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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

Report on the application of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an instrument that allows one million citizens to invite the European Commission to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. It is a tool for agenda-setting and participation in the democratic life of the Union. The rules governing the European Citizens' Initiative are based on the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty¹ and are implemented through the Regulation on the Citizens' Initiative, which has been in application since 1 April 2012². Since then, organisers of initiatives have gathered an estimated 9 million statements of support from citizens across the European Union.

Article 22 of the ECI Regulation foresees that every three years, the Commission shall present a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of this Regulation.

2015-2018: TOWARDS A REVISED CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

The first Commission report adopted on 31 March 2015 listed a number of challenges arising in the implementation of the ECI Regulation in its current form, ranging from technical or logistical aspects to issues of a more political nature³.

This report triggered a review of the ECI instrument to collect views on ways to improve its implementation. This involved consultations with, and contributions from key stakeholders and interlocutors, including EU institutions and advisory bodies, Member States, civil society organisations and ECI organisers. The 'ECI Days' organised each year since 2012 by the European Economic and Social Committee and some civil society partners have provided a forum for discussion and input. Other EU institutions and bodies, as well as various stakeholders, have also carried out their own assessments and evaluations of the instrument. In particular, the European Parliament issued a resolution on 28 October 2015⁴, which called for a revision of the Regulation.

Against this background, the Commission adopted a proposal for a new Regulation on the Citizens' Initiative on 13 September 2017⁵ (referred to in the rest of this report as 'the proposal'). Its objective is to achieve the full potential of the ECI by making it more

¹ Art. 11(4) of the Treaty on European Union and Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

² Regulation (EU) N° 211/2011 adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in February 2011. This Regulation is complemented by Commission implementing regulation (EU) N° 1179/2011 of 17 November 2011 on the technical specifications for online collection systems.

³ [Report on the application of Regulation \(EU\) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative – 31 March 2015.](#)

⁴ [European Parliament resolution of 28 October 2015 on the European Citizens' Initiative.](#)

⁵ COM(2017) 482 – 13.09.2017

accessible, less burdensome and easier to use for organisers and supporters. The proposal takes account of the numerous inputs gathered over the previous years, as well as comments received in the context of a public consultation held in 2017 on the revision. These are summarised in a staff working document accompanying the proposal, which also includes details on the issues regarding the functioning of the ECI, as well as an analysis of options for improvement⁶, building on the studies the Commission launched to accompany the revision of the ECI⁷.

The proposal addresses the main shortcomings the review identified, namely:

- the difficulties for citizens to propose legally admissible initiatives – this is evidenced by the relatively high rate of refusals of registration before signatures can be collected (30% of requests for registration could not be registered by the Commission as the proposed initiatives were manifestly outside the scope of the Commission's powers);
- a complex and burdensome process for organisers of initiatives to collect statements of support, as evidenced by the low rate of successful initiatives (i.e. initiatives that manage to reach the required number of signatories within the one year collection period); e.g. inflexibilities in the ECI timeline; differing data requirements for signatories from one Member State to another; complex process for collecting statements of support online;
- overall, a relatively limited debate and impact so far generated by citizens' initiatives.

Within the present legal order, the Commission has already taken various non-legislative measures to introduce practical improvements in implementing the ECI instrument. In particular, it has provided free of charge hosting servers for organisers' online collection systems, reinforced advice and support to (potential) organisers and communication activities, improved the user-friendliness of the online collection software that organisers can choose to use and it has decided where appropriate to partially register initiatives.

In particular, the sharp decrease in the proportion of requests for registration refused by the Commission (only 2 refusals out of 17 proposed initiatives submitted since April 2015, in comparison to 20 out of 51 in the period from April 2012 to March 2015) can be also attributed to the introduction by the Commission of the practice of allowing partial registrations in cases where such an approach is justified.

These changes brought significant improvements, but were of a non-legislative nature only. In order to ensure that the ECI instrument is fully effective and accessible, the

⁶ The Staff Working Document is available on the [Review dedicated page](#) of the ECI website.

