

## A Brilliant Brussels Idea!

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At last, some really good news from the European Institutions! They're launching the "European Citizens' Initiative". You'll be able to set up a petition, and when you've collected the signatures, you can come to Brussels and present your idea or your issue to the parliament and to the Commission. (There may be a good lunch in it too).

Of course there are terms and conditions. You'll have to collect a million signatures. You must do it within twelve months. The signatures must come from at least seven EU countries, and there is a minimum threshold for each country to qualify. In the case of the UK, it's about 55,000.

The petition must be operated by citizens, not by charities or NGOs. But of course NGOs will in fact use the initiative "they'll just nominate an activist as the nominal citizen.

Cynics might point out that many of the NGOs that might use the initiative are themselves funded by the European Commission. But Hey! What the hell? That's the way we do things around here "the Commission paying pseudo-independent lobby groups to lobby itself, and feed back its own opinions.

And how does the Commission respond to a petition? What does it have to do? Well nothing, really. It can consider the petition. It can write a letter saying why it won't act, or (more likely) promising to keep the issue in mind. But it has absolutely no obligation at all. Zilch. In this respect it's like the much vaunted Yellow Card scheme, by which national Parliaments, after enormous efforts, can question a Commission measure, and the Commission's obligation is limited to sending a letter acknowledging receipt.

In other words, mere window-dressing. A process designed to give a spurious appearance of democracy legitimacy where none exists.

I debated the initiative on a BBC TV discussion programme yesterday with Commissioner Sefcovic and Danish MEP Dan Jorgensen. The Commissioner helpfully said that they couldn't guarantee any action. After all, he said, a million people were way less than 1% of European citizens. Suppose the other 99% disagreed? Good question, Commissioner, but it rather undermines the whole point.

They say they want direct citizen participation in the decision-making process. Yet they fight tooth-and-nail to block referendums, and when they get a NO vote in a national referendum, they ignore it, or they by-pass it, and carry on regardless. So much for citizen participation. The EU institutions, in fact, treat the voter with utter contempt.

Perhaps it's appropriate that they're launching this wonderful new initiative on April 1st. All Fools Day. They are, indeed, taking us for fools.

[Roger Helmer's blog](#)