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News | 23.05.2012

European Parliament will listen to Citizens

Mandatory hearings for Citizens' Initiatives introduced

An important milestone on the road to a “Europe of citizens” that is also an important success for the Greens has been reached: The European Parliament decided to change its Rules of Procedure introducing mandatory hearings for successful European Citizens’ Initiatives. The new regulation will ensure that Europe keeps its ears open towards active citizens.



Commenting on this achievement, MEP Gerald Häfner, rapporteur on the European Citizens’ Initiative and Coordinator of the Green Group in the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the EP, said: *"Years of fighting for more citizens’ participation have come to a successful end. We managed to open the doors for more bottom-up involvement that can bring Europe close to its citizens. We started moving away from the centralist and elitist style of policy making towards a Europe of citizens. Since 1st April, European citizens have been able to send their legislative proposals to the institutions in the form of a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI). At least 10 such initiatives have been put forward so far – and six have already declared admissible by the Commission. They demand, for example, more resources for European exchange programmes, unified mobile phone tariffs, more protection for milk cows, extension of voting rights for EU citizens living abroad, and the implementation of the basic right of access to clean water. It is clear that citizens are ready to use the opportunity created by the introduction of the ECI. Now, it’s up to the institutions to prove that they are ready to listen. I have always been fighting for a serious legal and political response to such initiatives. When one million citizens come up with a legislative proposal, they must be offered the possibility to discuss it in an appropriate form with hearing withn the Commission and Parliament. With this demand, the Greens stood alone in the beginning, but eventually we managed to convince the other Groups."*
Today, the EP voted to include exactly such a form of hearings in its Rules of Procedure and committed

itself to organise a public and thorough hearing on its premises for each citizens' initiative that has collected the necessary number of signatures. All interested citizens will be able to follow that debate directly or via webstreaming. All interested MEPs can participate. The hearing will be organised by the President of the EP together with the Committee in charge for the given policy field and the Committee on Petitions. The European Commission will be represented on the highest possible level, i.e. by the Commissioner in charge of the subject or, in case of unavailability, through the Director General in charge. The change of the EP's Rules of Procedure is the final step in the process of implementing the ECI – and therefore an extraordinary milestone in our efforts to improve citizens' participation and democracy in Europe. It is globally the first transnational instrument of participation and therefore an international role model. It is a huge success for the citizens of Europe, for the Greens in the European Parliament, for the cooperation between the responsible persons in the political groups and for civil society organisations and campaigns. **Background:** The European Citizens' Initiative was put forward by several democracy NGOs like Mehr Demokratie, Democracy International and the Initiative & Referendum Institute Europe and included into the draft of the planned EU Constitution. After the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, it was included in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 11, Section 4). The first draft regulation for implementation published by the Commission in early 2010 was rejected by a majority in the European Parliament. Only after the four rapporteurs A. Lamassoure (EPP), Z. Gurmai (S&D); D. Wallis (ALDE) und G. Häfner (Greens/EFA) had achieved significant improvements in the negotiations with the Commission and the Council, was the new proposal adopted by the EP with an overwhelming majority on 15th December, 2010 (628 in favour, 15 against) and on 14th February 2011 by the European Council. After a 13 month period for implementation in the Member states, the regulation entered into force on 1st April 2012. Since then, citizens of the EU have been able to make legislative proposals – provided they manage to collect at least 1 million supporting signatures from at least 7 Member States. Successful initiatives are examined by the European Commission and receive a hearing in the Parliament, in the presence of the Commissioner or Director General in charge. The Conference of Committee Chairs will appoint the Committee responsible to organise the hearing. The Committee on Petitions, with its experience in defending citizens' interests, will be included in each case. All hearings are public and will be transmitted online as web-stream. After that, the Commission has to decide if it wants to initiate a legislative procedure based on the citizens' proposal.

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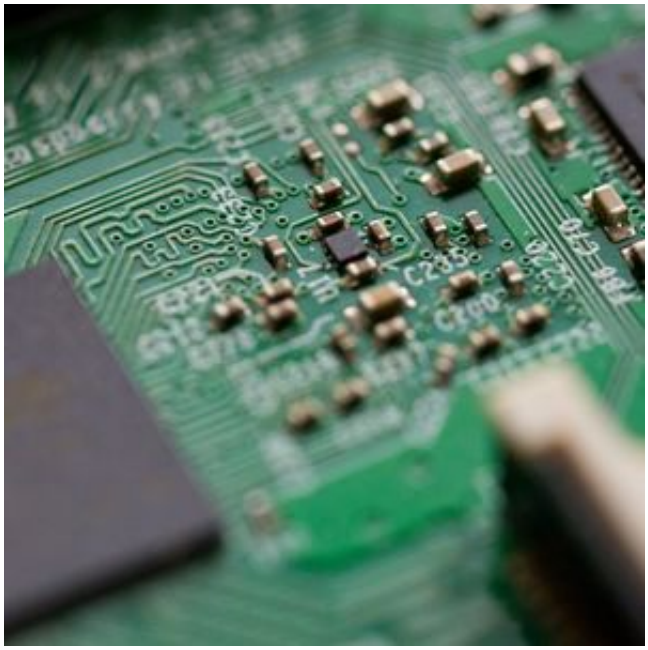


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