⁷ In addition to a study on ICT impacts of the Regulation on the citizens' initiative issued in June 2015, three other studies were commissioned by the Commission on signatories' data requirements; on the use of electronic identification (eID); and on online collection systems and technical specifications pursuant to ECI Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 and Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011. These studies are available on the [Review dedicated page of the ECI website](#).

adoption of a new regulation is a priority as identified in the Joint Declaration on legislative priorities for 2018-19 adopted by the Presidents of the three Institutions on 14 December 2017.

This report is the second of its kind and closely follows the comprehensive assessment carried out in the run-up to the proposed revision of the current ECI Regulation. It therefore builds on this recent exercise and includes further details and factual information on the implementation and functioning of the European Citizens' Initiative.

The following section provides a state-of-play of the ECI procedure, which includes a brief analysis of the main problems ECI stakeholders are confronted with. As appropriate, it refers to some of the improvements already introduced or to those proposed by the Commission in its proposal for a new Regulation.

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVES

The lifecycle of a citizens' initiative is based on rules and procedures set out in the Regulation. An initiative needs to be launched by a citizens' committee and is then registered by the Commission provided that the conditions for admissibility are met, in particular the fact that the initiative does not manifestly fall outside the Commission's powers. This becomes the trigger point for the collection of statements of support. If the verification of statements of support by Member States' competent authorities confirms that the minimum number of signatories has been reached, organisers submit their initiative to the Commission, which has three months to reply. This phase also includes a meeting with the Commission and a public hearing organised at the European Parliament.

Since the previous report on the application of the ECI in March 2015, the Commission has received 17 requests for registration of proposed citizens' initiatives, out of which 15 were accepted and 2 refused. Additionally, two initiatives whose registration had initially been refused in the previous three-year period were registered by the Commission further to Court decisions (see below).

The table below provides an overview of the number of all proposed citizens' initiatives registered and requests for registration refused since the entry into application of the Regulation in April 2012.

	04/2012-03/2015	04/2015-03/2018	Total since 04/2012
Total initiatives registered	31	17	48
Total requests for registration refused	20	2	22

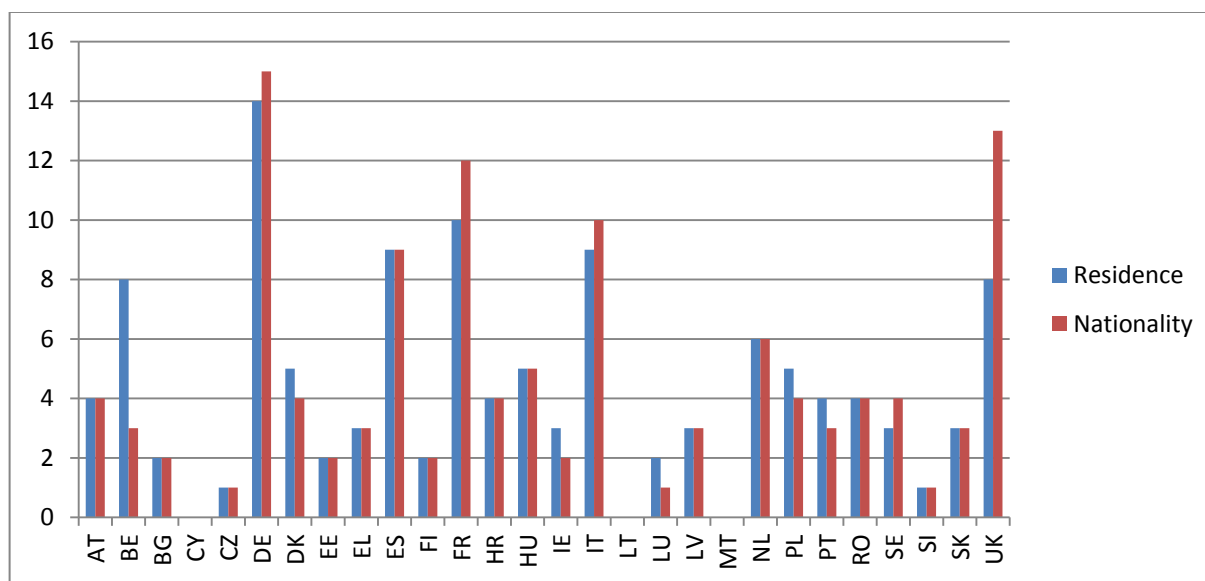
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECI PROCEDURE

