

Ideal companions?

The European Citizens' Initiative and the European Parliament

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Abstract

How can a European Union citizen have a say in Brussels? The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is a unique participatory democracy tool for citizens. A politically sensitive revision is currently discussed – how much should the citizens directly be involved? One of the actors involved is the European Parliament (EP). The EP has been neglected in research about the ECI, despite being one of the co-legislators contributing to its existence and being active in the debate. How do they view the ECI? This thesis aims to uncover the relations between the EP and ECI campaigners, using ideal types to gain a better understanding of ECI campaigners' view on the EP. Using grounded theory to analyze official material and interviews with ECI and EP actors, this thesis concludes that while ECI actors are viewing the EP as a vital partner, they also acknowledge its limited powers in the ECI process. The EP actors argue the ECI to be an important tool, but in need of revision and also that many MEP's feel uneasy with some of the issues brought up by ECI's. The results also suggest that the ECI could represent a new ideal type of influence in the EU.

Key words: The European Citizen's Initiative, The European Parliament, Ideal Types, Political influence, Participatory democracy

Words: 19571

List of abbreviations

AFCO	European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs
CSO's	Civil Society Organizations
EU	European Union
ECI	European Citizens Initiative
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EP	European Parliament
MEP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PETI	European Parliament's Committee on Petitions
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the functioning of the European Union
The ECI Regulation	Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative (Consolidated version 01/07/2014)

List of ECI shortenings

30km/h – making the streets livable!	30hm ECI
Water and sanitation are a human right!	R2W or Right to Water
Water is a public good, not a commodity!	
Wake up Europe! Taking action to safeguard the European democratic project	Wake up Europe
Fair Transport Europe – equal treatment for all transport workers	Fair Transport Europe
Mum, Dad & Kids - European Citizens' Initiative to protect Marriage and Family	Mum, Dad & Kids
European Initiative for Media Pluralism	The Media Initiative
Unconditional Basic Income (UBI)	UBI
Exploring a pathway towards emancipatory welfare conditions in the EU	
Central public online collection platform for the European Citizen Initiative	The online collection- ECI

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1 The European Citizens' Initiative and the European Parliament – partners or awkward acquaintances?

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), the first transnational tool of participatory democracy, enables citizens from seven EU member states to put forward a legislative proposal, if collecting one million signatures in 12 months for their cause. This would put citizens on an equal footing with the European Parliament and the Council (Kaufmann, 2012). Launched in April 2012, hopes were high that the ECI would bridge the increasing gap between the EU institutions and the EU citizenry.

However, high thresholds, a tricky online collection system, different rules on data requirements for signing an ECI and a massive lack of awareness of the tool made it extremely difficult for ECI organizers to succeed. In addition, the Commission was not interested in sharing its legislative power (see for example www.citizens-initiative.eu).

One of the actors that has both presented several reports on the ECI and an official opinion urging the Commission to reform the tool, is the European Parliament. One could have imagined that the representatives of the people would be the first to embrace the opportunity to let the citizens have a say in EU decision making, however, the EP embarked on the road to the ECI in a rather hesitant way

(see section 4). Despite a slow start, the EP has officially embraced the ECI as a reform much needed to bridge the gap between the EU institutions and EU citizens. However, making citizens trust the EU, hearing and informing them is not the same as putting them in a position of power to change legislation. The European Parliament seems to be hesitant on this point, and this thesis will further explore this, and how the relationship between the EP and the ECI tool looks like today.

With the introduction of the ECI, many hoped that the tool would welcome new actors on the Brussel stage, and most research also claims this to be true (Bouza, 2015; Greenwood, 2015; Hedling and Meeuwisse, 2015). However, the new actors are new kinds of organizations rather than citizens. What do these new actors think of the EP, supposedly their ally in the quest to make the ECI a powerful tool of influence for citizens? This thesis aims to find out exactly that.

1.1 Previous research

Being the first formal transnational instrument for participatory democracy (Kaufmann, 2012:228), the European Citizens' Initiative understandably attracted the attention of many scholars upon the launch of the tool in 2012. A whole issue in the journal "Perspectives on European Politics and Society" was dedicated to the ECI in 2012, where the most prominent researchers in the field debated the future of the tool. Was it direct or participatory democracy (Monaghan, 2012)? How would it work (see for example Cuesta-Lopez, 2012) and who would benefit from this new tool (see for example Greenwood, 2012)?

Many scholars focused on the legal aspects of the ECI (for example Organ, 2014) and some on the role of parties (Hrbek, 2012). Others focused on the

implications for democracy in the EU (for example Mincheva and Szeligowska, 2012) and on the effects for civil society (Greenwood, 2012; Bouza and Del Rio Villar, 2012). The Convention of the Future of Europe, where the ECI was proposed, also attracted much attention (see for example Kaufmann, 2012; De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012).

The ECI could be seen as a possible way to create a European demos or at least a European sphere with an EU public debate (see for example Hatton, 2014; Monaghan, 2012). The ECI could also be part of the solution to the EU democratic deficit (De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012; Mincheva and Szeligowska, 2012) and serve as a bridge between the EU institutions and the EU citizens (see for example Kaufmann, 2012).

However, the ECI could also be seen as yet another top-down, elitist participatory engineering project in the EU participatory democracy (see for example Monaghan, 2012:230; Avril & Neem, 2014:161). Researchers pointed out that the origin of the instrument itself during the Convention was the result of lobbying and not widespread demand from the citizens, casting doubt on the broader aim of involving the citizens in EU decision-making (see for example De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012:301).

After the launch of the ECI, a large body of research pointed to the flaws in the tool, for example the arbitrary admission of initiatives by the Commission (see for example Organ, 2014), the fact that so few ECI's reached the goal and the fact that those who did got no substantial answer. Recent research takes a closer look at the new actors using the ECI (Bouza, 2015; Greenwood, 2015; Hedling and Meeuwisse, 2015). However, none has looked at the way the new actors seek to influence in the EU.

The European Parliament's road from an unelected body with consultative power to today's decision-making organ made up of elected representatives has attracted many researchers (see for example Hix and Hoyland, 2011). However, in research concerning influence in the EP the focus is on lobbying (see for example Coen, 2007, Lehmann, 2009, Klüver, 2013, Rasmussen, 2015) and the representative function of the EP and the representative democracy ideals (see for example Bouwen, 2007). Most studies combining the European parliament and political influence treat civil society influence and lobbying as separate concepts (Klüver, 2013). The Commission is the EU institution most famous for its participatory stance towards citizens and civil society and less is written on the participatory projects of the European Parliament, like the Agora or the EP's relation to civil society. The position of the EP is not quite clear on this (see for example Saurugger, 2010, Bouwen, 2004; Luksic & Bahor, 2010). There are also very few studies on the European Parliament's role in the ECI process, as most studies tend just to mention it briefly or take its role for granted (see for example Gaillard, 2014, Hrbeck, 2012).

As the co-decision maker, the EP has had a big impact on the ECI legislation and it has to vote through any changes made to it. Moreover, MEP's has been very active in the debate on the ECI and publicly supported different ECI campaigns. The EP power of persuasion should not be taken too lightly (see for example Hix, 2002), and its opinion on the ECI could possibly determine the future success of the tool. It is quite remarkable that no scholar has yet included the EP, in a more substantive way, when conducting research on the ECI. Looking only at the formal, institutional requirements of the ECI, there are a number of issues that doesn't fit with institutional logic. In other member states, initiatives like the ECI

are normally linked to the parliament (Jungar, 2007), but not in the case of the ECI, where the organizers by-pass the European Parliament and propose legislative change directly to the Commission. The ECI is thus put on equal footing with the EP and historically, the Parliament has been protective of its representative function (see for example Saurugger, 2010; Bouwen, 2007).

Clearly, there is more to the story than formal obligations and legal documents can tell us. Could the answer lie in the relations between the ECI organizers and the MEP's? The last question is also new in the research on the ECI. Most researchers have so far mapped out the (new) actors that use the ECI tool (for example Bouza and Greenwood, 2014), but they have not investigated how they view EU institutions or how they go about to influence EU decision making.

This thesis aims to break new ground for further research on both subjects – the European Parliament stance on the European Citizens' Initiative and how the ECI organizers view the EP. Also, could the ECI represent some new kind of influence in the EU? Taking inspiration from the concept of political style, which is most often used in research on political leaders (see for example Hariman, 2010; Keller, 2005; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014), two ideal types of influence are developed; lobbying and corporatism. Taking the actors and the reasoning of the ECI organizers, this will be used to detect patterns. Do they belong to these ideal types or do they represent something new in their way of viewing influence? Can this be said to influence their view on the EP?

The European Parliament's view of the ECI as a tool is also laid out, together with a more in depth study of EP actors view on the tool, its actors and the issues they bring. Could these views of the ECI possibly explain the EP's recent legal stance toward the ECI?

The over-arching research question guiding this quest is the following:

How can we understand the relation between the European Parliament and the ECI?

Two sub-questions accompany this:

- Can the ECI campaigns be said to represent an ideal type and is this reflected in their view of the EP?
- How does the EP perceive the ECI as a tool and the ECI campaigns?

2 The road to the European Citizens' Initiative

In this section, the underlying reasons for the creation of the ECI will be examined, starting with a brief discussion of the democratic ideals in the EU followed by a short discussion on the democratic deficit.

The democratic principles of the EU can be found in title II in the TEU, article 9-11. The EU legitimacy rests on the base of representative democracy, as stated in article 10 TEU. It is primarily the European Parliament that has a representative role vis á vis the people, being directly elected by the EU citizens. However, the members in the Council can also be said to be representatives in a sense as they are elected on the member state level in their respective governments.

Starting with the European Commission (1992), "An open Structured Dialogue between the Commission and Interest Groups, SEC (92) 2272 final", one can argue that a norm of participatory democracy began to emerge in the EU. In the EU Treaties, participatory democracy takes form in article 11 Treaty on the European Union (TEU). The principle of participatory democracy is outlined, although the heading "participatory democracy" was cut out from the Lisbon treaty. The article originates from art. 47 from the Constitutional Treaty (Saurugger, 2010).

Article 11 states that;

1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.
2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.
3. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.
4. Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

The procedures and conditions required for such a citizens' initiative shall be determined in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

It is a rather limited form of participatory democracy, where the final decision whether to act upon the wishes of the citizens or not is placed in the institutions. Citizens can express their views, but when institutions are consulting, they turn to civil society. This is a main critique of the EU and it will be touched upon below.

2.1 The so-called democratic deficit

“[D]isagreement about how to respond to the deficiencies of the state of democracy originates from the different assumptions underlying different theories of democracy’.”

(Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007, p.2 in Saurugger, 2010:473-474)

How do we understand the concept of the democratic deficit? This might be different depending on your view on democracy. The concept was coined by David Marquand (1979), and it basically means that in the EU, citizens lack proper representation, and European institutions are not properly accountable before the citizens. However, the debate about whether the EU is democratic or not has been ongoing for longer than that (Szeligowska & Mincheva, 2012:271).

2.2 Solutions?

The European Parliament is the only institution with members that are directly elected by the EU citizens, and as such, it is seen as the most representative body in the EU. Looking at the MEP’s representative function in the EC Treaty, (art. 190.1) they were “representatives of the peoples of the States brought together in the Community”, advocating the states as being the important actors. However, in the Lisbon Treaty, the emphasis was on them being directly elected; “citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament” (art. 14.2 TEU).

The increased powers of the EP were justified with the argument that citizens should be able to hold politicians accountable, relating to the democratic deficit (Klüver, 2013). The parliamentary solution to the democratic deficit was held in high regard until the mid 90's. Turnout for EP elections were falling continuously (europaparl.europa.eu, 2014). Studies found that institutions – even with directly elected officials – were not capable of creating any identification among citizens (Saurugger, 2010).

Now, focus has shifted to other ways to enhance EU legitimacy. Alternative channels for citizens' influence are fighting for the limelight, advocating more participatory democracy. In an EU setting, this has traditionally meant participation by civil society.

Participation by civil society in the EU has generally been emphasized as a good thing, linking politicians and citizens since the mid 90's. The Commission has traditionally been very open to interest groups views on EU politics, relying on their expertise to solve problems and increase efficiency - mainly generating so called output legitimacy. However, the Commission White paper on EU governance from 2001 is a clear shift from this. The Commission states that the legitimacy of the Union is not only dependent on the output, but the legitimacy is also built on input from good governance, which in turn is built on participation and inclusion (Persson & Lindgren, 2011:13).

