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To: European Commission, ECI-Consultation@ec.europa.eu
Memo: response to the greenpaper on ECI, COM (2009) 622 final
From: Platform www.onemillionvotesforeurope.eu
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The platform One Million Votes for Europe would like to thank you for and take the opportunity to respond to the European Commission (EC) green paper on the ECI. The Platform has been created to inform, guide and assist citizens or organisations of citizens in their attempt to make use the ECI and reach One Million votes on an issue they want to address.

We applaud the steps taken by the EC on the European's Citizen's Initiative (ECI) which, as formulated in the Lisbon Treaty, helps pro-active citizens to be part of the democratic process and thereby can be perceived as an instrument to close the gap between EU institutions and its citizens. Citizens making use of the ECI will monitor the European Commission's reaction, expecting it to take its responsibility in regard. If the European Commission takes the issue seriously and communicate on their findings (impact assessment on the feasibility) in a way people understand this would contribute to creating more "proximity" between European citizens and EU institutions (. The functioning of the European Union and the role it plays in the daily lives of people will not be so far away anymore for those involved in an ECI, which is a small but significant step in reducing the EU's democratic deficiency.

General comments to the green paper:

- The European Union is diverse (many cultures and languages) and relatively new. The task to obtain One Million votes is a real challenge. Furthermore, citizens of Europe will need to experience that the instrument can be a successful tool for bottom up democracy and influencing the EU institutions. The latter is already (first step) achieved if the EC would show that it takes the proposal seriously (communicate, assess, communicate), maybe already before it reaches the land mark of one million votes. A second step would be that the EC formulates a legislative proposal based on the ECI and the outcome of the impact assessments. In this step the EC has the flexibility to alter the original ECI. The ultimate third step would be the decision making process. The EC, nor the European Parliament and Council are obliged in the decision making process to follow exactly the ECI on the matter. The steps illustrate that ECI could be a tool for signalling and agenda setting, but by no means ECI would oblige EU institutions to do exactly the same as proposed in the ECI. The general rules should take the above elements into account by making the administrative burden as low as possible.
- Where the European Commission has the right to take the initiative it does not need to await the One Million votes. In other words, an ECI could already be taken seriously by the EC before the amount of one million votes has been met. Such a scenario, in which the EC communicates that it takes action in reaction to a certain ECI initiative, could boost the working of ECI as well as the confidence of citizens in the European Commission.

Detailed comments with regard to questions figuring in the green paper:

1. Minimum number of Member States: we agree with the proposed minimum of 9 member states.
2. Minimum number of signatures: in general we agree with the 0,2% threshold of the total population and would like to make one remark to consider:
 - a. If citizens from more than 9 member states participate we support a threshold of 0, 15%. This would improve the workability of ECI especially considering the still challenging amounts of votes from large member states.
3. Especially young people are often neglected by decision makers (the under 18 age is most often not regarded enough by political parties). Therefore, we propose that citizens from 16 years of age would be allowed to participate.
4. Form and wording: we believe that it is sufficient and appropriate to require that an initiative clearly states the subject matter and objectives of the proposal on which the Commission is invited to act. Additionally, it would be excellent if the EC could be consulted up front on the feasibility and clarity (in written) of the proposal.
5. Collection, Verification and authentication of signatures: we would like to make sure that unintended consequences as noted on page 8 of the greenpaper are prevented (e.g. voice of citizens in some member states is easier heard than in others). Furthermore, the system should represent a limited burden for citizens. The ECI is a tool to start up the dialogue between EC and citizens. We believe that every EU citizen should be able to use the same European reference and that an EU set of minimum requirements is therefore needed. Member states should not be able to put specific provisions in place at national level (this would potentially make the ECI 27 times more complicated). Furthermore, practical experience has shown that citizens do sign national citizen initiatives but most often only put name and signature on paper (a lot of national citizen's initiatives take place off-line in the streets and squares). Internet voting is relatively new and will be a promising and powerful tool for the ECI in the near future. In that regard, the question is whether verification and authentication of signatures from internet has to be done by each member state or that this would be possible too on a European level. We would propose the following:
 - a. Collection of signatures should be possible both off-line and online. The collected signatures should be stored by the initiators of the initiative. The initiators have the responsibility to control the data and hand data over for verification purposes. Verification and authentication of signatures – if any (considering the essence of ECI) - should be done by taking an appropriate sample of the total amount of votes from which a default should be reached (e.g. sample on 0,5% of the votes per member states with an error margin of 5).
 - b. Practical experience has shown that it is undoable to ask too much personal data for CI's from citizens. Normally the following information is given by citizens: name and signature (street) or name, nationality, email and online signature (internet). Two elements of information could be used for verification of the signatures: telephone number or email account, the provision of one of the two being a minimum.
 - c. It would be desirable if a body of the European Commission would check the online votes. As a minimum step forward the European Commission should make the network of national (official) bodies visible for this purpose (easy to access). The EU should set specific rules for the response time for citizens on calls and emails from official bodies to check authenticity.
 - d. For an example of an ECI and a tool for internet voting, please have a look at www.onemillionvotesforeurope.eu.
6. Time limit for the collection of signatures: we are in favour of a time limit which is of an approach with an initial limit set at two years for the first 10 ECI's, as awareness about and confidence in the instrument needs to be raised. Once the ECI is more established (after 10 initiatives) the proposed timeframe of 1 or 1, 5 year seems reasonable..

7. Registration of proposed initiatives: The answer to both questions raised is yes. We support the idea to register the initiative on a website provided by the European Commission. This would also raise media attention on the ECI' s as well as EC insight in what keeps citizens of Europe busy . A suggestion could be that the EC could commit itself to select on a yearly basis one of the ECI' s to pay specific attention to, and work on, regardless the total amount of votes obtained by the initiators.
8. Requirements for organisers – Transparency and funding: we believe it would be sufficient if the initiators would be registered with their proposal on the EU website (outline of proposal plus description of organisers). Furthermore, the organisers should be required to provide information on funding that they have received in cases where the amount from a supporter exceeds a certain threshold (e.g. 5000 euro's). This information would be: the name of the supporting organisation and the amount funded.
9. Examination of citizens' s initiative by the EC: A timeline of 5 – 6 months would be appropriate, provided that the EC starts communicating with the initiators of the ECI in an early stage (at least via the proposed EU website, page 7 and 12).
10. Initiatives on the same issue: we do believe it is appropriate to introduce rules to prevent the successive presentation of citizen's initiatives on the same issue. We agree with the ideas of the EC on this.

On behalf of One Million Votes for Europe,

Yours faithfully,

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