



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

Directorate A – Strategy, Better Regulation & Corporate Governance
SG.A.1 – Policy Priorities & Work Programme

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

6 JUNE 2023

1. Approval of the agenda

The Chair (Rudiger Boogert, Head of Unit SG.A.1) introduced the agenda of the online meeting.

The agenda was approved without changes.

2. Objective of the meeting

The objective of the meeting was to discuss with the national authorities competent under Regulation (EU) 2019/788 on the European citizens' initiative (ECI) matters of implementation related to:

- the latest developments on ECI, including the state of play of the citizens' initiatives
- review of Regulation (EU) 2019/788
- updates on recent IT developments
- the state of play of the ECI communication campaign

The meeting was held in a virtual format, with two observers from the European Parliament present.

3. Points discussed

3.1 General ECI developments

The Commission services provided an overview of the citizens' initiatives registered since the last expert group meeting in September 2022 as well as the valid initiatives and the initiatives in the process of verification or pending submission. The key figures (up to 31 May 2023) show that 31 new initiatives were registered since the new rules started to apply in January 2020. The two-stage registration procedure was used in eight of these cases. Only one request for registration has been refused. Nine initiatives are currently collecting statements of support and three initiatives will start collecting statements of support soon (status: 6 June). The Commission services also informed on potentially successful initiatives that have either completed or are about to complete the verification process.

3.2 Review of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 on the European citizens' initiative

Commission services provided the Expert Group with an update on the progress of the review of Regulation (EU) 2019/788 on the European citizens' initiative and shared preliminary findings based on the results of the consultation activities carried out in the June 2022 – April 2023 period – see the related presentation.

Members were invited to provide relevant updates regarding the information they submitted through the questionnaire at the end of 2022 – in particular concerning plans in their Member State to lower the support age for ECIs, plans to integrate additional national eID schemes into the Central Online Collection System, activities of national contact points and recent experiences with the verification process.

Commission services also provided an overview of the main recommendations included in the European Parliament report planned for adoption on 13 June and invited the Member States to express their views to be able to take those into account in finalising its analysis in the context of the review.

In the ensuing exchanges, IE informed that the Government's programme includes a commitment for the newly established electoral commission to examine lowering the voting age. EE and AT stressed that given the organisers' and Member States' general satisfaction with the current Regulation, serious consideration should be given whether changes to the legal framework are needed. EE also in general terms underlined the burden on small Member States from new and amended legislation. AT referred to the latest improvements implemented for the ECI, in particular the ECI Forum, the revised timelines and the introduction of the Central Online Collection System.

Commission services invited Member States to provide any additional updates in writing, and announced that a dedicated survey will be circulated shortly after the adoption of the Parliament's report to gather Member States' views on the recommendations included in the report with particular relevance to Member States.

3.3 Update on IT developments

The Commission services gave an overview of the recent IT developments. Since the application of the new rules and until end 2022 (as of 1 January 2023, organisers can only use the Central Online Collection System), 20 out of 26 new ECIs used the Central Online Collection System (COCS) for collecting support, while the other 6 initiatives have chosen to use an individual online collection system. The users' satisfaction rate with the COCS remains high.

As regards the use of eID, 16 Member States now offer the possibility to their citizens to use eID to support an initiative (with six more preparing for its use). The support via eID remains nevertheless relatively low as a percentage of the total support collected, with one possible explanation that in some Member States the eID offered for signing statement of support is not the most popular one used by citizens. Member States that offer eID were therefore invited to consider adding the most frequently used eID means to the one(s) that they have already notified. The Commission can also usefully add this specific information in the online

form in the Central Online Collection System, for citizens to know which national eID can be used for signing statements of support.

The Commission services also informed the Member States about an IT incident that occurred in February this year, due to which the COCS was not available for some hours to sign ongoing initiatives. As the period of unavailability fell outside the availability parameters that the Commission has committed to offer to the organisers, the Commission granted the affected organisers a compensation in the form of a small extension (of one day) to their collection period, in line with the approach that was followed in 2012 in consultation with the Member States. The Member States did not raise objections or observations on this approach.

The Commission services finally alerted the Member States that as individual online collection systems can no longer be used by initiatives registered as of 1 January 2023, it is recommended to check whether updating is required as regards the national provisions that the Member States may have implemented in relation to those systems (e.g. certification process) and/or information made available on their websites. The ECI website has already been updated accordingly.

3.4 Communication activities

The Commission services recalled the objectives of the ‘EU Take the Initiative’ campaign, launched in 2018:

- To raise awareness of citizens about the ECI as one of their key EU citizenship rights, also in line with the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe (integration of ECI on revamped Have Your Say portal)
- To strengthen the network of multipliers and partners at national and local levels and provide them with high quality and easily accessible promotion materials to autonomously promote the ECI.

The Commission services gave an update of the main communication activities, by presenting a new Facebook group on ECI, a new educational toolkit for schools, multilingual social media promotions, the monthly ECI newsletter, available communication materials, as well as promotion of ECI in youth/democracy festivals, webinars, podcast series etc.

The Commission services, via its contractor, continue to make promotion for the ECI as a tool via its social media campaigns, which is one of the main channels to reach out to citizens (and foremost younger people) and potential organisers. A new Facebook group, launched on 31 March 2023, allows for additional interaction and community building.

In June 2023, the Commission launched an educational toolkit for secondary schools, to allow teachers to introduce the EU and the ECI in a playful way to their pupils (aged 16+). The ECI toolkit uses instruction, project work and role play across four units so that pupils learn how decisions are made in the EU, how these decisions affect their everyday lives, and how the European Citizens’ Initiative allows them to join with others to shape EU policy on issues important to them. The aim of this toolkit is to increase awareness of the ECI among students, showing them a way to be active citizens. The educational toolkit will be accompanied by a competition for the students, starting in autumn 2023.

The number of visits to the multilingual ECI website grows every year, and it reached 1.165.000 visits in 2022. The ECI Forum offers its multilingual information and legal advice

for organisers, blogs, specialised webinars, as well as an online course, taken by 780 people since its launch in 2021.

In 2023, the Commission services, via its contractor, will promote the ECI in events in the six focus Member States for the year: Spain, Sweden, Estonia, Italy, Romania and Poland. The focus is on democracy festivals or big public events such as youth, book or science festivals. Furthermore, the Commission services organise regularly online meetings for the ECI Ambassadors network, the national contact points and other multipliers.

3.5 Any other business

There were no other points raised by the Member States.

3.6 List of participants

- Representatives from the European Commission:
Secretariat-General, Unit SG.A1 and DG Informatics, Unit DIGIT.A.3.006
- Representatives of the following Member States:
Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Croatia; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Hungary; Ireland; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovenia; Spain, Sweden
- Observers from the European Parliament (AFCO and PETI Committee secretariats).

The Powerpoint presentations shown at the meeting have been published on the ECI website: https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/how-it-works/regulatory-framework-european-citizens-initiative/expert-group-meetings_en