

To: The European Parliament

Subject: Strengthening the European Parliament's role in the European Citizens' Initiative

Keywords: Disconnections; Democracy; Decision-making; European Citizens' Initiative; Euroscepticism

SUMMARY

Key facts

European citizens demonstrate multiple forms of disconnections to the European Union (EU). These disconnections are a complex phenomenon that only sometimes amounts to Euroscepticism. They threaten the EU in its very existence.

Essence of our Analysis

Our qualitative research offers three key findings: (1) The diversity of disconnections is greatly underestimated. (2) The EU's current attempts to improve communication with its citizens are insufficient to address the challenge of disconnections. (3) Disconnected citizens need a more engaging and inclusive dialogue between them and policy-makers.

Key Recommendation

To address the challenge of disconnection, we recommend building on the 2020 reform of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) in three ways: (1) the European Parliament (EP) should follow the resolution procedure after each public hearing of the citizens' initiative; (2) The European Commission should make a legislative proposal if there is a resolution that passed with a majority of MEPs; (3) The EP should publicly evaluate the Commission's proposal.

Goal

The policy aims to reconnect European citizens with European institutions in order to increase the EU's democratic legitimacy and give crucial support for its very existence.

1. ASSESSMENT

- 1.1 While an increasing number of European citizens express clear Euroscepticism, many feel other forms of **disconnections**, e.g. cultural, religious, institutional, or geographical disconnections, demonstrating the complexity of this phenomenon. **No single narrative**, such as the one about the left-behind, the poor, or those lacking education disliking the EU, can explain the current situation.
- 1.2 Failing to address the fact that more and more citizens feel disconnected from European politics **destabilises the EU** and threatens to **call into question its very existence**.
- 1.3 Addressing the challenge of disconnection demands more than the EU's current attempts to improve communication. It requires understanding the various perspectives of disconnected citizens and using these very perspectives to gain insights into how to improve the EU. Doing so led us to **reassess the democratic tools the EU offers**.
- 1.4 The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is a tool that allows citizens to propose legislation to the European Commission. So far, the tool has been little used by citizens and the European Commission has only made one legislative proposal based on an

ECI. **Improving the ECI** can help to address citizens' disconnections. A reform of the ECI is to be implemented in 2020. Yet, the reform not only remains vague on several procedural aspects, especially **the role of the EP**, but also **fails to increase the impact of the ECI**. Improving both of these aspects would **increase democratic legitimacy** within the EU and help **reconnect citizens with European institutions**.

2. ACTION REQUIRED

2.1 Context

2.1.1 The regulation to be implemented by January 2020 states that once the Commission has validated the initiative's statements of support, the EP has to hold a public hearing of the organizers of the ECI, and "assess the political support for the initiative". Then, the Commission examines the content of the ECI and decides if it should lead to a proposal. The last step is a follow-up assessment by the EP.

2.1.2 In its current wording, the legal text does not specify the form the EP assessment should take, if and to whom it should be communicated, the role of the EP's assessment in the Commission's decision, or the form and impact of the EP's follow-up to the decision.

2.1.3 In her programme, Ursula von der Leyen, the President-elect of the European Commission, has committed "to put forward a legislative proposal in response to every resolution that is passed with a majority of Parliament's constituent members".

2.2 Three changes to the European Citizen's Initiative

To reinforce the President-elect's commitment, to improve and clarify the role of the EP in the ECI, and to make the ECI more impactful, we propose:

- (1) On the public hearing in front of the EP: **After the hearing, the European Parliament should follow the resolution procedure in its assessment of any initiative.**

Objective: To clearly assess the political support for the initiative and, should the resolution pass, trigger a legislative proposal by the Commission based on the initiative in accordance with President-elect von der Leyen's commitment to do so with every passed EP resolution.

- (2) On the examination by the Commission: **In case the EP resolution has passed with a majority of Parliament's constituent members, the Commission should put forward a legislative proposal.**

Objective: To make the decision of the Commission more transparent, to increase the EP's role in the decision-making process, and to increase the likelihood of an ECI leading to a legislative proposal, thus making the ECI a more attractive and efficient democratic tool for the European citizens.

- (3) On the "follow-up" by the EP: **The EP should debate the Commission's decision and release a public communication.**

Objective: To improve the transparency of the whole process.