

Report on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2016

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Notis MARIAS (ECR, EL) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during 2016.

The aim of the report is to summarise the work of the committee in the year 2016.

Members stressed the wide range of subjects raised in the petitions filed, from the internal market, justice, energy and transport to fundamental rights, health, environmental law, disability and animal welfare, and on the various implications of Brexit on citizens.

In terms of **statistics**, they underlined the increase by 10 % in the number of petitions received in 2016 (1 569). 1 110 petitions (70.8 %) were considered admissible. There were 6 132 users of Parliament's Petitions Web Portal who supported one or several petitions in 2016, as compared to 902 in 2015. There was an **increase in the proportion of petitions originated from Italy** by 4.8%. Another **significant increase concerns the proportion of petitions originated from the United Kingdom**: in 2015, 3.0 % of the petitions were received from the UK, and in 2016 the figure was 7.4 %.

Main areas concerned: contrary to recent years, the main area of petitioners' concern in 2016 were **internal market issues**. Members pointed to the considerable number of petitions received on alleged infringements of fundamental rights of holders of State-owned maritime concessions and the proper application of Directive 123/2006/EC (Services Directive) in Italy.

The committee also noted the following:

- the anxiety of petitioners concerned about their **future rights following the referendum in the United Kingdom on withdrawal from the European Union** which was evident in a large number of petitions concerning the United Kingdom. Members recalled that Parliament's resolution of 5 April 2017 underlined that the withdrawal agreement can only be concluded with its consent and its requirement for the fair treatment of EU-27 citizens living in the United Kingdom and of United Kingdom citizens living in the EU-27. The Commission was asked to ensure that citizens are not used as bargaining chips or see their rights eroded as a result of the negotiations;
- numerous petitions to the European Parliament demonstrated obstacles that **persons with disabilities** have to face in various fields such as access to public transport, use of sign languages, financing or access to education. The committee underlined its willingness to continue its support for efforts to strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities. It called for the European institutions to ensure that **implementation measures by the national authorities** comply fully and consistently with EU legislation and with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Members emphasised that a fact-finding visit to Slovakia took place in September 2016 to gather information on the issue of the use of investments in institutions for persons with disabilities and recommended that the Commission look into the current situation.

Relations with the Commission: Members reminded the Commission that requests for assistance from the Committee on Petitions should be followed up properly, and reiterated their call on the Commission to **improve the quality of its replies, in substance as well as depth**. Furthermore, they considered the fact that national courts have primary responsibility for ensuring the proper implementation of EU legislation in the Member States should by no means preclude a more proactive role by the Commission, particularly

in cases related to **protection of the environment and public health** where the precautionary principle should prevail.

The committee went on to remind the Commission that the Committee on Petitions is committed to responding to citizens' expectations in a timely and responsible manner, while ensuring the **democratic scrutiny and proper application of EU law**. In this respect, it was concerned by the considerable increase – by 21 % – in **open infringement cases** compared to the previous year. The Commission was asked again to share information on the state of play of ongoing infringement procedures. Members also insisted that the Commission **identify the means of enhancing cooperation with Member States' authorities** when it comes to responding to inquiries regarding the implementation of, and compliance with, EU law.

Lastly, the report emphasised Parliament's strong collaboration with the European Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman's crucial role in helping to improve decision-making processes and administration at EU level.