

# The Citizens' Initiative – or damp squib?

The appealing “European citizens’ initiative” was an innovation brought in by the Lisbon Treaty. EU citizens could demand action on a particular subject provided they collect a million signatures. It has proved remarkably ineffective. After three years there have been many initiatives, but not a single one has yet led to a new legislative proposal. György Schöpflin, a Hungarian member of the EPP group, stated in his report that there have been 51 initiatives launched yet not a single one has attained its goal.

Particular frustration has been expressed over the “*Stop TTIP*” initiative, which collected well over a million signatures, but the Commission obstructed it by claiming that it doesn’t comply with the criteria. Mr Schöpflin said, however, that legally, the Commission is in the right. Firstly, under the existing procedure anything that is a current process cannot become a subject of a citizens’ initiative. Secondly, and that is more complicated, a European citizens’ initiative procedure cannot stop, reverse or negate legislation.

To his credit, Mr Schöpflin said “I think that should be changed. It should be possible for an initiative to ask for an existing directive to be overturned.” It is hard to see this ever happening. Essentially, EU “citizens” have no input into anything which the EU is actively pursuing. They can only whinge about it after it has become a *fait accompli*.

So while a strong case exists for enlarging the powers of the Citizens’ Initiative, the idea of the Commission agreeing to ordinary people overturning or changing in any way their grandiose schemes is impossible. The reality is that any improvements in the scheme look remote.