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## **The European Citizens' Initiative and EU Civil Society Organisations**

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### **Abstract**

The procedural demands of the new European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) require the 'Citizens Committees' which host them to be backed by professional organisation. One potential source would be civil society organisations (CSOs) organised at EU level. Yet direct participatory democracy measures challenge the status of established Brussels based NGOs seeking an alternative 'Civil Dialogue' between themselves and EU political institutions. The institutionalised advocacy orientation of these EU NGOs make them ill-suited to developing mass campaigning activities, although the ECI concept will incentivise such groups to develop more direct links with those they seek to advocate for. By contrast, there is a new community of CSOs newly mobilised into EU politics by the ECI, largely from Germany and Austria, with a more political orientation than traditional EU CSOs. These organisations are progressively becoming EU institutionalised, opening Brussels outreaches and increasingly appearing on the (European) Transparency Register. Either way, the ability of groups to link the EU institutions with civil society will be enhanced by the ECI.

### **Stakeholder approaches to the European Citizens Initiative**

Because the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is a direct participatory democracy measure, the constituency of organisations mobilised around the

European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is clearly distinguishable from the mainstream constituency of Brussels based interest groups geared towards institutionalised dialogue between themselves and EU institutions. Stressing this distinction, European Parliament Vice-President Diana Wallis, the EP's member most involved with institutional measures for participatory democracy affecting both direct and organised civil society strands, commented forthrightly: 'an ECI is not for MEPs, not for NGOs, but for all citizens' (EurActiv, 2011). Nonetheless, the procedural demands of the ECI require the 'Citizens Committees' which host them to have access to professional organisation. One potential source might thus be civil society organisations (CSOs) established at EU level.

There are seven interest groups organised at EU level which launched initiatives pre-dating the conditions laid down by Regulation 211 of 2011, and which therefore have no official status. Two ECIs involved global level organisation outlets, with *Friends of the Earth global*<sup>1</sup> and *Greenpeace International*,<sup>2</sup> rather than the European Policy Offices, doing the running, drawing upon global organisational resources and experiences of paying helpers for collecting signatures.<sup>3</sup> Similar types of outlets, such as Amnesty International, might have been expected to follow suit, except that a niche organisation in the same field, the *European Association for the Defence of Human Rights* (AEDH), tried out the available options for electronic signature collection via an experimental petition because it is actively campaigning on associated data protection rights issues involved with the ECI. The *European Trade Union Confederation* (ETUC) has also tried out the concept pre-Regulation, seeking to use its geographic breadth of organisation<sup>4</sup> as well as its recent experiences in organising public protest events. Of note, however, is that it failed to achieve 60% of the required threshold level of one million signatures; a view is that the issue was too broadly and generally focused upon a 'Europe for high quality services, accessible to all'. *Solidar*, aligned with the wider socialist and labour movement, also launched a pre-Regulation initiative to 'Save our Social Europe' which failed to reach the threshold of signatures, attributed also to a failure to give sufficient prominence to the campaign among the organisation's other issues (Fischer and Lichtblau,

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<sup>1</sup> Friends of the Earth Global, 2007, 'Against Nuclear Energy.'

<sup>2</sup> Greenpeace International, 2007 'GMO Initiative 1'.

<sup>3</sup> The going rate is €1 per signature.

<sup>4</sup> ETUC has 83 member organisations in 36 European countries

2008). The sixth organisation, the *European Emergency Number Association* (EENA) launched an initiative corresponding with its mission 'dedicated to promoting high-quality emergency services reached by the number 112 throughout the EU' which quickly became absorbed into a public policy measure by EU institutions before it reached any significant threshold. The *European Disability Forum* (EDF)'s Initiative for an all encompassing legislative instrument on the rights of people with disabilities (see Appendix 1) is a case which stands out. It is a member of the European Social Platform, which has been leading an alternative campaign for a participatory democracy route of 'Civil Dialogue' through accredited EU NGOs. The second is that it achieved the highest number of signatories among the 21 unofficial initiatives which pre-date the regulation. These factors warrant giving the EDF case further scrutiny later, along with further lessons which emerge from the cases which did not achieve the one million signature threshold.

