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News | 18.03.2016

European Commission says "sorry, but no" to European Parliament's call for stronger rights for citizens

As we reported back in October 2015, the European Parliament has called on the European Commission to improve the European Citizens' Initiative whose dismal success rate in its first three years has clearly demonstrated that urgent changes need to be made if we want citizens to keep their trust in Europe. But the informal response from the European Commission, finally sent to Members of the Parliament's constitutional affairs committee more than three months later, is unequivocal: "The Commission considers that after only three years after its effective entry into application, it is at this point too early to launch a legislative revision of the Regulation. Nevertheless, as part of its ongoing assessment of the functioning of the instrument, the Commission will continue to work in 2016 to further assess the possible need for such a revision at a later stage."

Why the European Citizens' Initiative needs to be reformed, urgently.



Only 6 new ECIs

In 2015 only 6 new EU citizens initiatives were registered

” Citizens are losing faith in the European Citizens' Initiative but for some reason, the EU Commission still refuses to reform it.

- Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament

The European Commission, whose First Vice-President Frans Timmermans is responsible for the European Citizens' Initiative, does admit that there are flaws in the current regulation. But what it fails to see is any urgency in the need to revise it. In fact, minutes from Commissioners' meetings have revealed that there is a [growing sense of unease](#) about this democratic instrument. The Commission [recognises that a number of improvements](#) are necessary, while at the same time refusing to do anything about it. These much-needed improvements include:

- Registering only part of an initiative if the other part falls outside of the Commission's powers (as opposed to dismissing it completely)
- Changing the deadlines
- Allowing 16 years olds to participate in ECIs
- Better protection for organisers of ECIs so they can have a legal personality instead of taking on personal liabilities
- No more details in the rejection letters when the Commission refuses to register an initiative

The Commission has also ignored the several improvements called for by the European Parliament:

- It doesn't consider it necessary to establish an independent body which would carry out the initial legal check for the registration of a citizens initiative
- It has refused to start preparing a legal act in response to a successful ECI within 12 months after issuing a positive opinion.
- It will not give financial support to ECI organisers from the EU budget
- It will not consider improvements to transparency or check the funding and sponsorship of ECIs
- It has refused to recognise the right for citizens to use their mother tongue even if it is not an official EU language

On the bright side, the Commission has promised to work on raising awareness of the European Citizens' Initiative, to improve the online collection software and simplify in cooperation with the Member States the data requirements for signatories, as well as exploring the development of a digital signature. This is a small start, but it's clear that the Commission needs to do much more to make sure that the European Citizens' Initiative lives up to the expectations raised by the Commission itself when it launched in April 2012. Far from being what the Commission called the most important example of citizen-led democracy in the world, the European Citizens' Initiative has failed dismally in this regard. The Greens/EFA group will continue to push for the necessary improvements that can help citizens' have a real say in European law-making, as was envisaged by the creation of the European Citizens' Initiative. What do you think? Contact us on [@GreensEP](#)

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