

**eMPower eParticipation Trial Project co-funded by the European
Commission under the EU eParticipation Preparatory Action**

Comments to Green Paper of the European Citizens' Initiative

- 1. 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?***

Our view is that one third of the Member states seem to be too high to achieve and of course this can create important barriers to whole procedure of the citizens' initiative. Taking into consideration that an initiative may be of interest of a European Region that includes no more than 4 or 5 MS (e.g. the Balkans), we believe that the threshold should be set at one fifth of the Member States.

- 2. 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?***

Citizens' initiatives shall be strongly supported and for that reason the threshold set seems to be satisfactory as a minimum supporters or voters number. Also we believe that the percentage shall refer to each country separately and not to the total population of the countries involved.

- 3. 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?***

We strongly agree to that.

- 4. 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 citizens' initiative?***

From our expertise that arise from the implementation of the eMPower project, which is an e-Participation project promoting e-Petitions in three Member States, Greece, Portugal and Italy, we believe that the initiative can take the form of an e-Petitioning procedure which will be enriched with social characteristics aiming to support the voters in the best possible way.

Thus we believe that an ePetition platform shall be developed which will give the opportunity for consultation between citizens, experts and decision makers prior to

the wording of the initiative in order to end up to a petition fully accepted either from a legal point of view or from domain point of view (e.g. environment, energy, citizenship etc).

Throughout the petitioning process voters will be supported with managed content, stored in the ePetition system's database and external content coming from well known websites and portals such as EUR-LEX, Google News or News Agencies sites, Scientific websites etc. In such a way the voter will have the chance to view the initiative's topic from all its aspects and decide in an objective way to support it or not.

This e-Petition system shall be administrated by the EC and a standard procedure shall be set from the stage of the formation of the petition to the stage of the submission of the electronic petition.

- 5. 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?**

Our proposal (see question 4) declares our belief for online support of the citizens' initiative (ePetitioning). Towards this direction we strongly support the development of a pan-European authentication framework which has to be adopted by the Member states and will ensure the reliability and transparency of the ePetitioning procedure.

- 6. 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?**

A time limit for the collection of signatures shall be set. We believe that one year is an appropriate time limit but on the other hand a time limit of six months for consultation on the petition text shall be set, as well.

- 7. 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?**

We approve the development of a central online system for the registration of the proposed initiatives and our proposal aims to the development of an ePetitioning web portal with special Web 2.0 characteristics (such as Facebook and Twitter links, web blogs and discussion forums within it, ability for creation of community groups and electronic campaigning functionalities).

8. ***What specific requirements should be imposed upon the organisers of an initiative in order to ensure transparency and democratic accountability? Do you agree that organisers should be required to provide information on the support and funding that they have received for an initiative?***

We agree that transparency is ensured through the provision of information on the support and funding that the organizers have received for an initiative.

9. ***Should a time limit be foreseen for the Commission to examine a citizens' initiative?***

The ePetitioning procedure that is the basis of the central ePetitioning portal shall be composed by several stages, each one of which shall have certain duration. Regarding the examination of the ePetition we believe that a 6-month period seems to be reasonable enough.

10. ***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?***

The proposed ePetitioning system gives the opportunity for avoiding duplication of submitted petitions by grouping them in thematic sections and merging the similar ones in order to give them the opportunity to gain wider support and impact throughout the European Union. However, it is important to examine the possibility of giving the opportunity for the registration of a petition that stands exactly opposite to another one that has already been registered.

Relevant information regarding the eMPower project

eMPower is an eParticipation Trial Project co-funded by the European Commission under the EU eParticipation Preparatory Action. eMPower is aiming to motivate and strengthen the involvement of NGOs and citizens in the decision-making process on environmental issues at a National and European level by providing methods and tools for supporting citizens' participation and collection of signatures to promote relevant public initiatives and demands of civil society.

The project will use state-of-the-art eParticipation ICT tools to support ePetitioning so as to enable transparent, interactive and democratic communication processes, the results of which will be joint proposals, initiatives and viewpoints of NGOs and citizens regarding environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity, genetically modified organism, Mercury, waste management, water management.

The Pilot Trials will run in 2010 in three Member States (Greece, Italy & Portugal). The Environmental NGOs will be involved in the process as moderators in order to coordinate submission of better quality ePetitions at National & Cross-border level. The National News Agencies partners of the project will be involved in the promotion of the petitions / initiatives

The main objective of the project is to validate a viable system for European Citizens Initiatives and explore the issues involved

The project started on the 1st of January 2009 and will run for 2 years.

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