Annual report of the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015

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The European Parliament adopted by 441 votes to 97 with 8 abstentions a resolution 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,** Parliament 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. The number of petitions received is modest when compared to the EU's total population, which indicates that the vast majority of EU citizens and residents are unfortunately 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 Member States to matters which affect and concern them, and come within the Union's field of activity.

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. Parliament 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. Parliament stressed that the Commission has begun to incorporate the concluding observations by the UNCRPD into the petition treatment process.

Environmental protection: Parliament considered that in its role as guardian of the treaties, particularly when it comes to environmental matters, the Commission should go beyond a mere formal examination of procedural compliance and focus more on the actual content of the core issue. Members urged the Commission to adopt an approach that allows it to make use of its powers and prerogatives on an ex-ante basis, with respect to preventing irreversible damage to ecologically sensitive areas.

Work of the Committee on Petitions: Parliament 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.

Work of the Commission: Parliament welcomed the fact that the Commission is committed to the petition process and that it responds as quickly as possible to new petitions forwarded to it by Parliament. It recalled, however, that on many occasions the Commission does not provide any new information in its replies to petitions for which a review has been requested owing to a change in their status and context. Members regretted the occasions when the Commission focuses essentially on procedural aspects and does not enter into the substance of the issue.

They added that, where required, the Commission should provide Parliament with a synthesis of the individual cases related to EU Pilot procedures, and reiterated that Committee on Petitions must be informed by the Commission of developments in infringement proceedings directly linked to petitions.

Cooperation with national parliaments: Parliament considered it essential to improve cooperation with national parliaments and their relevant committees and with Member State governments. It repeated its 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 urged a broader interpretation of the scope of application of the Charter, and for the pertinence of this article to be ultimately reassessed in future revisions of the Charter and the treaties.

Lastly, the resolution noted that the web portal of the Committee on Petitions, which began to operate in late 2014, is up and running, but not yet finalised.