

Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2017

2018/2104(INI) - 13/12/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 342 votes to 34 with 39 abstentions a resolution on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2017.

In terms of **statistics**, the European Parliament received 1271 petitions in 2017. This represents a decrease by 19 % compared to 2016 when Parliament received 1569 petitions. Users of the petitions web portal have the possibility of supporting petitions. In 2016, 6 132 users acted as supporters. In 2017, 15 540 users of the portal supported one or several petitions. These numbers show an increase by 153 %.

Key issues

Members noted that **environmental issues** were the main area of concern for petitioners in 2017. Subjects of discussion were the impact of mining activities on the environment, waste management, and water- and air pollution. Parliament regretted the fact that environmental rules are not always properly implemented in the Member States, as described in the petitions.

Other key areas are:

Animal welfare

Members noted the large number of petitions on animal welfare. They considered it vital to launch a new EU strategy to bridge all the existing gaps, harmonise legislation and ensure full and effective protection of animal welfare, including animal transport, through a clear and comprehensive legislative framework.

Brexit

Parliament noted that the committee discussed the impact of Brexit on Citizen Rights raised in petitions at several occasions and also contributed to various Parliament's resolutions on Brexit. Members also encouraged the Commission to urge the Member States to find solutions against the **loss of voting rights and the disenfranchisement of EU citizens** who freely move and reside within the European Union. It expressed disappointment that the draft Withdrawal Agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom makes no reference to citizens' political rights.

Disability issues

The number of petitions on disability issues decreased by 0.5 percentage points from 0.7 % in 2016 to 0.2 % in 2017. Petitions show that main challenges for persons with disabilities are access to transport and the built environment and discrimination, in particular in employment.

Raising public awareness

Parliament noted that only a small number of EU citizens and residents are aware of the right to petition, and called for further effort in making the work of the committee more responsive to public concerns. Furthermore, it stressed the importance of raising awareness about the actual competences of the EU, its functioning and its need for future improvements, in order to ensure that citizens can be involved in discussions about possible reforms and to prevent the 'blame Brussels' phenomenon used by some

irresponsible Member States. A broader public debate about the EU, as well as better information and rigorous media reporting would reduce the number of inadmissible petitions.

Members emphasised that the **European Citizens' Initiative** should be both transparent and effective in order to serve as an important instrument for active citizenship and public participation. They regretted that this has not been the case in the past and that no tangible legislative outcome of previously successful initiatives has taken place.

Petitions web portal

Parliament underlined the importance of further developing the Petitions portal and the need to make it a two-way communication gateway and an easily accessible interactive tool, providing citizens of all EU Member States with access to all basic information regarding petitions and their treatment, and creating thematic communities for exchanges of documentation and best practice.

Members stressed the need to further minimise the administrative burden in how petitions are processed and the need to improve communication with petitioners by sending them notifications on the progress of their petition in their own language. Since the end of 2017, documents such as meeting agendas, minutes and Commission communications related to petitions are being automatically uploaded.

Role of the Commission

Parliament urged the Commission to make proper use of its powers stemming from its role as guardian of the Treaties. It noted that refusal to investigate citizens' complaints, thoroughly and promptly in line with the Commission's approach in its 2016 communication entitled 'European Union Law: Better Results through Better Application' may prevent a rapid understanding of possible serious systemic shortcomings. Parliament found such an approach within the domain of environmental legislation to be harmful, considering it a regression from the previous approach to EU environmental legislation implementation and an overall inhibition from its duties of guardian of the Treaties.

Parliament also reiterated its request for regular updates on developments in infringement proceedings.

Child welfare

Parliament took note of the final report and recommendations of the Committee on Petitions' Working Group on child welfare issues, adopted on 3 May 2017. It wanted to see an effective follow-up to these recommendations and called on the EU institutions and Member States to comply with European legislation and improve cross-border cooperation on family matters, by providing training for judges and professionals, information on legal aid and bilingual lawyers.

Labour rights

Lastly, Parliament noted that consideration of petitions on precarious working conditions has revealed that, in certain Member States, many workers are the victims of inadmissible and discriminatory practices. It deplored the fact that the Commission has accumulated a substantial backlog of cases relating to breaches of EU labour law by certain Member States, thereby allowing infringements of workers' rights to continue for years.