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Greens/EFA work to improve European Citizens' Initiative to make it a real tool for democracy in the EU

The European Citizens' Initiative was touted as the world's first transnational tool for direct democracy and was heralded as a breakthrough in citizen participation because it allowed for 1 million citizens to call on the European Commission to propose EU legislation. However, three years later, citizens and campaign groups are unhappy with the results, and the Greens/EFA have denounced several deficiencies in the way the ECI works.

To present some facts: Of the 51 ECIs that have been proposed so far, 20 have been rejected by the European Commission for legal reasons, namely because the Commission considered them to be “manifestly outside [its] competence”. Of those that were given the go-ahead to start gathering signatures, only 3 were successful in meeting the thresholds imposed for presenting the initiative to the Commission. Even then, the European Commission has the sole discretion to decide whether or not it makes a legislative proposal on the basis of a European Citizens' Initiative, which raises questions about its independence in the process.

The Greens/EFA have therefore proposed that the European Citizens' Initiative be amended so that the registration process is simpler for citizens, and so the Commission is obliged to act in response to an ECI. Today, the Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO) of the European Parliament has voted unanimously on a report on the ECI, thus sending a strong signal to the European Commission that it should undertake a substantial review of the regulation.

Specifically, the Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur, **Josep Maria Terricabras**, successfully proposed in the report that:

- There should be a review of potential conflicts of interest generated by the fact that the European Commission is responsible for proposing EU legislation but also for deciding on whether or not to register and act on European Citizens' Initiatives.
- The system for collecting online signatures should be accessible to people with disabilities.
- There should be an explicit reference to the fact that the collection of ID numbers should be avoided.
- There should be a focus on raising public awareness of the ECI and the age for signing an ECI should be lowered to 16 instead of 18.
- The citizens' committees organising an ECI should be able to acquire legal personality.

There were some other proposals tabled by the Greens/EFA which were rejected by other political groups. Notably, we wanted to ensure that every ECI that reaches one million signatures would result in a proposal for a legislative act from the European Commission, but the text was watered down so that the Commission would only need to propose a legal act "after issuing a positive opinion".

Next steps

The European Parliament Resolution on the European Citizens' Initiative will be voted on in plenary on 26 October 2015. The Greens/EFA group will continue to work to include further improvements in the report, because we believe that citizens should be able to fully exercise their democratic rights in the EU.

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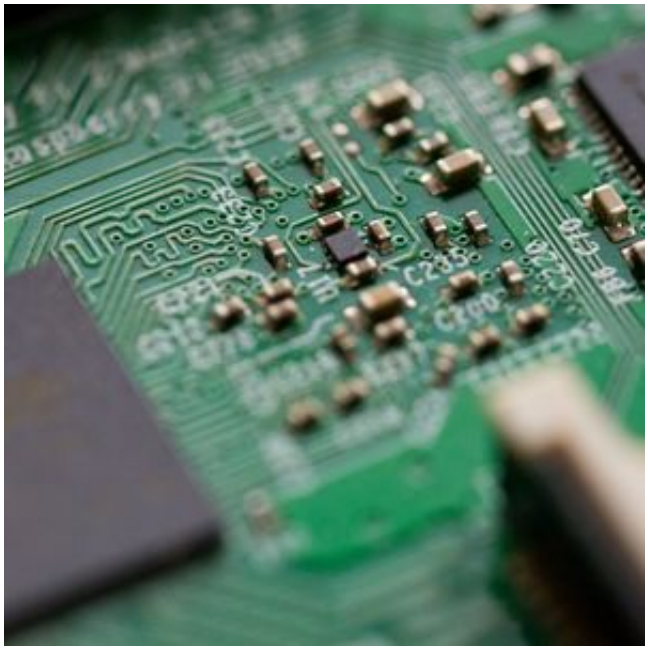


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Responsible MEPs



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