European citizens’ initiative

2017/0220(COD) - 13/09/2017 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to reform the European Citizens’ Initiative in order to facilitate its organisation.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: The European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: the instrument of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon and was made operational on 1 April 2012 by Regulation No 211/2011.

The aim of this instrument is to **enhance citizens' involvement in the democratic life of the European Union**, by allowing them to directly address the Commission with a request to submit a proposal for legal acts of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

Since its first report on the application of the Regulation adopted in 2015, the Commission has implemented a series of non-legislative measures to facilitate the use of the instrument by organisers and citizens and to mitigate the main problems identified, namely:

- the difficulties encountered by the organisers in the **registration** phase including the high rate of refusals to register proposed citizens’ initiatives;
- the **complexity for organisers of initiatives to collect statements of support**, as evidenced by the low rate of successful initiatives;
- differences in requirements for **personal data** of signatories;
- **low number of initiatives** reaching the one million threshold and the limited impact so far generated by citizens' initiatives.

The resolution of the European Parliament of 28 October 2015 highlighted a number of problems and called for the revision of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 and the adoption of a package of amendments to improve the functioning of the ECI.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: no impact assessment has been carried out. The Commission notes, however, that technical and practical measures to simplify the ECI should **reduce the administrative burden** for both organisers and Member States.

CONTENT: the proposal seeks to replace Regulation No 211/2011 with a view to improving the way the ECI operates, with the main policy objectives of:

- **making the ECI more accessible, less burdensome and easier to use** for organisers and supporters;
- **achieving the full potential of the ECI as a tool to foster debate and participation**, including that of young people, at European level and to bring the EU closer to its citizens.

Concretely, the proposal:

- stipulates the **right of every citizen of the Union of at least 16 years of age** to support an initiative by signing the statement of support;

- introduces the requirement to make available an **online collaborative platform for the ECI** providing a discussion forum as well as information and advice to organisers, support to organisers with regard to the translation of the main elements of their initiatives into all official languages of the Union for publication in the Register;
- provides for the requirements for the organisers of initiatives, including the formation, composition and responsibilities of the group of organisers composed by at least seven citizens of the Union entitled to vote in the elections to the European Parliament and residents of at least seven Member States;
- provides that statements of support may only be collected after an initiative has been registered and establishes the requirements for the registration or refusal of initiatives;
- clarifies that statements of support for initiatives may be collected online or in paper form and that only forms which comply with the models set out in Annex III of the Regulation may be used to collect statements of support. Personal data to be provided by the signatory would be reduced;
- introduces the requirement for the Commission to set-up and operate, by 1 January 2020, a **central online collection system** made available free of charge to organisers of registered initiatives and allowing citizens to provide support to initiatives online;
- stipulates the possibility for organisers to **set up their own individual online collection systems**, the security and technical features for these systems and the procedure for the verification by the competent national authorities in the Member States;
- provides that each Member State shall **verify and certify** the statements of support signed by their nationals;
- lays down the **conditions and time limits** for the submission of initiatives to the Commission;
- sets out the **publication and public hearing phase** for initiatives submitted to the Commission and sets out the conditions for the public hearing at the European Parliament within three months from the submission of the initiative by the organisers;
- obliges the Commission to receive the group of organisers at an appropriate level as well as to **set out in a Communication its legal and political conclusions on the initiative**, the actions it intends to take, if any, and its reasons for taking or not taking action;
- provides for **awareness-raising and communication** activities on the ECI to be carried out by the Commission.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS: the specific budgetary implications of the proposal relate to a number of online systems for the European citizens' initiative which the Commission will put in place and make available free of charge to citizens and organisers.

The estimated impact on expenditure (in commitment appropriations) is estimated at **EUR 2.050 million for 2019 and EUR 2.140 million for 2020**. For administrative expenditure, the impact is estimated to EUR 1.071 million per year.