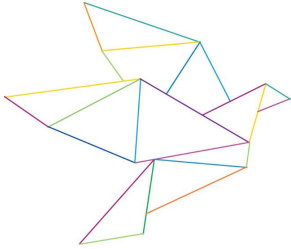


# State of the Union – Democracy

## Package: Questions & Answers on the

### European Citizens' Initiative and

#### Political Parties Funding



What is the European Citizens' Initiative?

The European Citizens' Initiative is a tool for participation and agenda-setting at EU level, offering one million EU citizens the possibility to invite the Commission to submit a legislative proposal. The current rules governing the Citizens' Initiative are based on the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and implemented through the [European Citizens' Initiative Regulation](#), which is in application since 1 April 2012.

An Initiative needs to be launched by a committee composed of at least seven EU citizens from at least seven different Member States. The organisers must submit their proposed Initiative to the Commission to be registered. The Commission must assess the legal admissibility of the proposal before registering it. The Commission does not analyse the substance at this stage.

Once an Initiative is registered, organisers have one year to collect statements of support. If the threshold of one million statements of support from at least seven Member States is met, the organisers can submit their successful initiative to the Commission. The organisers are invited to meet the Commission and to participate in a public hearing at the European Parliament. Within three months the Commission must decide either to follow the request or not, and in both instances is required to explain why in a Commission Communication.

**What has been achieved during the first five years of the European Citizens' Initiative?**

Since April 2012, 47 initiatives have been registered, and an estimated eight million statements of support have been collected by organisers. Three Initiatives have reached the one million signature threshold. A fourth Initiative has also reached this threshold and the signatures are currently being verified before it is submitted. Two of the three successful Initiatives are being acted upon by the Commission – '[Right2Water](#)' and '[Stop Vivisection](#)'.

## **How has the Commission supported Citizens' Initiatives?**

The Commission has taken a number of practical steps, within the constraints of the current Regulation, to support organisers of Initiatives. The Commission offers hosting of online collection systems on its own servers and assists organisers to get their systems certified by the relevant national authority.

The Commission has also progressively improved the support provided to organisers in framing their Initiatives, improved its online collection software including through collection on mobile devices, and allowed partial registration of Initiatives to reduce the rate of refusals.

While a number of Initiatives have successfully been completed, showing that the Regulation technically works, the instrument has not yet achieved its full potential. A revision of the Regulation is needed to eliminate further obstacles.

## **How will the new Regulation help organisers to successfully register their Initiatives and collect support?**

Organisers will be able to ask their questions directly to the Commission before registration as well as consulting other organisers on a collaborative platform that the Commission will make available. They will also be able to seek advice locally in their Member States where points of contact will be set up. There will also be the possibility of partial registration.

The proposal also clarifies that partial registration is possible where only part(s) of the Initiative are manifestly outside of the Commission's competences and where these parts do not include the main objectives.

The collection period remains 12 months. However, as a novelty, organisers will be able to choose its start date, within a 3-month period following the registration.

The organisers will be able to use a central online collection system managed by the Commission. The system will be made available free of charge to organisers and include the possibility to support initiatives using eID, to upload the paper-based statements of support in scanned version and to transfer statements of support digitally to the competent authorities in the Member States for verification. The processing of personal data via this system will be the responsibility of the Commission, limiting the liability of organisers. The organisers could still set up their own system and have it certified, if they so wish.

The organisers and the Commission can also collect the email addresses of the signatories of a citizens' initiative, subject to their consent, to keep them informed of the progress of the initiative and/or on any follow up actions.

## **How will the new Regulation make it easier for Citizens to support Initiatives?**

The new rules foresee that the Commission will translate all initiatives into

all EU official languages, to improve inclusiveness and communication.

The Commission is also proposing to harmonise the minimum age for supporting an Initiative at 16 years of age, lowering it from 18. This change will immediately impact approximately 10 million young Europeans, and also enable all EU citizens to support an initiative regardless of their country of residence.

The proposal will also reduce the amount of personal data citizens have to provide. Depending on the Member State, citizens would need to provide either: their first names, family names, date of birth and address, or their first names, family names and last four digits of their personal ID number.

Finally, by basing participation in the new system on nationality (and not a mix of nationality and residence as was the case in the past) the new rules aim to ensure that all EU citizens living outside their country of nationality can make use of their right to support citizens' initiatives.

### **How will the new Regulation improve debate on successful Initiatives?**

The examination phase will be extended from three to five months to allow more time for debate. The Commission will meet the organisers within one month from the submission of the initiative, and the public hearing at the European Parliament will be organised within three months and will allow for a balanced representation of all stakeholders and of other EU institutions and advisory bodies. Within five months, instead of the current three months, the Commission will adopt a Communication in response to the Initiative.

### **What is the role of European Political parties?**

Democracy is one of the fundamental values on which the European Union is founded. To ensure the functioning of a representative democracy on the European level, the Treaties determine that the citizens of the European Union are directly represented in the European Parliament, a point reinforced in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. As such, European political parties and foundations receive funding from the EU budget.

A European political party can be formed subject to meeting several criteria, in particular that it observes the values on which the Union is founded, as expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

### **Why are you proposing changes to the current Regulation on European Political Parties?**

In practice, despite some progress, the criteria to fulfil the requirement of representation in at least one quarter of Member States allowed the creation of parties with an artificial European dimension, composed mainly of individual politicians and dominated by one or two national political parties, failing to be transparent with voters and gaining a disproportionate share of EU funding when compared to their democratic representation. The Commission is therefore proposing the following legislative changes:

- To ensure a genuine European dimension of European political parties and to prevent the same national party or individuals from artificially sponsoring several European political parties, only political parties and no longer individuals should be taken into account when calculating the representation requirements for forming a party.
- The funding of European political parties should better reflect the true share of each party's vote in the European elections. At present, 15% of the total budget is distributed evenly across all parties, however large or small their vote share. The Commission has therefore proposed to improve the democratic legitimacy of EU funding for political parties by linking it more clearly to their representation in the European Parliament, allocating 95% of the total budget on the basis of vote share in European elections.
- Citizens have a right to know who and what they are voting for in European elections. To provide for greater transparency, and to strengthen the democratic accountability of European political parties, the Commission also proposes that European political parties ensure that their member parties should publish its programme and logo on their websites, while also indicating the current gender balance of their Members of the European Parliament.

### **What other changes are you proposing to the funding of political parties and foundations?**

Our proposals will enable European political parties and foundations to absorb a larger part of the existing dedicated funding allocated to them in the European Union budget.

To deal with European political parties and foundations having difficulties in meeting the current co-financing threshold of 15%, it should be lowered, enabling more of the existing public funding set aside for European parties and foundations to be directed appropriately, for example in the 2019 European election campaign. The Commission proposes to lower the co-financing requirement to 10% for European political parties and to 5% for European political foundations.

### **How will these new rules be enforced to better manage taxpayers' money?**

For reasons of legal certainty and transparency it will be explicitly provided that where a European political party or political foundation, due to a change in circumstances, no longer fulfils the conditions for registration, or where the party or foundation has provided false or incomplete information, it should be removed from the Register.

The protection of the EU financial interests will be strengthened by providing for more effective recovery of funding in case of breach of the rules. Unduly paid funds will be recovered, including from natural persons responsible for the infringement in question.

**For more information:**

[2017 State of the Union speech](#)

[2017 State of the Union Brochure](#)

[Proposal for a regulation: European Citizens' Initiative Regulation Revision](#)

[Proposal for a regulation: Amendment on statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations](#)

[Press release: Reform of Citizens' Initiative and Political Party funding](#)