Other sources of pre-Regulation initiatives include MEPs, political (including federalist) sources, as well as diverse networks or foundations not primarily aligned with the European Union (Green European Foundation – GEF, 2010). This denotes an 'ECI community' which is somewhat differentiated from established EU level CSOs, confirmed by the location of the established ECI campaigning organisations in Germanic Europe. An organisation which has played a leading role with the ECI from the outset is the Marburg based *Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe* (IRI-Europe), led by one of the original advocates of the measure for the Forum preparing the Constitutional Treaty, Bruno Kaufman. Kaufmann is also a member of the Salzburg based NGO, *European Citizens Initiative Office (ECIO)*, together with other Austrian participatory democracy activists, and sponsored by the Austrian government and state of Salzburg. Another ECI veteran is Carsten Berg, Campaign Director in the Cologne office of Democracy International; its web site 'citizens-initiative.eu' came above the European Commission's official ECI site in a Google search until the regulation came into force on 1 April 2012<sup>5</sup>. Other leading German organisations campaigning on ECI issues have been the Berlin based *Mehr Demokratie* and the Bochum based *Aktion Eliant*, one of the few pre-

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<sup>5</sup> Using the term 'European Citizens Initiative'

regulation initiatives which collected beyond the one million threshold. Most of these organisations have since developed a Brussels outreach capacity, and some have signed up to the Transparency Register.

The broader organisation set mobilised behind the ECI have picked up the campaign from a Brussels base. They include committed federalist outlets such as the *European Movement*, transnationally orientated student organisations (*Café Babel*; *European Students Forum*), and the *European Citizens Action Service (ECAS)*. ECAS has long occupied a niche position differentiated from the mainstream of Brussels NGOs with its emphasis upon an EU engaged with citizens rather than one engaged with organised civil society. As the institutions prepared the shape of the initiative through to its start in April 2012, ECAS has led the impetus from Brussels with practical implementation measures aimed at supporting the development of new initiatives, and campaigning aimed at extending the frontiers of detail involved in the measure.

The 'ECI community' is founded on organisations mobilised around direct democracy measures, and in particular the 2009 'European Citizens Consultations' experiments initiated by Commissioner Wallstrom . Its essentially political nature is underlined by the extent of core activism linking it to the European Parliament. The Green Party in the European Parliament organised a series of hearings on the ECI in 2009/2010, and is linked to ECI activists through the work of the *Green European Foundation*. Two of the 'gang of 4' Rapporteurs on the ECI across the two lead committees in the European Parliament (Zita Gurmai; Gerald Häfner; Alain Lamoussoure; Diana Wallis) were themselves central players in proposing and achieving the measure in the original constitutional Treaty (Häfner ; Lamoussoure). Häfner became an MEP (Green) in order to pursue a lifetime's work he had pursued through his preceding work inside *Mehr Demokratie*.

The difference between the 'ECI constituency' and the 'Brussels NGO community' in their approaches is evident from the responses to the public consultation on the ECI undertaken by the European Commission in the winter of 2009/2010, documented below. The majority of the 133 CSO respondents were organisations based outside Brussels and who had not then signed up to the

European Commission's (then) *Register of Interest Representatives* (ROIR). The less engaged responses came from EU CSOs with most to lose, i.e. those which: are themselves creations of the EU institutions to meet the needs of the latter; receive most of their funds from EU institutions; have invested most of their energies in the creation of a 'civil dialogue' based around further empowering the status of organised civil society in interactions with the Commission. The Platform of European Social NGOs ticks all of these boxes. It defines civil dialogue as