The White Paper received much criticism from the EP, who saw this as a threat to their claims to be the peoples' representatives and as such providing legitimacy to the EU (ibid). This led the Commission to underline the importance of parliamentary deliberation (Luksic & Bahor, 2010).

Although the White paper pointed out the need for increased participation in the EU, it was rather vague on who should participate. The words "citizens", "civil society", "people", "general public", etc. were frequently used, but the most concrete proposals actually concerned civil society. As such, not much changed in their functionalist view of civil society organisations (CSO's) participation – increasing not only the democratic legitimacy in the union, but also the efficiency, by having large organisations with an aggregate view of citizens (Persson & Lindgren, 2011:13-14). The participation of CSO's in EU decision making is seen as something natural today, as part of a democratic norm by European institutions and it is also enshrined in the Lisbon treaty (Saurugger, 2010:485).

Participation is seen as the remedy for numerous issues in representative democracies; decreasing turnout and trust in political institutions and falling numbers of people joining political parties. Citizens are thought to be more likely to think politics is interesting, more likely to engage in it, support it and trust it if given the chance to participate (see for example SOU 2000:1). The logic is that if a person is him/herself involved in decision making and form the laws, that person is less inclined to break them, or argue that they are unfair (see for example Pateman, 1976).

Moreover, while political parties are mostly concerned with left- and right wing politics, a large number of issues that doesn't fit neither of these ideologies are seen as increasingly important by the citizens, for example European integration and environment issues. These issues divide the parties internally and therefore; they are not brought up on the political agenda. By using participatory

tools, citizens can make sure to put these issues on the agenda and force political parties to take a stance (Jungar, 2007).

The ECI has proven to bring issues to the EU level that were not on the agenda before they put it there. The ECI's One of Us and Stop Vivisection for example brought sensitive issues to the EU stage, issues that a lot of Europeans deem important but they never reach the political debates. The ECI Right to Water also brought up the issue of human rights, something that is often discussed in the EU but perhaps not put this clearly in a legislative proposal from the Commission. However, the ECI has been criticized for being top-down organized by EU institutions to cover the democratic deficit without really adding anything new. The institutions want the ECI to enhance EU legitimacy, but critics argue that it is only yet another way of influencing for Brussel-based CSO's already active at the EU level (Bouza, 2015).

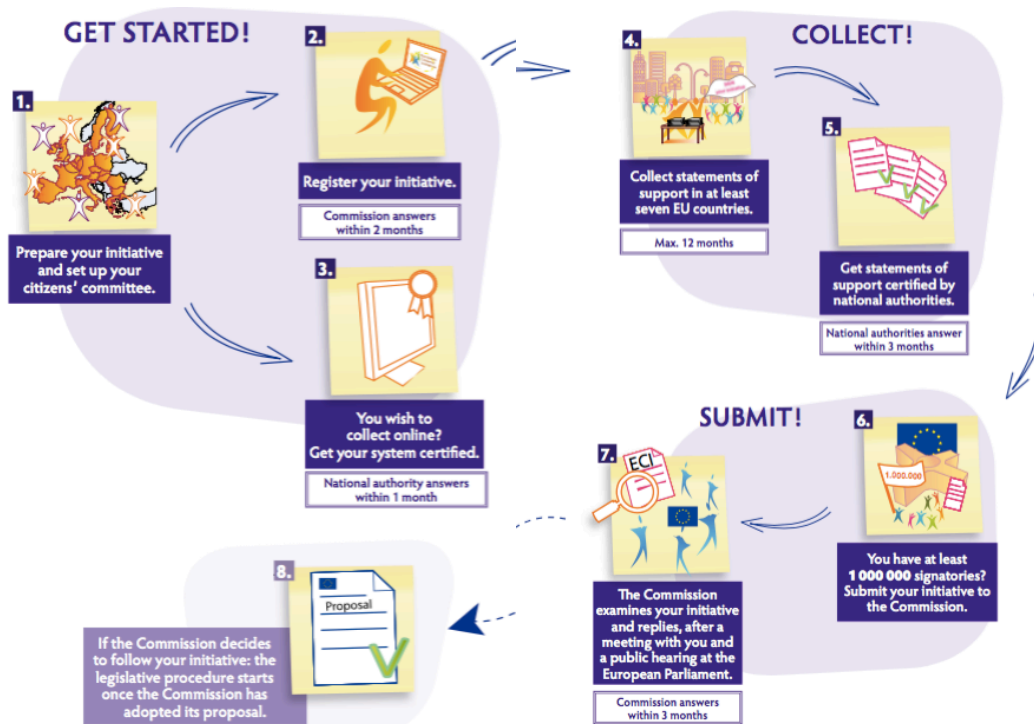
3 The European Citizens' Initiative

How can an ordinary EU citizen affect the EU? The “European Passport to active citizenship” lists for example writing a petition, voting in the EU elections, enrolling in a party and much more (EESC, 2015). The most direct way however, is the European Citizens' initiative. It is the first transnational citizens' initiative, where citizens in the EU has the possibility to influence the decision making by submitting a proposal directly to the Commission. The ECI is an agenda setting tool, a right for citizen to set the agenda in accordance with the rules of the ECI (Kaufmann, 2012).

The Commission has the full decision-making power as it decides whether to act or not on the proposal. Also, the ECI cannot be used to amend EU treaties (Organ, 2014). In the ECI, the power-sharing aspect is limited to the agenda setting, making it a tool of participatory democracy rather than direct democracy (Bouza García, 2013).

3.1 Procedure

Taking the ECI procedure from the launch to the finish line, this is what it looks like:



(pictures from the Commissions “Guide to the European citizens’ initiative”, 2015)

To make sure that the initiative is truly European, an organizing committee needs to consist of at least seven EU nationals to form an ECI. Members of the European Parliament may initiate an ECI, but they won’t be counted in the seven person’s requirement. Also, organizations such as Greenpeace can initiate an ECI, but it is individuals that take the responsibility of the initiative and the funding and support needs to be transparent (Kaufmann, 2012:237).

When the committee is formed they need to prepare a proposal, the so called initiative, including a reference to the relevant treaty provision on which the organizers base their case. It cannot be manifestly frivolous, abusive or vexatious, or is contrary to the values of the EU as set out in Article 2 TEU (ibid). The legal base for the ECI has proven difficult for many organizers, who do not have a legal background. The proposal needs to be within the EU treaties and the Commission

has made clear it won't accept any proposal extending EU competence (Organ, 2014:428).

The first contact with the Commission is when ECI organizers upload this online in one of the EU official languages, together with information on funding and support. Translations to other EU languages to gather signatures has to be approved by the Commission, to make sure the text is the same as the original. The Commission then has two months to check the ECI committee, the legal base of the ECI, that it's not abusive and that it's compatible with the EU values (art. 2 TEU). If the ECI is successful, the initiative is then officially registered. If not, the ECI can appeal their case (Kaufmann, 2012:237-238).

After being registered, the initiators have one year at their disposal to collect the required amount of one million signatures. The signatures have to come from at least seven different EU member states with different numbers of signatures required according to members in the EP. The online collection system has to be approved by the member state in which the signatures are collected (Davies, 2011). A person from an EU member state currently living in another might therefore experience troubles signing, as it is the member state that verifies the signatures and they often use ID-numbers and/or proof of residence (see for example the EU Ombudsman report, 2015). The age limit for signing is the same as for the EP election. The member states have 3 months to verify the signatures and if the one million threshold has been reached, the ECI can then be submitted to the Commission (Regulation No 211/2011).

The Commission publish the successful ECI "without delay" and then it has three months after submission to decide whether to propose legislation or not. It should also meet with the organizers and co-host a public meeting at the EP with

relevant actors. Legislative proposal or not, the Commission issue a communication on it's reasoning after a 3-month period and the organizers can then choose to accept the outcome or contest it in court. The whole process is estimated at 20 months (Kaufmann, 2012:239).

The ECI legal foundations can be found in the TEU and the provisions are set forth in article 11(4) (see section 2) and it also relates to article 21 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative (Consolidated version 01/07/2014) (hereafter the ECI Regulation), the above mentioned criteria and the ECI process are outlined. The Commission also has an implementing regulation (No 1179/2011) regarding the online collection system (OCS) and the parliament has implemented Rule 197a of Parliament's Rules of Procedure concerning the EP hearing (Novak, 2015).

3.2 The current status

Currently, there are four initiatives running on the Commission webpage, one finished collecting signatures in December 2015 and one withdrew in June 2016 (<http://ec.europa.eu>, 2016). The ECI Support Center also reported two new ECI's on their way in their January 2016 newsletter (ECI Support Center, 2016).

In March 2015, the Commission wrote a report on the ECI, in which it described the status of the ECI tool. At the time of writing this report, the Commission had received 51 requests for registration of ECI's, 31 of which were successfully registered (16 in 2012, nine in 2013, five in 2014 and one in 2015). 20

initiatives did not fulfill the registration check by the Commission and were not allowed to continue. 10 initiatives were withdrawn by its organizers, 18 were collecting statements of support until the end of their period and 3 succeeded to reach the threshold of 1 million. Two had received a formal response from the Commission (Right2Water and One of Us), one did so in June 2015 (Stop Vivisection). Out of all these initiatives, six citizens' committees brought their refusal to the General Court and One of Us also contested the Commission formal reply (Commission, 2015).

Three ECI's have succeeded to collect (over) one million signatures. The Right to Water had strong support from trade unions, the One of Us was supported by the Catholic church and the Stop Vivisection success was largely due to animal rights volunteers, mainly in Italy. While the Right to Water campaign benefited from a large pre-established network and financing, One of Us got publicity with both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis as supporters and they also got considerable funding. Stop Vivisection did not benefit from large funds, but generally benefited from an extensive use of social media (ecithatworks.org, 2014).

3.3 Who organizes an ECI?

There is some confusion whether the ECI is really a tool for citizens. Luis Bouza Garcia and Justin Greenwood takes a closer look at the ECI's, aiming to characterize the campaign committee and the organizations supporting the ECI. They conclude that users of the ECI are mainly new actors in Brussels and that they bring with them different issues (Bouza and Greenwood, 2014). In their analysis, they also include pilot initiatives starting before the ECI was officially launched.

However, leaving the pilot ECI's out still gives us a picture of the ECI as a tool for new actors in the EU.

Hedling and Meeuwisse categorize the ECI's according to three groups; "the political actors", "experts" and "the Erasmus generation", while emphasizing that they are not mutually exclusive (2015: 217). The political actors consist of politicians (both on an EU and local level), religious actors and civil society actors with a political agenda. The expert group are given less space in the research, being exemplified by the ECI Stop Vivisection and the Online collection ECI (Hedling and Meeuwisse, 2015:218). Lastly, the Erasmus generation are seen as individuals wanting to promote the European project, many of which are students or young EU professionals (ibid).

Bouza distinguishes the number of ECI's per type of organized interest in this manner:

<u>Type of organization</u>	<u>Number</u>
EU CSO's	15
National CSO's	22
Business	5
Undisclosed and New organizations	14
Officials	4

The category "undisclosed and new organisations" is explained by the fact that there is no identifiable organization promoting them. The ECI organizing committee is based on students or small groups of individuals seeking publicity. The results show that most of the EU organisations that does promote ECI's are not among the ones already based in Brussels (Bouza, 2015).

The web survey also revealed that most respondents got backing from some organization, mostly aided with signature collection however. Best practice and networking were also mentioned by some (Appendix I). In a publication, the founder of the ECI “Act4Growth” summarized why her ECI did not succeed, namely because of time, money and resources (ecithatworks.org, 2014), a recurrent theme. At the ECI day, one ECI organizer explained that he did not think that his ECI would stand a chance, had it not got the support from the trade organizations. It is costly and it demands knowledge about how the EU works just to make the ECI pass the Commission registration (Interview 14). The Right to Water (R2W) ECI was backed by the EPSU trade federation and benefited from their network, know-how and resources (Interview 9b, 2016). Most ECI organizers seem to acknowledge the fact that funds are needed to succeed with an ECI, even though this is not mentioned in the ECI regulation.

