Annual report of the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Ángela VALLINA (GUE/NGL, ES) on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015.

It began by recalling that the purpose of the annual report on the activities of the Committee on Petitions is to present an analysis of the petitions received in 2015 and of relations with other institutions.

In terms of **statistics**, the report noted that 1 431 petitions were received in 2015, 47% down on the figure for 2014; 943 petitions were considered admissible, of which 424 were quickly examined and concluded after duly informing petitioners on their respective issues of concern. 519 petitions remain open for discussion in the Committee on Petitions. 483 petitions (around 34%) were declared inadmissible, with Members noting that there is still widespread confusion about the EU's fields of activity as is shown by this high number.

With regard to **main areas of policy**, the key issues of concern raised in petitions pertain to a wide range of issues, such as environmental protection, breaches of consumer rights, the application of justice (in particular, custody rights regarding minors), fundamental rights, free movement of persons, discrimination, immigration, employment and animal welfare. The committee noted the following:

- **Mortgage legislation and risky financial instruments**: Members drew attention to Parliament's resolution of 8 October 2015 on this issue in Spain, in the light of the petitions received, concerning which Parliament issued a series of recommendations for the proper application of EU mortgage legislation and combating banking abuses. Members called on the Commission to supervise closely the implementation in all Member States of Directive 2014/17/EU on credit agreements and Directive 93/13/EEC on unfair terms in consumer contracts, and to share best practice in order to improve protection of citizens in financial difficulties.
- **Persons with disabilities**: in January 2015 two Members were appointed as representative members of the Committee on Petitions in the structures of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) and they took part in the analysis of the preliminary report of the European Union and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Geneva in August 2015. The report stressed that the Commission has begun to incorporate the concluding observations by the UNCRPD into the petition treatment process.

Work of the Committee on Petitions: the report stated that confidence in the system and in the European project as a whole has been dented by recent events in the United Kingdom, the humanitarian refugee crisis, the social and economic impact of austerity measures, the inability to resolve the financial crisis in a way that guarantees all citizens a free and dignified life, and the rise in xenophobia and racism throughout Europe. The Committee on Petitions has the responsibility and the huge challenge of strengthening constructive dialogue with EU citizens and residents on European issues.

Members believed that petitions could help to better assess the impact that EU legislation has on people's daily lives by **acting as a bridge between citizens and the institutions**. Since the committee aims to engage in a trustworthy and fruitful dialogue with citizens, it should help to promote participatory democracy and provide an adequate response to petitions, in terms of both the timing and the quality of the answer. Members stressed that petitions are also **important for the legislative process,** as they detect existing loopholes and deficiencies in the transposition of Community legislation. They applauded the

intention to establish an informal petitions network within Parliament, with the participation of Members representing every Parliament committee.

Cooperation with national parliaments: the report considered it essential to improve cooperation with national parliaments and their relevant committees and with Member State governments. Members repeated their call for a structured dialogue to be launched with Member States in the form of regular meetings with the relevant national parliament committees.

Charter of Fundamental Rights: Members **deplored the strict and restrictive way** in which the Commission has interpreted Article 51 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which states, inter alia, that the Charter is addressed to the Member States 'only when they are implementing Union law. They recalled that, owing to the existence of Article 51 of the Charter, the expectations of citizens often go beyond what the Charter's legal provisions strictly allow for and are often unmet, and the Commission was asked to adopt a new approach that is more consistent with those expectations.