Implementation of the Regulations on the European citizens' initiative

2022/2206(INI) - 13/06/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 502 votes to 49, with 54 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of the regulations on the European Citizens' Initiative.

Parliament has always been a strong supporter of the idea of making the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) an effective and user-friendly instrument facilitating the democratic participation of citizens in defining the Union's priorities.

Since the introduction of the ECI, the Commission has received 127 requests, 101 of which have been registered. To date, only nine ECIs have reached the threshold of one million signatures (‘Right2Water’, ‘One of Us’, ‘Stop vivisection’, ‘Ban glyphosate’, ‘Minority SafePack’, ‘End the Cage Age’, ‘Save bees and farmers’, ‘Stop Finning – Stop the Trade’ and ‘Save Cruelty Free Cosmetics’), the first seven of which have received a response from the Commission; whereas the ‘Minority SafePack’ initiative was the first ECI to be debated in Parliament based on the revised ECI Regulation.

Main conclusions

The ECI is a major instrument of participatory democracy at EU level that could lead to a proposal for an EU legal act. However, Members 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.

The resolution stressed that the online collection of statements of support is fundamental to the success of ECIs and recalled that individual online collection systems have been an important driver of innovation and have considerably contributed to strengthening support for ECIs.

Parliament welcomed the fact that a number of Member States have decided to lower the minimum age entitling to support ECIs. It also 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.

Given that the ECI is a demanding and costly process, 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.

Parliament reiterated its call on the Commission to act on ECI entitled ‘Minority SafePack’ and to propose legal acts based on it.

Recommendations

Parliament reiterated the need to include and further strengthen awareness on EU policy-making in education programmes and school curricula throughout the EU. It 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; Parliament and its Liaison Offices should be involved in the information campaigns;

- 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;

- consider ways to provide more effective follow-up to ECIs falling outside the EU's remit through a structured cooperation with the relevant authorities of the Member States;

- 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;

- ensure a balanced and transparent composition of the ECI Expert Group, including in particular the involvement of experts from civil society organisations on a permanent basis;

- 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.