenge the fundamental direction of travel of the European Commission.

### **Use of the ECI**

Of the 40 applications to register an ECI, eight campaigns are in progress at the time of writing (Table 1), and three have concluded and exceeded the required number of signatures (Table 2). The registration period of ten initiatives expired and fell short of the one million threshold (incorporating three withdrawn and re-introduced in identical terms) (Table 3). Seventeen were refused registration (including 1 re-registered in different terms) (Table 4), and two have been completely withdrawn (Table 5). The three initiatives which met the signature thresholds each have the backing of an established and professionalized social movement (Table 2), a feature missing from the ten completed ECI campaigns which did not (Table 2). This is obviously a key factor for initiatives designed to go the full course, but more strikingly for our focus we judge that 11 of the Campaign Committees had no access to organizational support at the time they launched their campaigns, which we list in Table 6.

TABLES 1-6 HERE

A feature from Table 6 is the novelty of topics introduced (mostly successfully) by registration requests, a feature also of the refused requests listed in Table 4. On first sight many seem to provide evidence in support of an apparently seductive characterisation of the ECI by the Director of the Greenpeace European unit that

*‘An ECI may be a useful tool as part of a campaign that aims to raise awareness and create some political momentum on lesser known issues of public interest that otherwise get little media and political attention.’* (Jorgo Riss, correspondence, 14.6.2013).

The clearest example seems to be the maverick *End EU-Switzerland Agreement on Free Movement of People* initiative, aimed at punishing Switzerland for its treatment of guest workers, supported by donations from two individuals and operating from a ‘letterbox’ residential address in London (thus potentially a twelfth case for Table 6). This campaign was also notable by being withdrawn (Table 5) before collecting signatures, after the act of registration alone generated extensive publicity in Switzerland, demonstrating the variety of tactical uses of the measure. Would-be ECI campaigns, such as *Recommend Singing the European Anthem in Esperanto*, also seem to fit the bill. Nonetheless, the caricature does not capture the contention of most of the seventeen refused campaigns, including the two CCs mounting separate legal challenges in the European Court of Justice to annul the Commission’s rejection, *One Million Signatures for a Europe of Solidarity* (cancelling Greek debt) and *Minority Safe Pack* (recognition for minority languages) (Table 4). Whilst judicial activism may prolong an issue attention span and provide an opportunity to make wider political points about the nature of the EU, there are far less expensive ways of achieving goals of publicity and momentum. Many of the refused registration requests involve issues of territorial identities which would not qualify as ‘lesser known issues’, while four campaigns have links to Eurosceptic political parties (Tables 3 and 4). A long-established and contentious cause to achieve registration is *Weed Like to Talk* (legalise cannabis) (Table 1).

Two campaigns in Table 6 fall squarely within topics already covered by EU lobby organisations, suggesting that ECIs can create a measure of competition among organised civil society. The registration application for an initiative seeking a ban on legalised prostitution (Table 4) was launched by activists separate from the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) on a matter where the EWL has had a campaign since 2011. Similarly, the *End Ecocide in Europe* campaign operates within the strongest ‘family’ area of EU NGOs, environmentalism. Two campaigns feature prominent anti-globalisation activists, with different national branches of ATTAC<sup>ii</sup>, in the forefront of the *Unconditional Basic Income* (UBI) campaign, and in the background of *Water and Sanitation are a Human Right!* A notable feature of the UBI campaign (Tables 3 & 4) is its determination to

engage with EU politics by diluting its demands from a previously refused application in order to institutionalise a wider campaign. The entry into the arena of these players demonstrates the potential for the ECI to be used as a mechanism to bring political contestation to the EU political system. Appeals requiring the active involvement of citizens may become a more central part of the activism of organisations; the novelty of the ECI is not that it would by-pass organisations, but that it will force organisations to take their case to civil society.

