

REFIT Platform Opinion

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REFIT Platform Opinion on the submission by a member of the Stakeholder group on the European Citizens' Initiative.

The REFIT Platform has considered the need to make the European Citizens' Initiative more 'fit for purpose' through simpler requirements for the application of the existing system and through revision of the legal framework.

The Stakeholder group recommends that the Commission takes into consideration the issues identified by the Platform in the on-going review of the ECI, including both simplification of the implementation of the ECI and the revision of the Regulation. Some members of the Government group have expressed explicit support for some of the recommendations made by the Stakeholder group while others require more time to take a position.

Detailed Opinion

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1 Submission by Ms Kavrakova

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) gives citizens of the EU the unique opportunity to directly place their interests at the heart of European policy-making by asking the European Commission (the Commission) to legislate on a matter of its competence. However, since its entry into force on 1 April 2012, this instrument has demonstrated both its potential as well as its limitations when it comes to connecting with citizens in an honest dialogue aimed at

answering citizens' concerns and providing a space where they can contribute to policy-making.

Four years after the entry into force of Regulation No. 211/2011 (or: the ECI Regulation), the interest of using the instrument has decreased due to the many difficulties encountered by the ECI organisers. Only three initiatives succeeded in reaching one million signatures and have been submitted to and responded by the Commission. None of them was followed by a legislative proposal.

The challenges have been identified, discussed and summarized during the review of the ECI Regulation in 2015 by all major stakeholders from institutions and civil society (the European Commission, the European Parliament the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Ombudsman, the ECI Support Centre, Democracy International, the ECI Campaign). Certain improvements could be made within the existing legal framework. Others however require a revision of the ECI Regulation in order to increase its user-friendliness and make it "fit for purpose".

The following issues require revision of Regulation No. 211/2011:

- the so-called 'legal admissibility test' (the registration of the submitted ECIs by the EC)*
- the procedure of the follow-up to a successful ECIs;*
- the citizens' committee and the liability of organisers;*
- the moment of the start of the 12-month collection period;*
- the simplification of the online collection of signatures.*

2 Policy context

ECI Instrument and EU legislative framework

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was introduced in the EU Treaties by the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 11 TEU and Article 24 TFEU). This new instrument of participatory democracy aims at involving citizens more closely in agenda-setting at EU level by enabling at least one million EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal in areas of its competence.

The rules and procedures for the ECI have been implemented by (EU) Regulation No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative (ECI Regulation) which entered into application in April 2012. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011 also lays down the technical specifications for online collection systems pursuant to the ECI Regulation (i.e. the technical requirements for the online systems used for the collection of statements signed by EU citizens supporting to ECIs).

Some key aspects in the implementation of the ECI Regulation, such as the data requirements for citizens in the statements of support forms for the ECI, depend on the Member States. While these requirements are provided under Annex III of the ECI Regulation and can be modified via a Delegated Act (Commission Delegated Regulation amending the Annexes of

the ECI Regulation), a simplification of the requirements should be based on changes proposed by the Member State concerned.

Review of the ECI Regulation: The first triannual report on the application of the ECI Regulation was adopted on 31 March 2015¹. The Commission's report analysed the implementation of the ECI Regulation and, in this context, the overall functioning of this new instrument of participatory democracy at EU level.

The analysis, as outlined in the report, is based on feedback received from stakeholders, including organisers of citizens' initiatives, directly or via the Ombudsman's own-initiative inquiry², the European Parliament's study³, various publications, conferences etc. It also takes into account information and views gathered from Member States via the Commission's expert group on the citizens' initiative⁴.

The Commission report concluded that the ECI has been effectively implemented. The fact that three initiatives⁵ have managed to complete the full lifecycle of an ECI, from registration through successful collection of the required level of support to the formal reply of the Commission confirms that the necessary procedures and mechanisms are in place to ensure that the ECI is operational.