Ms. Del Pino, the executive coordinator of the ECI “One of Us” explained that she had a background in the Spanish pro-life movement, with some contacts with other like-minded entities in other countries before the ECI started (Interview 10, 2016). The Media Initiative, founded by Giovanni Melogli and Lorenzo Marsili, is another example of an initiative that had close connections with pre-established organizations, namely their own Alliance International de Journalistes and European Alternatives, respectively (Interview 12, 2016). Stop Vivisection, the third successful ECI, also had backing from pre-established animal rights groups, especially in Italy (Interview 3, 2016). Also, the Italian parliamentarian Beppe Grillo, leader of the political party the five-star movement, aided the campaign.

“he invested a lot in this campaign, on television, and public campaigning. (...) We would never have that amount of money, because the ECI brought in virtually nothing, without that good fortune from the Italians, we would never have gotten one million [signatures], that’s for sure” (ibid).

Many organizers had tried different ways of influencing the EU before launching the ECI, including sending petitions to the EP, contacting an EU and/or a national official to take up an issue at the EU level and two answered that they had previously participated in a consultation with the EP or the Commission (Appendix I). Some organizers had knowledge about the EU from work, for example Marcin in the Online collection ECI, who worked with the ECI IT collection system before. Giovanni from the Media Initiative previously worked as a policy advisor in the EP, from 2004 until 2009 (Interview 12, 2016).

The ECI campaigns seems to be very varied; who’s running them, the origin and who support them. There are few common denominators except that all seeks to influence the EU, just like lobbyists and civil society groups, other non-state influential actors. So are they any different from them? In section 6, ideal types of influence will be outlined, and in section 7 this will be tested on the ECI’s. Do they represent an own, new way of influencing the EU?

4 The European Parliament

In the European Union, the European Parliament represent the citizens, being directly elected every five year in EU-wide elections. There are currently 751 Members of Parliament (MEP's), with at least six MEP's from each member state, irrespective of size or population, and maximum 96 MEP's per member state (Art. 14.2 TEU). However, this has not always been the case. The European Parliament has through treaty changes transformed from an unelected, consultative body to the EU flagship of legitimacy and direct representation of EU citizens with substantial decision-making and executive powers.

In the Treaty of Rome, the then European Parliamentary Assembly only had consultative power. In the Summit Conference in Paris 1974 it was decided that the EP would be directly elected, instead of appointed by national parliaments, and the first EP election took place 1979. In 1975, the EP budgetary powers were strengthened (europaparl.europa.eu, 2016a) and in 1987, the Single European Act (SEA) involved the EP in accession and association treaties and introduced the co-operation procedure (art. 252).

In 1993, the Treaty of Maastricht granted the EP both legislative and executive power; the co-operation was accompanied by co- decision (art. 251). In 1999 the Treaty of Amsterdam the co-decision became the main legislative procedure and the number of areas in which it was applicable grew and put the EP on equal footing with the Council in about two-third of all legislation. The EP could also ask the Commission to present legislative proposals on specific policies.

(Lehmann, 2009) Also, the EP had to approve the Commission president, instead of merely being consulted. (Hix, 2002)

Finally, the Lisbon Treaty further extended the role of the EP and made it a true co-decision maker together with the Council, by making the co-decision procedure the ordinary legislative procedure, covering more areas than before, including the budget (art. 314 TFEU). Apart from electing the president of the Commission, the EP also needs to approve the rest of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (art. 17.7 TEU). It can vote for the resignation of the Commission in cases of misconduct and loss of trust (art. 17.8). It can also submit proposals to the Council on treaty reform (art. 48 TEU) and it can submit oral or written questions to both the Commission and the Council.

As citizen's representatives, the European Parliament can for example receive citizens' petitions and it elects the EU Ombudsman (stated in article 227 and 228 TFEU). The EP petitions committee (PETI) is responsible for receiving, debating and deciding on petitions from citizens. It may ask the European Commission to conduct an investigation or take action within the EP to attempt to solve the issue brought forward in the petition (europarl.europa.eu, 2016b).

The most important differences between a petition and the ECI are that the petition can be launched by only one person, whereas in the ECI there must be seven organizers from seven member states and that the ECI proposes a legal act to the Commission, whereas a petition merely reports an issue that affects the petitioner/s directly. Moreover, the ECI is addressed to the Commission and follow-up is mandatory within a set time frame, whereas the petition is addressed to the parliament and follow-up varies.

The EP did also have their own civil society project – the Agora. The EP invited civil society representatives to meet with members of Parliament where pressing problems of the union were addressed in a deliberative fashion. The input from the Agora was intended to aid the European Parliament in the decision making process (Roger, 2013). The EP organized four Agoras, in 2007 on the future of Europe, in 2008 on climate change, in 2011 on the financial crisis, and in 2013 on youth unemployment (europarl.europa.eu, 2013). The founding father of the Agora, Gérard Onesta, argued that EU needed to create a link between its institutions and the EU citizens in order to move forward with EU integration (Onesta, 2006:2). It closely resembles the civil society consultations of the Commission, the aim of the dialogue is consensus and topics are based on the EP calendar rather than citizen's ideas. Today, the Agora project seems to have faded away, with no reference to any coming ones or plans for the future.

4.1 The European Parliament and the ECI

The debate on popular influence is old in Europe, and the EP has been involved since the 80's. However, as stated above in section 2.1.2, when the Commission suggested a bigger involvement of CSO's in EU decision-making, the EP saw this as a threat to their own role and they have been reluctant towards participatory tools (Gaillard, 2014:96).

In the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2002, where the new EU treaty was discussed, NGO's successfully lobbied for the inclusion of citizens. A German representative brought forward the European Citizens' Initiative, which

would put citizens on equal footing with the European Parliament and the Council (Kaufman, 2012:231). As the Constitution was voted down in popular referendums, the Lisbon Treaty took form as a compromise, and the ECI was included in article 11.4 instead (Maiani, 2011).

After the Convention, the EP had changed its hesitant stance towards participatory tools, now being an advocate for a citizen's friendly ECI. The European Parliament presented its resolution on the ECI, written by the AFCO and PETI committees, in December 2010, in which it stated that the ECI should be user-friendly and not pose such an administrative burden to actors involved. This demand still echoes in the following EP reports. The admissibility check of the ECI's, the required number of member states from which signatures originate from and the time span for collection was also much discussed (Szeligowska & Mincheva, 2012:273).

The EP wanted the admissibility check to be when the ECI's started. The Commission's suggestion of one third of member state signatories was seen as too burdensome, so the EP suggested one fifth instead, and the time span for collecting suggested was suggested to be 18 months, instead of 12. When negotiating with the other institutions, the EP also fought for easier ID-requirements, but the Council did not agree and they remain a requirement today in some states. The EP also had to give up the time line amendment to be able to secure the right to a hearing in the EP for successful ECI's (Greenwood, 2015). The EP lost many of its core issues. However, it successfully lowered the threshold to a quarter of member states needed for signatures, and the admissibility check was finally put in the very beginning with registration (Szeligowska & Mincheva, 2012:273).

5 Research design

This section aims to explain the reasoning behind this thesis and the material used to discover the reasoning of actors from the European Citizens' Initiative and the European Parliament. This study takes on a rather novel subject, where previous research can only shed some light on the issue.

As stated above, this thesis takes inspiration from the research on political style by developing two ideal types of influence; lobbying and corporatism. Literature on the ECI is still grappling with how to classify and view ECI campaigns and this thesis is an attempt to use a novel approach to bring new knowledge on the issue by looking for patterns resembling the two ideal types. Evidence seems to suggest that the ECI tool not only attracts new actors and issues, but also that actors using it has a different logic on influence. In ideal type-analysis, the ideal types developed are not real, but rather the extreme version of themselves. This leaves the researcher with a "check list" which could help identify how close a group resembles the ideal, and if it does not – it might be more useful to call it something else. It doesn't paint the picture of a lobbyist, but rather of the "typical lobbyist" – how close does this person resemble the ideal type of a lobbyist? (Esaiasson et al, 2012:139-143).

In this thesis, two ideal types are put in place and both are given key characteristics, deducted from previous research. Worth to mention here is that it is not the persons that are of interest here – not the lobbyist him/herself but the concept of lobbyism, including the actors. Then the attention is turned to the ECI and its

actors – do they resemble either ideal type or do they have own characteristics, enough to build an ideal type of their own? Are they combining traits from both? Previous research has only categorized types of ECI organizers according to the persons in the ECI committees. What this thesis aims to do is looking at how they try to influence in the EU. By looking at how the ECI organizers view the ECI tool, a pattern is distinguished.

Having a better understanding of the ECI, its organizers, and how they seek to influence, the next question is how ECI organizers view the European Parliament and how the EP views the ECI and ECI campaigns. Of course, as there are 751 MEP's and even more staff in the EP, asking them all would be impractical. A consultation of official documents was carried out to get the official stance of the EP and then some semi-structured interviews were carried out with people involved with the ECI to get more in depth answers.

This thesis is inspired by the grounded theory approach, in which there is a constant movement back and fourth in the research process (Bryman, 2008: 545). The original research question was if the EP would feel threatened by the ECI as they could be seen as having a conflict of interest by both representing citizens. However, after consulting data on the ECI and analyzing legal texts, this was refuted and other interesting aspects showed up instead, leading the thesis to it's current research question. Grounded theory was also a useful approach when developing the ideal types. However, as the scope of this thesis did not allow for complete theoretical saturation, there could possibly be other interesting questions coming into light with more interviews (Bryman, 2008:543), which can be seen as a critique. Nevertheless, the thesis has resulted in new insights that might help understand the complex nature of transnational participatory democracy and more

precisely the reasoning of the EP and the ECI campaigns. Valuable input to the academic debate has been given, interesting questions and ground for further research.

On the comparison of the views of the ECI organizers and the EP regarding each other, this thesis has been more inspired by the case study approach (see for example George and Bennet, 2005); the views of the ECI organizers and the EP representatives are laid out and the aim is to see how they view each other, if this can be traced back to the ideal types and if these views could have any impact on the actors' behavior.

5.1 Method

To be able to get to know a person's view of something, one can usually not rely on official documents about the ECI only. To be able to get a more complete view of the ECI's, semi-structured interviews has been conducted with ECI organizers (see Appendix III). Well known for providing more detailed and unexpected answers, the structure of the interview also allows for some flexibility and follow up questions, while making sure that the interview stays on topic (Esaiasson et al, 2012:254). The interviews were based on the interview guide (Appendix III), but the order in which the questions were asked and the wording also depended on the answers, to allow for a more natural flow.

Interviews were carried out with both the three successful ECI organizers and with organizers from three unsuccessful ones, in terms of signatures. All ECI interviews except one was carried out via Skype and lasted on average for 30 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured in order to investigate what

background the ECI organizers had, how they used the ECI, how they organized and their views of the process and of institutional actors involved. All respondents were aware that their answers would be used in this thesis. The interviewees were selected as they represented a broad range of different sort of ECI campaigns and issues, both successful and unsuccessful and both ECI's with the intent to collect signatures and one where they had another logic.

Moreover, information on one ECI was taken from the ECI day mentioned in the introduction, where an organizer was presenting and answering questions about the ECI campaign he participated in. Also, a short survey was sent out to all the registered ECI campaigns. One interview was also conducted with Bruno Kaufmann, an expert on direct democracy, in order to give another view on the ECI campaigns and the response from the institutions. It was also carried out via Skype.

A web survey was made to test the questions for the interviews, but also to provide a picture of the familiarity with the EU that campaigners had, their views of the EP, their campaigning tactics and their ECI campaigns' level of professionalism. However, only one third of the initiatives answered, which is why the results are not generalized to be valid for all ECI campaigners. A summary of the findings, data and the questions can be found in appendix I. Although the response frequency did not reach 50 %, the findings still produced valuable new knowledge and interesting findings.

To use triangulation, a combination of different sources, has been important in this thesis, as some information is hard to get from only one place. Official documents such as minutes, legal texts and press releases has been used together with the results from the interviews and the web survey. Triangulation has

the benefit of cross-checking the data to make sure findings are correct and to ensure a higher validity of the findings (Bryman, 2008:379).

To find out the European Parliament's general view on the ECI tool and its organizers, and to provide a starting point for further interview questions, official documents such as reports and minutes were analyzed. This also provided new insights and a reformulation of the research question, as mentioned above. To find out the official stance of the EP on the ECI, official sources like the EP website and the EP political parties press releases were consulted as well as news articles.