Some campaigns have established formal organisations following registration, notably *30km/hour*, and *'A High Quality European Education for All'* which captured the diversity of some campaigns with a response to a request for disclosure of signatures that *'we feel the importance and success of an ECI is not measured by the number of signatures'* (correspondence, 5.2.2014). A commentator from *Democracy International*, one of the key movers of the measure and co-organiser of an annual 'ECI Day' conference held whilst the campaigns listed in Table 3 were in progress, reflected on her way home that:

*'many ECI organisers admitted that they had launched an ECI merely for reasons of public relations and networking, while lacking belief that they could actually reach the amount of one million signatures.'* (Pfafferott, 2013).

Six campaign committees have a strong student element to them, of which four have an identifiable focus from EU studies; notably, none of these are among the refused initiatives, suggesting some degree of information asymmetries requiring attention during the procedural review during 2015. As well as offering an outlet for personal commitments, the ECI is likely to appeal to student campaigners by offering opportunities for experimentation and self-expression with an innovative device, drawing upon resources of flexi-time, IT skills, discourse skills, and ready access to pools of potential support, as well as opportunities to build a profile and establish lasting networks with careers in mind.

The evidence presented in Tables 1-5 identifies a diverse range of territorial sources of ECIs. Only three of the 39 requests for ECI registrations unequivocally originate from Brussels based EU organisations. Two of these originated from trade unions (ETUC, Table 2; FERPA, Table 4) drawing upon movement traditions of mobilising individuals for public protest against decisions taken by EU institutions (Leiren and Parks, 2014). The remaining 36 applications has a principal epicentre among activists and sponsors grounded in other territorial levels of politics, whether international, national, or local. Nine campaigns have a diverse range of national origins, whereas the remainder have a clear epicentre: five in each of Germany and France, three from each of Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain and the UK, two from Austria<sup>iii</sup>, and one from each of Poland, Sweden and Romania (Table 7):

## TABLE 7 HERE

Of the nine campaigns with cross-border origins, five involve a modal Belgian (mainly Brussels) element but not to the extent to place it as an epicentre of any of them. A number of campaigns involve issues involving a strong territorial impact. Spain accounts for two campaigns involving issues of territorial identity for Catalonia, and another distinctly national issue (bullfighting). Greece was the source of three campaigns related to economic austerity, and extensive interest in the progress of *Water and Sanitation are a human right* (against water privatization) which experienced extensive local politicization in Thessaloniki. In Germany, this campaign also received extensive publicity after being chosen as the feature for the front page of a popular weekly television magazine, and a subsequent TV show satirising the Commission as an agent of water privatisation. The ability to frame the issue in simple yes/no terms seems to have been a key factor in its success (Plottka, 2013), particularly given that a pilot campaign on another subject run by the leading EU trade union had met with less success in attracting signatures. Around the time of the half-way stage of registration of the official campaign, the Commission gave a clear signal of support with a public message that it intended to be responsive to the large number of signatures collected, and that it shared the same direction of policy travel (European Commission, 2013). Four of the campaigns – all refused registration requests – raise issues involving territorial identities in member states, and seem to be looking for ways of Europeanising policy proposals. They do not so much suggest contention with the European Union but a genuine interest in bringing a cause to the EU's attention.

### Use during the 'Pilot' phase

Table 8 lists the subjects of unofficial campaigns introduced during the time between the incorporation of the ECI concept into the draft Treaty establishing a constitution for Europe, and the start of the official measure in April 2012.