Citizens' committee

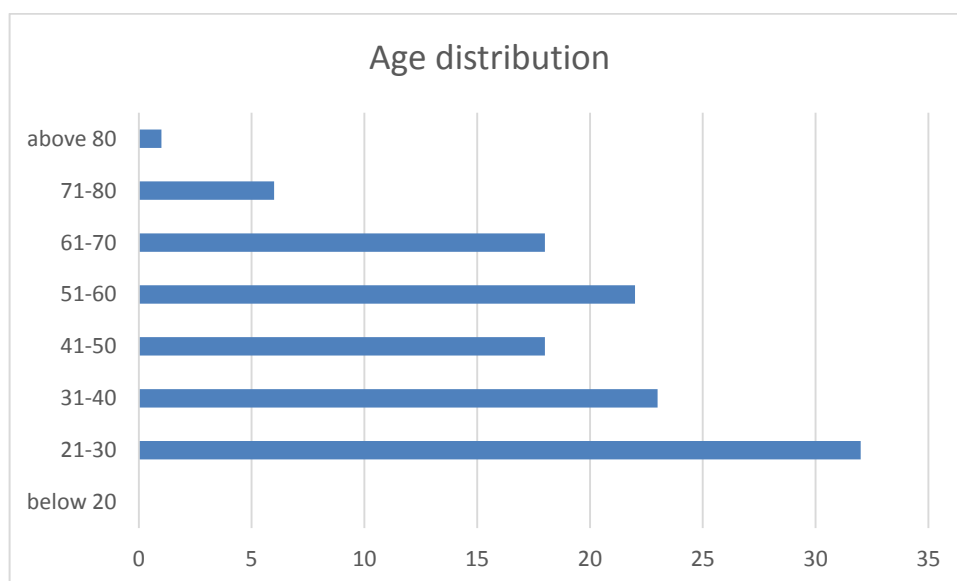
A prior condition to the launch of a citizens' initiative is the setting-up of a citizens' committee of at least seven EU citizens residing in seven different Member States who must be of the age to vote in European Parliament elections. Whilst there is no limit to the number of citizens on the committee, only those seven members are formally registered by the Commission.

Statistics on members of citizens' committees for initiatives registered since April 2015:

- Residence and nationality of committee members



- Age of committee members (at the time of registration)



Registration of initiatives

Before starting to collect statements of support, the organisers need to register their initiative with the Commission, which checks at that stage in particular that the citizens' committee complies with the requirements described above. It also checks that the proposed initiative does not fall manifestly outside the Commission powers to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union for the purpose of implementing the Treaties, and that it is not manifestly abusive, frivolous and vexatious, as well as not manifestly contrary to the Union's values.

The Commission has two months to verify that the conditions stated in Art. 4(2) of the ECI Regulation are met.

The previous report already emphasised the challenge the registration procedure represented for organisers, in particular in relation to the scope of the Commission powers. Improvements were subsequently introduced at two levels. Since 2015, the College of Commissioners adopts the decisions on the registration of the proposed citizens' initiatives, demonstrating the importance given by the Commission to the ECI and to the priority of listening to citizens and their concerns. The publication of press releases by the Commission has also reinforced the visibility of registrations.

In addition, the Commission has introduced the practice of registering initiatives partially where appropriate. In those cases, the Commission adopted a decision setting out the conditions of the registration, including specifying the elements registered by the Commission and the basis on which statements of support for the initiative may be collected.

As a result, since 2015 only two proposed initiatives did not fulfil the registration requirements and therefore could not be registered by the Commission ('Stop Brexit'; 'British friends - stay with us in EU').

Since the entry into application of the Regulation in 2012, six citizens' committees have brought proceedings before the General Court against Commission decisions refusing the registration of their proposed initiatives⁸. While the proceedings before the Court have continued during the reporting period, all these actions concern decisions adopted in the period 2012-2014.