'a tool of participatory democracy. It defines the relationship between public decision makers and organised civil society... civil dialogue aims to put forward the views and needs of organised civil society.' (Social Platform, 2010)

The Social Platform has on a number of occasions argued for an accreditation system for interest groups involved in a Civil Dialogue, with a special access status reserved for those, such as itself, which meet the criteria it has recommended (Social Platform, 2000; Social Platform, 2002; European Commission, 2005; Social Platform, 2010). In its own response to the ECI Green Paper consultation, the Social Platform ignored the procedural questions on the operation of the ECI on which the Commission had invited comments. Instead, the Social Platform focused entirely on the other sections of Article 11 of the (Lisbon) Treaty on European Union (a-c) in its response entitled '*How to establish an effective dialogue between the EU and civil society organisations*' (Social Platform, 2010). In essence, the seven demands in the document ask for a special status in EU policy-making, and enhanced funding, for organisations which carry eligibility criteria which match those of the *Platform* itself. The document seeks to re-interpret the other instruments of Article 11 as placing new requirements upon the institutions to establish a 'Civil Dialogue', the issue which the Social Platform was formed to pursue; thus, a classic exercise aimed at agenda re-framing.

In an accompanying letter to its response, the Platform wrote:

'As a response, Social Platform calls on the European Commission to launch a public consultation on how to implement the first part of the Lisbon Treaty article 11 on civil dialogue. It would also be used to assess existing mechanisms of consultation. This would ensure that both parts of the article are properly implemented.

Social Platform would like to stress that the right to petition is not the only new instrument related to participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon introduces into EU decision making processes.

The first part of article 11 (which regards civil dialogue) requires all EU institutions to implement new mechanisms of dialogue with civil society (as opposed to consultations, run by the European Commission as it is the case now).

Given that the European Commission has not revised its procedures to dialogue with citizens for almost a decade, we believe it is time for the European Commission to discuss with civil society organisations how this new mechanisms of dialogue should take place in the future between EU institutions and organised civil society.'

Members of the Social Platform, such as the *European Older People's Platform-AGE*, and the *European Youth Forum (EYF)*, pursued very similar lines in their responses, including almost identical wording (right down to the same spelling mistakes - *my emphasis*, below) :

'We regret that the consultation is limited to the Citizens initiative and we call on the European Commission to launch a public consultation on how to implement the first part of Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty on civil dialogue. It would also be used to assess and improve existing mechanisms of consultation.

This would ensure that both parts of this important Article are properly implemented. The first part of Article 11 (which regards civil dialogue) requires all EU institutions to implement new mechanisms of *dialogue* with civil society (not only one way consultations).



Since a Register of interest representative groups has been set up, *we strongly recommend to the European Commission to organise a discussion with the registered civil society organisations how this new mechanisms of dialogue should take place between EU institutions and organised civil society.*' (AGE, 2010)

After welcoming the ECI, the European Youth Forum similarly requested that:

In addition to the concrete responses above, the European Youth Forum calls on the European Commission to launch a public consultation on how to implement the first part of the Lisbon Treaty article 11 on civil dialogue. This process would also be used to assess existing mechanisms of consultation with the aim of ensuring that both parts of the article are properly implemented.

The European Youth Forum would like to stress that the right to petition is not the only new instrument related to participatory democracy that the Treaty of Lisbon introduces into EU decision making processes. The first part of article 11 (which regards civil dialogue) requires all EU institutions to implement new mechanisms of dialogue with civil society (as opposed to consultations, run by the European Commission as it is the case now). Given that the European Commission has not revised its procedures to dialogue with citizens for almost a decade, *we believe it is time for the European Commission to discuss with civil society organisations how this new mechanisms of dialogue should take place in the future between EU institutions and organised civil society.*'

The *European Civic Forum* (ECF) took a similar position to the Platform:

'in addition to direct participation tools such as the European Citizens' initiative or the European Citizens Consultation, and the relatively permanent and structured dialogue that some European institutions developed over the years with civil society organisations, there is now a need to devise a structured, efficient and sustainable overall framework for European civil dialogue' (ECF, 2010).