The same logic as above applied in the interviews with EP actors, although a different interview schedule was used (Appendix II). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three members of the European Parliament (MEP), one MEP assistant and one political advisor face to face in Brussels, one MEP via phone, one MEP assistant via Skype and one MEP has answered questions via email. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. The aim with the interviews was to gain a more thorough understanding of how EP actors reason around the ECI, their views of both the tool itself, the proposals and of the ECI organizers. As this is a subject without much previous research conducted, this thesis aimed to provide a description of the views of the EP and the actors interviewed. The interviewees were aware that I would use the interviews in my research and the interviews were recorded. Two interviewees wished to look at the material before it was used in the thesis.

When choosing whom to interview, it is important to remember that the MEP's normally have a wide range of tasks at hand and one could not expect that every MEP would know about the ECI in detail. Several MEP's and other EP staff members also declined to participate in an interview as they felt they knew too little.

Considering what conclusions this thesis can draw from this material, this has to be taken into account. Members of the constitutional affairs committee (AFCO) and the petitions committee (PETI) were asked as the committees has been involved much in the ECI process. As such, the chance of them understanding the ECI was bigger and the interviewees also fitted with the logic in the ideal types. For example, previous research has shown that rapporteurs and chairs of committees face more intense lobbying efforts, as well as assistants or advisors. Were ECI's to think as lobbyists, chances would also be that they might have contacted some of these actors.

6 Ideal types of influence

Starting with a brief introduction of political style, the concept that influences the logic behind the ideal types, this section moves on to the logic of MEP's. As representatives of the EP, their logic is important to understand how an actor can influence EP decision making. Then, the two ideal types are described and the main traits are put together in a table, which will be used in section 7 as well.

Political style has been addressed in many ways by scholars, from Inglehart's broad depiction of a changed political style among the western publics (Inglehart, 1977) which mostly focused on values, to political styles of social movements (see for example McGerr, 1990). Political style research also focuses a lot on actors and leadership style (see for example Keller, 2005 and Hariman, 2010). As an example of how the concept can be used, let's look at Moffitt and Tormey. In their work on populism, they outline some difficulties with the label "populism" — an actor can be from both the left and the right of the political spectrum, have a loose or tight political organization, and incorporate different discourses and still be labelled a populist (2013). This could allow for an arbitrary definition of the concept and to avoid that, they identify common features of populist leaders, introducing the concept "political style" into the conceptual framework of populism (ibid). While Moffitt and Tormey seeks out a better definition of "populism" by using political style, this thesis aims to use the concept to develop two ideal types.

Klüver lists three preferences of the MEP's; first obtaining citizens support, second gaining support of actors with economic power and third acquire policy-relevant information (Klüver, 2013:39). To be re-elected, the MEP's has to show that they have acted in accordance to the wishes of their constituents. This means that MEP's are assumed to pay extra attention to NGO's or CSO's with a broad and big member base, as winning them over could mean support in an election campaign, and more votes. Gaining support from economically powerful actors could also benefit a campaign for re-election.

The MEP's are also bound by the values and norms of the EP and the EU. Including civil society and citizens and strengthening participatory democracy are values that are encouraged in the EU system and therefore every MEP has to conform to these values if they don't wish to be heavily criticized or shamed (Saurugger, 2010 and Klüver, 2013). If civil society or citizens chose to accuse the parliamentarians for not listening to them, or not taking their view in account when deciding on an issue, they could use shaming tactics against the EP and MEP's (Klüver, 2013).

The third factor that influences MEP's reasoning is the need for information. The EP handles very many diverging fields of law and decides on 2.790 texts per parliamentary term (Sabbati, 2015). The MEP's can't know everything in every field, and this makes it possible that they would appreciate to get input from interest organisations that they trust on matters they are deciding on.

Having outlined the MEP preferences, let's look at the actors that could use these facts to gain influence in the EU, namely the ideal lobbyist and corporatist.

6.1 The lobbyists

The word lobbying originates from the meetings with actors interested in influencing politics and politicians in hotel lobbies. There are still rather few laws regulating lobbying in the EU countries and many of those existing is codes of conducts of various sorts (Kalniņš, 2011:3). Lobbying is a contested concept, but it can be defined as:

“Anybody who acts on the instructions of a third party and sets out to defend the interests of that third party to the EP and other Community institutions” (Greenwood, 1997:83).

This definition excludes organizations that are engaged in lobbying for their own interests. The number of lobbyists accredited to the European Parliament has grown from around 800 in the early nineties to around 1200 in the mid-nineties, showing that lobbyists gradually understood the importance of the EP (Berkhout, 2015:3).

Lobbying in the EU takes various forms and the lobbyists are not homogenous actors, however, one can argue that business actors makes up most of the lobby groups aimed at the EU parliament (Coen, 2007). There is a core of lobbyists in the EU and that long term stability provides for good networks and better knowledge on EU issues and decision making (Shotton, 2015). Mostly assumed in the literature, the lobbyists are seen as people or firms with a permanent

base in Brussels, who use their influence, network and knowledge about the workings of the union to achieve goals for whoever is currently hiring them.

Lobbyists are strategic in who they chose to lobby, they are impatient as they have a client to deliver results to, and as such they try to lobby where it is deemed to have the biggest effect on the outcome. In the EP, it is the members with most influence that gets lobbied – that is the rapporteurs on issues and the shadow rapporteurs (Rasmussen, 2015:370). Opinion leaders, parliamentary assistants, committee administrators and group coordinators also holds valuable posts that can be used to influence legislation (Shotton, 2015).

Most lobbying takes place in committees, ahead of the plenary discussions. Interest groups lobby MEP's regardless whether that MEP seems friendly or not, as long as the lobbyist's proposal reaches the right persons early in the process (Rasmussen, 2015). Also, the lobbyists can't be sure of which party group will form the winning coalition. For that reason, it's better to lobby several of them even though they may not be sympathetic to the lobbyist views (Marshall, 2015). The MEP's seem to be aware of the situation where coalition members get more lobby attention than opposition MEP's (Mach, MEP).

In lobbyism research, the terms “outside” and “inside” lobbying are often used to refer to lobbying strategies, originally coined by Wyn Grant (1978). Outside lobbying tend work outside the rules of the game and the term “outsiders” are generally referring to anyone trying to influence decision makers through petitions or demonstrations for example, making this more useful to describe the ECI campaigners. However, Klüver asserts that most work on lobbyism is actually rather contradictory, for example different studies show different results on whether resources are crucial for lobbyism success or not (2013:13).

In this ideal type lobbyists are seen as insiders, meaning that they are recognized as lobbyists, they know and work within the rules of the game and decision makers consult them on basis of their expertise. Here, the characteristics for the typical lobbyist are outlined:

Actors	Arena	Arguments	Motivation
Insider experts in EU affairs, based in Brussels, employed to influence an actor	Private meetings with policy makers	Providing expertise/already made proposals in return for influence	Profit, delivering quick results to the client

6.2 The corporatists

The European tradition of corporatism means that the state provides institutional channels of influence for major interests such as labor and employer unions (Kalniņš, 2011:3). The EU has a long history of consulting with stakeholders, especially at the Commission, known for its active support of civil society organizations in order to legitimize their proposals (Klüver, 2013). As the CSO's have long been a partner to the EU institutions (see section 2.2), they have adapted to them, their consensus way of making decisions, the language and the thinking. To shape legislation, they make proposals in line with the institutional agenda. This could be viewed as a sort of corporatism, where the CSO's have a permanent representation in Brussels and deals with EU legislation on a regular

basis. They also have a large network with organisations similar of their own (Greenwood, 2015: 204).

Who are these civil society organisations? Klüver defines them as interest groups that have a political interest, but they are not seeking public office. They also have to have an organization, it cannot be just a movement, contrasting for example the women's rights movement with the European Women's Lobby – which is an organization (Klüver, 2013:25-26). They are mostly membership organizations and their aim can be compared with that of the lobbyist, but instead of the client, it is the members best interest that drives them. A big member base makes it more plausible for EU institutions to listen, as members are voters. To attract members, the organization must show that it's capable of fulfilling the member's interests, by directly and indirectly shape policy outcomes.

CSO's are mainly influencing with insider strategies, in the EP by contacting MEP's with information or suggestions for example. However, a number of newer organisations also influence with various outside tactics such as demonstrations or maybe supporting an ECI. Insider CSO's use their member base as proxy for citizens and trade legitimacy against influence with the EP (Bouza, 2012:338; Greenwood, 2015). As such, they do not need the ECI, but see it more as a threat to them and their legitimizing role in decision making, examples are provided by Bouza (2015), showing the Social Platforms answer to the Commission regarding the launch of the ECI. Instead of advocating for the ECI, the platform suggested the Commission to further enhance the civil dialogue (see also Greenwood, 2015:193), in which they would have a major role.

Summing up the patterns from this section, one can argue that there is an ideal type of corporatism, mainly insiders relying on their members and

experience to provide solutions in favor of their members by giving legitimacy to decisions.

Actors	Arena	Arguments	Motivation
Insider member organisations in Brussels	Consensual settings: dialogues, committee consultations	Providing citizens views, the member base legitimize their claims	Members interests, enhancing member base

7 Ideal ECI organizers and hesitant parliamentarians

This section aims to answer the broad research question “How can we understand the relation between the European Parliament and the European Citizens’ Initiative?” by answering the sub questions of the ECI ideal type and the EP perception of the ECI. Can the ECI be said to represent an own ideal type, are there any “typical ECI campaigns”? Could one detect traits of this also when investigating ECI organizers view of the EP?

What does the European Parliament really think of the ECI? So far, they have both been cherishing initiatives for their ability to put important questions on the agenda and making citizen aware of EU issues, while at the same time hesitating when it comes to giving EU citizens real power to change legislation. Is it possible to connect this to a discussion of ideal types?

7.1 The ideal ECI campaign?

Could the ECI form an ideal type of it’s own? The ECI tool shares some characteristics with the corporatist structure. The ECI was initiated by the European institutions, after successful lobbying (by organisations for direct

democracy), but in an attempt to legitimize the EU rather than empowering citizens, a trait shared with CSO's corporatism. However, the ECI relies more on the outsider logic of political pressure from the citizens than on insider tactics used by corporatists, it is built into the tool itself with the signature collection and reinforced by the actors that use it.

The actors behind an ECI were introduced in section 3.3. Most researchers find that the majority of ECI's are supported by organizations (for example Bouza, 2015:188). However, as mentioned above, it's mostly new actors without involvement in the EU decision making although they might have a network in Europe. One might even say that it is a fully thought through tactic by the ECI organizers, to gather support from as many organizations as possible to successfully reach out to more people all over Europe. Looking at the web survey, most respondents answered that they got support from organizations in the form of networking and spreading the word (Appendix I).

The support of organizations seems not to be about their involvement with the EU system, but simply to reach out to people, representing a different logic from corporatists. For example, the EPSU is not strictly a campaign organization, but in the Right 2 Water ECI, their strengths as an organization with both many members and an already established legitimacy and network in the EU helped (Interview 9b, 2016). The nature of EPSU is that of a lobby organization originally: "(...) we have lots of very strong ties with the EP, and with other European organizations, so we already got that kind of personal connection" (Interview 9a, 2016). This might go against the previous claim, however, in the case of the ECI though, signatures are all that matters, and the EP connections were more used to spread the word in order to get signatures. The R2W campaign did get a lot of

support from MEP's after the Commission's inability to act, but looking at the ECI campaign at large, the organizational structure was mostly used in order to get signatures.

Some ECI's are simply using the tool for publicity and even a rejection by the Commission could serve this purpose. Also, withdrawn initiatives stay on the Commission platform with contact details, websites, etc., also providing for free publicity (Bouza and Greenwood, 2014). Other actors also use the ECI to get a network started:

“Also, with the network from the ECI we now have the European network federation One of Us. (...) One of Us is well-known, we already have the name, and also the impact. Everyone identifies One of Us with defense of life in Europe” (Interview 10, 2016).

The Online Collection Platform ECI did not even start collecting signatures:

“This initiative was not really to collect one million signatures, because it's so hard to explain to people that's not involved in the process (...) It was just another pressure on the Commission to bring this up to discussion in a sense. Actually, the pressure was so big that the Commission needed to provide some hosting on their Luxembourg servers (...)” (Interview 11, 2016).

However, one should be careful measuring the success of an ECI like that. The point is that for many ECI organizers, starting an ECI might bring more benefits than an eventual answer from the Commission (Interview 1, 2016).