The General Court confirmed the refusal decisions in four cases⁹. Two of these four General Court judgements have been appealed before the Court of Justice of the EU. On 12 September 2017, the Court of Justice dismissed the appeal in the first of these cases

⁸ Cases T-754/14, T-361/14, T-44/14, T-529/13, T-450/12, T-646/13

⁹ Cases T-450/12, T 44/14, T 529/13, T 361/14

and confirmed the judgement of the General Court and the Commission decision refusing to register the proposed initiative¹⁰.

In two other cases, the Commission has registered the initiatives to comply with judgements, which the General Court of the EU made in 2017¹¹ ('Stop TTIP'; 'Minority SafePack'). An action for annulment was then introduced against the Commission decision of March 2017 to register the proposed initiative 'Minority SafePack'¹².

The Commission proposal for a new Regulation aims to improve the registration procedure, including the possibility of providing (preliminary) information to the organisers if the initiative falls outside of the Commission's powers. It also clarifies the conditions for partial registration of initiatives; i.e. where only part of the initiative is not manifestly outside of the Commission powers to submit a proposal for a legal act for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

Collection of statements of support

The ECI Regulation provides that support for a citizens' initiative can only be given by citizens of the Union who have reached voting age in the European Parliament elections, which is 18 years old everywhere in the EU with the exception of Austria where it is set at 16.

The organisers have 12 months maximum to collect statements of support either in paper form or online using forms compliant with the models in Annex III to the Regulation.

Regarding the collection of statements of support for the latest initiative to reach the one-million threshold, 'Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides', around 21% were collected on paper and around 79% online¹³.

Data requirements

Signatories must fulfil the requirement of a link of nationality or residence with a given Member State and provide personal data for verification by competent authorities in the Member States. These requirements vary from one Member State to another.

The Commission can modify the signatories' data requirements set out in Annex III by a delegated act at the request of Member States. After a first modification in 2013 concerning 6 Member States, a second modification in 2015 simplified the requirements for 3 other Member States.

¹⁰ Cases C-589/15, C-420/16

¹¹ Cases T-646/13, T-754/14

¹² Case T-391/17

¹³ Figures related to the collection of statements of support are only available for the submitted initiatives as these are the only official figures available to the Commission and the Member States.

These divergences in data requirements for citizens' support have impacted negatively on the efficiency and effectiveness of the citizens' initiative: i.a. some EU citizens are prevented from providing support; in some countries a high amount of personal data is required or the types of data required may be considered sensitive to provide and therefore may deter citizens from giving their support; as many as 13 forms are currently in use requesting different sets of personal data which makes the collection of statements of support a highly cumbersome exercise, in particular in paper form; etc.

These outstanding issues are addressed as a priority by the proposal adopted in September 2017 and are described extensively in the staff working document accompanying the proposal.

Online collection

The online collection of statements of support from signatories is one of the strengths of the instrument and often an indispensable part of the organisers' toolbox. It can nevertheless be a significant challenge for organisers.

In order to collect statements of support online, they currently have to build their own system (including software and hosting server) and have it certified by a competent authority in the Member State where the data will be stored. Technical specifications for online collection systems are set out in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011 of 17 November 2011 to implement the requirements set out in the ECI Regulation (Art. 6).

The collection systems must also have the necessary technical and security features to protect the personal data of signatories.

The Commission has provided extensive assistance for the online collection element of the ECI. In accordance with the Regulation, the Commission made available an open source software free of charge in December 2011, which organisers can use with or without modifications. They are, however, free to use another software of their choice.

Identifying a hosting server to install the software has represented a recurrent challenge for organisers, in terms of costs but above all in terms of organisation, causing delays in the launch of their online collection. In 2012, the Commission decided to offer organisers the hosting of their online collection systems on its own servers, free of charge and beyond its obligations under the current Regulation.

The software developed by the Commission provides a set of functionalities to collect statements of support online, to store signatories' data securely and to export the data for their subsequent submission to the competent national authorities in the Member States.

The software has been regularly upgraded to keep it up-to-date and make it more user-friendly. It includes the possibility of collecting statements of support using mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets as well as establishing links with social media and

websites for campaign purposes. Additional improvements have been designed for people with disabilities¹⁴.