In some accounts, the ambivalence towards the ECI among some of the established NGOs could also be reflected within the wider European Commission because of the way it represents a perceived challenge to its right of initiative. This remains a matter of speculation; just as interesting is the potential ambivalence within the Secretariat General itself as a result of the 'organised civil society pathway' it has thus far followed rather than direct democracy measures. Whilst there is a broad tradition of pursuing a participatory democracy strand within this particular service, it has to date been more driven by a practical orientation to work within the existing framework of relations for a climate of continual improvement. The 'existing framework' is based around creating a pluralist system of checks and balances with organised civil society, refining administrative procedures aimed at achieving a democratic basis of transparency, a balance of input, equality of access, and deliberation (Dahl, 1982). The European Citizens' Initiative represents something quite different. Whilst some of the organisations mobilised by the ECI question the extent to which the Secretariat General has reached beyond its Brussels dialogue partners to inform wider civil society, the 'Warming up for the Citizens' Initiative' conference it hosted in January 2012 struck a different note entirely, with Commission speakers at a variety of levels heralding a 'new dawn' in the democratic life of the EU, and even towards a 'common European civic space'.<sup>6</sup> The event itself was webcast, and used all available social media. In their opening addresses, Commissioner Šefčovič and the Danish (Presidency) Minister placed particular emphasis upon the role of social media in making the mechanism work, and in reaching beyond established organised lobbies to mobilise citizens, and young people in particular. Beyond rhetoric, the development of a free open source software tool for electronic signature collection by DG Informatics of the European Commission suggests a facilitating role. Similarly, the responsible Director in the Secretariat General made an offer at the event to place the expertise of the Commission at the disposal of organisers in making judgements as to whether an initiative falls within the scope of Treaty competencies.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eutv/portal/warmingup2012>

## The demands made on Petition host organisations by ECI procedures

Working through the European Commission's 2012 *Guide to the European Citizens' Initiative*<sup>7</sup> helps to identify the resource requirements for a would-be Initiative:

- the identification of the legal basis of Treaty competencies under which the proposed measure falls, and ensuring that it is not contrary to EU values as stated in the Treaties (such as subsidiarity and the Charter of Fundamental Rights - Ponzano, 2011). These factors will require legal advice of varying depth depending upon the degree of certainty involved.
- recruiting at least seven citizens of voting age who are nationals of at least seven member states;
- attracting sufficient funding, and sources willing for their sponsorship to be declared publicly;
- translation costs for twenty three official languages of the EU;
- building an online collection system which meets very detailed technical requirements, themselves the subject of an implementing Regulation,<sup>8</sup> and certified by the national authority where the data is to be stored;
- collecting one million signatures within twelve months of registering the Initiative on the official Commission web site for the scheme<sup>9</sup>, requiring signatories to provide various data about themselves depending upon the member state. This includes, in two-thirds of member states, the need to supply a national identification document number alongside the full postal address, and date and place of birth; and a signature for non-electronic collection means;
- bearing legal responsibility for complying with data protection requirements;
- obtaining certification in each of at least seven member states of reaching the threshold of the minimum number of signatures.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>

<sup>8</sup> Commission implementing Regulation 1179/2011 of 17 November 2011.

<sup>9</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome>

Those who have experience with similar types of measures talk of the need for at least five conversations to achieve one signature. Carsten Berg has suggested that a successful campaign needs to recruit at least 100 NGOs, including established national/local NGO alliances in at least eight EU member states, each of whom make advance commitments as to the number of signatures, and contributory campaign funds, they will obtain (Green European Foundation, 2010). Cost estimates vary, from accounts of the early unofficial ECIs of €800,000 (see the experience of the 'Initiative for Applied Anthroposophy' provided in ECAS, 2011) to forecasts under an official ECI of 'easily one million Euros per ECI' (Thomson, 2011), and those among leading campaigning organisations who believe that the likely costs have been understated.