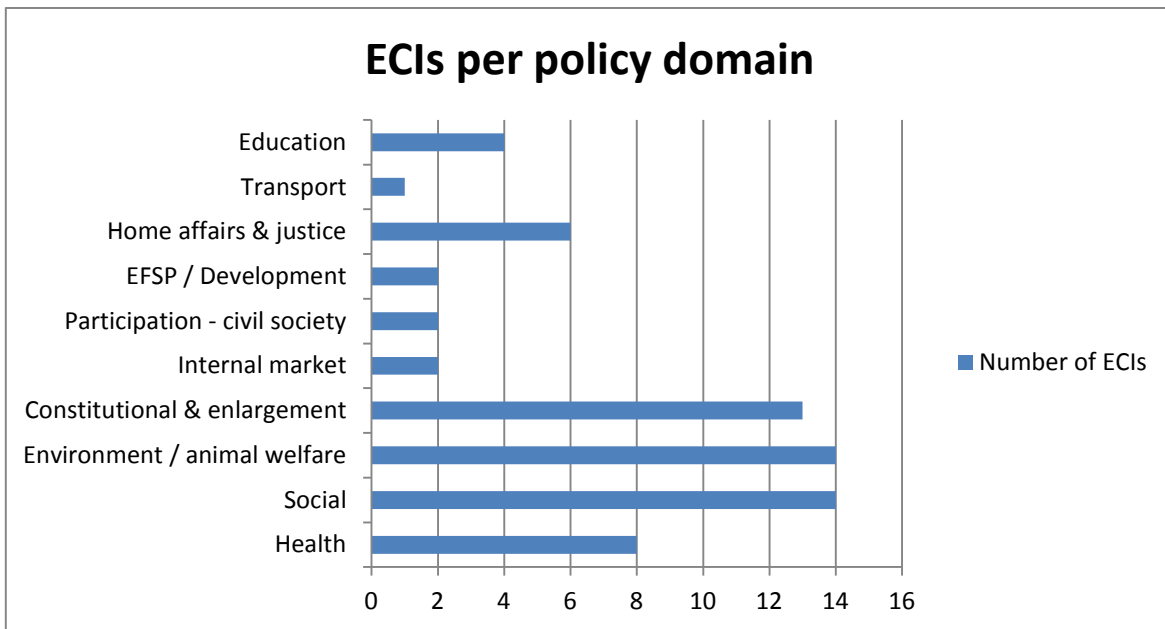
## TABLE 8 HERE

The topics and sources of 'pilot' campaigns have a different feel about them than many of the official ECIs. The *Oneseat* campaign, seeking to consolidate the European Parliament's meeting place in one location, helped to build the career of one MEP (and subsequently European Commissioner), but was more notable as the first to use the concept and surpass the one-million signature mark, demonstrating how a direct participatory mechanism may be used for building causes and raising protest. The two anti-GMO pilot campaigns introduced by Greenpeace also exceeded one million signatures each. The second of these demonstrate how campaigns can have an impact outside public policy, in that it was a contributory factor in decisions made by two large companies, Monsanto and BASF to reduce or abandon their GMO activities in Europe (EurActiv

2012). The group of pilots also include alliances of companies and business interest associations (3 promoters in total), in some cases in cooperation with specialised consumer groups or foundations. One of the cases involved entry into the arena by a US based company come foundation. Typically, these sponsors involve a campaign calling for increased attention by EU institutions to their sector. There was a significant concentration of these organisations in the health sector, with pharmaceutical companies behind initiatives on obesity, cancer care or natural medical treatments. The campaign for applied anthroposophy is an example of an alliance between the 'third sector' and commercial interests, launched by a group of German and Austrian retailers of anthroposophic therapies, drugs and agricultural products together with international associations linked to the Steiner movement. As the only one among the five pilot campaigns to have exceeded one million signatures which did not come from the 'usual suspects' of EU Brussels players or professionalized global NGOs, it achieved 'pin-up' status among ECI promoters. In a sign of the way such newcomers may become incorporated into EU politics, *Aktion Elliant*, has since opened an office in Brussels and signed up to the EUs Transparency Register lobby regulation scheme, followed by two of their member organisations. Similarly, two of the main promoters behind the ECI, the *Initiative and Referendum Institute* and *Mehr Demokratie*, signed up to the Register once the ECI entered into force. Paradoxically, they all join a group of organisations (ECAS, European Alternatives, King Baudoin and Madariaga Foundations) acting as institutionalised lobbyists in Brussels for the ECI (DeClerck Sachse, 2012) and which tried out the direct democracy concept with a pilot campaign without subsequently initiating an official registration.

When the group of unofficial pilot campaigns are merged together with the official ECI registrations as a single data set, one half fall within the three fields of health, environment and social issues (Figure 1, below), where national organisations and new coalitions as originating sources are concentrated. Whilst European organisations do not ignore these areas, their interest in the different policy areas is spread more evenly across the categories. This seems to suggest that the ECI can act as an agenda-setting mechanism in areas where there is widespread criticism by civil society organisations of the insufficiency of action by the EU in these fields. A further sign of the contentious potential of the ECI involves the number of constitutional issues raised by initiatives, despite their inability to propose Treaty changes.