As the ECI is transnational, the question has to be one that everyone understands while still be relevant for many people and provoke debate. This is a common issue among organizers and the successful R2W organizers reasoned that part of their success was that their message was simple, consensual and easy to understand: “Water is a consensual issue, recognizing the right to water is an issue you can get a lot of people to stand behind” (Interview 9b, 2016).

Even with a super interesting issue at hand, collecting one million signatures is hard, regardless of what support you might have from organizations. “It was not difficult to convince anyone that freedom of the press is necessary in a democracy. The problem was to translate that support in signatures (...) (Interview 12, 2016). You also need a lot of volunteers. “If you want a successful ECI, you have to have a lot of troops on the ground. You have to have people that look for signatures every day, because it’s huge to collect one million signatures” (Interview 9b, 2016). Mr. Ménache from Stop Vivisection argued that all the requirements for signatories scared some people from signing, even though they might support your initiative (Interview 3, 2016). R2W and the Media Initiative chose consensual issues, Stop Vivisection and One of Us did not. The questions and the people behind an initiative might not help in establishing an ideal type, what is common is rather their way of thinking about signatures and impact.

Almost all ECI have a website, online campaigning is key after the activists collecting the signatures. The strategies most ECI organizers seemed to use was social media. Networking with national and transnational groups also

dominated the answers in the web survey, as well as engaging with national media (Appendix I). The Stop vivisection ECI had no budget, but they relied heavily on social media to extend the reach of the initiative for example (Interview 3, 2016).

The outside strategy deployed by ECI's is for example to point to democratic values, that if the Commission doesn't respond to the demands of ECI's, the democratic deficit would worsen or that they have an obligation to listen to the citizens. Ms. Waterworth from R2W exemplified with their situation: "[If the Commission answers] we appreciate what you say but respond with no legislation as the ECI was supposed to do, there's a problem there and I think we need to challenge them on that" (Interview 9a, 2016). Ms. Del Pino from One of Us also pointed to disappointed people she met from both the One of Us ECI, as well as conversations she had with others running ECI's, that they had lost faith in the EU (Interview 10, 2016).

Some campaigns are more professional than others, some ECI's have had large resources and staff, while others were run by one person coordinating it all. The former might use different arguments (democratic values of institutions) than the small ones (pushing citizens to act) and they may target different publics (Hedling and Meeuwisse, 2015:225-227). For example, the Media Initiative ECI had a very professional campaign using numerous ways to reach people; a video on their website explaining the ECI procedure and their aim, videos of MEP's signing their proposal, etc. (Interview 12, 2016). However, the goal is always the same: reach out to gain signatures.

7.1.1 The ideal ECI campaign

ECI campaigns are very diverse and there is more than one reason why an organizer starts an ECI. However, looking at the influence-part of the ECI campaigns, some common traits forming an ideal ECI can be deducted.

They have to mobilize large number of citizens which requires a transnational network. This is a different approach from most of the previous research, that only looks at the organizations “behind and ECI”. This approach makes it no secret that most ECI’s are backed by organizations – certainly the ECI’s don’t (see for example section 4.2.1.). What is interesting here is how the ECI organizers use the organizations, namely to spread the word and collect signatures. Therefore, the “actor” box here is labelled “Citizens forming transnational networks” as that is exactly what the citizens in the ECI committee are doing. How they do it or who they are aided by is not as relevant, although one can also note that most organizations forming an ECI’s network are new to the Brussels bubble. They do not rely on organizations for insider information or funds, primarily, but to reach out and make people sign.

They rely on outsider tactics, meaning mobilization, creating discussions and bringing up (usually) non-consensual issues. Mostly, they are primarily motivated by the ECI tool’s agenda setting potential, having the possibility to bring an issue in the light is enough to some. Representing (or being) citizens, they demand the attention of EU institutions, sometimes using the argument about the democratic deficit.

The ECI campaigns do share some characteristics with both corporatism and lobbyism in some respects, but overall, the logic of influence is

different. Using the same schedule as for lobbying and corporatism, this summarize the findings:

Actors	Arena	Arguments	Motivation
Citizens forming transnational networks	Mobilizing citizens using campaigns aimed to create discussion	Democracy; as constituents, the EU decision-makers should listen	Publicity and agenda setting

7.2 ECI organizers views of the EP

While most ECI organizers seem to have a similar view on the Commission, the views on the European Parliament differs among them. Most ECI organizers interviewed reported their ECI had some MEP's supporting them, and most ECI organizers seemed to have a rather functionalistic approach to them. Bearing in mind the ideal types, this section aims to understand how the ECI organizers view the European Parliament and what ideal type this view most closely resembles.

Most ECI organizers in the web survey had contacted MEP's and have gotten support for their ECI (Appendix I). The general view of the EP seems to be positive, as a supporter, among the ECI organizers. However, when Mr. Ménache from Stop Vivisection described the MEP interaction, it seemed to be occasional. Many MEP's were supporting the ECI in the public hearing, but they were also hard to get hold of during the campaign: "(...) the Italian MEP's mostly had contact with Italian activists (...) But for most of the time, I would say it was just an occasional email" (Interview 3, 2016).

He was also critical about the way the Stop Vivisection EP hearing was conducted, where the hearing took the form of a debate, not giving enough room for the organizers or the invited experts to explain the issue properly:

"We [the ECI organizers] were given a total of 34 minutes to speak in an audition that lasted for three hours. So, they asked him [Dr. Ray Greek, a known expert] to go from California to Brussels, and there they gave him 12 minutes of speaking time" (Ibid).

A smaller ECI also discovered difficulties in reaching out to MEP's:

“We got some political support, but when we tried to organize an official meeting with the MEP and the media, it was ‘not possible’. This was after it was clear we would not get one million signatures” (open answer in the web survey, 2016).

Smaller ECI's without substantial funding and/or without people with knowledge about the EU thus seemed to have a slightly more negative stance against the EP than larger and more professionalized ECI campaigns. The professional ECI campaigns did not seem to have the same issues to contact MEP's. However, the organizers of R2W also expressed understanding for the MEP's situation:

“(…) MEP's inboxes are flooded with literally hundreds of emails every day. Even if it's something they are really interested in, it might just get missed – and it's not them reading, it's their assistants” (Interview 9a, 2016).

One of Us had some MEP's openly supporting the campaign, and they benefited from the media attention this provoked, explaining that prominent politicians supporting their campaign helped them to reach out to more people, as they attract more media coverage (Interview 10, 2016). The Media Initiative organizer explained that his ECI used the MEP's to reach out to their constituents. He also knew whom to contact:

“You start with some influential members, for example chairs in political groups (...) in particular we contacted members of the cultural committee (...) The important part was the competence of the members” (Interview 12, 2016).

The Media Initiative also worked to get formal support from the political groups, for them to spread the word as part of their own campaigns. The organizers of R2W had the resources to let two employees work almost full time only with the ECI and building relations with MEP's. The R2W relied used the MEP's support much like the other ECI's – to spread the message, for them to re-tweet and share the R2W updates etc. However, they also got support of a more institutional character, from the own-initiative report by MEP Lynn Boylan, urging the Commission to take action on the ECI.

“Lynn would be one of the MEP's we've got support from along the way (...) She would have her interest because she understands the Irish water movement (...), I think they [the campaigns] mutually supports each other (...)” (Interview 9a, 2016).

MEP's also support R2W because they know that EPSU backs it up: “(...) we are a huge organization, with millions of workers and for many MEP's, they have a big interest to work with us as well.” (Interview 9b, 2016).

This seems to indicate that in some ways, ECI campaigns could think more in a lobby-oriented way (the Media Initiative) or as a corporatist (R2W). Also, it might indicate that from a MEP perspective, it makes more sense to keep in touch

with a bigger/more professionalized ECI campaign, which relates to the discussion in section 6.

Regarding the European Parliaments role in the ECI overall, Mr. Melogli argued: “I think the EP played the best role possible. They tried recently to revise the ECI (...), they still believe in this tool (...) (Interview 12, 2016). Some ECI campaigns think the EP does not support the ECI in general and their ECI in particular (Appendix I). Regardless of positive or negative answers regarding the EP role, many ECI campaigns seemed to view the EP as toothless in the ECI process. “(...) the role and the support of the EP and many members is not enough to collect one million signatures” (Interview 12, 2016).

Many ECI’s realize that the EP is good for publicity and legitimacy, but they doubt the concrete impact it makes in the ECI process: “(...) if there’s nothing that the EP can challenge [veto] (...) then their power is purely influence (...)” (Interview 9a, 2016). Ms. Del Pino from One of Us argued that the EP currently has no role at all, but that they should have a bigger role as they would take the decision on the proposal that the ECI is thought to produce. “And also to send a message to the citizens, that the parliament listens to the citizens” (Interview 10, 2016).

Having the ECI campaigner’s views on the EP, what ideal type could these views then most closely resemble? It seems to be a divide between professional and/or large ECI campaigns and amateur and/or smaller campaigns (in terms of signatures). The former seems to lean towards the lobby/corporatist ideal type and the latter towards the ECI type. Mr. Melogli from The Media Initiative knew very well whom to lobby in a lobbyist fashion and R2W had two full time employees working almost exclusively with the EP – closely resembling ideal type

of the corporate ideal type, where insider member organizations provides citizens views to MEP's to enhance members interest. The R2W organizers themselves said that this was the EPSU rationale.

However, the lobbyist type almost exclude itself as no ECI was looking for neither quick results, profit or acted on a third party's behalf. Moreover, looking at the way they were approaching the EP, by mobilizing citizens and asking for MEP's support – not to change legislation but to spread the message, the conclusion would still be that they would more closely resemble the ECI ideal type. All initiatives recognized the EP as a good partner for publicity reasons and used the ECI to put an issue on the agenda, which is much in line with the ECI ideal type. This is also much in line with the findings of Gaillard, (2014:89). However, most initiatives also claimed that the support of the EP alone would not generate signatures, and even institutional support in the form of adapted reports did not help to get the issue into concrete action. The ECI organizers seemed to understand this issue, but they nevertheless view the EP as a vital partner.

7.3 The European Parliaments view of the ECI

In this section, the reasoning of the European Parliament will be further uncovered (see also section 4.1). What is the official stance of the EP on the ECI tool? What do the interviewees think about the revision of the ECI, about their own role and about the ECI in general? Is it possible to relate their answers to the discussion above about the ECI ideal type? How can the relationship between the EP and the ECI be understood?

The European Parliament has shown a great interest in the ECI ever since the drafting of the ECI Regulation. It has held hearings with the three successful initiatives and the EP has cooperated with civil society in order to gain a better understanding of how the instrument has been implemented. The EP has framed itself as positive, as a promoter of a citizen friendly ECI. “During the law-making process they made every effort to make the initiative as user-friendly as possible” (Berg and Thomson, 2014). However, concerns have also been aired about the ECI being seen as a threat to the representative functions of MEP’s and about the initiatives themselves.

“Let me be clear, there will sometimes be frontal disagreement over an initiative. But if there is such disagreement, let it take the form of a dialogue, an exchange of views, rather than a confrontation from which the democratic framework itself comes out as the loser.” (ibid)

Mr. Schulz also mentions the ECI as a balance between corporate lobbying and citizens (ibid). The EP has also released several studies on the ECI, for example the

study “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation” in 2014, in which the European Parliament shine light on issues experienced by ECI campaigners and possible solutions. It also assesses the tool more in general terms and propose solutions to the Commission to ensure the ECI works (Ballesteros and Zaci, 2014).

Several MEP’s has also officially supported initiatives. In an own initiative report, MEP Lynn Boylan asked the Commission to follow up the Right to Water ECI with legislative action, a report that gathered substantial support and was successfully voted through in the EP (Boylan, 2015). The constitutional affairs committee (AFCO) and the petitions committee (PETI) are involved in the ECI, and the AFCO released a report on the ECI, with amendments from PETI and the legal affairs committee. It resulted in the European Parliament resolution of 28 October 2015 on the European Citizens’ Initiative (2014/2257(INI)), voted through in the Parliament with big support. The report called on the Commission to revise the ECI Regulation, to raise the public awareness of the ECI, improve the online collection of signatures, establish (another) independent body to give advice to organizers, setting up an ECI office in its representations in each member state, explain better its reasons to reject ECI’s and provide measures to improve the user-friendliness of the tool (europaparl.europa.eu, 2015).