At the same time, the assessment of the implementation of the Regulation also shows that various challenges exist in relation to this new institutional and legislative framework. The Commission report highlighted a number of these challenges, such as:

- the lack of legal personality for the organising citizens' committees;
- the timeline for various steps in an initiative's lifecycle (in practice, organisers often have less than 12 months for online collection);
- the setting-up of online collection systems;
- the divergent requirements of Member States for signatories, especially where these differing requirements lead to citizens being denied the right to support an initiative
- the registration procedure, as an important number of proposed ECIs are manifestly outside the scope of the Commission's competences.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2015/EN/1-2015-145-EN-F1-1.PDF>

² <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/case.faces/en/42908/html.bookmark>

³ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519240/IPOL_STU\(2015\)519240_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519240/IPOL_STU(2015)519240_EN.pdf)

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/legislative-framework>

⁵ "[Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!](#)", "[One of us](#)", "[Stop vivisection](#)"

Follow up to the review process

As a follow up to the review process, the Commission committed itself to further analyse the impact of these issues on the effectiveness of the instrument and to listen to the views expressed by stakeholders and other institutions, with a view to proposing measures which would contribute to the improvement of the instrument.

Throughout 2015, other EU institutions and bodies, Member States, and civil society stakeholders have prepared contributions to the review process, including in particular the Council, Parliament, Committee of Regions and the European Ombudsman. These contributions converge to a certain extent with the Commission assessment on the areas for improvement in the functioning of the instrument. This further stage of consultation and assessment of the functioning of the instrument by different institutions and bodies continues in 2016. The European Economic and Social Committee is currently preparing an Opinion on the ECI, as a contribution to the review process. In the Council, the Netherlands Presidency included the ECI on the agenda of a General Affairs Council working party meeting in January 2016 where the Commission provided a state of play and overview of planned actions for the coming months. Areas for further improvement in the functioning of the ECI under the current framework were also discussed in the meeting of the Member States' Expert Group on the ECI⁶, which took place in January 2016. These areas for improvement include the potential for simplification of signatories' data requirements, a possible revision of the technical specifications for online collection systems, the possible use of electronic identification (eID), and awareness-raising activities.

Identified Areas for improvement of the functioning of the instrument: The Commission has implemented important measures to improve the functioning of the instrument over the past years, including the following: (i) assistance and support to organisers throughout the ECI lifecycle; (ii) availability of the Commission's servers for organisers' online collection free of charge; (iii) improvement of the open-source software for the collection of statements of support; and (iv) improvement of the ECI website providing other information and communication actions in all EU languages.

Following the assessment of the implementation of the ECI Regulation, and in response to the contributions received in the context of the review process, the Commission plans to implement actions in the main areas which can be addressed already within the current framework. These include inter alia the following: (i) communication and awareness-raising actions; (ii) consider any role that the Commission Representation officers in the Member States can play; (iii) assessing the scope for possible revision of the Implementing Regulation laying down the technical specifications for online collection systems; (iv) reinforced cooperation with Member States in the context of the expert group on the ECI; and (v) enhancing the dialogue and public debate on successful ECIs, including a more effective organisation of the Hearings in Parliament.

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/files/summary-report-january-2016.pdf>

3 Opinion of the REFIT Platform

3.1 Considerations of the REFIT Platform Stakeholder group

General Comments (based on an ECI SWOT analysis)

Four years after the entry into force of the ECI Regulation which is the legal basis of the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy, the EU must improve the ECI's cost-effectiveness and user-friendliness. A recently conducted ECI SWOT analysis⁷ (*see Annex I*) shows that experts held stronger opinions regarding the weaknesses of the ECI as opposed to the strengths. There seems to be great citizen frustration with the instrument as it is currently practised. This puts the EU's objective to bring citizens closer to the EU at risk, and citizens' willingness to participate in the EU decision making process may be negatively affected.

Weaknesses⁸

The ECI *leaves citizens more frustrated due to its lack of impact* (6.19 score). The experts also attributed this element to the fact that the ECI *is not cost-effective, considered the great efforts required to organise it and the low certainty of impact* (5.8 score). Another weakness connected to this point is that *the results of the ECI are not-binding* (5.14 score). Most respondents clarified that 'binding results' do not necessarily mean a direct change in EU legislation because of a successful ECI. That would both be undemocratic and lead to 'dangerous waters'; however, there is a need for more effort by the European Commission to reach a binding follow-up (e.g. an inter-institutional debate on the ECI results).

