



Ombudsman: The European Citizens' Initiative should work in the most transparent way possible

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has issued a contribution to the public consultation on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). He called on the Commission to ensure that this important new form of public participation in EU policy shaping, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, works in the most transparent and citizen-friendly way possible. The ECI provides that one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States can call directly on the European Commission to bring forward legislative proposals in an area of EU competence.

According to Mr Diamandouros, "The ECI should make a vital contribution to the empowerment of European citizens. It is important that the rules giving effect to the ECI facilitate the exercise of this new right by all citizens." Aspects of the Commission's future role concerning citizens' initiatives could give rise to complaints about maladministration. The Ombudsman, therefore, contributed his views on how the ECI should work in practice, stressing the following points:

- Registration of an initiative (which should occur before the collection of signatures begins) should not become a bureaucratic or political hurdle. In particular, the admissibility of a citizens' initiative should not be a condition for registering it.
- To avoid time and effort being spent collecting signatures in vain, the Commission should, following its registration, issue an opinion as to whether an initiative is admissible.
- Organisers of initiatives will have to provide information about funding and participating organisations. The Ombudsman calls on the Commission to deal with complaints against organisers, which allege lack of transparency.
- A six-month deadline by which the Commission should examine a citizens' initiative is reasonable. Furthermore, where the Commission decides to present a legislative proposal, it should set itself a deadline by which it will do so.
- To facilitate effective supervision, the Commission should present its legal conclusions concerning the admissibility of an initiative (which could be examined by the Ombudsman) separately from its political conclusions regarding the substance of an initiative (which should be for Parliament to deal with).

The public consultation on the ECI ended on 31 January 2010. On 22 February, the Commission will hold a Stakeholder Hearing on the ECI in Brussels. It will then make a proposal for the adoption of a Regulation on the procedures and conditions for the citizens' initiative. It intends to have the ECI system in operation in early 2011.

The Ombudsman's contribution to the public consultation is available at:



<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/resources/otherdocument.faces/en/4592/html.bookmark>