

Dear,

Concerning the Greenbook on the European Citizen's initiative I have following remarks and propositions to make. I made these remarks in response to the questions that were posed in the Greenbook.

Only at the end I give a remark on something that is not mentioned in the Greenbook but that is very important to make a success of the Citizen's Initiative: it goes about not only in what time the Commission should react on the Citizen's Initiative but also about how the Commission will react and how the citizen who took the initiative can follow up this reaction.

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

**Questions:** *“Do you consider that one third of the total number of Member States would constitute a*

*“significant number of Member States” as required by the Treaty?  
If not, what threshold would you consider appropriate, and why?”*

**Answer:** As I understand the Lisbon Treaty and the comments in the Greenbook, the required one million citizens for a valid initiative should come from a limited number of Member States; the Greenbook proposes that a third of the Member States would do. This implies that if there are another million citizens signing for the initiative but coming from the other two thirds of the Member States they will not count for the validity of the initiative.

Apparently the Greenbook tries to combine two opposite requirements: on the one hand a certain concentration of people who support the initiative and on the other hand a certain spread of the support over a sufficient great proportion of the EU.

If this is really the case, I think a better proposition would be to require that two thirds of the supporters come from one third of the Member States and that the remaining third of the supporters come from the other two thirds of the Member States.

Thought should be given also to the possibility that the number of people in the EU might grow (or lessen) substantially; the required number of supporting citizens for a valid initiative should change proportionally.

### **2. Minimum number of signatures per Member State**

**Questions:** *“Do you consider that 0.2% of the total population of each Member State is an appropriate threshold?*

*“If not, do you have other proposals in this regard in order to achieve the aim of ensuring that a citizens' initiative is genuinely representative of a Union interest?”*

**Answer:** The threshold of 0.2 % is sufficient.

### **3. Eligibility to support a citizens' initiative - minimum age**

**Questions:** *“Should the minimum age required to support a European citizens' initiative be linked to the*

*voting age for the European Parliament elections in each Member State?  
If not, what other option would you consider appropriate, and why?"*

**Answer:** Yes

#### **4. Form and wording of a citizens' initiative**

**Questions:** *"Would it be sufficient and appropriate to require that an initiative clearly state the subject matter and objectives of the proposal on which the Commission is invited to act? What other requirements, if any, should be set out as to the form and wording of a Citizen's Initiative?"*

**Answer:** This is a very important item. Any initiative should be clearly stated so that the Commission and anyone else involved should know exactly what the initiative is about and what exactly is expected of the Commission. A legal draft would normally be clear enough for that. A legal draft supposes on the other hand a certain knowledge of European jurisdiction: you can't expect every European citizen to master that. I think that every initiative should be proposed in the form of a (small) greenbook like the greenbooks the Commission is proposing itself: in this greenbook an explanation of the matter can be given ending up with the precise questions that are posed to the Commission and should be answered by it.

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

**Questions:** *"Do you think that there should be a common set of procedural requirements for the collection, verification and authentication of signatures by Member States' authorities at EU level?"*

*To what extent should Member States be able to put in place specific provisions at national level?*

*Are specific procedures needed in order to ensure that EU citizens can support a citizens' initiative regardless of their country of residence?*

*Should citizens be able to support a citizens' initiative online? If so, what security and authentication features should be foreseen?"*

**Answer:** There should indeed be a common set of procedural requirements for the whole of the EU so as to create a level playing field for citizens of all Member States. The EU should set the rules and Member States should not be allowed to put additional conditions for the collection, verification and authentication of the signatures.

Even if that would put a considerable additional administrative burden on certain Member States, I would prefer an on-line collection of signatures; this could be done in the same way as banks control the signatures in case of payment by their clients. This supposes a whole on-line infrastructure that doesn't yet exist in all member States. In the future such an infrastructure would be very useful for the different citizens' initiatives that will inevitably come and for parliamentary and presidential elections. Everyone, including non-resident EU-citizens, who has access to internet should be able to vote in such a way; for people without direct access to internet, communities should set up voting centers where these people, with the help of

officers, would be able to sign up or vote on-line. Such an infrastructure will also considerably simplify the control of the signatures (no double voting or double signatures for example). If the EU wants to be a world leader in new technologies, the installation of such an infrastructure will be a stimulus for it. As to the security and authentication features of such procedures: this should be left to IT specialists to make sure everything is done according to the rules.

