

Democracy violation: European Commission rejects citizens' initiative to stop TTIP and CETA

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As the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations between the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) continue under a veil of secrecy, the European Commission (EC) rejected formally, last week, the request for registration of a 'European Citizens' Initiative' (ECI) to stop not only this trade deal, but also the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada.

The Stop TTIP Alliance, which counts over 230 organisations from 21 EU member states, including Health Action International Europe, issued an ECI—the 47th to ever be put forward—on 15 July, 2014. In it, we asked the EC to recommend to the EU Council of Ministers that it repeal the negotiating mandate for TTIP and not to conclude CETA.

Unfortunately, on 10 September, the EC announced that it had refused to register the Alliance's ECI, stating that, "*the proposed citizens' initiative falls manifestly outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.*"

What does that mean?

Given that TTIP and CETA are not yet legal acts—only internal preparatory acts—they cannot be contested through an ECI. Citizens, the EC argues, cannot challenge, criticise or stop trade agreements while they are still under negotiation; they can only *applaud* international negotiations and ask the EC to fast-track them. Furthermore, it means that citizens must wait until both deals reach their final drafts before an ECI can be submitted—and, yes, by then, it will likely be far too late.

But if the EU is a participatory democracy, why can't its citizens have a say about trade agreements *before* they are concluded and have an impact on their daily lives?

As Michael Efler, the coordinator of this ECI, states: "*The rejection of the ECI only confirms the Commission's strategy to exclude citizens and parliaments from the TTIP and CETA negotiations. Instead of paying attention to citizens, it is just lobbyists that are being listened*

to.”

The Stop TTIP Alliance is now planning to appeal the EC’s decision before the European Court of Justice, and discussing many other initiatives. Trade negotiations, after all, should be conducted transparently and with public scrutiny. EU citizens should be allowed to express their views, especially when these agreements threaten to change policy that would affect them on so many levels. (See, for example, our [joint statement](#) describing how TTIP could threaten European public policy-making and public health.)

We’re now asking EC President-elect, Jean-Claude Juncker, who promised to ensure democracy and transparency in all EU affairs, to correct the EC’s refusal of the ECI. Until TTIP and CETA negotiations open their doors to citizens, none of these trade agreements should be ratified. Citizens on both sides of the Atlantic must support them—and, at the moment, we clearly don’t.