There were issues where EP was not entirely united. The final version of the report also asked the Commission to follow up a positive opinion of an ECI with a legislative act within 12 months (europaparl.europa.eu, 2015). The Green party group with Mr. Terricabras as a shadow rapporteur argued for the ECI to have a mandatory legislative outcome so that the proposal could be debated in the EP. However, the party group’s internal discussions took too long, which led MEP

Schöpflin to make a coalition with the S&D group instead. As the S&D group had a more hesitant stance on the issues that might arise through the ECI, it was decided not to push for a mandatory follow-up (Interview 8, 2016).

However, in the Commission follow up, they argued that three year's time is not enough to evaluate the tool, without further specifying when they will revise it instead (Commission follow up, 2016). This of course sparked frustration in the ECI community (see for example citizens-initiative.eu, 2016) and among parliamentarians.

It was seen as “extremely disappointing” by the Greens shadow rapporteur Mr. Terricabras. The rapporteur for the EP resolution, Mr. Schöpflin was looking for a compromise proposal that would go through the Commission but PETI member Mr. Csáky reasoned that the EP did a mistake not pushing harder for EP involvement and for strengthening the ECI in general:

“You see, we were not very revolutionary but it was not accepted by the Commission anyway! It would be good if the EP had a stronger position in all of this [ECI] process” (Interview 6, 2016).

Mr. Schöpflin, was also disappointed:

“(…) I'm really disappointed; I did really think the Commission would move forward. I did not expect radical change, but I thought they would look at the [ECI] Regulation, thought they would revise it, including some of my proposals (...) the fact that there is now 50 something initiatives and not one has succeeded, now that tells me it's a total

failure” (Interview 5, 2016).

He also reflected on the Commission stance from an institutional perspective:

“The fact that the Commission is actually not doing anything, it’s telling me that they are actually disregarding the EP’s will (...) disregarding elected representatives – again very interesting legitimacy questions there. Legally, the Commission has every right to do so. (...) is this a political decision on Timmermans part, not to proceed? I don’t know” (ibid).

The successful ECI’s has naturally sparked debate among the EP party groups, where the ECI R2W has been debated more extensively in all party groups thanks to the Lynn Boylan report. Most party groups have expressed positive views on both the ECI itself and the ECI tool (theparliamentmagazine.eu, 2014). Stop Vivisection and One of Us has been received more cautiously, with for example the S&D and the European People’s Party groups opposing Stop Vivisection while it’s been supported by the Greens and the radical left (euractiv.com, 2015). The ECI One of Us has only received support from the EPP group (eppgroup.eu, 2014). Other party groups have adopted a strong stance against it, for example the S&D group, ALDE, the Greens and GUE/NGL (see for example womenslobby.org and guengl.eu, 2014).

In sum, one could conclude that the official stance of the EP seems to be positive towards the ECI as a tool, although they do not demand that the ECI

should be able to ask for treaty change. The EP did not ask for mandatory follow-up by the Commission neither and they leave to the ECJ to decide whether the Commission registration procedure is fair and just (citizens-initiative.eu, 2015). This could be seen as hesitant, as not fully supporting citizens empowerment and perhaps it's a sign that some of the questions brought up by the ECI were not expected and has made MEP's and parties wary of the outcomes of the ECI.

Turning to the interviewees view of the ECI tool, there were some different wordings, but most of them thought of the founding of the ECI as a bridge between the EU citizens and EU institutions. One interviewee did not agree with this position however:

“I think it would be a mistake to consider the ECI as a remedy of the so called democratic deficit. The [ECI] Regulation says that if it is one million signatures, it should be discussed. That's all. According to my opinion, that is no improvement of European democracy. My opinion is that the whole ECI is a bad idea. It is just to pretend there is more democracy. I don't think it can be useful. What I think is useful is elements of direct democracy on the national level.“ (Interview 4, 2016).

Most interviewees saw the ECI as a tool for letting citizens have a say, but did not view it as representative of citizens views in general. “I think it is an essential tool but perhaps not the overall representative of citizens. I would call it a strong representation of citizens' feeling and ideas” (Interview 7, 2016). Others

advocated for more tools for citizens' participation, that the ECI was just one out of many possible ways. "(...) [The ECI is] just one path, we should open many more [for citizens] (...)" (Interview 15, 2016).

Most interviewees had not been contacted by ECI campaigners, although a MEP assistant explained that contacting MEP's had been the approach of many ECI's, especially the three successful ones and especially during the election campaign.

"They definitely approach EU institutions. I don't think they approach them in a good way, it's a lot of campaigners trying to get signatures from MEP's, thinking that with an MEP they will have a political party on the EU level and then it would spread all over Europe. It's not working at all. (...) They also asked us to take a position "as a political party", "as a candidate", "as an MEP looking for a second mandate", will you support our proposal? This is really clever, a normal way to lobby. This shows how well structured these ECI's are. The only ones we received this from were the ones succeeding. So you can really see a difference between campaigns also." (Interview 2, 2016).

Collecting MEP's support to gain signatures connects to the arguments of the ECI organizers and the findings in the previous section. However, as acknowledged by both the ECI campaigners and the MEP assistant, this approach did not actually work in terms of materializing support to signatures.

The majority of the EP interviewees seemed to separate ECI's from lobbyists or established organizations.

“Well, in general I would say that lobbying activity has a more egoistic character (...). There’s an industry, or enterprise (...). I think it is a more responsible and a more non-egoistic position of the ECI’s” (Interview 15, 2016).

They also seemed more open to meet with citizens from an ECI than with a lobbyists and they also seemed to arrange the meeting in a different manner, handling it more as time to listen to their constituents (Interview 7, 2016).

7.3.1 Relating the ECI to the own role

When asked to relate the ECI to the own role, most interviewees saw dialogue as the main priority for the European Parliament in the ECI process. Only one hearing in the EP for a successful ECI won’t suffice, according to most interviewees. “Like the Stop Vivisection hearing, that was the main thing really, it’s just gone away since then” (Interview 7, 2016). Many thought that the EP needs to improve on this and provide a better visibility of the ECI.

“I think the EP could take a stronger lead in informing citizens better. I don’t even think citizens know of all the rights they have, I don’t think member states inform them and they also should” (Interview 8, 2016).

Mr. Mach was more critical about this however:

“I think it is ok, it’s just a petition and I don’t expect anything from this petition so (...) I think we can’t simply improve it by giving the EP a bigger role in it” (Interview 4, 2016).

ECI rapporteur Mr. Schöpflin instantly rejected any theories mentioning the EP feeling threatened by the ECI. “I don’t for a second think that the ECI is a rival to parliament, we are elected representatives, the people in the ECI are doing something else” (Interview 5, 2016).

The overall view of the EP actors seemed to be that MEP’s are in the EP to represent EU citizens. Everyone seemed to view their own role as being a facilitator for the citizens, help them voice concerns and create a balance between citizens and member states. “It’s not only an EU for the governments, Europe is for people too” (Interview 6, 2016).

It seemed like many of the interviewees were much in favor of a well done and fair representation of the citizens, but what about citizen participation? How should the MEP role look like, should they be supporters or not or not engage in the ECI at all? How should that support look like? Most EP actors were in favor of MEP’s supporting ECI’s, but whether that support should be public or not was not very clear. Some argued that the ECI was for citizens, and therefore, support should not be public.

“Since it is really a citizens’ initiative, not politicians or elected people, we should just sit in the back of the whole thing, probably, help and support. Of course we should support, but in a discrete way (...)” (Interview 15, 2016).

Others pointed to the MEP's already having other venues to use for their agenda and politics. "I see ECIs an important tool for citizens who want to change things. As a MEP there are other avenues available to me to effect change" (Interview 16, 2016). A similar issue has also been raised in the petitions committee, where MEP's have sent in petitions. They are entitled to do so, and they can also be involved in an ECI, only though they won't be counted as one of the necessary seven citizens (see section 3.1).

"I can safely say that we don't mind if they would sign a petition, or being involved in it, but initiating it? They are already working in the EP; they already have the possibilities to bring out issues here. It's for the citizens, ideally" (Interview 8, 2016).

Positions on this seems to vary among the interviewees, as there are also those who thinks that active, public involvement in an ECI is totally ok and just another way of making politics. MEP's have actually already been involved in many ECI's, for example in the ECI's UBI, Stop Vivisection and the minority safe pack.

"I think, generally, it's not a major problem. (...) Of course some MEP's are or will be active in some initiatives but it's their right, and if they are able to create support for one million signatures in different societies, why not? (...) I don't think it would be a danger for this instrument" (Interview 6, 2016).

The MEP's supporting an ECI is not seen as an issue by the rapporteur either, although Mr. Schöpflin also doesn't think that MEP support alters the outcome in any way.

“It's ok, I don't have a problem with it. I can see that technically; in theoretical terms it might be a conflict of interest. I can't see how the presence of a MEP would significantly change anything. It's the quantity [of signatures] that counts” (Interview 5, 2016).

Moreover, involving the MEP's in an ECI might actually be used to include new issues for debate.

“On average ECIs bring up different subject than the Commission would propose legislation on. ECIs also tend to shed a different light on the general topics than the Commission would” (Interview 16, 2016).

In sum: the EP actors seem to have a common stance that the European Parliament should enable citizens to bring forward an ECI and that MEP's are free to help them. Some of them argue that using citizens' tools to drive an own agenda or to promote themselves by publicly supporting an ECI campaign is not fair, as MEP's have other venues. However, the ECI also has the potential to bring new questions to the discussion table.

The interviewees were chosen based on their knowledge about the ECI. How much do they think that the rest of the EP know of the ECI? “I would say that the overwhelming majority of MEP's know very little about [the ECI]. We can't know everything” (Interview 5, 2016). The ECI is also not a very frequent

topic in debates, but if this is a result of little knowledge about the topic, time pressure or disinterest is hard to tell.

“There is a lot of support, but do I hear passionate speeches about the ECI? No, not really. (...) just because it doesn’t come up frequently doesn’t mean its not valued by the MEP’s” (Interview 7, 2016).

It seems like it’s up to the individual MEP how much they would like to be involved, and how much time they would like to devote on an ECI, depending on how well the issue corresponded to their political views. For ECI organizers to meet with an MEP, it seems to depend on how much support you have, which is interesting when comparing findings from the previous section on the ECI actors.

“If you have a few hundred thousand signatures... MEP’s either from your country, or they support your value politically, then I think you would have a good chance to meet with someone” (Interview 7, 2016).

7.3.2 Sensitive issues and difficult debates

While the general view of the EP and its actors seem to be that citizens should be included and their issues heard, it is clear from the interviews and the EP parties press releases that all issues are not seen as appropriate for the ECI or for the EP to discuss. Generally, the interviewees answers seem to reflect that MEP’s are worried as the ECI cannot be steered and all interviewees acknowledge that

some MEP's actually seems uneasy with the ECI. This issue has also come up in the PETI.

“(...) some of [the MEP's] seemed worried about topics and debates which were not in their favor. Let's say a million people were against gay marriage, (...) but most parties are in favor. If that would come up, politicians would not like to face a proposition to ban this” (Interview 7, 2016).

This issue is also something which Mr. Csáky in the PETI reflects on, when thinking about the sensitive issues that the ECI might bring up.

“For example abortion rights or rights of sexual minorities are sensitive questions for a lot of societies and they have different positions. If, by the ECI, someone would influence in the legal way in EU, for example in these specific questions, that might be a problem. It might cause tension in the EU society (...) there are different positions, hard to harmonize. I also accept this argument, but why not try to prepare such a compromise? After [the proposal by the ECI], in the second round, we have a chance to discuss the details, to try to make it into a more sophisticated version (...) I think that the argument about sensitive or difficult questions is not a good argument, generally.” (Interview 6, 2016).

Instead of dismissing the ECI, Mr. Csaky points to possible solutions when sensitive issues might arise. The concern of the MEP's seems to be that when sensitive issues might reach their table, they might be hard to fit within the program of their political groups, or even their domestic party. “Some of [the MEP's] are

reluctant, because they think that this direct intervention of people is a danger, which is a very comic comment of course (...) (Interview 15, 2016).

Mr. Terricabras highlights an interesting aspect here, touched upon earlier, that some MEP's might even dislike the idea of citizen participation in politics. Therefore, they are not very interested in supporting the ECI.

As many ECI campaigns deals with issues that normally doesn't reach the EP, this has caused some to question if ECI organizers are really using the tool as intended? Views among interviewees differ on this point, with some questioning MEP's reluctance towards the ECI and others pointing to the difficulties. The ECI is officially, according to art. 11.4 TEU, there for citizens to suggest proposals to help implement the Treaties.