Figure 1 Number of ECIs per subject area



Because civil society organisations achieve more when their proposals are aligned with the institutional agenda than when they challenge it (Ruzza 2007), ECIs openly challenging the Commission’s agenda may be primarily seeking a way to make opposition visible. Our data demonstrates that the policy style of initiatives is strongly aligned with their acceptability. Whilst ‘acceptability’ is clear in the outcome of official registration applications, we took a view in each of the pilots, and then cross tabulated these by source. While a majority of the initiatives originating from sponsors in the member states were unacceptable to the European Commission (13, 54%), the overwhelming majority of those originating among EU level organizations and newly mobilized entities were acceptable to the Commission (19, 73%). Another significant finding from our analysis is that there are clear differences in the way in which actors use the initiative. Thus, both European sources and newly formed entities are using the ECI tool to try to introduce issues in the agenda, whereas initiatives from national sources are clearly using it in a more contentious way. Overall, initiatives sponsored by EU organisations (and to a lesser extent newly mobilised entities) are using the ECI to introduce policy proposals that could be accepted by EU institutions. Others seem to be using the ECI as a way to express more radical policy change demands. This seems to confirm that regular involvement in policy-making makes a decisive difference in registers of collective action in the EU (Balme & Chabanet 2008).

## Conclusion

Users of the ECI are mainly new activists to EU politics who bring a different set of issues than Brussels based organizations centred on institutionalized advocacy. The ECI procedures provide a variety of opportunity structure for campaigners to insert issues onto the policy agenda which might not otherwise receive attention. The relative ease of registering an initiative in the first instance will attract those seeking a 'quick fix' of news coverage or to make a point but who have little serious intent of conducting a signature collection campaign. For some, the mere act of refusal by the European Commission to register a campaign provides by itself an opportunity to play the politics of victimhood, or to prolong the attention span of an issue by issuing a legal challenge before the European Court of Justice. Should a campaign achieve official registration as an initiative, movers have the option to withdraw it once desired coverage is achieved (such as the 'punish Switzerland' campaign). A few may be attracted by an institutional mechanism which places a premium on what they do best – collecting signatures from already convinced citizens. Yet only Citizens' Committees backed by the depth of established movements seem likely to be able to achieve the threshold signatory requirements within the required twelve month period. To these campaigns, the European Commission is clearly listening. For others, a twelve month campaign timeline also provides opportunities for continued publicity and for networking, and through the requirement for the European Commission to respond to them, accompanied by a public hearing in the European Parliament. These latter benefits offer more than the discretionary elements characteristic of the ordinary legislative procedure, but without further mandation on political institutions the ECI is unlikely to attract global advocacy NGOs with other means to pursue their mainstream campaigns.

There is already strong evidence that the ECI has incentivised entities based in the member states to engage in EU politics in ways which result in new developments. Of interest is that initiatives with national origins are disproportionately represented among the initiatives which contest the Commission's agenda, whereas the involvement of European organisations involves treading more consensual pathways. Campaigns which started life outside of the 'Brussels bubble' may become institutionalized by the ECI. But the introduction of contention by others suggests that the ECI is already having an effect upon expanding the European public space into spheres of contentious politics. This may be entirely aligned with the movement of politics surrounding the EU more generally into fields of contention, and which is clearly evident in the engagement with the ECI from the south of Europe on issues surrounding the response of the EU to the financial crisis. The apparatus is clearly there for movements grounded in contentious politics. In any event, it is clear from evidence thus far that the ECI has attracted advocacy campaigners seeking to stimulate public debate and deliberation far beyond institutionalized discussions in the 'Brussels bubble'.

