

European Citizen's Initiative  
Opinion of Hampshire County Council

Hampshire County Council welcomes the opportunity to input into this consultation on the European Citizen's Initiative, which is similar in content and aims to the recent national citizens' initiative within England and Wales, the "Community Call for Action" (CCfA).

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

Hampshire County Council agrees that one third of the total number of Member States would satisfy the requirements of the Lisbon Treaty.

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

We agree that 0.2% of the total population is an appropriate threshold.

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

Within the English CCfA, there is no age limit for citizens who wish to participate in a petition. This enables the whole public to participate in policy shaping – the primary aim of such initiatives. We would be happy to accept a similar proposal for this European Initiative. However, we appreciate that this may not be easy to implement in all the Member States and we are therefore content to set the age limit to the voting age for the European Parliament if this is the majority view.

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

We believe that an initiative should clearly state the subject matter and objectives of the proposal to facilitate its identification. Concerning other requirements, we think that there should be minimum prescription regarding the form and wording to encourage people to exercise their right to submit a citizens' initiative.

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

We agree that the verification procedure should be carried out by the Member States.

We feel that the EU should set a number of basic provisions regarding the collection, verification and authentication of signatures. This should include minimum requirements for all Member States to comply with (for example in the UK where a valid UK postal address is sufficient) as well as limits on more restrictive national measures to ensure harmonisation of the ease for citizens in all Member States to be heard. There should be no pressure put on Member States to verify these details using forms of national identification. Some consideration needs to be given to the participation of EU citizens who are temporarily not resident in the EU at the time of the petition (e.g. EU citizens who are studying or working temporarily in the United States). Will they still be eligible to participate and if so, how will their signature be verified? Hampshire County Council strongly supports the online participation of citizens in petitions. Similar authentication methods should be in place as for paper petitions, with the Member State verifying the 'signatures'. Again, verification & authentication measures must not be too restrictive as the use

of online tools is particularly useful to those citizens who are living in isolated or hard-to-reach places. For example in the UK, authentication could be undertaken in the same way as it is for European elections, using a postcode and date of birth.

#### **6. Time limit for the collection of signatures**

Hampshire County Council agrees that a suitable time limit for the collection of signatures would be one year.

#### **7. Registration of proposed initiatives**

We think that a mandatory system of registration of proposed initiatives is necessary to reduce the risk of duplication and overlap of initiatives. We urge the Commission to consider at what point in the process this registration should come into effect – if this was from the moment the idea is proposed this could lead to a large number of petitions starting but never coming to fruition, however if registration was mandatory when, for example, a certain number of signatures were secured, this could simplify the registration procedure and make it less burdensome.

We agree that the registration of proposed initiatives should be done through a specific website provided by the European Commission.

#### **8. Requirements for organisers – transparency and funding**

To ensure transparency and democratic accountability of an initiative, Hampshire County Council supports the suggestions within the document regarding the provision of certain basic information about how the initiative is being funded and the organisations that are supporting it. This will help ensure that the system is not being used for corrupt purposes.

We do not think that there should be any restrictions on who can present an initiative.

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

We think that there should be a time limit imposed for the Commission to examine a citizens' initiative and that this time limit should be set to 6 months. We think that there should be some flexibility in this time limit during the changeover of a Commission.

#### **10. Initiatives on the same issue**

Hampshire County Council thinks that there should be a rule introduced whereby a citizens' initiative on a specific subject can only be presented once during the lifetime of the existing European Parliament.