Annual report of the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2014

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Lidia Joanna GERINGER de OEDENBERG (S&D, PL) on the activities of the Committee on Petitions during 2014.

The purpose of the annual report on the activities of the Committee on Petitions aims to present an analysis of the petitions received in 2014 as well as to discuss possible improvements in procedures and in relations with other institutions;

In terms of statistics, the report noted that **2 714 petitions were received in 2014**, which is almost 6 % down on the figure for 2013 when 2 885 petitions were lodged with Parliament: 790 petitions were considered admissible and followed up; 1070 petitions were considered inadmissible; whereas 817 petitions were admissible and have been closed; 37 petitions had their recommendation challenged. These figures amount to nearly twice as many petitions as were received in 2009.

However, **the number of petitions received is modest when compared to the EU's total population,** which indicates that the vast majority of EU citizens are not yet aware of the right to petition, or of its possible usefulness as a means of drawing the attention of the EU institutions and the Member States to matters which affect them and about which they are concerned. Furthermore, even though some EU citizens are aware of the petition process, **there is still widespread confusion about the EU's field of activity**, as is shown by the high number of inadmissible petitions received (39.4 %).

Improve institutional coordination: the report stated that better institutional coordination with institutions **at EU, national and regional level, and with other bodies,** is essential if the issues raised by petitions are to be addressed in a prompt manner. It underlined the growing importance of the Committee on Petitions as a scrutiny committee that should be a point of reference for the **transposition and implementation of the European legislation** at the administrative level in Member States.

Members considered it essential that **cooperation with the national parliaments**, and their relevant committees, and with the **governments** of the Member States be strengthened, and that Member State authorities be encouraged to be fully transparent in transposing and applying EU law. They urged the creation well-functioning petition committees in national parliaments, which would increase the effectiveness of the cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and the national parliaments. They called for the EU institutions to take greater account of the work carried out by the **European Ombudsman** and for additional **mechanisms to ensure the direct involvement of citizens** in the decision-making processes of the European institutions.

The report warned about the persisting backlog in the treatment of petitions, and called for an **increase in the human resources** available within the Committee's Secretariat. It considered as well that Parliament has a particular obligation to ensure that inadmissible or unfounded petitions are not declared inadmissible, or are not closed, for an unjustifiably long period of time, and emphasised, in this context, the inadmissibility or closure of a petition must be justified vis-à-vis the petitioner.

Role of the Commission: stressing the Commission's significant role in assisting with cases raised by petitioners, the report called on the Commission to:

- monitor, in a proactive and timely fashion, certain projects reported by petitioners in which EU law has been, or will in the future be, breached through the implementation of official planning;
- **remedy such instances of incorrect transposition of EU law**, or of failure to transpose EU law, as have been reported in a large number of petitions and be less hesitant in making use of the initiation of infringement proceedings in this regard;
- engage fully in the process of petitions, in particular by conducting thorough **inquiries** of the admissible cases submitted to it, and, ultimately, to provide accurate and updated answers to the petitioners in writing;
- **facilitate access to documents** with all relevant information related to EU Pilot procedures, particularly with regard to petitions received;
- **ensure proactive monitoring**, and timely preventive action, by the Commission where there is well-founded evidence that certain planned and published projects may breach EU legislation.

Wide range of issues: the report stressed the wide range of the subjects raised in the petitions filed by citizens, such as: (i) fundamental rights, (ii) human rights, (iii) the rights of persons with disabilities, (iv) the internal market, (v) environmental law, (vi) labour relations, (vii) migration policies, (viii) trade agreements, (ix) public health issues, (x) separation or divorce of parents which raise child welfare issues, (xi) transport, (xii) animal rights and (xiii) discrimination. The Committee on Petitions must **specialise its work further** by nominating internal rapporteurs on the major policies to which petitioners refer.

Members also stressed citizens' concern regarding, and rejection of, the **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP),** and the opaque negotiations in which the Commission is participating, as highlighted in numerous petitions received in 2014. They pointed to the importance of the Commission urgently implementing the recommendations made by the European Ombudsman in this regard.

The committee underlined the high number of petitions received that **reject the use of hydraulic fracturing** for the extraction of gas and oil from the subsoil, and that highlight the harmful environmental, economic and social consequences linked to the use of this technique.

Lastly, it felt that the organisation of **public hearings** is an important way of examining problems raised by petitioners, and stressed the importance of ensuring that the Committee on Petitions has a **fully operational internet portal** through which petitioners may effectively register, submit their petition, upload supporting documents, support admissible petitions and receive information about, as well as automatic e-mail alerts about changes to the status of, their petitions.