A question arises as to whether the resources which EU interest organisations have are by themselves sufficient to meet the above requirements. Among EU business associations, only one association has more than fifty staff, because they are narrowly specialised upon interest representation to EU institutions rather than the provision of services to individual (SME) member companies. The European Trade Union Confederation has around 50 staff. Among 'NGOs', the EU policy offices of environmental organisations taken together have most staff, with WWF the leader with 43; beyond these, the best resourced NGOs are members of the Social Platform family, headed by the European Youth Forum with 27 staff, followed by a clutch of federations with 9-15 staff, including the Social Platform itself, *Caritas Europa*, the *European Anti-Poverty Network*, the *European Network Against Racism*, *European Public Health Alliance*, the *European Womens' Lobby*, as well as *Solidar* and the *European Disability Forum*. The *European Disability Forum*, and *Solidar*, are the only EU NGOs in the Social Platform circle to have used the concept prior to the Regulation. As a successful campaign, the EDF case is worth further examination on the criteria as to the criticality of resources. Relative to the norm for EU level NGOs it is reasonably well resourced, with a total budget of €1.65m and 12 staff, but these resources do not approach the estimates of requirements to conduct a successful initiative

campaign. In 2007 EDF presented to the Commission 1,364,984<sup>10</sup> signatures (of which one sixth were collected online<sup>11</sup>) in its petition “1 million 4 disability”. Whilst these were collected without the full burden of the verification procedures set out in the 2011 Regulation, signatories were required to provide personal details (including an address and date of birth, but short of a national ID number). A bailiff was hired by EDF to check these, and as an additional measure compliance with data protection was assured by registering the initiative at the ‘Commission for the protection of private life’. To achieve such a high level of signatories, the EDF sought to use its membership network to reach down to local levels, explicitly aimed at creating the impression of a ‘bottom-up’ Citizens’ Initiative rather than a ‘Top-Down’ measure (Green European Foundation, 2010), despite its own leadership role and primary function in addressing EU institutions; in other words, it sought to reinvent itself through mirror image. Each of its (29) national association members were given specific quotas to fulfil, as well as tasks such as translation. Beyond this, a wider support network was also used, such as the *Airports Council International-Europe* (400 airports in 45 countries), a long-time dialogue partner with EDF, which agreed to disseminate the petition widely in the premises of its members. The Belgian national broadcasting organisation pledged to obtain 50,000 signatures. EDF itself undertook a full public relations campaign, recruiting celebrities, holding a variety of public events, and using the media to the full. The one million threshold was reached within nine months.

The EDF case suggests that EU federations can pool together the necessary resources to achieve the threshold for the right issue, using the advantage they have of members in the member states. Three of the seven EU level organisations which tried out the ECI concept pre-Regulation were federations. Whilst ETUC has the broadest membership base, it was unable to achieve 60% of the required signature threshold (in pre-Regulation form). However, this is attributed among the ‘ECI community’ to the generalised nature of the issue it

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.edf-feph.org/Page\\_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thebloc=26547](http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thebloc=26547), accessed on 27.1.2012.

<sup>11</sup> <http://campaignhandbook.gef.eu/european-disability-forum-and-their-groundbreaking-first-citizens-initiative/>. The site for online signatures itself is at <http://www.1million4disability.eu/>. Each accessed on 27.1.2012.

proposed, rather than to network resource deficiencies. The ETUC affiliated European Federation of Public Services Unions is among the first to be preparing an official initiative ('Water is a human right, not a commodity'), again based on the advantage of access to network resources to which the European trade union movement has.

