

Strengthening the European Citizens' Initiative

Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in Brno (24/11/2023)

Recognizing that:

1. Democracy is a fundamental pillar of the European Union, European society, and the European Member States.¹ Its protection² and preservation³ are essential to uphold the values and essence of the European way of life.
2. Democracy, which represents the rule of the people, can only operate effectively when individuals actively engage with it. Institutional participation occurs indirectly through elections, deliberatively through citizen involvement, or directly via popular petitions and referendums.
3. In several European Member States, citizens' enthusiasm and interest in democracy has been on the decline, as evidenced by decreasing voter turnout.⁴
4. The European Union, in particular, is perceived by many citizens as a distant and detached institutional structure that inadvertently fosters anti-democratic sentiments and reinforces negative views toward Europe.⁵
5. The European Union introduced a direct-democratic element through the Treaties of Lisbon in 2007, known as the European Citizens' Initiative.⁶
6. Regulation (EU) 2011/211 implemented the European Citizens' Initiative for the first time, establishing legal provisions for citizen participation.⁷
7. Subsequently, Regulation (EU) 2019/788 further solidified the legal framework for this direct-democratic element.⁸ Its objective is to enhance the democratic functioning of the Union by actively involving citizens in the democratic and political life of the European Union.⁹

¹ Cf. Art. 2, TEU (Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union [2008], OJ C 326/17).

² "protect": defence against destructive forces from within and without.

³ "preserve": measures to prevent internal decay and maintain the confidence of citizens.

⁴ "In most OECD countries there has been a decline in electoral participation." (OECD, *Society at a Glance 2019: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 128).

⁵ International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy, Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise*, International IDEA, Strömsborg, 2019, p. 227.

⁶ Cf. Art. 11, IV, TEU (Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union [2008], OJ C 326/21); Art. 24, I, TFEU (Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2008], OJ C 326/58).

⁷ *Regulation 2011/211/EU of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative* (2011), OJ L 65/1-22.

⁸ *Regulation 2019/788/EU of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative* (2019), OJ L 130/55-81.

⁹ Cf. *Regulation 2019/788/EU of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative* (2019), OJ L 130/55.

Acknowledging that:

8. Since the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative through the 2007 Lisbon Treaties and Regulation (EU) 2011/211 on citizens' initiatives, a total of 110 citizens' initiatives have been registered, while 23 requests have been rejected.¹⁰
9. Among these 110 initiatives, 60 did not meet the target of one million signatures or other collection requirements, and 22 were voluntarily withdrawn by their organizers. Some initiatives are still in the process of collecting signatures (10), while others are about to begin (6).¹¹
10. As a result, only 12 citizens' initiatives have got successfully through the collection phase since the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative. Out of these, 10 have received an official response from the European Commission, and 2 are currently under examination by the Commission.¹²
11. Remarkably, this represents a mere 9.09% survival rate for initiatives that progress beyond the collection stage. Among these, only 3 initiatives have led to the drafting and presentation of legislative proposals by the European Commission yet.¹³
12. Despite the European Parliament's assessment of political support for these initiatives¹⁴, the decision to introduce a legislative proposal ultimately rests with the European Commission¹⁵, in accordance with the Treaties¹⁶.
13. Unfortunately, this situation appears in contradiction the principle of citizen participation and proximity to citizens. Even when citizens of the Union diligently meet high demands and receive political support from the European Parliament, which serves as the direct representative of Union citizens according to the Treaties¹⁷, their efforts can still falter due to the Commission's lack of will to initiate legislative projects.

¹⁰ https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/find-initiative/eci-lifecycle-statistics_en (last access: 08.02.2024).

¹¹ https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/find-initiative/eci-lifecycle-statistics_en (last access: 08.02.2024).

¹² https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/find-initiative/eci-lifecycle-statistics_en (last access: 08.02.2024).

¹³ The following European Citizens' Initiatives led to a legislative proposal: ECI(2012)000003; ECI(2017)000002; ECI(2018)000004.

Cf. https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/find-initiative_en?CATEGORY%5B0%5D=any&STATUS%5B0%5D=ANSWERED&SECTION=ALL (last access on 08.02.2024).

¹⁴ Cf. Art. 14, III, Regulation (EU) 2019/788 (*Regulation 2019/788/EU of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative* (2019), OJ L 130/67).

¹⁵ Cf. Art. 15, II, Regulation (EU) 2019/788 (*Regulation 2019/788/EU of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative* (2019), OJ L 130/68).

¹⁶ Cf. Art. 17, II, TEU (*Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union* [2008], OJ C 326/25).

¹⁷ Cf. Art. 10, II, TEU (*Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union* [2008], OJ C 326/20).

YEPP calls on:

14. The European institutions and the EPP to enhance democratic participation among EU citizens, especially by strengthening the European Citizens' Initiative. The goal is to promote active engagement of EU citizens in the democratic process and thereby strengthen democracy in Europe.
15. The EPP to focus on strengthening successfully registered European Citizens' Initiatives by making the exercise of legislative initiatives more binding for the European Commission.
16. The political representatives of the EPP and its member parties, both at national and European level, recognizing the complexity of Treaty revisions and acknowledging the potentially lengthy and intricate process, to advocate in the interim for an amendment to Resolution (EU) 2019/788. This amendment would ensure that, in the case of a positive assessment of political support from the European Parliament, the European Commission is encouraged or obligated to draft a legislative proposal, unless and to the extent that there are compelling legal reasons to the contrary (such as a lack of competence on the part of the EU).
17. The EPP to actively pursue the prompt conclusion of a binding interinstitutional agreement in accordance with Art. 295 TFEU between the European Parliament and the European Commission to provide the above-described procedure in the meantime. This would represent a significant step toward reinforcing not only the European Citizens' Initiative but also democracy in Europe itself.