Requirements for identification and personal data are excessive (6.19 score), which is also one of the main reasons why the respondents consider the *ECI not user-friendly* (5.9 score). The amount of information required to sign an ECI is excessive and discourages participation, particularly considering the low impact of the results in addition to the fear of online data theft. The Online Collection System (OCS) does not allow citizens to leave their email addresses which is also a flaw because *ECI organisers are unable to provide clear feedback to supporting citizens* (5.33 score), nor can they form a community around a certain topics of interest. Another important problem is that the *ECI is unknown to citizens* (6 score) mainly due to the fact that the tool is not publicised enough, and that people tend to ignore its existence since it seen as unsuccessful.

The third cluster refers to the weaknesses linked to the inflexible and complex ECI regulation. One particular point which has led to a lot of frustration is that *rules regarding the start of the time period for ECI support collection are inflexible and hinder the process unnecessarily* (5.90 score). ECI organisers have stated to have lost months of their collection period due to bureaucratic requirements and the certification of the OCS. ECI coordination

⁷ The SWOT solicited the opinion of 21 experts (academic researchers, civil society organisations, EU stakeholders, former ECI organisers and current ECI organisers) and it was conducted for the purposes of an in-depth study on the potential and the challenges of e-participation in the EU commissioned by the European Parliament.

⁸ In the SWOT survey, the respondents gave much higher scores to the weaknesses than to the strengths, which show a general agreement that the weaknesses of the ECI are more evident than the strengths. Out of the 16 elements, 10 of them were considered to be high priority and can be divided into three clusters.

should be simplified as it is currently *unnecessarily complex due to the lack of harmonised rules for identification requirements* (5.8 score). There is the need for Member States to agree also upon a European common set of requirements, which should include facilitating the signing of ECIs by **expats as they currently cannot sign an ECI in their country of residence** (5.14 score).

Overall Recommendation

Reduce the cost and burdens of the ECI process to empower citizens to easily launch an ECI and to allow more efficient run of campaigns. This would increase the awareness and success of the ECI as a tool for participatory democracy across the EU.

Comments and Recommendations to the Commission and/or the Member States

Subject 1: Legal admissibility test of ECIs as a prerequisite for their registration

Comments

The first challenge encountered by ECI organisers is getting their proposed initiative registered by the Commission. Registration can only take place if the proposal satisfies all four conditions set out in Art. 4 of Regulation 211/2011 – the so-called ‘legal admissibility test’. All 20 initiatives which have been refused registration so far have been identified to fall “manifestly outside” (Art. 4.2 (b)) the Commission’s powers. Each rejection letter sent by the Commission to the organisers has wording along the following lines: “*The Commission considers that there is no legal basis in the Treaties which would allow a proposal for a legal act with the content you envisage*”.

As the Regulation does not define the meaning of “manifestly outside” (Art. 4.2 (b)), many stakeholders consider that, in some cases, no detailed and clear explanations were provided by the Commission. In 2014, the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) carried out, with the kind assistance of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP, an analysis of the registration requirements and the “subject matters” of the rejected ECIs (*see Annex 2 – “The European citizens’ Initiative Registration: Falling at the First Hurdle?”*).

The practice of applying the Regulation by the Commission suggests that in a number of cases⁹: the legal admissibility test was too narrowly applied (e.g. because the proposed initiative correctly identified a legal basis in the Treaties, and the subject matter of the initiative fell within the scope of the EU’s competence);

The decision to refuse registration was arbitrary (e.g. because initiatives with similar characteristics were treated differently); and/or the reasons given for rejection were incomplete (e.g. because the Commission did not fully address all the Treaty provisions cited as a legal basis).

⁹ ECAS’ analysis of the subject matters of the refused initiatives suggests that, at least in a number of cases – **about ¼ of the rejected ECIs** - the Commission has erred in its decisions to refuse registration (see “Category 3: Initiatives that were (possibly or probably) within the EU’s competence”, page 17). The Commission appears to have applied the legal admissibility test too strictly/narrowly in some cases. The Commission also appears to have acted arbitrarily by registering initiatives that clearly have no legal basis in the Treaties (see Study (Annex 2) “Other anomalous decisions”, p.18).

Recommendations

- Define the remit of the “legal act” and/or of the political actions that the European Commission can initiate or undertake.
- Provide a definition of what it means to be “manifestly outside” the Commission’s powers’ that is clear, easy to understand and not subject to arbitrary interpretation.
- Clarify the procedure for the legal admissibility test and increase the transparency of the decision-making process.
- Establish an ECI officer, similar to the Hearing Officer for competition law.
- Secure adequate legal advice for ECI organisers with regard to the legal basis of their initiative.