Since April 2015, twelve initiatives have used the Commission software, ten of which also used the Commission's hosting service.

No use of the 'advanced electronic signature' as per Art. 5(2) has been reported to date.

Timeline for collection

Organisers have one year to collect statements of support from the date on which the Commission registers their initiative. In practice, organisers frequently have less than one year for collection given the logistical requirements to initiate the collection. Many organisers for instance do not start preparations for the collection before they receive confirmation that their initiative will be registered, even though the Regulation allows them to request the relevant Member State to certify their online collection systems before the registration of the initiative. Experience shows that the result of the collection process is to a significant extent also influenced by the level and quality of organisation of the campaign¹⁵.

A complaint was filed with the Ombudsman by the organisers of the initiative 'Mum, Dad and Kids' as regards the Commission's legal interpretation of the 12-month collection period. The Ombudsman found that, as the law stands at present, the Commission was justified in considering that the collection of statements of support begins on the date of registration of the proposed initiative¹⁶.

To address the issues referred to above, the proposal for a revised ECI regulation includes a number of improvements ranging from a more flexible timeline, in particular the possibility for organisers to choose the start date for the collection period up to three months after the registration date, in addition to providing for a central online collection system, which the Commission will set up and manage free of charge as an alternative to individual systems.

Verification of statements of support and submission to the Commission

Once the organisers have collected the required number of statements of support (one million overall and minimum thresholds to be reached in at least 7 countries), they submit them to the competent national authorities who have 3 months to verify and certify the number of valid statements of support.

¹⁴ A study was carried out in 2013 to spot any elements that would not follow best practice for accessibility. In the implementation of the new user experience design implemented in 2017, the use of best practices on accessibility has been included in relation to the front-end of the application. Further work on accessibility is underway.

¹⁵ It is to be noted that the 'Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides' initiative managed to collect the required number of statements of support in only approximately 5 months.

¹⁶ Decision in case 1086/2017/PMC.

If it is confirmed that the minimum number of signatories has been reached, organisers submit their initiative to the Commission. Three initiatives were successfully submitted to the Commission by March 2015 (as described in the previous report), and an additional one, ‘Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides’, followed in on 6 October 2017.

All Member States' authorities have been requested to verify statements of support for the initiative ‘Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides’. For this initiative, more than 87% of the statements of support collected were found to be valid by the competent authorities. Only two authorities obtained results below 75%.

Verification by use of random sampling was carried out in 12 Member States (among them, two for the statements of support collected on paper and one for the statements of support collected online). No significant discrepancies in the results as regards the validity of the statements of support could be observed between the Member States using random sampling and the ones verifying all statements of support.

The fourth initiative ‘Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides’ gathered the support of 1,070,865 signatories¹⁷.

The Member States for which all four successful ECIs managed to reach the threshold were Germany, Spain and Italy.

Total (cumulative) number of signatories per country for the four successful initiatives:

AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR
132,923	102,095	15,462	14,273	10,147	33,019*	29,610*	6,023*	32,100	220,463*
DE	EL	HU	IE	IT	LV	LT	LU	MT	NL
2,202,500	89,243	97,026	23,822	1,450,862	13,889	30,286	18,034	26,899	98,403
PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE	UK		
285,857	98,823*	116,907*	67,211*	43,272	322,429	33,831	147,376*		

** Total number of statements of support including from certificates received after the date of submission of the initiative concerned to the Commission*

The provisions on the verification of statements of support were designed to leave some flexibility for Member States so that existing procedures at national level for similar instruments could be used, therefore limiting the administrative burden. This has led to a situation where the scope of the data requested to signatories and of the verification process differs from one Member State to the other. However, the recent study on data requirements has concluded that the current verification approach as foreseen in the Regulation is well designed compared to similar instruments at regional and national levels. No instance of significant fraud has so far been reported either.

¹⁷ The distribution of signatories per country can be consulted at: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/successful/details/2017/000002>.

It is also to be noted that the lack of a time limit for the submission of a successful initiative to the Commission may create confusion and uncertainty for citizens who provided their support, but also for EU institutions, as to the follow-up of successful initiatives. The Commission proposal addresses this issue by setting a deadline for the submission of an initiative.

