

“One million signatures for diversity”: MEPs discuss potential minority protection laws

On Thursday, the organisers of “Minority Safepack” presented their objectives at a hearing organised by the Civil Liberties, Culture and Petitions committees.

At the joint remote [hearing](#) that took place on 15 October, the European Citizens’ Initiative’s [organisers](#) presented their proposals on how EU law could promote minority rights, and linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe. The hearing brought together MEPs from the [Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee](#) and the [Culture and Education Committee](#), in association with the [Committee on Petitions](#), as well as from other participating committees. Senior representatives from the Commission, the Council of Europe, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, and the Committee of the Regions also took the floor.

Equality and support to minorities

During the first part of the hearing, speakers debated on equality and support to minorities, especially in relation to cohesion policy, EU funding, and state aid. Stateless persons were highlighted, with many MEPs stressing that they have inalienable rights to work, movement and education. The majority of MEPs urged the Commission to adopt a set of “ambitious” legal acts, with many stressing the importance of diversity not only between member states, but also within them.

A few MEPs commented negatively on the proposals, claiming that they risk exacerbating social divisions, while also being incompatible with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, which was rebuffed by the ECI’s organisers and other MEPs alike.

Preserving minority cultures

The second round focused on language, education, culture and audiovisual media. The overwhelming majority of speakers welcomed the proposal for a European Language Diversity Center. They also commented on the need for better access of small minorities to inclusive linguistic processes and original content. Other topics raised included the establishment of a single digital market, the role of media, geoblocking and copyright protection in relation to minority culture preservation.

Quotes

[Juan Fernando López Aguilar \(S&D, ES\)](#), Chair of the Civil Liberties Committee, said: “Our democracy is not simply the victory of a majority over a minority, but a way to govern in full respect of the minority. Diversity is essential to lively, vibrant societies”.

[Dace Melbārde \(ECR, LV\)](#), Vice-Chair of the Culture Committee said: “Language is one of the most subtle and explicit expressions of our cultural identity. Protecting and promoting linguistic diversity is one of the key priorities of our Committee”.

[Dolors Montserrat \(EPP, ES\)](#), Chair of the Committee on Petitions, underlined that her Committee “regularly receives petitions related to the rights of minorities” and that concerned petitioners were alerted about the event.

A complete list of hearing speakers is available [here](#). You can catch up with the recorded hearing here: [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).

Background

The EU introduced European Citizens’ Initiatives in order to enhance direct democracy. A group of citizens can put forward an initiative and, if more than one million citizens from at least seven member states support it, then the European Commission has to take action.

Parliament was instrumental in 2019 in [reforming the rules for ECIs](#) to strengthen citizens’ voices, and again in 2020 in ensuring that the COVID-19 pandemic [will not impede ongoing and future initiatives](#)

Further information

[Hearing webpage](#)

[Commission’s webpage on the Minority Safepack initiative](#)

[Bios of Minority Safepack speakers](#)

[Minority Safepack Proposals](#)

[Compilation of Relevant EP publications](#)

[EP Fact Sheets on the European Union: European Citizens’ Initiative](#)

[ECI Webpage](#)

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