

European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

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- ***What does the Treaty of Lisbon say on the European citizens' initiative?***

The Treaty of Lisbon introduces the European citizens' initiative. It provides that "not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties." (Article 11(4) of the Treaty on European Union)

It also provides that the procedures and conditions required for such a citizens' initiative, including the minimum number of Member States from which citizens must come, shall be determined in a Regulation to be

adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on a proposal from the European Commission (Article 11(4) TEU and Article 24 TFEU).

- ***When does the Commission intend to adopt its proposal for a Regulation?***

The Commission would like to bring forward a proposal as soon as possible in the first half of 2010, after it has examined and taken into account all contributions received to the Green Paper.

- ***What is a Green Paper?***

Green Papers are documents published by the European Commission to stimulate discussion on given topics at European level. They invite the relevant parties (bodies or individuals) to participate in a consultation process and debate on the basis of the proposals they put forward.

- ***Who can contribute to the consultation on the Green Paper? Can non-EU citizens or non-EU organisations send contributions to the consultation?***

The Commission has opened a broad public consultation to seek the views of all interested parties. All input is welcome.

- ***Will the Commission organise a public hearing?***

Yes, the Commission intends to organise a hearing for those that will have responded to the Green Paper on 22nd February 2010 in order to discuss and exchange views on the stakeholders' contributions. Registration for the hearing will be open on this website during the course of January.

- ***What is the current position of the European Parliament on the future Regulation on the citizens' initiative?***

The European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution the 7th May 2009 setting out a number of recommendations as regards the European citizens' initiative.

The EP report is available at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0389+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

- ***What is the added value of the ECI?***

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the functioning of the European Union shall continue to be founded on "*representative democracy*" and European citizens will continue to be directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament. The Lisbon Treaty duly recalls these fundamental principles.

However, with the ECI, the new Treaty is widening up the sphere of public debate, allowing citizens to participate more intensively in the democratic life of the Union, through this new "*participatory democracy*" tool.

Whilst the Commission retains its right of initiative and will therefore not be bound to make a proposal following a citizens' initiative, it is committed to carefully examine all initiatives that fall within the framework of its powers in order to consider whether a new policy proposal would be appropriate.

The Commission therefore believes that this new instrument will make a very positive contribution not only to European democracy but also to EU policy making.

- ***What is the difference between an ECI and a petition?***

The right to petition the European Parliament, which has already existed under the previous Treaties, differs substantially from the new citizens' initiative introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Petitions can be submitted by citizens of the Union as well by natural or legal person residing or having their registered office in a Member State, either individually or in association with other citizens or persons and must concern matters which come within the Union's fields of activity and which affects him, her or it directly (e.g. a complaint) and therefore they do not necessarily concern new policy proposals. Petitions are addressed to the European Parliament in its role as the direct representative of citizens at Union level.

The citizens' initiative, on the other hand, enables at least one million citizens to call directly on the Commission to bring forward new policy initiatives.

- ***Are there citizens' initiatives within the Member States?***

Citizens' initiatives already exist in a majority of Member States, either at national, regional or local level. The following Member States have citizens' initiatives at national level: Austria, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and The Netherlands. Regional citizens' initiatives exist in Austria, Germany, Spain, Sweden and The Netherlands. Local citizens' initiatives can be found in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Citizens' initiatives are also present outside the EU (Switzerland,

USA...). These initiatives differ considerably as regards their scope and generally operate according to different procedures.

- ***Can an ECI deal with the seat of the European Parliament in Strasbourg?***

No, making a proposal on this matter does not fall within the framework of the Commission's powers. The seat of the institutions is determined by common accord of the governments of the Member States.

- ***Can third country nationals residing in the EU sign-up for an ECI?***

In accordance with the Treaty, third country nationals cannot sign-up for an ECI. Indeed, the Treaty clearly states that only citizens who are nationals of the Member States can sign-up to an initiative.