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**Table 1:** Registered European Citizens' Initiatives in progress (March 2014)

ECI/summation	Citizens' Committee characterisation	Supporting organisations (€ if financial)	Policy style
<p><b>Act 4 Growth</b></p> <p>Public policy support for female entrepreneurship.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead professional EESC<sup>iv</sup> Group 1 member (donation of €12,500)</li> <li>• Balkans, Germany, Austria epicentre;</li> <li>• cross-border activists;</li> <li>• mid-aged women in female business networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EuroGender Network</li> <li>• European Network for Gender Equality</li> <li>• European Network for Women in Leadership</li> <li>• East Midlands (UK) Brussels office.</li> </ul>	<p>Consensual</p>
<p><b>Do not count Education as part of deficit</b></p> <p>Take public spending on education out of national public spending deficit calculations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High youth/student component;</li> <li>• Greek epicentre;</li> <li>• also includes: advisor to Portuguese Socialist delegation to EP; co-ordinator of Citizens Association of Bulgaria; French youth voluntary service initiative.</li> </ul>		<p>Consensual</p>
<p><b>European Free Vaping Initiative</b></p> <p>Take e-cigarettes out of regulation by de-classifying them as tobacco or medicines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active in UK/USA association of SME e-cigarette manufacturers;</li> <li>• available in: Hungarian; Polish; German; English.</li> </ul>		<p>Contentious</p>
<p><b>European Initiative for Media Pluralism</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalist activists drawn from varied locations.</li> <li>• Previous version withdrawn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Alliance of Journalists (€2000);</li> <li>• European Alternatives (€2000) (network of activists with epicentres in Romania/Paris/Rome/ Berlin);</li> <li>• European Federation of Journalists (Brussels).</li> </ul>	<p>Consensual</p>

<b>New Deal 4 Europe – For a European Special Plan for Sustainable Development and Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawn from Italian trade union <i>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italian committee for <i>New Deal 4 Europe</i> (€2000);</li> <li>• Union of European Federalists;</li> <li>• Permanent Forum of European Civil Society.</li> </ul>	Consensual
<b>Teach4Youth – Upgrade to Erasmus 2.0</b>  Enrol recent EU graduates to teach for 1-2 years in low-income communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by students at <i>Science-Po</i>.</li> </ul>		Consensual
<b>Turn me Off!</b>  Turn off lights in empty shops/ offices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students of European Affairs;</li> <li>• French;</li> <li>• young.</li> </ul>		Consensual
<b>Weed Like to Talk</b>  Legalise Cannabis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by political science students at Science Po;</li> <li>• age ranges 21-25.</li> </ul>		Contentious

**Sources:** ECI official website; campaign websites; ECAS *Citizens' House* website & data; ECI link meetings.

**Table 2:** Initiatives successful in reaching collection thresholds

ECI	Citizens' Committee characterization	Supporting organisations (€ if financial)	Signatures collected	Policy style
<p><b>One of Us</b></p> <p>Seeking an end to EU funding of activities involving destruction of human embryo.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Catholic movement;</li> <li>•France/Italy epicentre;</li> <li>•campaign address in premises of Belgian Jesuit office.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•€50k donation from Italian organization.</li> </ul>	<p>1,897,588.</p> <p>Submitted to COMM</p>	Contentious
<p><b>Stop Vivisection</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Initiated by Italian MEPs (one on committee);</li> <li>•Italian movement activists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Italian anti-vivisection organisations &amp; parties (€14,501).</li> </ul>	<p>1,326,807</p> <p>In verification</p>	Contentious
<p><b>Water and Sanitation are a Human Right!</b></p> <p>Trade Union campaign against water privatization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Public sector trade unionists, centred on the Brussels office of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU);</li> <li>•Germanic composition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•EPSU (€100,000);</li> <li>•Public Services International;</li> <li>•European Trade Union Confederation &amp; national trade unions;</li> <li>•Aqua Publica Europea</li> <li>•European Anti-Poverty Network;</li> <li>•European Public Health Alliance;</li> <li>•Social Platform;</li> <li>•European Environmental Bureau &amp; green movement organisations;</li> <li>•National trade unions;</li> <li>•National branches of ATTAC &amp; anti-globalisation professionalized social movements;</li> <li>•150 organisational sponsors in total, strong Germanic flavour.</li> </ul>	<p>1,884,790 verified.</p> <p>EP Hearing held on 17.2.2014; COMM decision due March 2014.</p>	Consensual

**Sources:** ECI official website; campaign websites; ECAS *Citizens' House* website & data.

Key: COMM – European Commission.