Examination and follow-up by the Commission

During this phase, the organisers are invited to meet the Commission and a public hearing is organised at the European Parliament. The outcome of this three-month examination phase is the adoption of a Communication, in which the Commission explains the actions it intends to take, if any, and its reasons (Art. 10).

The ‘Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides’ initiative called on the European Commission *'to propose to member states a ban on glyphosate, to reform the pesticide approval procedure, and to set EU-wide mandatory reduction targets for pesticide use'*. The Commission received representatives of the organisers on 23 October 2017 and was represented by First Vice-President Timmermans and the Commissioner for health and food safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis. A public hearing was held at the European Parliament on 20 November 2017, in which Commissioner Andriukaitis participated.

The Commission adopted a Communication on 12 December 2017 setting out the actions it intends to take. While the Commission will not adopt a proposal to ban glyphosate-based herbicides as the decision to renew the approval of glyphosate for 5 years is fully justified on both scientific and legal grounds, it will present a legislative proposal by May 2018, notably with a view to improving transparency in scientific assessments and decision-making. The Commission will also strengthen efforts for the continuous and measurable reduction of risk from pesticide use.

The following is an update on the initiatives submitted to the Commission before the adoption of the previous report on the European Citizens’ Initiative on 31 March 2015.

The ‘Stop vivisection’ initiative (which was submitted to the Commission on 3rd March 2015) called on the Commission *'to abrogate directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes and to present a new proposal that does away with animal experimentation and instead makes compulsory the use - in biomedical and toxicological research - of data directly relevant for the human species'*. A meeting was organised on 11 May 2015; the Commission was represented by Vice-President Katainen and senior officials from the departments concerned. A public hearing was organised at the European Parliament on the same day, during which, and for the first time, external experts were invited to take the floor. The Commission was represented by Vice-President Katainen.

The Commission adopted a Communication on 3rd June 2015 announcing actions in four directions; i.e. accelerating progress in the Three Rs (to replace, reduce and refine animal

use) through knowledge sharing; developing, validating and implementing new alternative approaches to animal testing; enforcing compliance with the Three Rs principle and aligning relevant sector legislation; engaging in a dialogue with the scientific community.

The Commission organised a scientific conference in Brussels on 6-7 December 2016 to take stock of the progress in the follow-up actions to the initiative and to discuss how to exploit cutting-edge advances in biomedical and other research in the development of scientifically valid non-animal approaches¹⁸.

It is also to be noted that following a complaint by the organisers of the ‘Stop vivisection’ initiative to the Ombudsman, a decision concluded that there was no maladministration from the Commission in the handling of this initiative (April 2017)¹⁹.

Regarding the ‘One of us’ initiative to which the Commission answered that it considered that the existing legal framework was appropriate, its organisers have brought proceedings before the General Court of the EU for the annulment of the Commission communication adopted in response to the initiative. The procedure before the General Court is pending²⁰.

Concerning the initiative ‘Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!’ several follow-up actions have been implemented since the adoption of the Commission Communication in March 2014²¹. Of particular note is the initiative's contribution towards maintaining ‘water and sanitation’ as a key priority area for the post-2015 EU development framework²² and subsequently in the list of Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’²³. In addition, the Commission adopted a proposal for a revised directive on drinking water on 1st February 2018²⁴ which, in response to the initiative, foresees inter alia an obligation for Member States to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups have access to water. The European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017²⁵ also includes the principle that everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water and sanitation (principle 20 - Access to essential services).

¹⁸ Further details on follow-up actions are available on the [dedicated page](#) of the ECI register.

¹⁹ Case 1609/2016/JAS.

²⁰ Case T-561/14.

²¹ See the relevant [follow-up page](#) of the ECI register.

²² Communication ‘A Decent life for all: from vision to collective action’ of 2 June 2014, COM(2014) 335.

²³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

²⁴ COM(2017) 753 – 01.02.2018

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf

In the proposal to revise the Citizens' Initiative Regulation, the Commission has included a number of improvements, in particular the transmission of the initiative, when it is received, to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, a more inclusive public hearing at the European Parliament to ensure balanced representation of all stakeholders concerned by the initiative, and extension of the examination phase from three to five months to allow more time for debate and allow it to feed into the Commission's response.

