

CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

THE EUROPEAN UNION POLICIES COMMITTEE

FINAL DOCUMENT, PUBLISHED PURSUANT TO HOUSE RULE NO 127
AND RELATING TO:

Report from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Regulation (EU) no 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative (COM (2018) 157)

Approved 13 February 2019

Report on the application of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative

FINAL DOCUMENT APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE

The European Union Policies Committee of the Chamber of Deputies,

Having examined, pursuant to House Rule No 127, the Report from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative (COM (2018) 157);

Whereas:

Instituted by the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an important tool of participatory democracy that enables European citizens, who must number at least one million and be resident in at least one quarter of the Member States, to invite the European Commission to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties;

The Commission's Report refers to the application in the period 2015-2018 of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative;

On 13 September 2017, the European Commission presented a proposal for the revision of the citizens' initiative provisions of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011;

Considering that:

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have finally reached an agreement paving the way to the approval of the proposal to amend Regulation EU No 211/2011 referring to the citizens' initiative. The revised Regulation is set to come into force on 1 January 2020, after the newly elected European Parliament has taken office;

So far, the ECI has not made as great an impact as was hoped when it was first introduced into the European legal system, partly on account of the implementation difficulties mentioned in the Commission's Report, which the Proposal for a Regulation seeks to overcome;

Most ECI organisers ran into both practical and legal difficulties in securing authorisation, and many of them then appealed to the EU Court of Justice and to the European Ombudsman against decisions of the European Commission not to register their initiatives;

Since the ECI Regulation took effect in 2012, a total of 9 million statements of support for various initiatives have been collected from across the European Union, yet of the 54 initiatives that were registered, just four managed to produce the necessary number of verified signatures;

It seems clear that the use of this tool of democratic participation would be invigorated both by the enhancement of the online platform run by the European Commission for the collection of signatures and by the creation of an online collaborative platform, in particular one that includes a discussion forum, to support the exchange of good practices between ECI practitioners;

The European Commission's decision to reinforce the consultancy and support systems for ECI organisers and enhance communication activities to improve the user-friendliness of the software used for online data collection is therefore to be welcomed;

Aware of the need to encourage the broader and more active participation of European citizens in the process of decision-making at the European level;

Acknowledging that this final document needs to be transmitted to the European Commission as part of the political dialogue, as well as to European Parliament and the Council;

Expresses a

FAVOURABLE OPINION

With the following qualifications:

- a) The ECI should play a fundamental role in promoting broader and more active citizen participation in EU decision-making to reinforce the democratic nature of the EU's deliberative process;
- b) European institutions should be encouraged to continue with the revision of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative with a view to giving effect to the recommendations of the European Parliament and the suggestions of other European Union civil society bodies and stakeholders, which are particularly aimed at making it easier for citizens and organisers to access, use and disseminate the instrument;
- c) The European Commission taking office after the forthcoming European elections should both undertake a targeted public awareness campaign to foster the use and dissemination of the citizens' initiative and commit to following up with activities to optimise the effectiveness of the ECI as an instrument of democratic participation;
- d) The Commission should also be encouraged to improve the operation of the electronic signature-collection system and expand its application by building a centralised online version – funded from the EU budget and therefore not entailing any additional costs for organisers and citizens – that collects and shares the email addresses of citizens who have issued statements of support for an initiative and signed an informed consent clause to allow the sharing of their data;
- e) The data collection system to be rolled out across the EU needs to become more standardised and therefore capable of simplifying the collection and cataloguing of statements of support and making it easier for EU citizens, regardless of country of residence, to sign them;
- f) The examination of the proposal put forward for the amendment of Regulation (EU) No 2112/2011 should be used as an opportunity to bind the European Commission to submitting, for each successful ECI, a corresponding proposal for a legal act of the EU within 12 months of the issuing of a favourable opinion, just as is done for parliamentary initiatives. The European Commission should be similarly bound to providing a comprehensible and detailed justification for each rejected citizens' initiative so that the organisers may amend and resubmit them;
- g) ECI organisers should be allowed to choose the start date of signature collection, which must not be later than three months after the initiative is registered;
- h) The proposed amendments of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 should include provisions requiring the European Parliament to draw up a report for each ECI and to debate and vote on the report in a plenary session;
- i) When the number of signatures supporting an ECI reaches 200 thousand, the European Parliament should conduct public hearings on the relevant initiative;
- j) The deadline by when signatures must be collected should be extended from 12 to 18 months.