Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions in 2020

2021/2019(INI) - 16/11/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Petitions adopted an own-initiative report by Gheorghe FALC (EPP, RO) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions in 2020.

Statistical analysis

In 2020, Parliament received **1 573 petitions**, compared to 1 357 in 2019, an **increase of 15.9%**, and compared to 1 220 in 2018, an increase of 28.9%. On the Parliament's web portal, the number of users who supported one or more petitions was 48 882, compared to 28 076 in 2019, a significant increase. This increase is partly explained by the fact that many petitions expressed citizens' concerns resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: 13.23% of the petitions received in 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the number of petitions remains modest in relation to the total population of the EU, which shows that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the right to petition and to encourage citizens to exercise it.

A direct link between citizens and the European institutions

Members pointed out that petitions are the gateway for citizens to the European institutions and allow the European Parliament and other European institutions to establish a direct link with citizens and residents of the Union, to understand their concerns and to maintain a regular dialogue with them, especially when they are affected by the incorrect application of EU law.

The report stressed the **need for enhanced cooperation** between the Committee on Petitions and the lead committees, the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, as well as the national, regional and local authorities of the Member States on inquiries or proposals regarding the implementation of and the compliance with EU law, including the necessary answers to the committee.

Members called for more active participation of Member State representatives in committee meetings and for swifter responses to requests for explanations or information sent by the Petitions Committee to national authorities.

Cooperation with the Commission

The report stressed that enhanced cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and the European Commission is essential to ensure that petitions are dealt with successfully. The Commission is invited to:

- play a more active role in the Committee on Petitions to ensure that EU citizens and petitioners receive **precise responses**;

- ensure **transparency** and access to documents and information in the context of pilot procedures relating to open petitions and EU infringement procedures closed;

- take account of any issues relating to the **breach of Union law** raised in petitions as a matter of priority when initiating infringement proceedings, in particular where these issues relate to environmental legislation;

- clarify its competence in respect of petitions, including those which raise issues which fall within an area of EU activity but not under a policy where the EU has legislative competence;

- **report regularly on the progress** of compliance with EU legislation in the cases under consideration.

Cooperation with other committees in Parliament

Noting that in 2020, 56 petitions were forwarded to other committees for opinion and 385 were forwarded for information, Members recalled that cooperation with other committees in Parliament is essential for the accurate and comprehensive handling of petitions. **Public hearings** organised jointly with other parliamentary committees contribute to a more comprehensive examination of petitions. Members are convinced of the crucial importance of regular meetings of the **petitions network** to enhance cooperation between parliamentary committees.

Important issues

The report pointed out that, despite the reduced time slots for committee meetings in 2020 owing to Parliament's precautionary measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19, the Petitions Committee expressed its position on important issues raised in petitions by **contributing to numerous parliamentary reports**, notably in relation to the conclusion of the agreement on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, the situation of fundamental rights in the Union, the reduction of inequalities, with particular attention to in-work poverty.

In addition, the Petitions Committee examined a large number of petitions on COVID-19 and responded to them in 2020, mainly by using its urgency procedure. In this respect, the report drew attention to the follow-up given by the Committee on Petitions to the issues raised, which resulted in the adoption in plenary of the resolutions on the Schengen system and measures taken during the COVID-19 crisis, on the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in the COVID-19 crisis and on reducing homelessness in the European Union.

The report stressed the importance of meeting the expectations of EU citizens in the field of environmental protection, and therefore called on the Commission and Member States to ensure the proper implementation of EU legislation in this field.

Web portal

Members called for further efforts to make the portal widely known, through social media, easier to navigate and fully accessible to all citizens, especially to persons with disabilities, including by enabling the tabling of petitions in national sign languages. They called for more information to be posted on the petitions web portal, including the progress of petitions and requests for information from other institutions.