Subject 2: Numerous and different data requirements. About 11 000 EU citizens cannot sign an ECI.

Comments

Different personal data requirements for the verification lead to the use of different forms for the collection of statements of support in the different Member States which is burdensome e.g. one organizer made use of 43 different forms to run the ECI campaign and more could have been used¹⁰. The most demanding form required the signatories to indicate their name, place of residence, street, house number, postal code, city, country, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, personal identification number, i.e. passport or identity card (e.g. Austria, Italy and France) – including the name of the issuing authority in Italy¹¹.

In addition, due to the different national requirements, some EU citizens residing outside their Member State of nationality – either in another Member State or in a third-country, are not able to sign. This problem was estimated to potentially affect 11 million EU citizens¹².

Recommendations

Revise Article 6 and Annex III and IV of Regulation 211/2010 to establish a simplified single statement of support form (preferred option) or

Facilitate simplification and harmonization of the data requirements by Member States (second preferred option).

Adopt a unified approach based either on nationality or on residence to allow all EU citizens to sign.

Subject 3: Citizens' committee and the liability of organisers

¹⁰See Annex 3: “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014, page 38. The study has been commissioned by the AFCO and PETI Committees of the EP to identify difficulties faced by organisers of ECIs and to analyse possible solutions and propose recommendations.

¹¹ Mario Tenreiro, Article ‘Citizens’ Initiative: What’s next?’, in Berg, C. and Thomson, J., ‘ECI That Works’, The ECI Campaign, Germany, 15.04.2014, p. 84 (Annex 3).

¹² Stein, R. and Muller-Torok, R., ‘The Assignment of European Citizens to Member States in the Regulation on the European Citizens’ Initiative’, Vienna University of Economics and Business. (Annex 3)

Comments

Under the Regulation, the seven European citizens who initiate the citizens' committee are personally liable for each step of the ECI process including the work of all volunteers across Europe at national and local level. The fear of the risks linked to personal liability (be prosecuted for infringing EU or national law) is one of the reasons that potential organisers do not launch ECIs¹³.

In practice, compliance with the ECI Regulation and the data protection Directive, as well as with the national transposing legislation, represents an obstacle for organisers of the ECIs¹⁴ as it is:

- burdensome, e.g. specific security features for storage rooms such as locks, fire alarms;
- not clear, e.g., organisers are not sure how to download and transmit online forms in a safe way to national authorities¹⁵;
- risky – organisers are personally liable, i.e. 'the level of sensitive personal data required exposes citizens to identify theft and fraud which can leave the ECI organisers liable for fines (in Germany, the fine is up to EUR 300.000 if data is not protected at every stage of the campaign)¹⁶.

Recommendation

- Provide the ECI organisers with the possibility to establish their citizens' committees as legal entities.

Subject 4: The start of the 12-month collection period

Comments

According to Article 5(5), ECI organisers have one year to collect signatures. The starting date coincides with the registration of the specific ECI by the Commission. Article 6(2) further specifies that organisers can only start collecting online signatures through OCS once the competent national authorities have certified the system. In case the certification of the system takes longer and is finalized after the registration of the ECI by the Commission, the

¹³ "European Citizens' Initiative – First lessons of implementation", page 15 (Annex 3)

¹⁴ Berg, C., 'First ECI Withdrawn - EU Directive on Dairy Cow Welfare', The ECI Campaign Article, 20.07.2012 (Annex 3)

¹⁵ Under some national laws, organisers are required to notify the collection of signatures to data protection authorities. In some cases, such authorities were not aware of the existence of the ECI and this caused a lack of certainty about organisers' obligations and the imposition of additional unforeseen obligations. For instance, in Bulgaria, the data protection authority required the registration of each single ECI volunteer gathering paper signatures as an 'operator of personal data (see Merz, P., 'End Ecocide in Europe' Article in Berg, C. and Thomson, J., 'ECI That Works', The ECI Campaign, Germany, 15.04.2014.). This delayed the organisers and they lost time in collecting signatures and this had implications, in terms of burdens, for the registration application (see "European Citizens' Initiative – First lessons of implementation", 2014, page 16 of Annex 3)

¹⁶ "European Citizens' Initiative – First lessons of implementation", 2014, page 15 (Annex 3)

organisers are losing precious time for collection of statements of support¹⁷. Moreover stakeholders also consider the one year deadline too short because of many procedural obstacles.

