

UEF contribution to the Green Paper of the European Commission on a European Citizens' Initiative

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General Remark:

A revision clause of 3 years should be included in the ECI, for all the above mentioned points in order to be reconsidered after a first trial period.

1. Minimum Number of Member States from which Citizens must come

UEF recognizes that under the current status of E.U. a minimum number of States is needed as a threshold, combined also with a minimum number of citizens per state. Such a quota will ensure equal representation of small and larger MS preventing at the same time a possible misuse or overuse of the ECI. But such a threshold should not in any case exceed the $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total number of MS in order to keep the ECI as open as possible to the citizens and allow more synergies and initiatives to be launched.

2. Minimum Number of signatures per Member States

The criterion of a Minimum number of States must be combined with another one of a Minimum number of signatures per MS, to ensure equal and fair representation of the European Citizens. The percentage of 0,2% seems to represent a common ground for all MS. But since the differences among the populations of the MS are vast in some cases, UEF proposes that this minimum limit should not –for larger countries- in any case exceed the number of 100.000 signatures.

3. Eligibility to support a Citizens' initiative – minimum age

Since the 0,2% represents not the citizens with the right to vote, but a percentage of a total population, the age limit should not be connected with the voting right, in order also to introduce young people to democratic procedures and give them the possibility to have a first “democratic experience” within the EU. The age of 16 is therefore proposed.

4. Form and wording of a Citizens' initiative

UEF proposes that samples can be provided by the EC, but in general the Citizens should be left the right to express themselves in their own particular way. From simple texts, to draft legal acts the meaning of the ECI is to give the citizens space to act and mobilize the EC in policy areas where is competent.

In order to facilitate the procedure, the EC should reply upon request on the admissibility of the Initiative in a three months deadline after the proposal has been submitted.

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

This is maybe the most difficult and controversial issue. Where citizens should be given the right to freely collect signatures it is true that a monitoring system is needed to ensure transparency and verification. UEF underlines that a common set not only of minimum but also of maximum provisions must be set by the EC, to guarantee equal level of easy access to all EU citizens.

Concerning the e-signatures, as long as the verification systems are not yet in an acceptable level of reliability this option should be excluded until a European system of e-verification of signatures is applied, unless this method is accompanied from another way of verification i.e. fax/letter. This option will be also revised within 3 years time, unless technological progress is faster on that.

As for the centralized system operated by the EC, UEF is of the opinion it can be avoided. Transparency and Funding can be also served if the organizer publishes all relevant details to any website the petition uses anyway to promote the scope of it. The organiser and funding must be also stated obligatory in all documents and other material produced.

6. Time limit for the petition

Time limit should not be imposed, because even if it is imposed can be easily surpassed from petitions that will start collecting significant number of signatures before being registered to the system.

7. Official Registration

UEF is of the opinion that registration can only be optional, if the organiser asks for the Commission's opinion on the admissibility of the petition. In this case the EC must react and reply within 3 months.

8. Reaction of the Commission

After the EC receives an ECI, signed by more than 1 million citizens, there should be a reply –in case the organizers haven't ask about it in advance- on the admissibility within 3 months and complete any verification control within 6 months. After that another time limit of 6 months should be left to EC to act accordingly.