Press release | 31.03.2010

Citizens' Initiative

Toothless tiger or a real opportunity for citizens?

The European Commission has just presented the "Citizens' Initiative", an important tool for participative democracy that gives the right to a million Europeans to invite the Commission to propose legislation in a particular field.

Reacting to the Commission's proposal, **Gerald Hafner, member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee** of the European Parliament, said:

"Today is a big day for Europe of the citizens. The citizens' initiative, for which we have long fought, for the first time opens the door to the participation of citizens at the heart of European politics. We now need to ensure that the door is not summarily closed again. There is still no certainty that this instrument will become an effective tool for citizens rather than a toothless tiger.

The Commission's proposal is useful, but it is still too cautious and not close enough to citizens. Above all, it has too many conditions that citizens must respect, but too few rules governing how the Commission must deal with the requests. It cannot remain like that, we must improve the proposal. For example, hearings by petitioners should be considered. The Commission must not be allowed to simply ignore a petition signed by millions of citizens.

The proposal also contains improvements. I am pleased that the Commission accepted my suggestion that there not be a threshold of 0,2% of EU citizens, but rather a number of citizens that varies with the Member State. We also appreciate that the Commission has accepted the idea of accepting on-line initiatives. The minimum number of countries has been kept at nine. This favours large and well-organised unions and other large professional bodies and constitutes an obstacle for true citizens' initiatives. To encourage the participation of citizens, this number needs to be lowered.

The fourth paragraph foresees a clause giving the Commission the possibility of excluding initiatives that are considered abusive or against the values of the EU. This definition is too vague and opens the door to abuse and arbitrary decisions. Citizens must be able to appeal in cases where the Commission considers their initiative to be unacceptable".

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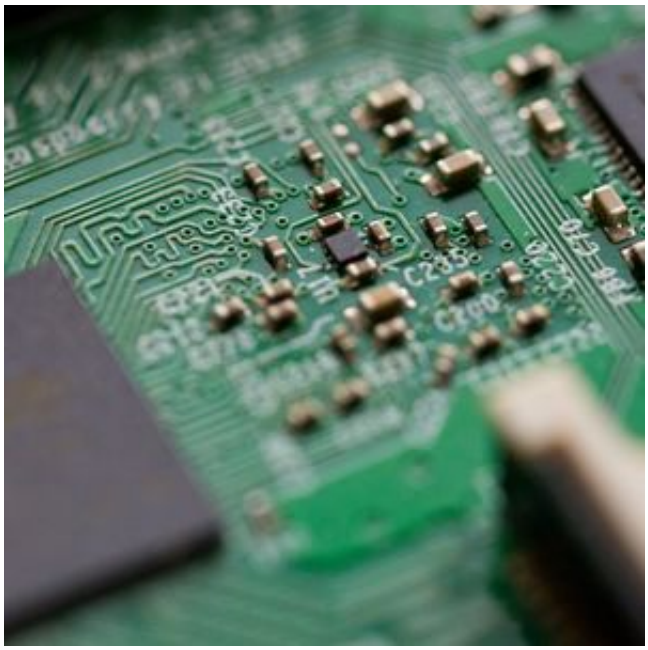


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