The EDF-ETUC comparison also suggests that organisations need to network beyond their own membership to draw in those who are able to provide other resources. There is, apparently, no shortage of legally qualified personnel willing to offer their services for such a high profile and new initiative. Beyond this are required data protection specialists, professional fund-raisers, and marketing professionals. EDF were able to assemble all of these resources and skill sets in support of their campaign, but needed to draw from beyond its member resources to do so, from organisations willing to support a cause with which they wished to be associated.

Another successful proposer of a pilot initiative, Aktion Eliant, involves a case of an organisation with a more limited resource base than EDF. It resolved this problem through its position within a wider established international movement of producers and consumers of anthroposophic (spiritual) medicine, including Steiner institutions, centred in Switzerland. However, the organisation has become socialised in the Brussels network by its experience with its initiative, recently opening an outlet in Brussels and regularly networking with other organisations recently mobilised by the ECI.

Thus, it is access to network resources, rather than ownership of resources itself, which is a key issue, in conjunction with the nature of the issue itself. The failure of the Solidar Initiative has also been attributed, in part, to variable commitment from network partners (Fischer and Lichtblau, 2008). One of the best funded of the unofficial pre-Regulation initiatives, the European Emergency Number, hosted by the corresponding association, failed to achieve more than 15,000 signatories in four years (Green European Foundation, 2010). And the Friends of the Earth unofficial ECI '1 Million against Nuclear Power', despite recruiting 780 supporting organisations, was unable to attract more than 634,

686 signatories within a three year period (2004-7) of campaigning. The latter failure is attributed to the loose nature of the network of supporting organisations together with the lack of central co-ordinating mechanisms (illustrated by the inclusion of signatures from Swiss citizens in the total), varying degrees of commitment, a topic which was at that time considered to have been exhausted relative to fresher concerns such as climate change, the inclusion of too many demands, and considerable variation between member states in opposition to nuclear power (Fischer and Lichtblau, 2008).

## **Conclusion: the Impact of the ECI on Civil Society Organisations and the future of EU participatory democracy**

The European Citizens' Initiative is seen by its movers as primarily an agenda-setting tool (Kaufman, 2012), particularly given its lack of mandatory status. It is therefore impossible for advocacy related organisations to ignore. Whilst civil society organisations at EU level find the ECI a threat to a 'Civil Dialogue' agenda which is centred on them, the risk of ignoring the ECI is the prospect of marginalisation from the constituency they claim to speak for if an initiative is launched within their fields of domain. To date, the institutionalised nature of EU politics means that such groups have been heavily incentivised to prioritise their activities towards advocacy with EU institutions rather than 'bringing the EU to their members' (Warleigh, 2001; Sudbery, 2003). Bouza Garcia summarises the significance of the consequence:

'competition with outsider organisations using the ECI may give EU civil society organisations a strong motivation to inform, involve and mobilise their members and public opinion at large which would in turn contribute to a generalisation of public sphere oriented participation tools. The consequence may be that the Commission – civil society relations would turn from a low saliency, expertise oriented and consensus seeking regime towards a more public opinion and mobilisation and contested regime'.  
(Bouza Garcia, 2011, p.15)

Among the new ECIs lining up to be among the first, the only traditional EU CSO centrally involved is the European Federation of Public Services Union. The remainder lie outside of the established 'Brussels circuit', again emphasising the new constituency mobilised by the measure. Greenpeace has handed over responsibility for a 'GMO II' ECI to the '*World in Action Platform*', while Friends of the Earth has teamed up with Global 2000 to pursue its anti-nuclear initiative, each emphasising the long standing role of such organisations in bridging the institutionalised world of EU politics to the wider community of organised civil society and to social movements (Hadden, 2009). The list of initiatives in preparation likewise demonstrates the way in which the ECI is mobilising