“(...) there are some issues which have been presented that don't go in that direction. As you saw with the One of Us ECI, that got a million signatures but it was a very sensitive subject for many. It was not what the instrument was intended for, to bring up morals or ideologies and discuss them in this way” (Interview 8, 2016).

Mr. Schöpflin also point to the same conclusion, giving an example of the (now withdrawn) ECI Wake Up Europe.

“As for Wake up Europe, (...) it's a very political ECI, the ECI community doesn't like it, it's not what the ECI was thought to be about. I think the ECI is open to various forms of use which were not, I

think, there in the initial intention (...). But the instrument [the ECI] as such is not necessarily a bad one” (Interview 5, 2016).

ECI’s dealing with sensitive issues on morals and ethics or initiatives pointing fingers at one country are seen as problematic by the EP actors. Everyone acknowledge that MEP’s seems worried that the ECI would worsen the picture of the EU rather than aid EU integration by the ECI. However, everyone but one interviewee supports the idea of the ECI tool.

How could the European Parliament tackle these issues? Most respondents think that the EP needs to be open and debate the issues brought up by ECI’s, even issues that might not suit the traditional left-or right wing scale. By being open, discussing and trying to understand why citizens are bringing certain things up, the EU could also hinder anti-EU sentiments.

“I don’t judge... the questions that interests’ citizens. I think we have to be extremely open to all questions and desires citizens have (...) So I accept extremely different initiatives and I would agree in principle with all of them. If you look at the ECI initiatives up until now, you see that things are brought up that has not been defended before, and that’s important. Why are citizens engaged in that?” (Interview 15, 2016)

The ECI tool was accused of producing anti European initiatives by the Commission (www.euractiv.com, 2016), a statement that was thought to be true for some ECI’s, but far from all of them by the interviewees.

“Then you are into the discussion of what European is. Maybe people just have the wrong idea about the EU and this is what needs to change? I think the R2W is a good example, I don’t think that is protesting anything, it’s calling for a right to be protected. (...) some ECI’s are much more difficult because they don’t carry the political support of the mainstream. People all over EU are currently voicing dissatisfaction in many different ways: The ECI has become another way for people to do that (...)” (Interview 7, 2016).

Again, this relates to the politics of the EP, that some ECI’s would perhaps be harder for an MEP to fit into their political party view. Also, not all ECI’s labelled as anti-European would be seen as such by others, “I do think that [ECI’s] are in general more pro-European. They might criticize the job of the EU Commission, but it does not mean it’s not pro EU” (Interview 2, 2016).

Regarding the future for the ECI tool, the response is mixed. When the ECI was launched, there was a wave of optimism. So far, the Commission have only received three successful ECI’s and only made a few statements on each. “It’s not really reflective of the efforts brought in. I actually think the petitions committee is a better way to access the Commission” (Interview 7, 2016). This statement reflects the view of many interviewees, that the ECI effort right now is not really “worth” it, as the Commission treats the ECI more as a petition at the moment. “I think [the ECI] is still alive (...) but it’s actually not doing anything” (Interview 5, 2016). The number of people that chose to start an ECI has gone down.

“I’m afraid it’s the picture of the disillusion of civil society and citizens.

I said it would be good if it’s a real and effective instrument, for the citizens, more effective than the petition right” (Interview 6, 2016).

In the ECI, single member states cannot block an issue in the same way as they can with petitions, the issues are European and the signatures ensure a wide appeal among citizens. “That’s why I see this as an important instrument for the future of the EU” (Interview 6, 2016). There is hope from most interviewees that the ECI will transform to a working tool to bring citizens closer to the politicians in Brussels, but for now, everyone seems to agree that it is not working.

To conclude, this section has shown that the EP actors interviewed see the ECI as a tool for letting citizens have a say, but do not view it as representative of citizens views in general. Most interviewees haven’t been contacted by ECI campaigners, and the majority of the interviewees seem to separate ECI’s from lobbyists. It seems up to individual MEP’s how much they get involved in an ECI campaign, depending on how much support the ECI has, the origin and the question. This is interesting, taking into account the MEP preferences outlined in section 6 and the answers from the ECI campaigners.

Most interviewees saw dialogue as the main priority for the European Parliament in the ECI process. They viewed their own role as MEP’s as being a facilitator for the citizens, to help them voice concerns and create a balance between citizens and member states. However, positions vary among interviewees whether it is appropriate if and how a MEP should support an ECI campaign. Most of the

EP actors think that signing an ECI is ok, while there is both advocates for MEP's starting an ECI and those that thinks this is for citizens only.

Sensitive issues that are hard to include in a political setting and the uncertainty of the ECI's seems to make MEP's uneasy with the tool. Some interviewees are hesitant towards this kind of citizens' inclusion, thinking that a lot of the ECI campaigns are not in line with the original intent of the ECI. Others view it as a benefit, as a tool to raise new subjects on the EU agenda. Regardless, most interviewees think that the EP needs to discuss the ECI more, be open to the issues brought up and meet difficulties with a political response instead of restricting views, in the way that many think the Commission is doing by not making the ECI more user-friendly.

8 Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question “How can we understand the relation between the European Parliament and the ECI?” As the ECI’s are very diverse, this thesis looked for patterns to develop an “ideal ECI” type. The “ideal ECI campaign” would be citizens forming a transnational network, they mobilize other citizens using campaigns aimed at creating discussion and their primary motivation is to gain publicity for their issue and set the agenda. They argue that their issue should be listened to as they are and represent EU constituents. Looking at the interviewees, it seems like this ideal type would hold true to most of them, to a larger or lesser extent.

This pattern was found also when looking at ECI campaigners reasoning about the European Parliament. The EP was seen by most in a functionalistic way as an ally. It is seen as too weak to change the mind of the Commission but powerful in providing legitimacy and publicity to the ECI campaign. However, both ECI organizers and EP actors acknowledged that the support of MEP’s would not necessarily result in any large amount of signatures for an ECI. Nevertheless, ECI organizers still view the EP as a vital partner to succeed, although one organizer pointed out that the EP should enhance its role in the ECI process to still be relevant.

The EP actors did not deliver a corresponding view on the ECI organizers as being partners in all aspects. Rather, it seemed like MEP’s are worried about the issues that the ECI brings up. Many pointed to One of Us and Stop

Vivisection that brought up moral and ethical issues that the MEP's does not know how to handle and include in political debates or programs. Some interviewees even questioned if some ECI's were in line with the original intent of the tool, which is much in line with the Commission reasoning (Bouza and Greenwood 2014:263). Others instead pointed to the importance of letting citizens airing subjects they deem as important. Although mentioned by some, the main line of thought did not seem to center around the ECI campaigns as political partners but rather as something the MEP's needed to support and that the EP should listen to, but not necessarily act on.

However, the EP actors did seem to view the ECI organizers in line with the ideal type provided above – most of them denied the ECI working as lobbyists and most of them talked about ECI's as “citizens” rather than organizations and civil society. This is interesting, as this was seen as something positive – everyone but one agreed that the ECI was a splendid tool, they seemed only to have objections when it came to the questions of some ECI's. This also correspond with the official stance of the EP and the EP political parties.

Although the ECI tool is heralded as the bridge that is supposed to connect EU institutions with its constituents, many also acknowledged that many of the ECI proposals are hard to include in a political agenda. Moreover, the ECI is not seen as representative of citizens views and worries still exists that the tool will be hijacked by extremists or populists. This might also be some of the reasons why the EP did not suggest a more powerful and influential ECI tool in it's report to the Commission, combined with the knowledge that the Commission had a restrictive stance towards the tool as well.

What could be said of the future of the ECI? Both ECI organizers and most of the EP actors interviewed seemed united in the claim that the ECI needs revision to become more user friendly. Also, many argued that the EP should have a bigger role in debating the ECI proposals and informing citizens of the tool. One of the main challenges for the tool seem to be the vast ignorance of the EU citizens.

This study showed that there are diverging opinions about the ECI in the EP. However, to detect a pattern regarding who is more positive or negative towards the tool and how that might affect it in the long run, a study of greater scale would be needed. This study suggests researchers to not only look at individual characteristics in ECI campaigns, but also to treat them all as an entity to understand the progress or regress of the tool and the institutional response from others. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate the views of the MEP's on citizens' initiatives on a larger scale, comparing domestic politician's views on citizens' initiatives with those of the MEP's in the EU.

The ECI tool brings up new issues and invites new actors to Brussels. However, it is not the only tool to do so and due to it's current limited impact, citizens find other ways to influence EU politics. Maybe lessons for the ECI development could be learned if one compares the ECI, EP petitions and petition websites like change.org. How could the future of citizens' engagement look like in the EU?

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List of interviewees

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Interview 2: Gaillard, Romain, assistant to Durand, Pascal MEP. Skype interview the 23rd of March.

Interview 3: Ménache, André, scientist from Stop Vivisection. Skype interview the 4th of April.

Interview 4: Mach, Petr, Member of the European Parliament, member of AFCO, Interview the 5th of April.

Interview 5: Schöpflin, György, Member of the European Parliament, AFCO rapporteur on the ECI follow-up report. Interview the 6th of April.

Interview 6: Csáky, Pál, Member of the European Parliament, vice-chair in PETI, Interview the 6th of April.

Interview 7: Howie, Thomas, Assistant to Jude Kirton-Darling and Paul Brannen MEPs, interview the 6th of April.

Interview 8: Byrne, Vivienne, political advisor. Interview the 8th of April.

Interview 9a: Waterworth, Ruby, communications and campaigns officer, R2W.

Interview the 11th of April.

Interview 9b: Durivaux, Guillaume, policy staff at EPSU. R2W. Interview the 11th of April.

Interview 10: del Pino, Ana, executive coordinator of One of Us. Skype interview the 12th of April.

Interview 11: Dzierżak, Marcin, representative from the online collection platform ECI. Skype interview the 12th of April.

Interview 12: Melogli, Giovanni, Campaign Initiator & Spokesperson for the European Media Initiative. Skype interview the 15th of April.

Interview 13: Aghte, Heike, representative from 30km/h – making the streets liveable! Meeting on the ECI day the 20th of April.

Interview 14: Mads Hvid, organiser from the "Fair Transport Europe" ECI, speaking on a panel on the ECI day the 20th of April.

Interview 15: Terricabras, Josep-Maria, Member of the European Parliament, member of AFCO and shadow rapporteur for the EP Greens. Skype interview the 21st of April.

Interview 16: Metsola, Roberta, Member of the European Parliament, vice-chair in PETI. Email interview.

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Appendix I

Summary of the web survey for ECI's

Latest updated 2016-05-12.

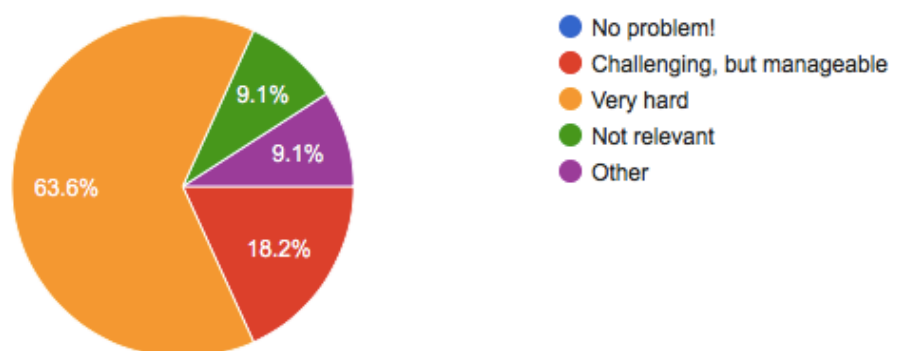
The 11 initiatives answering represented both new and old initiatives, both successful ones and those who were not. Three respondents came from France, the others from Hungary, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, Poland, Italy, Sweden and Germany.

When asked why they chose to start an ECI, most respondents answered with the aim of their ECI, but some also pointed out that they wanted to change something specific in the EU framework, like the EU competences, out of interest for EU issues or in general to influence legislation.