Transparency - funding

In accordance with Art. 9, organisers have to provide information on sources of funding exceeding EUR 500 per year and per sponsor. This information is published on the ECI register.

Overview of sponsorships for the initiatives registered since April 2015:

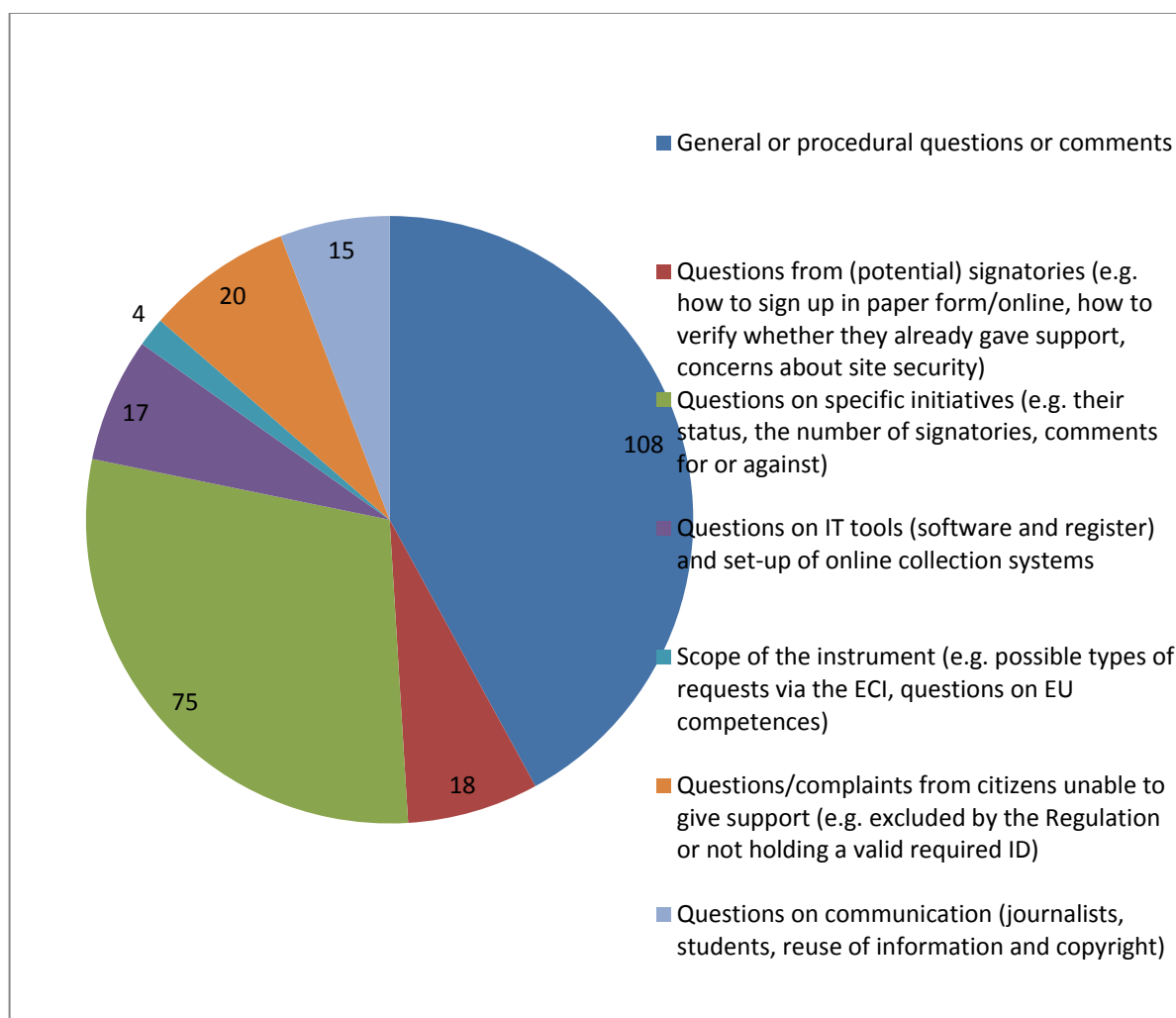
	NO FUNDING SOURCES	TOTAL AMOUNT OF FUNDING BELOW EUR 10,000	TOTAL AMOUNT OF FUNDING ABOVE EUR 10,000
Number of initiatives	8	2	7

The declared support and funding for the 'Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides' initiative amounts to EUR 328,399, which is the highest amount to date for a successful citizens' initiative.

