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GREEN PAPER ON A EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE - A EURO COOP CONTRIBUTION -

Euro Coop ID number in the EC's register of interest representatives: 3819438251-87

A. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Euro Coop welcomes the European Commission's initiative to open a wide consultation on the implantation of this important new right conferred by the Lisbon Treaty, the European Citizens' Initiative.

This right of crucial importance to bridge the gap often perceived between EU citizens' aspirations and the European institutions. A broad debate on its concrete form involving citizens and other stakeholders is equally important, as they are the ones who use this right in the future.

Euro Coop, representing 25 million consumer-members, is of the opinion that the application of this right should remain simple and exclude any administrative overburden that would constrain the expression of citizens.

B. COMMENTS

1. Minimum number of States from which citizens must come

As the European Parliament, Euro Coop believes the threshold should be set at one quarter of Member States. Euro Coop considers that a threshold set at one third of Member States would be too high. It is of crucial importance that citizens perceive this objective as reachable as to stimulate such initiatives.

2. Minimum number of signatures per Member State

As the European Commission and the European Parliament, Euro Coop considers that 0.2% of the total population of each Member State is an appropriate threshold. Such a threshold puts the different Member States on an equal footing, without penalizing citizens coming from smaller Member States with a fixed number.

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

Euro Coop supports the Commission's view that such a minimum age should be linked to the voting age for the European Parliament elections in each Member State. That is to say that the minimum age to support a citizens' initiative would be 18 in all Member States except Austria (16).

4. Form and wording of a citizens' initiative

Euro Coop considers that it would be 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. Options such as the requirement to prepare a draft legal act would be unnecessarily restrictive and burdensome.

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

In line with the Commission's view, Euro Coop supports the option of a common set of procedural requirements for the collection, verification and authentication of signatures by Member States' authorities at EU level. Furthermore, Euro Coop considers that Member States should not be able to put in place specific provisions at national level. The future Regulation should be clear enough to enable direct implantation of a unique European right. Having to sign a common initiative, European citizens should not be faced with different additional conditions depending on their Member State of residence.

Similarly, Euro Coop defends the idea of EU citizens being able to support a citizens' initiative regardless of their country of residence, drawing on the experience of the European Parliament elections. Online support could be an option but not the only option, as real campaigns at the contact of European citizens remains key. Authentication would be possible by crossing the signatures with the voting list for the European Parliament elections.

6. Time limit for the collection of signatures

Euro Coop agrees with the European Commission and the European Parliament on a one-year limit for the collection of signatures.

7. Registration of proposed initiatives

Euro Coop agrees with the necessity of a mandatory system of registration of proposed initiatives. Such a system could be organized through a dedicated website provided by the European Commission or the European Parliament.

8. Requirements for organisers - Transparency and funding

When registering their initiative, organisers should provide full transparency on their support and funding. Organisers should also comply with the obligations relating to the protection of personal data according to the relevant national law implementing EU legislation on data protection.

9. Examination of citizens' initiatives by the Commission

Euro Coop supports the idea of a 6 months-time limit for the European Commission to examine a citizens' initiative, which should be enough for adequate consideration.

10. Initiatives on the same issue

Euro Coop is of the opinion that no rules should be introduced to prevent the successive presentation of citizens' initiatives on the same issue. The free expression of citizens must prevail and a topic gathering more than one million European citizens cannot be discarded by the European Commission, even more if such a topic has already been in the spotlights with a recent initiative.

C. CONCLUSION

Euro Coop welcomes this new democratic right provided to the European citizens. As an organisation representing 25 million European consumer-members, it wishes this right to be simple of use, with a light supporting system that would not create heavy administrative burdens.

EURO COOP is the European Community of Consumer Cooperatives, whose members are the national organisations of consumer cooperatives in 18 European countries. Created in 1957, EURO COOP today represents over 3,200 local and regional cooperatives, the members of which amount to more than 25 million consumers across Europe.

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