## 6. Time limit for the collection of signatures

**Questions:** *“Should a time limit for the collection of signatures be fixed? If so, would you consider that one year would be an appropriate time-limit?”*

**Answer:** There should indeed be a time limit upon the period wherein signatures can be collected and indeed one year would do: not too short so that the citizens will have the time to organize themselves and not long to avoid ever-lasting procedures.

## 7. Registration of proposed initiatives

**Questions:** *“Do you think that a mandatory system of registration of proposed initiatives is necessary?”*

*If so, do you agree that this could be done through a specific website provided by the European Commission?”*

**Answer:** Yes, there is need for a system of registration of the proposed initiatives and this can be done (should be done even) by a specific website provided by the European Commission.

## 8. Requirements for organizers - Transparency and funding

**Question ...** *“ What specific requirements should be imposed upon the organizers of an initiative in order to*

*ensure transparency and democratic accountability?*

*Do you agree that organizers should be required to provide information on the support and funding that they have received for an initiative? “ article 8, page 12*

**Answer:** In the Lisbon treaty it is foreseen that citizens, not organizations, could take the initiative to do proposals to the European Commission. This should be kept this way to avoid that the citizen's voice is drawn once more in all kinds of interventions going out from big organizations or powerful multinationals. These instances have already their channels to contact the Commission. Of course citizen's should be allowed to organize themselves to introduce a proposal to the Commission. But this should be an ad hoc organization meant only to introduce the proposal. No known organization should be allowed to take the place of the citizens and to introduce a proposal.

To prevent that a member of an organization introduces a proposal in place of the organization where he belongs to while the organization controls the campaign by funding and organizing it, it should be forbidden that gifts exceed 10 Euro's. All gifts should also be put on one single bank account number (or one single bank account number for every country that is participating in the campaign) where control by European administration is possible to see if the rules are followed.

Organizers should be individual citizens and should indeed be required to inform on the support that they get for an initiative. If there is proof that the initiative originates from any kind of organization (firm, political party, foreign country, action group,...) and not from the individual who claims it, the initiative should be blocked immediately and become invalid.

## 9. Examination of citizens' initiatives by the Commission

**Questions:** *“Should a time limit be foreseen for the Commission to examine a citizens' initiative”*

**Answer:** Yes, there should be a limit on the time that the Commission has to react on a citizen's proposal. This period should be short. Indeed, if there is a period of one year wherein citizens have time to sign the proposal, the Commission knows already one year in advance what is coming up. The Commission doesn't know from the beginning if the required one million signatures will be reached, but after some time it will become clear if that will be the case or not and the Commission can start its preparations. For that reason I think the Commission should react within 3 months after the closing of the collection time of one year. That should also be the case when the one million signatures are reached in a shorter time than one year.

## 10. Initiatives on the same issue

**Questions:** *“Is it appropriate to introduce rules to prevent the successive presentation of citizens' initiatives on the same issue?”*

*If so, would this best be done by introducing some sort of disincentives - or time limits?”*

**Answer:** I don't think it will be necessary to introduce rules to prevent citizens from presenting repeated initiatives on the same issue.

There are several possibilities:

- The Commission has taken a close look to the questions posed in the initiative but has chosen for another political solution strongly arguing why she has chosen for that solution and not for the direction given by the citizen's initiative: in this case there is little chance that the citizens will present their initiative again and if they do so they will probably not get a million signatures again; if they persist and if they get a million signatures for a second time it means that the issue involved appeals strongly to the people and it might be a good thing that the Commission takes a second look at it;
- The Commission takes the initiative lightly: the citizens should then have the possibility to present the same initiative or a close brother of it, again.
- The Commission follows the recommendations of the initiative: in that case there is little chance that anyone should want to present the same initiative again.

Out of a democratic point of **view** I think it would be better to let the possibility open to introduce several successive initiatives on the same issue.

## 11. Reaction of the Commission

**Questions:** *“How should the Commission react to the Citizen’s Initiative? Should the citizen who took the initiative be given a possibility to enter in contact with the Commission and to defend his point of view and if so how should this be organized?”*

**Answer:** The Lisbon Treaty leaves the Commission entirely free in the way it should react to a Citizen’s Initiative: the Commission has to give a notification to the European Parliament about the action it envisages and that ‘s it. If this action is only a recommendation to further study than there is no one who can alter this.

For that reason and to give the Citizen’s Initiative a real democratic character, the Commission should defend its reaction to the Initiative before the European Parliament. The citizen who took the initiative should be given the possibility to defend his point of view in the same session of the Parliament. And the Parliament should follow up the actions of the Commission afterwards. This is essential to make sure that something is be done with the Citizen’s Initiative.

Sincerely yours,

Johan Blondé  
European Citizen