Support and awareness-raising

Contact point:

In accordance with Art. 4(1), a point of contact is available, which is hosted by the Europe Direct Contact Centre. Since April 2015, the contact point has treated 257 requests for information from citizens.



The questions are re-directed to the Commission when the Europe Direct Contact Centre cannot reply directly, for example when the questions relate to whether or not a possible initiative complies with the registration criteria, to which replies of an informal nature are provided, without prejudice to any formal reply by the Commission following a possible request for registration. Since April 2015, 66 questions have been re-directed to the Commission.

Organiser account:

Once an initiative is formally registered, the Commission answers organisers' questions directly via their dedicated account on the ECI website. Answers are also provided by email and phone on an on-going basis.

IT support:

Support from the Commission is offered regarding the use of its online collection software, as well as the hosting of online collection systems on its servers: almost 300 requests have been treated on these aspects over the past three years. Assistance has also been provided using the Joinup platform, which enables stakeholders to access information on latest developments.

Support to translation:

Translation of initiatives is the responsibility of organisers and has been a cumbersome process since the beginning. Since 2015, support offered by the European Economic and Social Committee to organisers on translations has been welcome, and has significantly contributed to improve the situation. As specified in its proposal for a new Regulation, the Commission intends itself to translate the content of initiatives, and has already started providing those translations to organisers as of 2018.

Other:

Another important new element of the proposal is the creation of an online collaborative platform to support the exchange of good practice between ECI practitioners, in particular via a discussion forum and other support and training tools and mechanisms. Within the framework of a pilot project of the European Parliament, the Commission has already initiated the setting-up of such a platform, which is to be tested and further developed until a fully-developed version is made available under the new Regulation. The first version of the platform is planned to go public in April 2018.

The launch of the collaborative platform will also coincide with the start of a communication campaign on the citizens' initiative more generally, which will include the use of targeted tools and products to support the visibility of the instrument, promotion via social media targeting the general public, as well as the organisation of events in Member States focusing on potential multipliers.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the inputs of EU institutions, bodies and stakeholders, the Commission has thoroughly assessed the remaining bottlenecks and addressed them in its proposal for a Regulation of 13 September 2017. The revision will bring wide-ranging simplification and improvements for citizens and organisers in all the successive steps of the ECI lifecycle. It will help achieve the full potential of the ECI as an instrument to foster debate and citizen participation at European level and bring the EU closer to its citizens, in line with the Commission's priority 10 ('A Union of Democratic Change').

The European Parliament and the Council are currently discussing the proposal and the three institutions have undertaken in their Joint Declaration to give it priority treatment in the legislative process to ensure substantial progress and, where possible, delivery before the European elections of 2019. The Commission calls for its adoption by the end of 2018 so that it can enter into force in January 2020 and deliver its significant benefits for EU democracy and citizen participation as early as possible.

In the meantime, the Commission continues to work to improve the operation of the ECI within the existing legal framework. A first version of the online collaborative platform

will be launched in April 2018, and the Commission will increase its communication and awareness-raising activities on the ECI instrument through a communication campaign starting in 2018.

The Commission will continue to follow up on successful initiatives wherever appropriate, and will be open about its detailed reasons where that is not the case, in line with its 10 political priorities. The Commission has committed to follow up actions in three of the four successful initiatives and has announced or adopted legislative proposals for two of them.

The ECI instrument, as shown by the 9 million statements of support collected by the various initiatives so far, fosters citizen participation across the continent and contributes to the emergence of pan-European debates and involvement in the democratic life of the EU. By involving citizens directly and allowing them to put forward their ideas on issues that matter to them, the ECI adds value to the EU law-making process and contributes to bringing citizens closer to the Union.