Report under Rule 227(7) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2019

2020/2044(INI) - 23/11/2020 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Kosma ZOTOWSKI (ECR, PL) on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations during 2019.

Statistical overview

Members recalled that Parliament received 1357 petitions in 2019 compared to 1220 in 2018, an increase of 11.23%, despite the period of suspension of parliamentary work due to the European elections. Of the petitions presented in 2019, 41 were co-signed by one or more citizens, 8 by more than 100 citizens and 3 by more than 10 000 citizens.

Of the 1357 petitions presented in 2019, 938 were declared admissible and 406 inadmissible, and 13 were withdrawn. The relatively high number (30%) of petitions declared inadmissible in 2019 shows that there is still a general lack of awareness of the EU's areas of activity.

Strengthening the role of the Petitions Committee

Members considered that the Petitions Committee should strengthen its role in defending and promoting the rights of EU citizens and residents, ensuring that petitioners' concerns and complaints are examined within a reasonable timeframe and resolved through an open, democratic and transparent petitions procedure, as well as through enhanced cooperation and dialogue with other EU institutions and national, regional and local authorities.

The report highlighted the importance of a permanent information campaign and public debate on the Union's policy areas to raise public awareness of the right to petition the European Parliament. It called for a more active press and communication service and a more active presence on social networks.

Processing of petitions

Members stressed the need for enhanced cooperation between the Petitions Committee and the committees responsible, the European institutions and national, regional and local authorities in the Member States in the context of investigations or proposals relating to the application and enforcement of EU legislation. They welcomed the commitment of Commissioner-designate Maroš Šefovi to improve the Commission's handling of petitions and to ensure that accurate responses are provided within three months.

Members called on the Commission to:

- ensure transparency and access to documents in the framework of the EU Pilot procedures in relation to petitions;

- check that national authorities undertake to solve the problem mentioned in the petition, while being ready to intervene if their actions are ineffective;

- present a proposal for a recast of the 2001 Regulation with a view to enhancing transparency and accountability through the promotion of good administrative practice;

- take steps to ensure that the interpretation of the scope of Article 51 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is as coherent and broad as possible.

Main areas of concern

Members noted that the environment - waste management, climate change denial, nuclear safety, endocrine disrupters and health protection - was the petitioners' main concern in 2019. They therefore called on the Commission and Member States to ensure proper implementation of EU legislation in this area.

The report also drew attention to:

- the large number of petitions on Brexit submitted in 2019, mostly calling for the protection of EU citizens' rights before and after Brexit;

- the special role played by the Committee on Petitions within the EU in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular with regard to petitions on inclusive education for disabled children;

- the important work undertaken by the Petitions Committee to ensure the protection of animal welfare in the EU: Members considered it essential to launch a new EU strategy on animal welfare aimed at filling all existing gaps and ensuring the full and effective protection of animal welfare through a clear and comprehensive legislative framework.

European Citizens' initiative

The report noted the significant number of new European Citizens' Initiatives registered by the Commission in 2019, demonstrating that citizens are seizing this opportunity to use participatory instruments to have a say in the policy and legislative processes.

Regretting that to date the majority of successful European Citizens' Initiatives have not resulted in a legislative proposal from the Commission, Members encouraged the Commission to approach European Citizens' Initiatives as openly and responsively as possible, in order to make this instrument a real success of European participatory democracy.

Petitions web portal

Members suggested increasing the visibility of the online petitions portal on the Parliament's website and making the portal more accessible to people with disabilities, including the possibility for petitioners to submit petitions in EU national sign languages.