Council approves compromise with Parliament on the European citizens' initiative

The Council today endorsed an agreement reached with the European Parliament and the Commission on a draft regulation aimed at making it possible for EU citizens to call for legislative proposals to be made on a specific issue.

The so-called citizens' initiative, one of the main innovations under the Treaty of Lisbon, will enable citizens to ask the Commission to bring forward legislative proposals if the supporters of an initiative number at least one million and come from a significant number of member states.

The Treaty of Lisbon has introduced a new dimension of participatory democracy, alongside that of representative democracy on which the EU is founded, with the aim of bringing the EU closer to its citizens by encouraging more cross-border debate about EU issues.

The draft regulation sets out the procedures and conditions for implementing the citizens' initiative. In particular, a proposed initiative must fall within an area of EU competence and be consistent with the Union's values.

The required "significant number" of member states is defined as at least one quarter of EU members, and a key is established for calculating the number of supporters necessary from each member state. Support for a proposed initiative can be expressed in either paper form or electronically. The draft regulation contains provisions on the verification of signatures and in order to prevent potential abuses.

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1 At a meeting of the General Affairs Council.
2 The Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on 1 December 2009.
3 The required minimum numbers amount to the number of Members of the European Parliament elected in each member state multiplied by 750.
Once an initiative is registered, the organisers will have 12 months during which to collect the required one million signatures. They will also be required to submit information on funding and support.

Agreement on the draft directive was reached on 30 November. The Parliament is expected to approve the agreed text in first reading on 15 December. The Council will then adopt the regulation without further discussion once the agreed text has been finalised.

The regulation will be applicable one year after entry into force in order to allow member states and the Commission to take the necessary measures to implement it.