

European Commission
Secretariat General
Directorate E “Better Regulation and Institutional Issues”
Unit E.I “Institutional Issues”
B – 1049 Brussels

31 January 2010

Submitted by Terri Grover & Ajaz Ahmed as part of the European Group Project

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write in response to your Green Paper on a European Citizens’ Initiative.

As part of our European Union course we are required to undertake a group project on any area of EU law. We have chosen to create an educational DVD on The Lisbon Treaty.

Part of our project will involve a discussion around the European Citizens’ Initiative hence our response to the proposals put forward by you. As a group we have come together to discuss your Green Paper. We set out our response as follows:

1. Minimum number of Member States from which citizens must come

We agree with the Commission’s proposal that the threshold of one third of Member States (currently nine), from which signatories must come would strike a fair balance and be sufficiently representative of a Union interest.

We feel that this would constitute a “significant number of Member States” as required by the Treaty.

2. Minimum number of signatures per Member State

The Group did not feel that setting a fixed number of participating citizens for all Member States is a valid proposal for the reasons set out by the Commission in their Green Paper.

The Group agrees with the Commission that the most commonsensical approach would be to set a threshold that is a proportion of the population of each Member State. The Group, however, disagrees that 0.2% of the population is an appropriate threshold. Instead, The Group feels that 1% of the population would represent an adequate proportion of each Member State. This would have the further advantage of ensuring that the initiative put forward is a popular one, thus ensuring that the Commission does not become burdened with frivolous proposals.

3. Eligibility to support a citizens' initiative – minimum age

The Group did not feel that the minimum age needed to be linked to voting age. Many 16 year olds are enrolled on law and politics courses in Sixth Form Colleges and are therefore able to make an informed decision.

The Group also recognised that for the purposes of verification of the signatures if electoral role numbers were to be utilised then it would present difficulties for almost all Member States, where at present the voting age is 18.

If on the other hand a system of verification by way of National Insurance numbers were to be utilised rather than the voting age then the Group felt that the minimum age should be 16 years of age.

The Group posed the following question: would migrant workers be bound by their own Member State's minimum voting age requirements, or would they be required to adopt the requirements of the country in which they are currently residing, notwithstanding the length of stay?

4. Form and wording of a citizens' initiative

The Group decided that the best approach would be for the Commission to create a proforma application form which citizens are required to fill out in order to submit a proposal. Citizens would be permitted to append any further information which they think would be helpful to the application form. The application form should request details on the subject matter and objectives of the proposal. The proforma should be available on line.

5. Requirements for the collection, verification and authentication of signatures

The Group felt that the best way to authenticate signatures would be for the Commission to create a multi-lingual website which citizens could go to and fill out certain personal details: name, date of birth and address, for example. All citizens have access to computers and the internet, if not at home or work then by virtue of internet cafes. This method is likely to result in many more citizens becoming involved. It will also give migrant workers a much better opportunity to have their say. An EU official could keep a regular check on the website to ensure that it contains no malicious material.

The Group examined the workings of the No 10 e petition website in the UK. A similar system would be quite easily and cost effectively adopted by the Commission for collection, verification and authentication of signatures.

6. Time limit for the collection of signatures

The Group agreed with the Commission that a time limit should be set for collection of the signatures. We consider that six months would be sufficient. The document is online and is therefore far more easily accessible than requiring citizens to attend a designated centre to sign the document.

7. Registration of proposed initiatives

The Group considered that the time for registration (six months) should run from the date that the initiative is posted online.

8. Requirements for organisers – Transparency and funding

The Group considered that to truly be a citizens' initiative the process must be voluntary and not open to manipulation by large corporations. There is therefore a requirement that organisers should be required to provide information on any support and funding that they have received for an initiative. In fact if possible rules should be devised to prevent the commercial financing of any initiatives to ensure that vested interest groups / professional lobbyists do not start manipulating the system.

9. Examination of Citizens' initiatives by the Commission

The Group felt that the Commission should be given six months in order to consider a proposal. This is in accordance with the time given to those proposing an initiative to collect signatures.

10. Initiatives on the same issue

The Group felt that all initiatives should be submitted online and that similar to the No 10 e petition site an official can examine the proposed initiative before it is posted on the site for the collection of signatures. If the initiative is a duplication or turned down for malicious or unsuitable content then reasons should be provided explaining whether the point is already addressed by another initiative.

Ultimately, it should be for the Commission to determine whether to put forward an initiative. However, they must publicise reasons for not allowing a certain petition.