Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions in 2020

2021/2019(INI) - 16/12/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 679 votes to 4, with 7 abstentions, a resolution 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. The Conference on the Future of Europe should be used as an opportunity to explain to EU citizens the role of the Committee on Petitions.

A direct link between citizens and the European institutions

Parliament stressed that the petitions tool was essential to **promote the principles of direct democracy and to improve the active participation of citizens** in the European Union. It stressed that the Committee on Petitions plays a fundamental role in involving European citizens in the activities of the Union and representing a discussion forum in which citizens can make their voice heard in the EU institutions. It called on the EU institutions to take into account the opinions and complaints expressed in petitions when developing policies, in order to better respond to citizens' problems.

The resolution 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 resolution 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:

- refrain from general replies and to provide timely, precise, clear and targeted responses to efficiently answer the concrete requests of petitioners;

- 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. Members are convinced of the crucial importance of regular meetings of the **petitions network** to foster cooperation between parliamentary committees. They called on the Parliament to draft a mechanism to allow the Petitions Committee to be directly involved in the legislative process.

Important issues

The resolution 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.

Most of these petitions concerned the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms against emergency measures, including lockdowns, and the issue of transparency in the development, purchase and distribution of COVID vaccines. They also covered issues relating to treatment and protective equipment, as well as the assessment of the management of the health crisis in the Member States.

Parliament highlighted the important contribution of the Petitions Committee to the protection of **children's rights**, as well as the protective role the Petitions Committee has played within the EU in the context of the UN Convention on the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. It stressed the importance of meeting the expectations of EU citizens in the area of **environmental protection**, which remained a key concern for petitioners in 2020.

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.