



Contribution of the King Baudouin Foundation to the public consultation on the “Green Paper on a European Citizens’ Initiative”

Reply relating to point 9: “Examination of citizens’ initiatives by the Commission”

The King Baudouin Foundation welcomes the Green Paper prepared by the European Commission regarding the implementation of the European Citizens’ Initiative as foreseen in Article 11, paragraph 4 of the Lisbon Treaty.

While we agree with the proposals which are laid out in the Green Paper, we feel that the paper falls short in presenting the next steps which the Commission will take in response to a successful European Citizens’ Initiative.

The European Citizens’ Initiative is a useful tool to give citizens a direct voice in the European decision-making process, but only if the impact of a successful Initiative on that processes is clear to citizens and policy-makers. So far, no clear and transparent “response system” has been developed. We believe that this is essential to give the European Citizens’ Initiative credibility.

No indication is given of how the proposals made in European Citizens’ Initiatives will be addressed, how the Commission will take their content into account and which decision-making process will be applied. The Green Paper discusses, in point 9 only, the timeframe in which the Commission should reply to a European Citizens’ Initiative and indicates that this reply should be in form of a Communication in which actions such as “studies and impact assessments in view of possible policy proposals” could be envisaged.

One of the lessons learnt from fruitful programmes such as Plan D, Debate Europe and Europe for Citizens is that adequate and transparent systems in the European institutions for responding to citizens are essential for the credibility of any citizen participation tool. Citizens need to know what impact their active engagement in a European Citizens’ Initiative will have on EU decision-making.

In order to overcome this shortfall, the King Baudouin Foundations suggests involving citizens in developing clear policy proposals in response to a successful European Citizens’ Initiative. Such a role for citizens has been developed and tested within the framework of Plan D, Debate Europe and Citizens for Europe through initiatives such as the European Citizens’ Consultations. Citizens’ consultations are a pan-European participatory tool which involve randomly-selected

citizens from all 27 EU Member States - representing the diversity of the population - in European policy debates and policy development. They have demonstrated that in-depth deliberation - using techniques and technology which overcome the traditional boundaries of geography and language - can provide valuable qualitative input. They represent a useful tool not only to receive an in-depth feedback from citizens on policy ideas, but also to develop policy proposals.

We therefore propose that the Commission should use citizens' consultations as an additional tool alongside studies and impact assessments when preparing possible policy proposals. This would not only add to the credibility of the Commission's response, but would also allow feedback and input from randomly-selected citizens and make use of the participatory methods newly developed under Plan D, Debate Europe and Citizens for Europe.

Brussels, 28 January 2010

Contact:

Stefan Schäfers

European Programme Advisor

King Baudouin Foundation

rue Brederodestraat 10, B-1000 Brussels - Belgium

T: +32-2-549 02 39

schaefers.s@kbs-frb.be

www.kbs-frb.be