**Table 3:** ECIs failing to reach signature thresholds during registration period

<b>ECI/mission</b>	<b>Citizens' Committee characterisation</b>	<b>Supporting organisations (€ if financial)</b>	<b>Signatures collected</b>	<b>Policy style</b>
<b>30km/h</b>  Default speed limit for urban areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German epicentre;</li> <li>• origins from single campaigner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrian, cyclist and green organisations at national and EU level (German: €11,300);</li> <li>• Individuals (€750).</li> </ul>	35,791	Consensual
<b>ECI online collection platform</b>  Seeking infrastructure support for ECIs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German/Austrian epicentre.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Petition, an online campaign support tool of the Berlin based NGO House of Democracy &amp; Human Rights.</li> </ul>	7364	Consensual
<b>End Ecocide in Europe</b>  Criminalise ecocide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young, post-student activists;</li> <li>• cross-border movers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual donors €3324.</li> </ul>	119,835	Contentious (identical earlier version withdrawn)
<b>Let me Vote</b>  Extend voting rights of EU citizens living in other member states.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France/Brussels epicentre;</li> <li>• Led by President of <i>EuroNews</i> website;</li> <li>• mid-aged;</li> <li>• federalists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europeans without borders;</li> <li>• European Alternatives;</li> <li>• EuroNews Foundation;</li> <li>• Union of European Federalists;</li> <li>• Democracy International;</li> <li>• no financial support declared.</li> </ul>	3604	Contentious (identical earlier version withdrawn).
<b>Fraternité2020</b>  3% of EU budget to expand exchange programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young student/post student of European Studies/ Politics.</li> <li>• Epicentres in France &amp; European University Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 national organisations (€7000).</li> </ul>	71,000	Consensual
<b>High quality European Education for All</b>  Establish a stakeholder platform to formulate a European policy on school education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with cross-border family heritage;</li> <li>• multi-lingual;</li> <li>• mid-aged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign established the 'MEET European Education Trust';</li> <li>• 3 EU associations (each €1000);</li> <li>• 6 European schools/related (each €1000);</li> <li>• 5 national associations (each €1000);</li> <li>• 3 individuals (€1000).</li> </ul>	Undisclosed	Consensual

<p><b>Responsible waste incineration</b></p> <p>Environmental impact of waste incineration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auvergne (France) epicentre;</li> <li>• spare time young campaigners</li> <li>• Available in French only.</li> </ul>		780	Consensual
<p><b>Single Communication Tariff</b></p> <p>End cross-border roaming charges.</p> <p>(identical earlier version withdrawn).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-student politics activists;</li> <li>• cross-border.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individual donor (€2000);</li> </ul>	145,000	Consensual
<p><b>Suspension of the EU Climate &amp; Energy Package</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private individuals</li> <li>• rural protection/anti-windfarms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polish party</li> <li>• Eurosceptic group in EP</li> </ul>	Undisclosed	Contentious
<p><b>Unconditional Basic Income</b></p> <p>Commission asked to encourage EU member states to explore co-operation to improve social security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ATTAC activists</li> <li>• Austria/Germany</li> <li>• working committee drawn from 20 countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) (€1080);</li> <li>• Individual donors (€1080);</li> <li>• Transnational social movement linked to campaign to <i>Occupy Wall St.</i> movement (Brand, 2012).</li> </ul>	285,042	Consensual

