
Submission to the Green Paper on a 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?**

We have no strong feeling about the absolute number of countries that should be needed. To ensure that gaining the support across the required number of Member States (9 on the current proposal) does not become too burdensome and expensive, an appropriate pan-European online multilingual consultation and collaboration service needs to be provided and/or supported by the Commission to ensure that not just well funded campaigns will be able to collect the 1 million signatures across the "significant number" of Member States for an European Citizens Initiative (ECI).

- 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?**

We have no strong feeling on the absolute proportion of the population. Whatever level is chosen, it will require that the Commission provide and/or support national online consultation and collaboration services (as an integral part of the pan-European service mentioned above) to enable the collection of signatures from 0.2% of the total population within each Member State.

- 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?
If not, what other option would you consider appropriate, and why?**

Yes we agree. This will require that the age of each signatory to an ECI will need to be recorded along with their signature. This should be incorporated into the proposed online service mentioned above, with the appropriate privacy and security of each signatory's personal data. This will have the practical consequence of simplifying validation of signatures by allowing verification of signatures against electoral rolls, particularly where national identity databases are not in place (see 5 below).

- 4. Would it be sufficient and appropriate to require that an initiative clearly state the subject matter & 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?**

Yes we agree that it would be appropriate to require that an initiative clearly state the subject matter and objectives of the proposal. This could be greatly facilitated by use of a common pan-European standardised online system provided or supported by the Commission. We also feel that the promoters of ECI's should receive neutral support and guidance at a local level from a trusted agency to help formulate their proposals in a clear and unambiguous way, but not in any way to bias or distort their proposal; see also 7 below. This neutral support could also help them to ensure that the subject of the ECI is likely to concern a policy area where the Commission has powers to act. This will be particularly important to enable support in other Member States and languages. Again an appropriate interactive multilingual pan-

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European online service could greatly facilitate this, and provide appropriate facilities to allow neutral/trusted public authorities to help the promoters of an ECI.

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?

It is vital that there is a “level playing pitch” across the EU and that the voices of all EU citizens are equally heard, but with Member State administration and procedures, as is done in European Parliament elections for instance. It is also critical that the authentication of signatures does not become burdensome and destroy ECI's as “a new dimension to European democracy” and atrophy ECIs to an unused and unusable procedure, as has happened with a number of national initiatives' procedures. The online service mentioned above could be designed to provide the required verification and authentication of signatures, and yet allow a vibrant ECI “culture” to grow and prosper, connecting EU citizens to the European Commission in a way that is not there at the moment.

It is important that the system define an identity infrastructure based on several components to be added as required. This infrastructure should use only the identity component needed by the law underlying the petition process (for example it could verify the age but not the address). The most important component of this identity infrastructure would be the verification that one citizen can sign just once (*one citizen – one signature*) without necessarily knowing their identity. Therefore this identity infrastructure should be designed in a way that would allow the definition, in a flexible but secure way, of the verification requirements in the ECI process.

If ECIs are truly to bring “a new dimension to European democracy”, then they must be readily available on a common basis to all citizens and groups in the EU. Thus we feel that it is absolutely essential that the process be undertaken online in an easy-to-use interactive multilingual common pan-European service, available to all citizens in Europe. An offline-only approach would make the whole process much too long and too burdensome for all but the best funded groups. Systems should be in place to support multiple channels for signatures: at the moment, paper and web-based signatures, but allowing for new channels, for instance use of mobile technologies.

A common pan-European online service could ensure that there is a common set of procedural requirements for the collection, verification and authentication of signatures by Member States' authorities at EU level. The service could accommodate any of these latter specific provisions at a national level, by each signatory to an ECI proposal inputting their Nationality (as is done currently with PETI petitions).