Recommendations

Streamline and simplify the ECI process – permanent free server, one single centralized system, simplified single statement of support form.(preferred option) or extension of the collection period to 18 months or Introduction of a buffer period by modifying the various steps for launching the ECI as follows:

1. Registration of ECI.
2. OCS certification.
3. Start the collection of signatures

Subject 5: Online collection of signatures – system, features

Comments

Almost all stakeholders point out the costly and burdensome process to set-up and run an ECI and the difficulties in fundraising which risks the ECI to be hijacked by interest groups who typically have more resources than groups composed of single EU citizens across Europe.

The study commissioned by the European Parliament “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014 (*see Annex 3*) indicates that “some consider that up to one million EUR is necessary to run a successful ECI” including the value of the work of the volunteers and the services provided for free to support a successful ECI campaign.

Actual funding received by the organisers of successful ECIs according to the European Commission Official Register is as follows: EUR 140.000 for ‘Water and sanitation are a human right!; Water is a public good, not a commodity!’; EUR 159.219 for ‘One of us’; EUR 14.501 for ‘Stop vivisection’.

Estimated costs for the use of private servers are approximately EUR 10.000-20.000, Yet those who have used private servers explained that the OCS certification process actually costs about EUR 30.000¹⁸.

Almost all of the organisers made use of the Commission servers which were offered for free as a temporary solution from July 2012. The many and substantial obstacles encountered by organisers while using the OCS led to only *44% of the people who start the signing process*

¹⁷ “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014, page 42 (Annex 3)

¹⁸ “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014, p.22 (Annex 3)

*on-line actually complete it and support the ECI*¹⁹. At the same time by 2014 more than 6 million citizens across the EU have signed an ECI and more than 60% have done that online according to the study.

The problems which still seem to exist²⁰:

- The system is not fully compatible with the needs of visually impaired people.
- When there are too many visitors online, the system does not ‘support’ them.
- There are difficulties in linking the system to social media.
- The system is not specifically designed for smart phones.
- The software is not user-friendly.
- The use of ‘captcha’ as a verification process has a number of disadvantages that stakeholders considered as hindering the online signature process: ‘captcha’ limits the possibility for visually impaired citizens to sign; ‘captcha’ limits the possibility of citizens who do not use the Latin alphabet to sign; captcha’ causes signatories to lose time and leads to the risk of dropping the signature process.
- Organisers are not able to collect signatories’ email addresses within the Commission’s system which prevents informing them of the outcome of the ECI and promoting EU debates.
- The fact that there is no unified OCS system causes further costs and burdens. Each Member State should be ready to certify the OCS system if organisers choose a server in their country. For organisers, this means different application procedures. National authorities also stressed that the one-month deadline for certification is very short.

Recommendations

Envisage a permanent free server as a right of the ECI organisers and one single centralized system which should be redesigned to address the current shortcomings.

Advantages of the proposed solution include saving costs and burdens for the organisers, the Commission and the Member States:

- organisers would not need to prepare complex applications for the certification of the OCS and the Commission would not need to support them and Member States in this task;
- Member States would not need to certify a different OCS each time as the OCS would be designed with fixed features that comply with the applicable EU law and do not need to be decertified since they do not change over time.

This approach will allow the introduction of a simplified single statement of support form.

Recommendation 4 of the study commissioned by DG DIGIT and Secretariat – General (SG) to Kurt Salmon (*see Annex 4 D 3.2 Final Report, Assessment of ICT impact of the*

¹⁹ “European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014, p.34, footnote 124 (Information based on desk research and stakeholder consultation (ECI organisers)).

²⁰ European Citizens’ Initiative – First lessons of implementation”, 2014, p.34 (Annex 3)

Regulation (EU) N 211/2011 of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative) confirms that “**a central platform should be made available to ECI organisers as a permanent solution (scenario 2)**”.

