

Five minutes with Sven Giegold, Member of the European Parliament: “The European Citizens’ Initiative is a step towards a more direct involvement of citizens in European decision-making.”

Sven Giegold, Member of the European Parliament, argues that the new European Citizens’ Initiative will not solve the European Union’s democratic deficit. However, it is a step towards greater direct involvement of citizens in European decision-making.



Is the [European Citizens’ Initiative](#) (ECI) the solution to Europe’s democratic deficit?

No, I do not think so. The European Citizens’ Initiative is a step towards a more direct involvement of citizens in European decision-making. However, it doesn’t solve the problem that the Council of the European Union is meeting behind closed doors, and that lobbying power in Brussels is still very unevenly distributed between strong vested interests and weaker interests.

A citizens’ initiative has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens. Do you think these numbers are reasonable?

I think these numbers are fine, otherwise there would be too many of these initiatives. If any crazy person could easily collect the necessary amount of signatures, then the initiative would have no meaning. What is so important is for it to be truly international –one million signatures must be collected over seven member states.

After this, there is the opportunity for the initiative to have a hearing in the European Parliament. After this takes place, the European Commission has to come forward with a clear, understandable approach and response to the demands of the citizens.

Is there a risk that lobbyists might hijack initiatives?

Certainly, this danger exists with all forms of direct democracy, and we have seen this many times in referendums. However, I do not think that the possibility for misuse is a convincing reason to close the door on any form of direct democracy.

Furthermore, the ECI only implies the right to start an initiative; it does not grant any decision-making rights to citizens. These rights remain fully representative in the form of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. Hence, I think there is no danger of lobbyists hijacking initiatives.

What will you do to promote the ECI? What would make the ECI more appealing?

I maintain a newsletter with about 20,000 subscribers to which I sent information on the ECI when it came into force on 1 April. I think many people are aware of this new opportunity already, and there are quite a few citizens’ initiatives which have already started. I am sure that in a few months’ time, there will be a dozen or more promising initiatives.

Which initiatives would you like to see?

There are several, but if the financial transaction tax is not implemented soon I think this would be a candidate to call for enhanced cooperation in this field between the member states who are willing to move forwards in this area. There is also an interesting [initiative on the human right to water and sanitation](#), which would follow the United Nations’ decisions.

If there was an initiative to abolish the Euro, how long would it take until one million citizens backed this initiative?

I do not know. It is easy to raise populist demands, particularly in times where one has the impression that our democracy is not always making the right decisions. However, these voices are in the public anyway, whether there is an ECI or not. But I am sure there will never be anything near to a majority in Europe who are for the abolition of the Euro. The costs are simply too high and it would be a huge step back in European integration.

Will the Euro still be with us five years from now?

Yes, I think it will still be around, because the costs of winding it up are just unbearable, politically and economically. However, the costs of keeping the Euro are continuously increasing because of the very poor economic policies that are pursued in Europe at the moment. We certainly need much more of an investment focus in parallel to the efforts to balance budgets. But this has to come, and it will come. We have waited too long already, which has cost billions.

Who should win the French Presidential elections?

Predicting the future is neither the core talent of politicians nor of economists. I can only tell you that I think the chance to get to a more balanced policy package towards the Euro crisis, faster, are larger if *François Hollande wins and has to deliver to Angela Merkel*.

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About the author

Sven Giegold – Member of the European Parliament

Sven Giegold was elected to the European Parliament in 2009. He is a German politician for the Alliance 90/The Greens party. Giegold is one of the founding members of Attac Germany. Born in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain), Giegold studied political science and economics in Lüneburg, Bremen und Birmingham.



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