**Sources:** ECI official website; campaign websites; ECAS Citizens' House website & data; ECI link meetings.

**Table 4:** Refused initiatives and their origins

Proposed ECI	Citizens' Committee characterisation	Policy style
<b>Abolish the European Parliament</b>	Eurosceptics. Bavarian political party epicentre. One of three registration requests launched consecutively during autumn/winter 2013/14.	Contentious
<b>Confidence vote on EU government</b>	As above.	Contentious
<b>EU decision making by referenda</b>	As above.	Contentious
<b>A Europe of Solidarity</b> (cancel Greek debt).	Self-description as 'Greece's debt relief social movement.' <sup>v</sup>	Contentious
<b>A European public bank for social development, ecology and solidarity</b>	Greek based segment of the <i>Party of European Left</i> .	Contentious
<b>Abolition of bull fighting</b>	Spanish anti-tauromaquia movement.	Contentious
<b>Against legalized prostitution</b>	Citizen activists independent of organizational sources of support.	Contentious
<b>Harmonise member state protection of pets &amp; strays</b>	Swedish epicentre. Support from a network movement operating at EU level, <i>European Stray Dogs and Animal Welfare</i> (ESDAW), linked to the <i>Stop Vivisection</i> ECI (Table 3). Originated from a petition to the EP.	Contentious
<b>Minority Safe Pack</b>  Recognition for minority languages.	Members drawn from office holders of (Schleswig-Holstein based) <i>Federal Union of European Nationalities</i> . South Tyrolean People's Party among sponsors. Challenge to refusal pending in European Court of Justice.	Contentious
<b>Cohesion Policy for regional Minorities</b>	Romanian NGO seeking right of Szeckler people in Romania to self-determination.	Contentious
<b>My Voice Against Nuclear Power</b>	Friends of the Earth Austria ( <i>Global 2000</i> ).	Contentious
<b>Right to Lifelong care</b>	Brussels based FERPA – <i>European Federation of Retired &amp; Older Persons</i> (ETUC affiliate).	Contentious
<b>Self Determination a Human Right</b>  Seeks to use UN Article 1 for independence goals	Catalan epicentre. Campaign committee drawn from a platform linking independence movements from Flanders, Scotland and Catalonia.	Contentious
<b>Recommend singing the European</b>	Brussels based NGO <i>European Esperanto Union</i> .	Contentious



<b>Anthem in Esperanto</b>		
<b>Stop Cruelty for Animals</b> Harmonise measures for stray pets	Italian/German epicentre.	Contentious
<b>Strengthening citizens participation in decisions on collective sovereignty</b>	Catalan 23professionalized pro-independence movement, with support from Catalan municipal authorities.	Contentious
<b>Unconditional Basic Income</b>  Acquire legal rights for Commission to hasten introduction of UBI	ATTAC/Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) (€1080).	Contentious

**Sources:** ECI official website; campaign websites; ECI link meetings; ECAS Citizens' House website & data.

**Table 5:** Withdrawn Initiatives

ECI	Sponsors (€)	Dates of registration	Signatures	Policy Style
<b>Dairy Cow Welfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ben &amp; Jerry's (€90,834);</li> <li>• World Society for the Protection of Animals (€181,878);</li> <li>• Compassion in World Farming (€72,755).</li> </ul>	10.5.2012-20.7.2012	293,511	Consensual
<b>End Ecocide in Europe</b>	• Individual (€2291)	1.10.2012-21.01.2013		(re-introduced : Table 3)
<b>End EU-Switzerland Agreement on Free Movement of People</b>	• Two individuals (€50,000)	19.11.2012-4.2.2013	No collection campaign	Contentious
<b>Let me Vote</b>	(see Table 3)	11.5.2012-29.01.2013		(re-introduced : Table 3)
<b>Single Communication Tariff Act</b>	(see : Table 3)	10.5.2012-21.01.2013		(re-introduced : Table 3)

**Sources:** ECI official website; campaign websites; ECI link meetings

**Table 6:** ECI applications made by Citizens' Committees with no identifiable organizational sponsors at the time of registration

30km/h
Against legalised prostitution
A Europe of Solidarity
End Ecocide in Europe
End EU-Switzerland Free Movement of People Agreement
High Quality European Education for All
Responsible Waste Incineration
Single Communication Tariff
Teach4Youth
Turn me Off!
Weed Like to Talk

