

ECI Minority SafePack presented at the EESC



Despite an overly complicated ECI tool, one million signatures collected for diversity in Europe

At its plenary on 20 September, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) invited the initiators of the European Citizens' Initiative Minority SafePack – represented by Loránt Vincze, president of the Federal Union of European Nationalities – to present their request, which is aimed at improving the protection of national and linguistic minorities in Europe

Mr Vincze and the proponents of the 5th successful ECI feel that the rights of national and linguistic minorities are not always respected. "As regards the different languages in Europe, only 24 are official languages, but we have around 60 different languages in Europe. Therefore, it is not easy for minorities to preserve their original language. In many cases the languages and cultures of minorities are even endangered", said Mr Vincze who was also calling for the creation of a Language Diversity Centre in the EU.

Mr Vincze thanked the EESC for being the first EU institution to give this successful initiative a platform. With regard to the upcoming European elections, he called on the EESC members to include the claims of the Minority SafePack in the debate on the future of Europe. Discussion should also be encouraged in the 28 capitals and in all major cities, not least in order to gather momentum and make the European Commission act. The organisers have not yet decided when to submit their ECI officially to the Commission. Since they are not tied to any deadline, they will first explore what could be the maximum outcome of their initiative by meeting EU high-level decision-makers, revealed Mr Vincze.

In his statement, Mr Vincze also complained about the ECI as an instrument, which is excessively complicated and expensive for ordinary citizens, and described the many hurdles his organisation had to overcome. This is a major complaint that the EESC has already been reiterating for many years and that has finally convinced the Commission to carry out a review of this important instrument for citizens' participation at European level. This review is currently on its way with the Commission, Parliament and Council having already entered the official consultations.

Without commenting on the content of the ECI, EESC members underlined the importance of and the EESC's commitment to supporting minorities and citizens' initiatives in general.

"This ECI on the Minority SafePack is an important one. It revolves around people and it concerns people's lives", underlined President Luca Jahier, who has made Europe's cultural heritage one of the focuses of his presidency. He acknowledged the great success of the initiative, stating that this

accomplishment is proof that European citizens can build the future of Europe, provided they work together and raise their voices in concert.

Background

We call upon the EU to improve the protection of persons belonging to national and linguistic minorities and to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity in the Union.

With this demand, engaged Europeans started their European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Minority SafePack, reaching the necessary one million signatures in 11 countries before the deadline in April 2018 (a minimum of seven countries is required). On 8 May, the Citizens' Committee, the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), and local organisers handed over 1 320 053 signatures (1 128 385 were validated), collected in 28 Member States.

The proponents call for a legal framework that guarantees the protection of autochthonous minorities. Demands in the ECI aim at

- creating favourable conditions for linguistic and cultural diversity to thrive by stopping the assimilation of autochthonous minority communities and language groups;
- letting minorities have a say in decisions that affect their lives;
- letting them exercise their cultural, educational and linguistic rights autonomously, and
- making them feel entirely at home on the territory where they have traditionally lived.

The [ECI Minority SafePack](#) includes nine proposals helping to achieve the ECI's targets and which should be included in existing EU policies.