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Ombudsman calls on Commission to make European Citizens' Initiative politically relevant

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The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in a Member State, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman offers a fast, flexible and free means of solving problems with the EU administration.

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The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has made proposals to strengthen the role that European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs) play in democratic political debate at the European level. The Ombudsman calls for better guidance for ECI organisers, a stronger involvement of the European Parliament and the Council and increased pressure on the Member States to make sure that all EU citizens can sign an ECI, regardless of where they reside.

Emily O'Reilly explained: "The Commission has done a lot to give effect to the ECI right in a citizen-friendly way. However, more can be done to ensure that ECI organisers feel that their efforts to mobilise one million signatures are worthwhile and that political debate at the European level takes account of their initiatives, even if specific initiatives do not lead to new EU legislation. We need a more effective dialogue with ECI organisers at different stages of an initiative as well as more transparent decision-making as regards what action the Commission takes on ECIs."

Eleven proposals to improve the ECI

The European Citizens' Initiative has been operational since April 2012. Since then, three initiatives managed to collect one million signatures in at least seven Member States. The most recent "Stop Vivisection ECI" proposes EU legislation aimed at phasing out animal experiments.

In December 2013, the Ombudsman opened an investigation on her own initiative, including a public consultation, to find out how the functioning of the ECI could be improved.

The Ombudsman formulated her eleven proposals after having analysed the Commission's opinion and the different contributions to her consultation. She asks the Commission, where it rejects ECIs, to explain those decisions in a consistent and comprehensible way, and to explain its political choices as regards the follow-up to ECIs that have obtained one million signatures in a detailed and transparent way. She also calls on the Commission to improve the online collection system software, as well as the quality checks to ensure that funding and sponsorship information are correct.

Because of different signature collection rules in the Member States, not all EU citizens are currently able to sign ECIs. The Ombudsman urges the Commission to, once again, propose to the legislature simpler and uniform requirements for all Member States.

The Ombudsman's full list of suggestions is available here:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/decision.faces/en/59205/html.bookmark>