



MEPs vote for a more user-friendly citizens' initiative

Committees: Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Several changes to the EU "citizen's initiative" plan, to enable citizens to request EU laws, were made unanimously by Constitutional Affairs Committee MEPs on Tuesday. The changes include an earlier "admissibility" check on proposals, a lower threshold for the number of participating countries, and an easier petition signing process.

The citizens' initiative is a new instrument introduced by the Lisbon Treaty whereby one million citizens may ask the European Commission to propose a new EU law. To put it in place as soon as possible, the Constitutional Affairs Committee rapporteurs, Alain Lamassoure (EPP, FR) and Zita Gurmai (S&D, HU), have been working closely with the two Petitions Committee rapporteurs, Diana Wallis (ALDE, UK) and Gerald Häfner (Greens/EFA, DE).

In a debate on Monday evening, Alain Lamassoure noted that after the vote "the rapporteurs of Parliament will have a genuine political mandate to open the official dialogues" (three-way talks among the European Parliament, Commission and Council), with the aim of finalising the legislative procedure swiftly. Zita Gurmai added "the citizens' initiative can give us good guidance on how to deal with European participatory democracy".

Admissibility check at the outset

Constitutional Affairs Committee MEPs suggest that, contrary to the Commission proposal to check the admissibility of an initiative only after 300,000 signatures have already been collected, the check be done already at the time of registering an initiative on the Commission web site. Checking earlier would ensure that citizens do not end up signing initiatives that do not meet the admissibility criteria.

To ensure that the case for initiatives is well-founded and that they have a European dimension, the draft report suggests a citizens' committee of at least seven members coming from seven EU Member States should be set up to register an initiative.

Lower threshold for number of Member States involved

The Lisbon Treaty says that citizens' initiative signatories must come from a "significant number" of Member States. The Commission and Council have stated that this figure should be one third of the Member States, while Parliament's rapporteurs argue that one fifth is enough.

Easier signing process

MEPs also sought to simplify the signing of initiatives by deleting a requirement to give an ID card number when signing. The signatory's name, address, nationality and the date and place of birth should suffice, they say. It is up to the Member States to verify the authenticity of the signatures.

Press release

MEPs agreed with the Commission and Council on the minimum age of the signatories by deciding that they should "be of the age laid down in each Member State, taking as reference the European Parliament elections".

Help desk, user guide and public hearing

The Constitutional Affairs Committee says the Commission should also help the organisers of an initiative by providing a user-friendly guide as well as a help desk. In addition, each initiative that manages to collect one million signatures in 12 months, as required by the regulation, should be discussed at a public hearing organised by the Commission and Parliament, it adds.

Next steps

Parliament, Council and the Commission will hold a formal triologue on the citizens' initiative on 30 November at 17.00h–18.30h. If the institutions reach an agreement soon, Parliament will vote on the issue at its December plenary session. The Member States had asked for 12 months to incorporate the new EU legislation in their national laws. MEPs approved an amendment saying that 6 months should suffice.

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