

# FEMMES D'EUROPE & INITIATIVE CITOYENNE WOMEN FOR EUROPE AND CITIZENS' INITIATIVE



Mercredi 21 septembre 2011. Wednesday, September 21, 2011  
Parlement européen - Bruxelles - Salle JAN 602. European Parliament - Brussels - Room JAN 602

## Women take the floor!

### The main ideas retained at the Conference « Women for Europe and Citizens' Initiative

On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011 the Robert Schuman Foundation, in partnership with the European Commission's DG "Education and Culture", the Karamanlis Institute for Democracy, the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation together with Lien Public, organised a conference "Women for Europe & Citizens' Initiative" at the European Parliament.

#### ➤ **The European Citizens' Initiative: Issues and Limits**

Established by the Lisbon Treaty, the European Citizens' Initiative is a new way of taking part in the elaboration of European Union policy. For the very first time, and as of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, European citizens will be able to ask the Commission to put forward legislative proposals to the Council and Parliament, on condition that the initiative has the support of a minimum of one million signatures that come from at least one quarter of the Member States in the Union.

Jean-Luc Sauron, chair of the European Lawyer's Association, believes that this new tool will establish an entirely new type of participatory democracy in the Union. It comprises the power of initiative - "coming together to act together". In his opinion the effective implementation of the citizens' initiative implies an inter-institutional agreement and an agreement between States. "*We cannot afford to play with democratic fire*".

However, legal responsibility should not be forgotten; we should be aware of and look into the conditions that are required for the launch of a citizens' initiative. With regard to this MEP Anna-Maria Corazza-Bildt recalled the upcoming publication of an initiative users' guide by the European Commission. The States also have to inform citizens about this new tool and launch TV campaigns.

The citizens' initiative has its limits: it should not be over-exploited; areas of competence should match those of the Commission. Signatories' personal data must also be guaranteed confidentiality. Finally the citizens' initiative is a tool for the citizens – it must not be "hijacked" by politicians, says Anna-Maria Corazza-Bildt.

## **> What European Women Expect**

The Robert Schuman Foundation has undertaken an on-line survey amongst 3,500 people, who were mostly women, to discover what they expected, notably with regard to Europe. Pascale Joannin, General Director of the Foundation presented the results of this survey as her panel debated:

- more than half (61%) of those who answered the on-line survey had already heard of the European citizens' initiative;
- issues involving the representation of women within political and economic organisations, male/female parity and wage equality are still the priorities to which the EU has to devote its work.

Speakers highlighted the importance of having the right to free speech, the need to redistribute roles within the family and also to improve access to political responsibilities for women. The glass-ceiling has to be broken.

## **> How can the citizens' initiative become a new tool to promote the position of women in Europe?**

The citizens' initiative is a means to enable women to express themselves and for them to give their opinion on a number of subjects. To do this, women will have to pool their competences (legal, editorial), to be in a strong position to propose the launch of a citizens' initiative.

After this day of debate it is clear that women are eager to launch a citizens' initiative. This is why the Robert Schuman Foundation devote space on its site, [http://www.femmes-europe.eu/vos\\_idees.php?ln=en](http://www.femmes-europe.eu/vos_idees.php?ln=en) to women who want to develop their ideas. They will prepare a project to launch a citizens' initiative as of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.