

Report on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions - Citizens' petitions during the year 2007

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The Committee on Petitions adopted an own initiative report by David **HAMMERSTEIN** (Greens/EFA, ES) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the parliamentary year 2007.

While welcoming the close collaboration between the Committee on Petitions and the services of the Commission and the Ombudsman, MEPs are, nevertheless, convinced that the Committee on Petitions itself should be offered the possibility to further enhance its own independent investigatory facilities, notably through the reinforcement of its secretariat and its legal expertise.

MEPs consider that the current procedure for registration of petitions unduly delays their examination. They support the formalisation of a procedure whereby petitions in the field of the internal market are transferred to the SOLVIT network with a view to significantly shortening the petitions process in the field of internal market issues (such as car taxes, recognition of professional qualifications, residence permits, border controls and access to education). They reiterate their requests to the Secretary-General to conduct an urgent review of the "Citizens Portal" on Parliament's website with the objective of enhancing the visibility of the portal as regards the right of petition. In this context, they call for the introduction of an IT facility for online tracking aimed at petitioners.

The report calls for the initiation of negotiations between Parliament and the Commission with a view to better coordinating their work on complaints in a way that facilitates, simplifies and streamlines the complaint procedures and makes them more transparent and expeditious. MEPs also reiterate the need for greater involvement on the part of Council and the Member States' Permanent Representations in the activities of the Committee on Petitions.

The Commission is called upon to take full account of the recommendations of the Committee on Petitions when reaching decisions regarding the initiation of infringement proceedings against Member States. In this respect, the Committee on Petitions should be directly and officially notified by the Commission when an infringement procedure is launched which is related to a petition under consideration by the committee.

In general, the Committee on Petitions expresses concern about the excessive length of time taken to conclude infringement cases by the Commission services and the Court of Justice. It therefore calls for the introduction of more stringent timescales. It also expresses its doubts about the efficiency of the so-called 'horizontal infringement procedures', which take longer to conclude and calls for a review of the infringement procedure aimed at ensuring greater respect for the application of EU legislative acts.

The Commission is called upon, when dealing with petitions and complaints related to environmental policy – which is one of the predominant concerns of petitioners in the EU –, to be more ready to act to prevent breaches of Community law.

The committee also expresses its concern at reports by petitioners that, even when they have obtained the support of the Committee on Petitions on the substance of their petition, they too often experience great difficulty in obtaining any compensation from the authorities and national courts involved. It considers that such systemic weaknesses need to be further investigated, notably in so far as they apply to the financial services sector.

The report notes that a growing number of petitions received, notably from citizens from the new Member States, concern the question of the restitution of property, even though this subject remains essentially one of national competence. MEPs call on the Member States concerned to ensure that their laws on property rights resulting from regime change are fully in accordance with Treaty requirements and the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. MEPs also note the growing number of petitions and letters received by the Committee on Petitions concerning the most sensitive matter of child custody, on which it is extremely difficult to take action.

Lastly, the report resolves to review the name of the Committee on Petitions for the next legislative term, so as to underline the element of participatory democracy in the right of petition. MEPs suggest that the term "Committee on Citizens' Petitions" may be more easily understandable.