

European citizens' initiative: temporary measures concerning the time limits for the collection, verification and examination stages in view of the COVID-19 outbreak

2020/0099(COD) - 20/05/2020 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to lay down temporary measures concerning the time limits for the collection, verification and examination stages provided for in Regulation (EU) 2019/788 on the European citizens' initiative in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

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 on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Member States have been affected in a dramatic and exceptional way by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of restrictive measures were taken to stop or slow down the transmission of COVID-19, including lockdown measures to restrict the free movement of their citizens, the prohibition of public events, and the closure of shops, restaurants and schools. These measures have inevitably also had a serious impact on European citizens' initiatives (ECIs), a participative democracy instrument that depends on the engagement of citizens across the EU. The national confinement measures and more generally the omnipresence of the pandemic make it currently nearly impossible for organisers to successfully continue their local campaigning activities and the collection of paper statements of support to help them gather the required statements within the set period of 12 months.

Member States and the European institutions have also certain obligations as regards the verification (including certification) of the validity of the collected statements of support and the examination of a successful initiative. These obligations are equally time-bound. Due to the exceptional circumstances, these obligations may not be able to be respected within the set legal time limits.

CONTENT: this proposal lays down temporary measures concerning the time limits for the collection, verification and examination stages provided for in [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/788](#) on the European citizens' initiative in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Collection period

In order to preserve the efficacy of the European citizens' initiative instrument during this pandemic and to provide reassurance and legal clarity to organisers of initiatives the collection, verification or examination of which is ongoing, the Commission proposes to adopt temporary measures to extend by 6 months the current 12-month period for initiatives whose signature collection was ongoing on 11 March 2020, the date on which the COVID-19 epidemic was qualified as a pandemic by the WHO.

That extension is based on the assumption that at least in the first six months since 11 March 2020 a majority of Member States or a number of Member States representing more than 35% of the Union population will have measures in place that will substantially hamper the organisers' possibilities to carry out local campaigning and collect paper statements of support. Where the collection period of an initiative started after 11 March, that period should be extended proportionately.

Verification period

Similar temporary measures should be taken to allow Member States to request the European Commission for an extension of the verification period in case their competent authorities due to the measures taken to combat the pandemic cannot complete the verification in time. The measures are temporary in nature, as these only apply until end 2022.

Examination period

The examination period is also subject to specific time limits. The European institutions are required to organise a meeting with the organisers (to be organised by the Commission within one month after submission of a successful initiative) and a public hearing (to be organised by the European Parliament within three months after submission). The organisation of such events may be difficult within the time limits set by Regulation (EU) 2019/788. In such a case, the European institutions should be allowed to organise such events as soon as the public health situation in that country again allows for organising such events. In such cases, the European Commission shall adopt its Communication in response to a valid initiative within three months after the public hearing in the European Parliament.

Lastly, this proposed Regulation should be adopted as a matter of urgency, so that situations of legal uncertainty affecting citizens, organisers, national administrations and the Union institutions, in particular where the relevant time periods for the collection of statements of support, verification and examination in respect of a number of initiatives have already ended or are about to end, remain as short as possible. It should enter into force as a matter of urgency on the day following that of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.