

Translation of letter

Letter dated:

From: Anne-Marie Meldgaard
Chair of the Folketing's Europe Committee
Copenhagen

To: Mr Barroso
Commission

**Subject: Observations of the Europe Committee
on the Commission's *Green Paper on a European Citizens' Initiative***

Ref.: 09-001010-1; contact: Morten Knudsen, direct line +45 33 37 36 95

Dear Mr Barroso,

I am writing to supply the observations of the Folketing's Europe Committee on the Commission's *Green Paper on a European Citizens' Initiative* (COM(2009) 622).

At its meeting of 13 January 2010 the Committee decided to send the following observations to the Commission.

Minority report of the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist People's Party and the Social Liberal Party

A minority consisting of the Social Democratic Party (S), the Socialist People's Party (SF) and the Social Liberal Party (RV) put forward the following report.

The Social Democratic Party, the Socialist People's Party and the Social Liberal Party welcome the new provision for a citizens' initiative in the Lisbon Treaty. The greatest possible number of citizens should be able to make use of the initiative, and should be able to do so simply and effectively. The parties consequently take the view that the form and procedure for citizens' initiatives should be governed by the following arrangements.

- The 'significant number of Member States' required under the Treaty should be one quarter of the total number of Member States.
- For a country to be counted among the one quarter of Member States that represent an initiative, the signatures should amount to at least 0.1 % of its population.
- The minimum age to support a European citizens' initiative should be the age required to vote at elections to the European Parliament in the particular Member State.

- As regards the collection of signatures and the verification and authentication of the signatures by the authorities in the Member States, a number of procedural requirements need to be laid down at EU level. But it should be a simple and straightforward matter for any citizen to support a citizens' initiative regardless of the country in which they are resident.
- Citizens should of course be able to indicate their support for an initiative over the Internet. Clear rules should be laid down on how this is to be verified, but it must not be made unduly difficult for citizens to support an initiative.
- The time-limit for collecting signatures should not be less than two years.
- It is a good idea that all initiative should have to be registered on a specific home page provided by the European Commission. This will also prevent identical initiatives from being launched separately.
- There should be a standard form available on the specific home page, with easily accessible guidelines to make it easy to enter the purpose, the subject-matter and the justification for the initiative and to ensure that the Commission is able to take action in response.
- The organisers of an initiative should provide basic information regarding the people involved and regarding funding.
- For Commission action on the proposal it seems reasonable that the time-limit should be six months.
- There should be very strict rules governing the circumstances in which the Commission may reject a proposal.

Minority report of the Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party

A minority consisting of the Liberal Party (V) and the Conservative People's Party (KF) put forward the following report.

The citizens' initiative is one of many advances in the Lisbon Treaty that will help to make the EU more democratic, and will help to strengthen the involvement of the citizens and of organised civil society in the development of EU policy.

The Liberals and the Conservatives therefore support the new citizens' initiative.

Minimum number of Member States from which citizens must come

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that one third of the Member States is enough, in particular in view of the threshold set in the provisions on 'enhanced cooperation', where at least nine Member States must take part. One third is also the threshold for the number of national parliaments required in connection with the application of the principle of subsidiarity.

Minimum number of signatures per Member State

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that it is reasonable to set a threshold in the form of a minimum share of the population in each Member State, in order to avoid purely domestic agendas. The population of the Union currently stands just under 500 million citizens. Therefore one million out of 500 million represents 0.2% of the population of the Union. This means that 0.2% of the population of the particular Member State can be taken as the minimum number of citizens required for that State.

Eligibility to support a citizens' initiative — minimum age

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that it would be proper to set the minimum age for supporting a citizens' initiative at 18. This is in line with the minimum age for voting in all Member States with the exception of Austria.

Requirements for the collection, verification and authentication of signatures

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that it is reasonable to lay down a number of basic provisions at EU level to prevent cheating with signatures. To prevent unnecessary bureaucracy, however, the Liberal Party supports a minimum measure of harmonisation, with a regulation laying down fundamental principles and minimum requirements, leaving the Member States responsible for detailed rules. This will combine a certain level of flexibility for Member States, whilst ensuring common features for the procedures across the EU.

Time limit for the collection of signatures

The Liberals and the Conservatives are in favour of a time-limit of one year for a European citizens' initiative. This will help to ensure that the particular initiative is still relevant. At the same time the period has to be long enough to allow reasonable time for a campaign to be conducted throughout the European Union.

Registration of proposed initiatives

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that there has to be a form of registration of the proposed initiatives before the collection of signatures begins. The Liberal Party supports the creation of a specific website to be provided by the Commission, which would also include all relevant information on the proposed initiative. It would provide the organisers with confirmation of the registration and would provide transparency as regards proposed citizens' initiatives for which campaigns are running. But we agree with the Commission's argument that it would not be appropriate for the Commission to verify the formal admissibility of proposed initiatives before any signatures have yet been collected. That could easily lead to confusion, giving some form of green light to proposed initiatives on more than purely procedural grounds.* It is the responsibility of the organisers to ensure that a proposal on the basis of which the Commission is called upon to act does legally fall within the framework of the Commission's powers, and is sufficiently clear and is known at EU level.*

* [Translator's note : Sic. The intention is apparently to reproduce the words of the Green Paper, but there appear to be some errors.]

Requirements for organisers — Transparency and funding

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that it should be clear who is behind the collection of signatures. The organisers ought therefore to give certain basic information, explaining for example how the initiative is being funded. To preserve the independence and citizen-driven nature of initiatives, the Liberal Party emphasises that there must be no specific public funding for a citizens' initiative. Nor should there be any restriction as to who may present an initiative — i.e. organisers can either be individual citizens or organisations.

Examination of citizens' initiatives by the Commission

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that once a citizens' initiative has secured enough signatures there should be a time-limit within which the Commission has to act. The six-month period proposed would be appropriate.

Initiatives on the same issue

The Liberals and the Conservatives believe that the Internet registration system already proposed ought to ensure that there are no overlapping initiatives. Where an initiative has failed there should be a stated time that must elapse before re-presentation, so as not to create undue burdens for the system and undermine its reputation as a serious instrument for democratic expression.

Minority report of the Danish People's Party

Lastly, a minority consisting of the Danish People's Party (DF) put forward the following report.

The Danish People's Party takes the view that the *Green Paper on a European Citizens' Initiative* is primarily a symbolic gesture: the Commission has never acted on requests from collectors of signatures, and it is not required to do so after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty either.

There is nothing in the Lisbon Treaty to require the Commission to implement a demand put forward in a citizens' initiative, so that in reality citizens' initiatives will not give the citizens of the Member States more influence or remedy the democratic deficit in the EU's decision-making procedures.

The Danish People's Party therefore regards the Green Paper as a diversionary tactic designed to create the impression that the European citizens' desire for greater democracy is being met.

Yours faithfully,
Anne-Marie Meldgaard
Chair of the Europe Committee