Implementation of the Regulations on the European citizens' initiative

2022/2206(INI) - 10/05/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Loránt VINCZE (EPP, RO) on the implementation of the Regulations on the European citizens' initiative.

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is one of the main innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in terms of democratic participation and is the first transnational citizens' initiative mechanism in the world. Parliament has always been a strong supporter of the idea of making the ECI an effective and user-friendly instrument facilitating the democratic participation of citizens in defining the Union's priorities.

Main conclusions

Members noted that the ECI is a **major instrument of participatory democracy** at EU level that could lead to a proposal for an EU legal act. However, they regretted that the overall number of valid ECIs and the impact of the ECI on the EU decision-making process remain very low. The regulatory and institutional frameworks and the use of the instrument need to be strengthened by improving its visibility, accessibility and legal effectiveness.

While recognising the advantages of the central online collection system in terms of budget and timetable, Member acknowledge the benefits of **specific online collection systems**, which give organisers greater freedom to use online collection systems tailored to their needs. Phasing out specific online collection systems could have a negative effect.

The report stressed the importance of integrating electronic identification systems (eID) into ECI signature collections. It noted that it is difficult to collect signatures in some Member States due to the types of data that signatories are required to provide. In addition, verification and certification procedures are not sufficiently transparent.

Members regretted that it is very difficult for citizens to manage ECIs without the support of associations with substantial organisational capacity and financial resources. They therefore stressed the need to **reduce as far as possible the regulatory, administrative and financial obstacles** faced by citizens in managing ECIs.

Regretting that valid ECIs have only limited legal and political impacts, Members stressed that, in order for the objectives of the revised ECI Regulation to be achieved and the full potential of this instrument to be realised, the Commission needs to **appropriately consider and respond to valid ECIs in a timely manner.** The Commission should also give due consideration to the arguments of Parliament expressing support for the demands of a valid ECI in a resolution.

Recommendations

Members reiterated the need to include and **further strengthen awareness** on EU policy-making in education programmes and school curricula throughout the EU. They also stressed the need to continue to **improve awareness about this participatory instrument**, in particular by promoting it on social media and including it in education programmes and curricula, in order to reach as many citizens as possible, especially young people.

The Commission is invited to:

- launch broad multilingual information campaigns to promote the ECI instrument and to better communicate the impact of ECIs;

- interlink the ECI website of the EU with relevant online platforms on citizens' participation at national level, so that the ECI can gain more visibility;

- adopt clear and simple procedures and provide detailed answers and possible solutions when initiatives are declared partially or totally inadmissible, allowing organisers to amend and resubmit them;

- assess the possibility of reintroducing the option for organisers to use individual online collection systems, with a view to strengthening the digital dimension of the ECI;

- encourage Member States to lower the minimum age for supporting an ECI;

- encourage Member States to use the electronic signature tool;

- take steps to simplify and further harmonise national data collection standards;

- provide financial support for valid ECIs reaching the threshold of one million signatures and assess the possibility of providing progressive financial support for ECIs that reach certain thresholds of signatures under one million;

- establish a proper dialogue with organisers about their goals and the best possible means to achieve them;

- carry out a thorough assessment of the proposals of each valid ECI and to comply fully with its legal obligation to set out its reasons for taking or not taking action;

- engage with organisers of valid ECIs after it has issued its communication, thereby increasing the possibility of legislative follow-up in the long term.

Parliament should commit to **vote on a parliamentary resolution** after every valid ECI and after every Commission communication setting out its legal and political conclusions on a specific ECI. Such a resolution should also be followed by a legislative own-initiative report.