

Start of the European Citizens' Initiative

With the Conference, *Warming up for the European Citizens' Initiative*, the European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic and the Danish Minister for European Affairs Nicolai Wammen presented the implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). The Treaty of Lisbon (Art. 11) introduced this tool of democratisation with the aim of bringing European people closer to the European Union. The European Citizens' Initiative will allow 1 million citizens from at least one quarter of EU Member States to invite the European Commission to bring forward proposals for legal measures in areas where the Commission has the power to do so.

The organisers of an ECI, a citizens' committee composed of at least seven EU citizens who are resident in at least seven different Member States, will have one year to collect the necessary statements of support. The number of statements of support has to be certified by the competent authorities in the Member States. The Commission will then have three months to examine the Initiative and decide how to act on it.

The Regulation governing European Citizens' Initiatives was adopted on 16 February 2011. However, at the request of Member States, who needed time to put mechanisms in place for certifying statements of support, citizens will only be able to launch ECIs as from 1 April 2012. For the moment, not all Member States have adopted national regulations, but the Danish EU Presidency is trying to keep pressure on them.

The Conference launched the Commission website, which gives all the important information needed for registering requests and provides the opportunity to collect signatures online: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome>. In the Conference the representatives of the EU Institutions emphasised several times the potentially central role of social media in relation to ECIs.

Of course the ECI can be of interest for churches and church groups in the future. It is one significant example of how the EU is trying to be more related to its citizens. We will have to observe how seriously the European Institutions will take those initiatives.

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