

Council adopts temporary measures related to the European Citizens' Initiative



The Council today adopted a regulation extending several deadlines linked to the European Citizens' Initiative due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The temporary measures, which will apply until the end of 2022, give organisers of initiatives more time to collect statements of support in order to reach the required threshold of one million signatures from across the EU.

For the initiatives that were ongoing on 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization announced a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the one-year collection period is extended by up to six months. For the initiatives that started collecting signatures between 11 March and 11 September, the collection period will run until 11 September 2021.

The Commission can further extend the collection period for initiatives, if necessary as a result of public health measures related to COVID-19, to a maximum of two years in total.

In addition, the regulation allows for an extension of the time limits for the verification of signatures in member states and for the examination of successful initiatives by the EU institutions. If the organisers of initiatives agree to this, they can participate remotely in meetings with the Commission and the European Parliament and in the public hearing concerning their initiative.

With regard to initiatives for which the collection, verification or examination period ended after 11 March, the deadlines are extended with retroactive effect.

Background

Under the EU treaties, the European Commission has the sole right of legislative initiative, with exceptions in only a few areas.

The European Citizens' Initiative is an instrument of participatory democracy which enables one million EU citizens from at least one quarter of the member states to invite the Commission to propose a legal act in areas where it has the power to do so.

In the event of a successful European Citizens' Initiative, the Commission is required to provide its answer in a communication setting out its legal and political conclusions on the initiative, the action it intends to take, if any, and its reasons for taking or not taking action.