As the right to sign an ECI is based on each individual's right to vote, then the procedures in place for authenticating and verifying voters in European Parliament elections should be

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adopted for the ECI. The ECI must make sure that the security and authentication do not likewise become barriers to stop ECIs becoming "a new dimension to European democracy", while ensuring systems are in place to give assurance that the signature thresholds have been met, and providing an auditable, non-deniable, non-repudiable record of the checks that have been carried out.

We would suggest that a thorough verification of a statistically significant sample of signatures could provide the assurance needed, rather than requiring 100% verification of every person signing the ECI signature (which would be difficult online or offline where a national ID register does not exist, as in the UK and Ireland). It may also be that on completion of an ECI which appears to have passed the required threshold, the totals gathered at national level will require an audit of the verification process.

It is important to give all EU Member States the opportunity to achieve the best European democratic standard in the ECI process. Therefore it would be necessary to provide a "support" function to ensure that proposed ECIs would adhere to the best practice of initiatives already working in the other Member States (standard level of privacy, of human rights, or children rights, prisoners rights etc). The proposed pan-European online service could provide such support and collaboration spaces to help ensure this and thus greatly contribute to ensuring the success of ECIs as a truly democratic tool in Europe.

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?

Yes one year is an appropriate time-limit. The proposed pan-European online service should greatly facilitate the timely collection of signatures and manage the progress of each ECI proposal in a transparent way along clearly defined stages.

To support the perceived fairness of the system the timescales allowed and responsibilities for all stages of the ECI process should be clear to all involved. For instance: it should be clear how long after an ECI has closed the Commission will act on it (see 9 below)

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?

Yes, using the common pan-European service proposed above would allow the proposers of an ECI to formally register it before the collection of signatures begins. This can be seen as an opportunity to ensure that the subject and wording of the ECI is valid, before a citizen or organisation go to the effort of collecting the required number of signatures

They would be required to upload all relevant information on the proposed initiative (e.g. title, subject-matter, objectives, background etc.) on the pan-European service, which would be publicly available and open for discussion on the service's collaboration and discussion forums. The system would then provide the organiser with confirmation of the registration, the date and a registration number, on the basis of which the collection campaign could be launched. There should also be a mechanism to link the ECI to campaign-related sites.

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In providing or supporting the pan-European service, the Commission should insist that it promote a pan-European open metadata and interoperability data standards (for instance building on the ePetitions data standards being developed in the UK) to allow seamless interworking with all other open ePetitioning and Citizens Initiative systems, and to support transparency and innovation by civil society in promoting campaigns.

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?

Yes this is reasonable, and the basic information could be readily provided at registration of the ECI (and would have to be updated on the ECI's submission). In the interests of transparency and democratic accountability, the organisers of initiatives should be required to provide certain basic information, in particular in relation to the organisations that support an initiative and how the initiatives are or will be funded. This would be in the interest of the citizens considering signing up to an initiative or joining in on the discussion forums of the proposed online service (mentioned above) and would also be in line with the Commission's European Transparency Initiative.

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

Yes. Using the proposed pan-European online service, this would be the Process Stage after completion of the signatures. It may involve some interaction with the ECI proposers, but should use the forums of the online service in the interests of transparency and democratic accountability, particularly for the supporters and signatories of the ECI. After a defined period (maximum of 6 months seems reasonable) the Commission should clearly and fully state on the online service, the action that it intends to take, and the reasoning behind the decision. All of this information should remain publically available (possibly as an archive) on the online service, so that EU citizens can browse back to determine what the Commission promised and actually did.

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?

No, the open discussion and collaboration forums of the common pan-European Web 2.0 interactive online service, will exert enough peer-group pressure from other citizens (without burdening the Commission) to be a disincentive to prevent duplication or successive ECIs on the same issue. In fact, the open and collaborative discussions enabled by the system, are likely to result in the merging of similar or related petitions for wider pan-European support and impact. However it would be totally valid that if one ECI is proposed in favour of an issue, that another may be created by another group against that issue. In any case, the operational and financial resources required to launch an EU-wide initiative will limit repetition and duplication.