**Table 7:** Classification by territorial origin of applications to register a European Citizens' Initiative

Territorial source	Name of ECI
Austria (2)	My Voice Against Nuclear Power
	Unconditional Basic Income
Belgium (3)	Right to Lifelong Care
	Singing the European Anthem in Esperanto
	Water and Sanitation are a Human Right!
France (5)	Responsible Waste Incineration
	Single Communication Tariff Act
	Teach 4 Youth
	Turn Me Off!
	Weed Like to Talk
Germany (5)	30 km/h
	Abolish the European Parliament
	Confidence vote on EU government
	Decision making by Referenda
	ECI online collection platform
Greece (3)	A Europe of Solidarity
	A European Public Bank for Social Development, Ecology & Subsidiarity
	Do Not Count Education as Part of the Deficit
Italy (3)	A New Deal 4 Europe
	Stop Animal Cruelty
	Stop Vivisection
Poland (1)	Suspension of the EU Climate & Energy Package
Romania (1)	Cohesion Policy for Culturally Distinct Regions
Spain (3)	Abolition of Bull Fighting
	Self-Determination a Human Right
	Strengthen Citizens Participation in Decisions on Collective Sovereignty
UK (3)	Dairy Cow Welfare
	End EU-Switzerland Free Movement of People
	European Free Vaping Initiative
Varied (9)	Act 4 Growth (B)
	Against Legalised Prostitution (B)
	End Ecocide in Europe
	European Initiative for Media Pluralism (B)
	Fraternité2020
	High Quality European Education for All
	Let Me Vote (B)
	Minority Safe Pack
	One of Us (B)

Key: (B) = a modal Belgian element insufficient to place Belgium as a campaign origin epicentre

**Table 8:** Unofficial ‘pilot’ initiatives pre-April 2012

<b>Name</b>	<b>Policy area</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Policy style</b>
1million 4disability	Social	European Disability Forum (Brussels based EU NGO)	Consensual
Against Nuclear Energy	Environment-treaty change	Friends of the Earth national branches	Contentious
Cancer Unite	Health	Business & stakeholders on cancer care.	Consensual
Efficient 112 all over Europe	Internal market	European Emergency Number association	Consensual
Emergency Initiative for Darfur	European Foreign & Security Policy / Cooperation	French organisations	Contentious
Equality for all!	Constitutional - treaty change	European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDHO)	Contentious
European Health Initiative / European Referendum Initiative	Health – constitutional - treaty change	US based Health Foundation	Contentious
European Obesity Day Charter Initiative	Health	Pharmaceutical Industry	Consensual
For a European Referendum on the EU Constitution	Constitutional - treaty change	Union of European Federalists	Contentious
For a political Europe of Freedom, Security and Justice	Home affairs	French politicians	Consensual
Free Sunday Initiative	Social	German catholic organisations	Consensual
GMO Initiative I	Environment-Health	Greenpeace national branches	Contentious
GMO Initiative II	Environment-Health	Greenpeace national branches	Contentious
Help Africa	EFSP / Cooperation	MEPs	Consensual
High Quality of Public Services	Social	European Trade Union Confederation	Consensual
Initiative for the Initiative	Participation / civil society	European Students Forum, European Citizens Action Service, King Baudouin Foundation, Madariaga Foundation	Consensual
Initiative pour un Service Civil Européen	Social – Citizenship	European Movement France	Consensual
Initiative of applied anthroposophy	Health	Anthroposophical professionalised social movement organisations, German epicentre <i>Aktian Eliant</i> (later with Brussels EU office).	Consensual
Oneseat initiative	Constitutional –	MEPs	Contentious

	treaty change		
Referendum on the next EU Treaty	Constitutional - treaty change	MEPs	Contentious
Save Our Social Europe	Social	Austrian association	Consensual

**Sources:** Fischer and Lichtbau 2008; Kaufmann 2010; campaign and ECI websites.

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<sup>i</sup> The rejection letter for one campaign (seeking abolition of bullfighting) runs to 4 pages of detailed legal justification

<sup>ii</sup> The Association for Taxation of Financial Transactions in Aid of the Citizen.

<sup>iii</sup> The re-registered Unconditional Basic Income campaign (Tables 3 and 4) is only counted once.

<sup>iv</sup> European Economic and Social Committee.

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.1millionsignatures.eu/?a=en>