Most of the respondents viewed it as very hard to collect one million signatures;

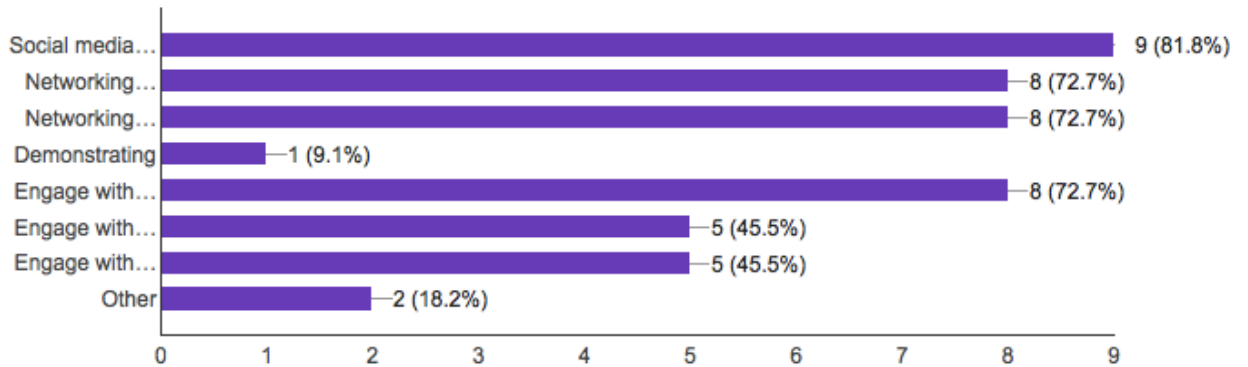
How do you view your chances of getting 1 million signatures?

(11 responses)



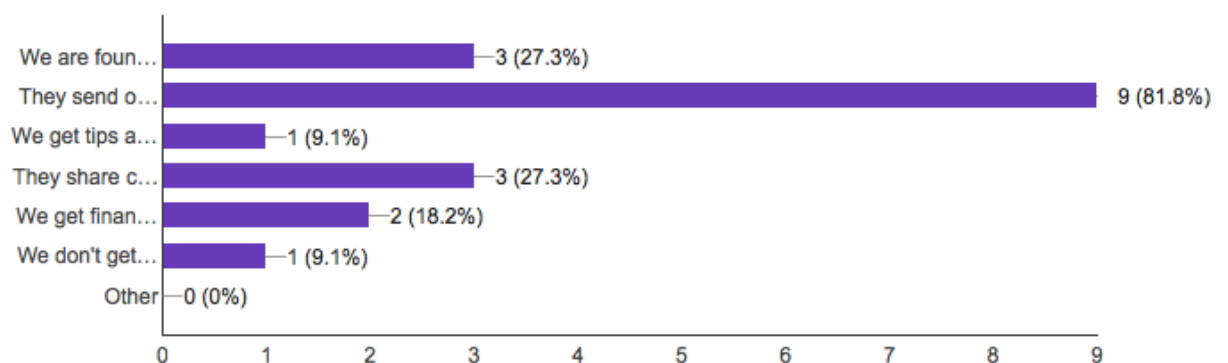
Most ECI campaigners made people aware of their ECI by means of social media, although networking and using national media also were popular strategies.

How do you make people aware of your ECI? (11 responses)



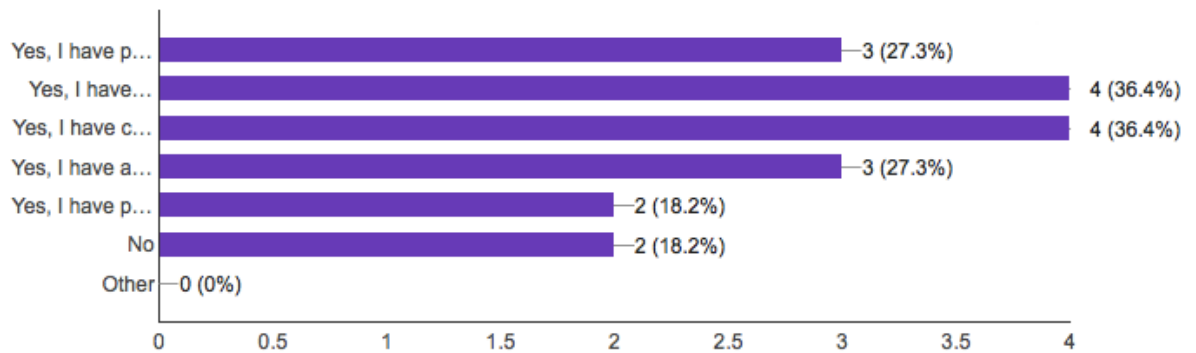
The ECI's that got support from action groups mainly did so by the latter passing on the message to their members. Three also responded that they were founded by one or several action groups.

How do your initiative get support from action groups? (11 responses)



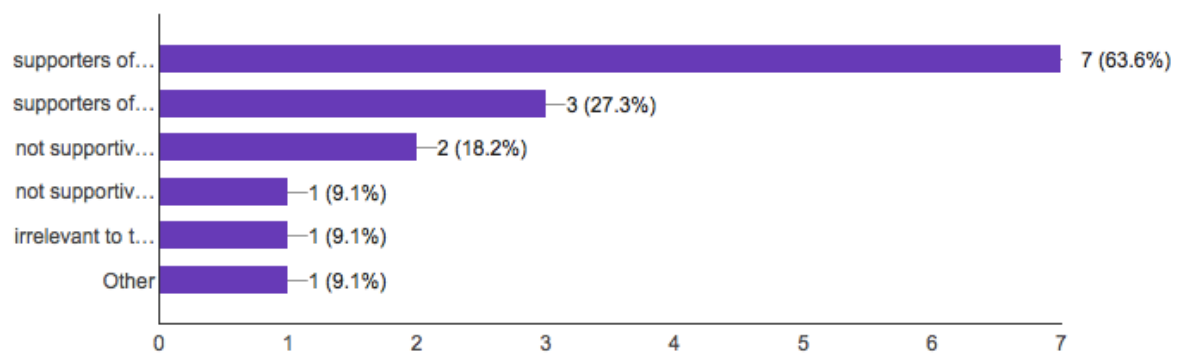
Most ECI organizers had previous involvement in the EU, mainly by contacting the EU institutions in different ways, although 4 had also worked in an EU institution.

Do you have any previous involvement in the EU? (11 responses)



Most ECI organizers thought that the EP was supportive of the ECI in general, only two disagreed. Three agreed on the statement that the EP supported their initiative, two did not. One organizer even thought the EP was irrelevant to the ECI process.

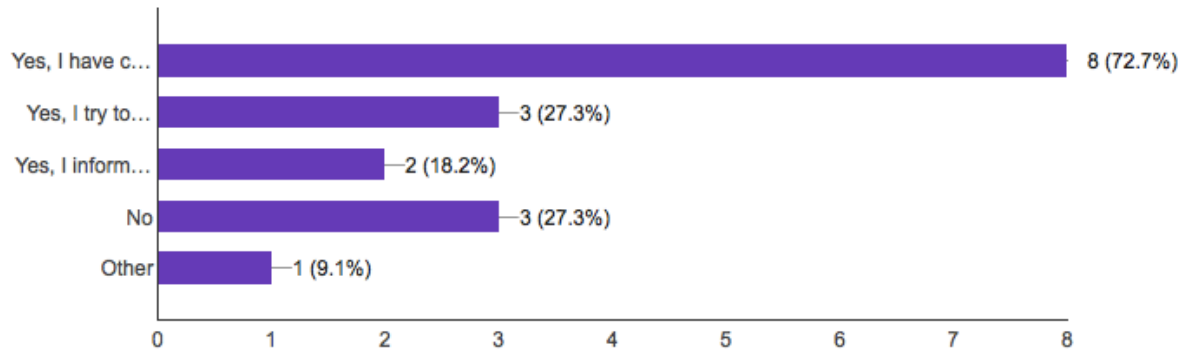
I think of the European Parliament as: (11 responses)



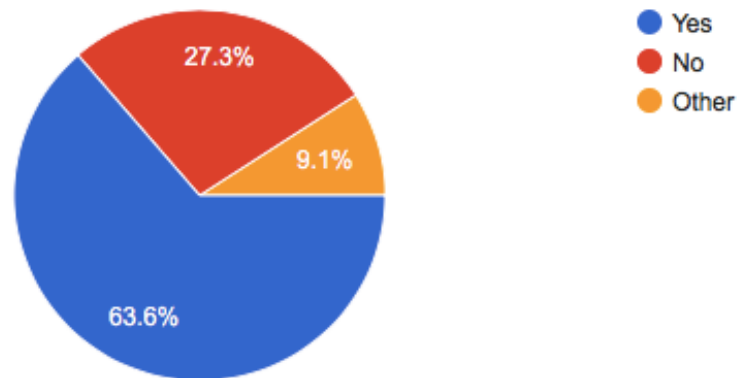
Most organizers have contacted MEP's regarding their ECI and have their support, three does not contact or have had any contact with MEP's.

Have you had any contact with members of parliament (MEP's) regarding your ECI?

(11 responses)

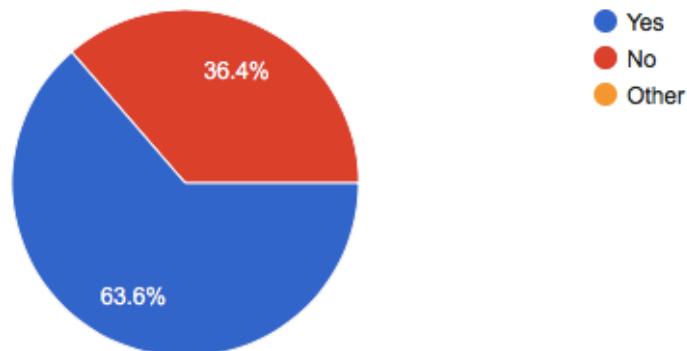


Are there any MEP's publicly supporting your initiative? (11 responses)



Have you participated in any committee consultation in the European Parliament?

(11 responses)



Appendix II

Interview guide EP actors

- What is your view of the ECI?
- Why was the ECI put in place, in your view?
- What do you think is the main advantage of the ECI?
The main disadvantage?
- What do you think about the questions the ECI campaigns bring up?
- What do you think of the actors starting an ECI?
The way they are organizing?
... and campaigning?
The way they approach you (/the EP) as a decision maker?
- Difference from more traditional lobbyists?
- Contrasting the ECI's with for example committee consultations or petitions to get to know citizens view on issues, what do you consider to be the biggest differences?
(for example the actors present, issues discussed, mode of communication)

- How do you view your role as MEP/the MEP role in relation to the ECI?
- Are you a supporter of any ECI?
- How would you react if an ECI would approach you?
- Do you think MEP's should support ECI's?
What do you think of ECI's approaching MEP's for support?
- Do you think the ECI gives an accurate view of citizens views?
Do you prefer other ways to collect citizens views?
- How do you view the EPs role in the ECI?
- What do you think of the Commissions stance on the ECI?
- Should the EP advocate harder for the ECI?

Appendix III

Interview guide ECI's

At first, some questions specific for that ECI, for example if they were interviewed before or wrote something regarding their ECI.

- Have you done any campaigns like this before?
National level?
- When launching this initiative, did you have any contact with other EU institutions as well?
- Why did you contact institutions?
Needed help or express your opinion on the ECI?
- Was any of the institutions supporting your ECI?
Which?
- Did you try to approach any MEP's on this issue?
If no: Why not?
If yes: How did the contact looked like mostly with MEP's – was it mostly you speaking to them or was it more a dialogue when you exchanged views?
What kind of arguments did you use when approaching them?
- What do you think of the contact with MEP's – how did you feel about it?
Welcoming approach or more that you had to fight to get your voice heard?
- There are quite many MEP's in the EP, how did you chose whom to approach?
- Did you get any tips of MEP's that might be in favor of your initiative?
- Did you reach out to officials others than MEP's that you think can change EU decision making on your issue (dossiers, special knowledge etc.)?
- What do you think of the EP role in the ECI?
Should they do more? What?
- Have you been asked to participate in any of consultations on the ECI process?
If yes:
- What are the biggest consultations you have been asked to participate in?
By whom?

If contacting MEP's:

- Did you notice any difference in the way you were being approached when you sat in a consultation and when you contacted MEP's during your campaign? For example how you were addressed, or speaking time or other such things?

- Have you been invited to consultations by any EU body in your area of expertise (IT) rather than as an ECI?
(if not) Would this be of interest for you?
- Have you held meetings or anything similar to inform on your ECI?

- I guess that you built a rather successful network during the time of your ECI
– was this also part of the aim with your ECI?
- Do you still push these issues with that network?
- Do you have any plans for the future regarding these issues?