It is based on the results of the cost-benefit analysis, where it appears that, based on the evaluation criteria defined by KURT SALMON, Scenario 2 prevails over Scenario 1 (which corresponds to the original architecture of the online collection systems, as defined in the ECI Regulation and related Commission Implementing Regulation No 1179/2011²¹) both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

With regard to efficiency, Scenario 2 would be the least costly scenario to implement compared to Scenario 1, independently of the number of ECI online collection systems certified and hosted per year²². The implementation cost differences are even greater the more ECIs are concerned. Indeed, should Scenario 2 be foreseen in the ECI Regulation as the only possible scenario, its overall cost could probably be optimised (unique IT tool for the register and the software, no need for the 28 Member States competent authorities to be ready to certify systems).

With regard to effectiveness, even though results vary from the different stakeholder groups' perspectives, overall, Scenario 2 appears to be the favoured scenario with regard to (i) Improvement in the allocation of resources (availability of resources), (ii) Improvement in the allocation of resources (responsibility of stakeholders), (iii) Improvement in the allocation of resources (expertise of the resources), (iv) Cost savings, (v) Citizens' satisfaction.

The only criterion for which Scenario 1 is ahead of Scenario 2 is the (vi) Benefits from third-party compliance with legal rules, as Scenario 2 does not allow hosting and software providers to penetrate the ECI market, and only to a limited extent for IT experts.

Subject 6: ECI Awareness raising campaigns

Comments

All organisers point out that, in addition to promoting their specific ECI, they needed to inform EU citizens and raise awareness about the ECI (*see Annex 5 as an example*). This is perceived as an additional burden to their limited campaigning resources.

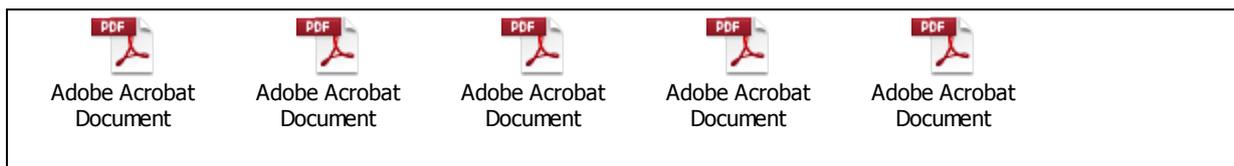
Recommendations to the Commission and/or to the Member States

Carry out awareness raising campaigns at all levels (local, regional, national and European) to promote the existence of the ECI as a tool for transnational agenda setting in the EU.

Annexes

²¹ Page 86 of the Study (Annex 4)

²² The (direct) cost of hosting and getting 1 ECI online collections system certified under Scenario 2 would be €129,784 against €161,259 under Scenario 1a (i.e. €31,475 cost difference between the two scenarios) and €191,259 under Scenario 1b (i.e. €61,475 cost difference between the two scenarios).



3.2 Considerations of the REFIT Platform Government group

Some members of the Government group have expressed support for some of the recommendations made by the Stakeholder group while others require more time for consideration.

One Member State considers the recommendations to be of valuable input for the ongoing reflections on how to improve this instrument of citizens' participation at the EU level. It is in the interest of Member States to make the ECI, where possible, more user-friendly and to strengthen the awareness about its existence and the opportunities it offers.

Hence, this Member State welcomes many ideas put forward by the authors of the draft opinion related to supporting the initiators and improving technical features. Further, some practical problems regarding, e.g., the timeline of an ECI could be tackled when reforming the ECI in order to enable initiators to fully seize the potential of an ECI. This Member State also believes that the increased use of electronic procedures, e.g. eID, offers the potential to simplify processes and to promote acceptance of the European citizens' initiative.

Moreover, it is considered that more awareness-raising and information about the ECI and its possibilities is needed. A lot of citizens still do not know about the instrument and the opportunities it provides to influence the EU's decision-making. In this regard, an honest dialogue with the initiators and a sincere expectation management are of key importance. In principle, the Member State is also willing to contribute to such activities.

Other proposals in the draft opinion need further clarification and/or their potential added value for the success of an ECI must be examined more thoroughly. As a general remark, it is important that the European citizens' initiative retain its character as an independent participatory instrument for citizens of the Union.

Discussions about the reform potentials regarding the ECI have been taking place in the Commission's Expert Group and in the Council bodies – this Member State is contributing in a constructive manner to these exchanges.