



Press Release

Communicating the European Citizens' Initiative  
**Regions contribute to make Europe more democratic**

*Brussels, 12 February 2010.*

The Assembly of European Regions' (AER) debated yesterday the new European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, which sets the frame for a new form of direct democracy and public participation in European Union policy shaping.

According to **Johannes W. Pichler**, Professor for European Law at the University of Graz and Director of the Austrian Institute for European Law and Politics in Salzburg (A), *"The European Union is more than just an association of sovereign states. Therefore, we need to find new instruments in order to democratically legitimize the decision making. It is only via the European citizens that opinions and clear majorities can emerge. Article 11.4 of the Lisbon Treaty by no means is the miracle solution, but it represents a possibility to reduce the democracy deficit in Europe. And regions are at the forefront to communicate this new means of direct democracy to its citizens."* **Sebastian Kurpas**, representing the European Commission, added: *"The European Commission has an interest in getting regions on board when it comes to communicating this new instrument and raising awareness about it."*

The ECI enables one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States to call directly on the European Commission to bring forward an initiative of interest to them in an area of EU competence. As regions are the point of reference for regional identity and the best promoter of a European identity, it is therefore one of the priorities of AER as a regional network and information multiplier to explain this unique tool to the citizens.

Thanks to a Live Web Streaming organised by co-organiser Steiermark (A) region, participants were able to directly answer to citizens' questions and concerns. Over 100 internet users joined the live webstreaming, some of them asking questions such as whether it is possible to sign their cause for an initiative online. **Erich Korzinek**, Head of the Steiermark Office Brussels, underlined: *"We as Steiermark believe that webstreaming as a communication tool has a big future. The challenge is how to reach the citizens in Europe and raise awareness about European topics. Webstreaming can be a useful tool to reach citizens and to create ownership and legitimacy."*

Yesterdays' meeting also kicked off the **4<sup>th</sup> edition of the AER Communication Award**, this year split into two categories:

- Communicating the ECI - AER will award those regions which promote a citizens friendly understanding of the new instrument.
- Communicating received European funding - AER will award those regions which communicate in the most effective ways the financial assistance provided by the funding to their citizens.

All information available at: [www.aer.eu](http://www.aer.eu)

*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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