

Revising the European Citizens' Initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) has been in operation for almost seven years, and the rules governing its functioning are now subject to revision. Following interinstitutional negotiations, the Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on the Commission's proposal to revise the ECI. That agreement now requires formal approval by the co-legislators, and the European Parliament is expected to vote on the proposal during its March I plenary session.

Background

The ECI enables 1 million European citizens to formally invite the Commission to table a proposal for a legal act. The detailed rules for such initiatives are laid down in a 2011 regulation, whose main stated aim is encouraging citizens' participation in the political life of the European Union. Since the ECI's launch in April 2012, more than 70 initiatives have been submitted to the European Commission and, to date, four initiatives have been [successful](#) in collecting the required 1 million signatures: 'Right2Water', 'One of us', 'Stop vivisection' and 'Ban Glyphosate'. However, since it came into force, numerous actors have raised concerns regarding the instrument's functioning, and raised questions as to whether the ECI has become a genuine and effective tool for citizens' participation. Stakeholders have called for reform to breathe new life into the instrument, aiming to simplify the existing procedures and increasing its usability.

European Commission proposal

On 13 September 2017, the Commission adopted a legislative [proposal](#) for updating the ECI tool, aiming to address the identified shortcomings and make the ECI more accessible, which echoes many of the suggestions of the various actors who have been calling for reform.

European Parliament position

The Parliament too has consistently [called](#) for the revision of the ECI. On 20 June 2018, Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) adopted its [report](#) on the proposal, calling, in particular, for strengthening the impact of successful initiatives. Following trilogues between September and December, on 12 December 2018 Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement, approved by the AFCO committee on 22 January 2019.

The agreement provides, in particular, for strengthened support for ECI organisers through, inter alia, a collaborative online platform to provide practical and legal advice. It codifies the practice of partial registration of initiatives, and commits the Commission to operate a central online collection system, phasing out individual collection systems after 2022. The agreement simplifies somewhat the personal data requirements for ECI signatories, and gives organisers more flexibility to choose the starting date for the one-year signature collection period. For initiatives which gather sufficient support, the agreement extends the time limit for the Commission's response from 3 to 6 months. To strengthen the political impact of successful initiatives, recent [changes](#) to Parliament's Rules of Procedure provide that the EP 'shall hold a debate' on such initiatives. Contrary to the Commission's and Parliament's suggestions, the agreement does not lower the minimum age to support an ECI to 16 years. However, EU Member States would be explicitly allowed to set such age at 16 if they choose to do so.

First-reading report: [2017/0220 \(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: AFCO; Rapporteur: György Schöpflin (EPP, Hungary). For further information see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).

