



Directorate-General Communication • Media Directorate • Media Services and Monitoring Unit

## Workshop for journalists

# European democracy and citizen participation

## Reform of the electoral law and the new citizens' initiative

### Exchange of views

29 September 2010

14:00 - 18:00 hrs

Room 7 C 050, PHS Building, European Parliament, Brussels

### Draft programme

14:00 Arrival and registration (EP Press entrance, rue Vautier)

14:30 **Opening**

Introduction to the workshop:

*Yannis Darmis, Paula Fernández Hervás, EP officials, Press Service*

Context, state of play and procedures:

*Sanna Kangasharju, EP press officer, Institutional affairs*

From 15:15: **Round table with Members of Parliament**

Participants in the round table:

*MEP Rafał TRZASKOWSKI (EPP, PL), Vice-chair AFCO*

*MEP Zita GURMAI (S&D, HU), Vice-chair AFCO, rapporteur for citizens' initiative*

*MEP Andrew DUFF (ALDE, UK), coordinator, rapporteur for election reform*

*MEP Gerald HÄFNER (GREENS/EFA, DE), coordinator, PETI rapporteur for citizens' initiative*

*MEP Ashley FOX (ECR, UK), coordinator, shadow rapporteur for election reform*

*MEP Helmut SCHOLZ (GUE/NGL, DE), shadow rapporteur for election reform*

*MEP Morten MESSERSCHMIDT (EFD, DK), Vice-chair AFCO, coordinator, shadow rapporteur for election reform*

*Moderated by: Michel Plumley, EP official, Press Service*

15:15 - 16:15

#### **The Citizens' Initiative**

How will this measure boost the involvement of citizens in the democratic life of the European Union? How will it work in practice? What is the role of the European Parliament? What sort of proposals can citizens make? How many signatures and from how many countries will be needed to launch an initiative?

16:30 - 18:00

#### **Electing MEPs: a new European Parliament election law?**

The electoral law to the European Parliament: current situation and possible changes

18:00 **Close**

Cocktail outside the meeting room

Contacts in the EP press service:

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## **Background**

**The European Parliament press service is organising a workshop for journalists on two topics that will have an impact on the way citizens participate in decision-making in Europe. The topics are *The Citizens' Initiative* and *The reform of European electoral law*. The workshop will provide an opportunity to question Members of Parliament on their views on these issues and on the various options available. It takes place the day before the Joint Parliamentary Meeting with National Parliaments on both these subjects, which journalists can also follow.**

### *The European Citizens' Initiative*

The European Citizens' Initiative, as provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon, will add a new dimension to the European democratic system by giving a group of one million citizens the right to ask the European Commission to put forward draft legislation falling within the EU's sphere of competence. This direct democratic instrument seeks to endow the citizens with the same right to request legislation currently enjoyed by the Council of Ministers and the EP. However, the decision on whether or not to propose legislation will remain the Commission's prerogative.

The other aim of the initiative is to foster debate at European level, to "connect" European institutions and citizens in order to pass legislation that meets people's needs and expectations.

As a first step, legislation has to be passed implementing the clause in the Lisbon Treaty that provides for the Citizens' Initiative. The Commission has put forward a proposal for legislation, and the Council has already adopted its position. It is now up to Parliament to assess, and possibly modify, the proposal. There are two EP committees responsible for steering the issue through: the Constitutional Affairs Committee as the lead committee, with rapporteurs Alain Lamassoure and Zita Gurmai; and the Petitions Committee, with rapporteurs Gerald Häfner and Diana Wallis, as an associated committee. The full Parliament is expected to vote on the proposal in December or the beginning of next year.

### *The reform of the European Parliament electoral law*

The possibility of reforming the law governing the European elections is currently being discussed in the European Parliament, as the institution with the right of initiative for any such change. The European Parliament elections are currently, to a large extent, organised according to national legislations and traditions. There are some common rules in the Electoral Act of 1976, last modified in 2002. For instance, Members must be elected in all Member States on the basis of proportional representation. However, there are no common rules, for example, on the minimum age of voting or eligibility to stand as a candidate.

The aim of the draft report is to have a new electoral system in place for the next elections in 2014. Parliament's rapporteur on the issue, Andrew Duff, is suggesting major changes in the election legislation. Among the main proposals is a pan-European constituency from which 25 additional MEPs would be chosen. Every citizen would have two votes: one for choosing a national or regional candidate and one for choosing a candidate from the transnational list. An EU-level electoral authority would be established to verify the results of the EU-wide list. Duff also suggests that all countries that have more than 20 million citizens should be divided into territorial constituencies. Furthermore, all voters should be able to choose between candidates from party lists or individual candidates. The seats of Parliament should be redistributed according to a principle of decreasing proportionality.

The proposals include also moving the elections from June to May and limiting the polling days to Saturdays and Sundays. The suggested minimum age for voting is 16 (currently the case only in Austria) and for eligibility to stand as candidate 18 (currently the case in 12 Member States).

The various proposals would require different legal instruments and procedures to adopt them, including a revision of the Lisbon Treaty after an Intergovernmental Conference of the Member States. The rapporteur suggests that also a Convention should be called to engage all institutions and national parliaments in a debate on parliamentary reform.