



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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C(2018) 4119 final*

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Assembleia da República for its Opinion on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Citizens' Initiative {COM(2017) 482 final}.

Increasing democratic legitimacy in the European Union through stronger citizen participation is among the ten priorities of the Juncker Commission (Priority 10 – A Union of Democratic Change). The proposal on the European Citizens' Initiative is one of the actions adopted by the Commission on 13 September 2017, as part of the Democracy Package, to continue delivering on this commitment. Making the European Citizens' Initiative more accessible, less burdensome and easier to use for organisers and supporters will help the instrument reach its full potential to foster debate among citizens at Union level, and to bring the Union closer to them.

The Commission welcomes the Assembleia da República's support for the European Citizens' Initiative and for the measures contained in the proposal to identify and address some of the shortcomings in the implementation of the current instrument. The Commission takes careful note of the concerns expressed by the Assembleia da República as regards some elements of the proposal. The Commission is convinced that the provisions of the new Regulation will help to ensure a continued reduction in the number of initiatives which cannot be registered and to increase the number of initiatives reaching the one million threshold under the Treaties. These provisions build on a number of concrete improvements already introduced under the current legal framework. In particular, the Commission's practice of allowing, where justified, for partial registrations of initiatives has contributed to a sharp decrease in the number of initiatives considered inadmissible.

The Commission also wishes to underline that it has followed up where appropriate on initiatives that reached the required level of support. In one case ('One of us'), the Commission considered that the existing legal framework was appropriate and no further action was required. In the three other cases ('Right2Water', 'Stop Vivisection' and 'Ban glyphosate and toxic pesticides'), the Commission has committed to a number

*Ms Regina BASTOS
Chair of the European Affairs Committee
Palácio de S. Bento
P – 1249-068 LISBOA*

*cc Mr Eduardo FERRO RODRIGUES
President of the Assembleia da República
Palácio de S. Bento
P – 1249-068 LISBOA*

of follow-up actions of legislative or non-legislative nature. In particular, in response to the initiative 'Right2Water', the Commission has proposed on 31 January 2018 a revised Directive on drinking water¹. Work on the follow-up to the 'Ban glyphosate and toxic pesticides' initiative is also well underway. On 11 April 2018, the Commission adopted a legislative proposal on transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment model in the food chain², in response to one of the aims of this initiative, and drawing also on the Commission's Fitness Check of the General Food Law Regulation. The proposal aims at revising the General Food Law Regulation, and other sectorial legislative acts dealing with the food chain, strengthening the transparency in the risk assessment process. It also aims at providing additional guarantees of reliability, objectivity and independence of the studies used by the European Food Safety Authority in its risk assessments to ensure trust in the food safety risk assessment of the European Union. This demonstrates that the European Citizens' Initiative has real impact on the European Union's policy and law-making.

With regard to the age of support for the European Citizens' Initiative the proposal seeks to lower the age of support to 16 years of age. The objective is to enhance the participation of the younger generation in the democratic debate at the European level, allow more than ten million young European citizens to support European Citizens' Initiatives, and contribute to broader objectives such as raising their awareness about the European Union. The proposal to lower the age of support to 16 years concerns only the conditions to support European citizens' initiatives, and reflects the non-binding nature of the European Citizens' Initiative as an instrument for participation and agenda-setting at the European Union's level. It remains the case that organisers of initiatives must be of the age to be entitled to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

The Commission fully agrees on the importance of the protection of personal data and the security of the online collection systems and tools for the European Citizens' Initiative, including the register and the online collaborative platform. The proposal contains a set of specific provisions to ensure the security of the online collection systems and tools and the protection of personal data of the citizens of the Union supporting European Citizens' Initiative, including inter alia that Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation) fully applies to the processing of personal data under the Regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative.

I would also like to underline that the initial proposal presented by the Commission is currently in the legislative process involving both the European Parliament and the Council. The Opinion of the Assembleia da República has been made available to the Commission's representatives in the ongoing negotiations between co-legislators so that it can inform these discussions.

¹ COM (2017) 753 final

² COM (2018) 179 final

I hope that the elements provided in this reply help to clarify the issues raised by the Assembleia da República and look forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*