European citizens' initiative

2014/2257(INI) - 28/10/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 527 votes to 39 with 103 abstentions, a resolution on the European Citizens' Initiative. Members welcomed the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which was a new political right for citizens as well as a unique and innovative agenda-setting tool for participatory democracy in the European Union, allowing citizens to play an active part in projects, and processes that affect them. Members considered that the ECI should be **encouraged and supported by all available means**, whilst recognising the need to make it more effective. Evaluation of the ECI: the resolution notes that more than six million EU citizens had participated in an ECI, that there were **51 requests to launch an initiative**, of which **only three** – the 'Right2Water', 'One of Us' and 'Stop Vivisection' initiatives – **were deemed admissible**. Experience had shown that the majority of organisers of ECIs had encountered a number of difficulties in setting up an ECI, in relation to both practical and legal aspects.

Three years on from the entry into application of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011, Members considered it necessary to **evaluate its implementation** thoroughly in order to identify any shortcomings and to propose viable solutions for its prompt revision.

Raising public awareness and giving the ECI a higher profile: pointing out the importance of public awareness of the ECI in order for it to be an effective tool for democratic participation, Members called on the Commission to use all public communication channels to raise awareness, and to take the necessary measures to ensure the transparency of the ECI and facilitate communication relating to current ECIs, for example by creating applications that provide information, send notifications and allow online signing. Member States' national parliaments should mention the ECI on their official website.

The Commission was called upon to **make its software for the online collection of signatures more user-friendly**, to make it accessible to people with disabilities, to offer its own servers for the storage of online signatures for free on a permanent basis, using existing EU budgets. There was a need to link the online collection of signatures to the relevant **new social and digital media campaigning tools**. Parliament called on the Commission to support the development of an **open-source dedicated ECI software program** for mobile devices.

Improve information to organisers: the Commission was called upon to:

- provide appropriate and comprehensive guidance – especially of a legal nature – as early as possible to the organisers of ECIs through the Europe Direct Contact Centre, so that organisers are aware of the possibilities open to them and will not fail by proposing an ECI that is manifestly outside the Commission's powers and does not comply with the legal admissibility criteria. Consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing **another independent body** tasked with giving advice;
- consider setting up a **dedicated ECI office** at its representations in each Member State to provide all the necessary information, advice and support for ECIs. A dedicated ECI office could also contribute to raising public and media awareness about the ECI;
- **explain in detail the reasons for rejecting an ECI** in order: (i) that the validity and complete objectivity of those elements can be subjected to legal scrutiny, (ii) that the **Commission's power of discretion** as judge and party in the assessment of an initiative's admissibility can be **reduced** as far as possible, and; (iii) that the organisers can decide whether to revise their ECI and resubmit it in a modified form;
- explore ways of referring initiatives, or those parts of initiatives, that did not fall within the scope of the Commission's powers to the competent authority, be it at national or regional level.

Moreover, Parliament called for the provision of **more detailed guidelines** on the interpretation of legal bases and of more information on **data protection requirements** in each Member State in which the organisers run their campaigns.

Improving user-friendliness: Parliament called for the improvement of the **multilingual ECI website** run by the Commission and for a single set of guidelines in all the EU's official languages on the rights and obligations of ECI organisers and on the administrative procedures applicable throughout the ECI process.

In this regard, the resolution called for the future establishment of a **physical and online 'one-stop shop'** providing, on a permanent basis, information, translation services and technical, legal and political support for ECIs.

Members called on the Commission to recommend to the Member States that they **lower the age for supporting and participating in an ECI from 18 to 16** and that it not to be tied to the right to vote in elections to the European Parliament, thus giving young people, in particular, the possibility of becoming actively involved in taking the European project forward.

Personal data: Parliament deemed it too complicated for organisers to provide different personal data in support of ECIs in the 28 Member States. It called for the standardisation of the nature of the data collected in the Member States and encouraged the Commission to negotiate further with Member States with a view to **reducing the number of data requirements** and making them more user-friendly.

Follow-up to ECIs: Parliament asked the Commission to revise the wording of Article 10(c) of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 to allow proper follow-up to a successful ECI. It urged the Commission to start **preparing a legal act on successful ECIs within 12 months after issuing a positive opinion.** Should the Commission fail to put forward a legislative proposal within this 12-month period, Parliament and its committees should exercise their right to ask the Commission to submit an appropriate proposal.