constituencies separate from traditional EU NGOs, frequently embedded within wider social movements. An Austrian NGO linked to the 'Occupy movement' is preparing a measure on basic income protection; parents groups drawn from across the member states are mobilising to promote the European baccalaureate standard; internet activists are mobilising against anti-piracy laws (Brand, 2012). Beyond these, MEPs are a further source of ECIs in the pipeline, including a tax on financial transactions, as well as those in conjunction with national CSOs, including a 'work-free Sunday (with German catholic organisations), and to incentivise organic purchases (with consumer organisations). Meanwhile, following a similar trend in the USA (notably, California), producer organisations have also picked up on the possibilities. The consultancy Fleishman-Hillard alerted its clients to the possibilities in 2011, and in particular the possibility of forging strategic alliances with NGOs. In similar vein, Glaxo Smith Kline are a key mover among patient groups in preparing one on recognition of the voice of obese patients.

For civil society organisations newly mobilised at EU level by the ECI, the effect over time is likely to be that of part Institutionalisation as they become socialised in the ways of the EU. Bouza Garcia noticed at the beginning of 2011 how the ECI advocacy organisations were increasingly appearing in the ROIR (Bouza Garcia, 2011). The replacement *Transparency Register* seems to compel registration in that:

'organisations and self-employed individuals engaged in activities carried out with the objective of directly or indirectly influencing the formulation or implementation of policy and decision-making processes of the EU institutions are expected to register'<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the new community of organisations at EU level mobilised by the ECI also have little choice but to join in the game of EU institutionalised politics. In order

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<sup>12</sup> [http://europa.eu/transparency-register/your-organisation/who-register/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/transparency-register/your-organisation/who-register/index_en.htm)

to pursue the detail of the issues on which they advocate, they need access to the specialised consultation opportunities which EU institutions provide. As a general rule, political institutions almost always prefer to have a dialogue with stakeholders rather than have them 'shout abuse through the letter box' (Bettsworth, cited in Jordan and Halpin, 2003, p.319); this norm particularly applies to the EU context where the relationship with interest organisations is highly institutionalised.

The end result thus seems to be that existing institutionalised EU groups will become incentivised to become much more outward looking towards both their own members and to civil society more generally, to the benefit of the EU 'public space'; while the ECI will bring in a new constituency of civil society organisations and social movements not previously engaged with EU institutions. The democratic legitimacy of the EU can only benefit.

## **Appendix 1:** The European Disability Forum signature petition<sup>13</sup>

BECAUSE I AM AWARE THAT ...

\_\_\_... there are more than 50 million citizens in Europe with a disability

\_\_\_... persons with disabilities face discrimination and prejudice on a daily basis and in all fields of life

\_\_\_... persons with disabilities do not have equal access to education, are on the top of unemployment rates and generally live on significantly lower income

\_\_\_... persons with disabilities cannot move around freely, go to work, to a restaurant, to theatres, to cinemas, to libraries, shopping, meet friends, or any other daily activity, due to inaccessible public transport, pavements or buildings

\_\_\_... free movement of disabled persons in the European Union is just an ideal due to legislative barriers preventing to leave the home country.

\_\_\_... more than 200.000 disabled persons in Europe are forced to live in closed institutions deprived of the most fundamental human rights

...AND I BELIEVE IN

in a European Union that works for and protects the rights of all its citizens, with no distinction:

\_ the right to equal access to education

\_ the right to equal treatment in employment

\_ the right to equal recognition and equal protection before the law

\_ the right to social protection, health and long-term care services

\_ the right to live independently in the community

\_ the right to access public transport, buildings and other architectural infrastructures

\_ the right to access information and communication technologies and services

\_ the right to access products for daily use

TODAY, I TAKE A STAND!

For a European Union in which disabled persons' rights are protected through effective legislation, combating all forms of discrimination and guaranteeing the full inclusion of more than 50 million citizens with disabilities in the European society

(signature form)

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.1million4disability.eu/admin/wysiwyg/assets/Press/1million4disability%20Press%20Pack-EN%28rev%29.pdf>

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