

# Report on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2006

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The Committee on Petitions unanimously adopted the own-initiative report by Carlos José **ITURGAIZ ANGULO** (EPP-ED, ES) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the parliamentary year 2006.

The report emphasises the significance of the petitions process in ensuring that European citizens' individual concerns about respect for their rights under the Treaty and European legislation receive appropriate responses and solutions. It emphasises the major contribution made by the Committee on Petitions to the work of the European Parliament aimed at reconnecting with the citizens of the EU and reinforcing the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of the EU decision-making process.

The report calls on the Commission to notify decisions on the opening of **infringement proceedings** as soon as it makes such a decision, and also relevant decisions by the Court of Justice, in particular when Parliament has been petitioned on the issue in question, and observes that the Commission has not followed up on repeated calls by the Committee on Petitions in this area.

The Petitions Committee has been called upon to notify, in writing and within a short time, its decisions relating to petitions that it considers at its meetings, so as to avoid misunderstandings and false interpretations by the mass media and petitioners. The report reiterates the importance of coordination in dealing with issues that are subject to both a petition to Parliament and a complaint to the Commission, given that the right to petition is a fundamental right, safeguarded by the Treaty, that Parliament provides a transparent framework for debates, which is a prerequisite for enhanced public accountability, and that in this context primacy must be accorded to the petitions process.

The report welcomes the decision to conduct a **review of the current rules governing the petitions procedure** in order to provide clarification regarding the assessment of the admissibility of petitions and to reinforce procedures related to **data protection and confidentiality** without undermining the essential transparency of the petitions process itself.

The Commission has been criticised for spending **unjustified and excessive amounts of time** pursuing and concluding infringement proceedings. The report notes its dissatisfaction with the frequent examples of non compliance by Member States with decisions of the Court of Justice. The committee considers that this undermines the credibility of the formulation and coherent application of EC law and that it serves to discredit the objectives of the EU. The Commission needs to make use of the possibility to bring Member States before the Court of Justice so that fines in the form of lump sums and penalty payments may be imposed whenever Member States delay the implementation of judgments of the Court of Justice in infringement proceedings.

MEPs welcome the agreement within the committee which has led to the increase in its membership to 40 full members, and considers that this is likely to ensure that European citizens and people residing in the territory of the EU obtain an even better understanding of their case in committee, thereby enabling Parliament to respond better to petitioners' expectations.

**Necessary financial resources are needed** to continue the development of the **E-petition** software system, which functions both as a database and as a management tool providing information about the petitions workflow.

MEPs confirm the need for greater involvement on the part of the Council, as an institution, in the Committee's activities and reiterate their proposal for the Council to designate a senior official to coordinate matters related to petitions, given that many petitions touch upon sensitive political issues concerning the transposition by Member States of Community legislation. The report welcomes the constant dialogue between the Committee on Petitions and the European Ombudsman. It points out that the Committee on Petitions supported the Special Reports on the European Schools and on the transparency of the Council's meetings. It supports the Ombudsman's request for an increase in his budget.

The committee encourages the practice of sending fact-finding missions to various Member States of the EU to investigate issues raised by petitioners as a way to facilitate effective and pragmatic solutions in the interests of the citizen. It stresses the significance of those missions in the efforts to improve communication with citizens and to raise awareness in the Member States about the activities of the European Parliament, in general, and of the Committee on Petitions, in particular.

In this context, the Secretary-General is requested to conduct an urgent review of the 'Citizens Portal' on the website of the European Parliament to enhance the visibility of the portal relating to the right of petition. Its presentation should also be upgraded in order to ensure its comparability and compatibility with the website of the European Ombudsman.

Lastly, the committee regrets the widespread failure by Member States to implement Community environmental norms correctly, and considers that there is a need for improved consistency in the monitoring, notably, of respect for the rules of Community law on the protection of biodiversity and on the assessment of the impact of certain public and private projects and plans on the environment.