Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions in 1994 and 1995

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The Council of Ministers should respond to public concern by finally adopting a compromise decision to improve the intolerable conditions in which animals are transported, the committee insisted in adopting unopposed a report by Mrs Annemarie KUHN (D, PES) on the committee's deliberations during 1994/95. The resolution contained in the report noted that many petitioners had complained about what they regarded as the intolerable conditions obtaining during the transport of domestic animals and animals destined for slaughter. Accordingly, it urged the Council "at last to reach a compromise in this matter, which has been pending for some considerable time, so that the security of the supply of animals for slaughter to the Union may be ensured in a civilized way and the public shown that the Community is taking account of their reservations". The resolution also urged the Council and Commission to show greater determination than hitherto in using the Union Treaty provisions on justice and home affairs to close the gaps in national legislation and intergovernmental agreements that often led to conflicts in areas such as marriage law, civil status and asylum. They should also speed up their efforts to ensure the free movement of persons. The Commission, in particular, should join with Parliament in considering ways to reduce the considerable disparity in the medical criteria laid down by Member States for the approval of occupational invalidity pensions. In future, the Commission should also apply the directive providing for the environmental impact assessment of development projects (which is currently being revised) in such a way that the Union's competence in this sphere was further increased. Petitions "reduce the democratic deficit" The resolution, which was based on the committee's experience of petitions during the parliamentary year in question, stressed that petitions were a fundamental civil right and thus an excellent means of reducing the Union's democratic deficit and relative lack of transparency. "The petitions procedure represents one of the best opportunities for the Community's institutions and bodies to be directly informed about the effect of their regulations, decisions and directives on the lives of Union citizens and persons residing in the European Union," it said. Under Article 156 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure both European Union citizens and third country nationals legally resident in the Union have a right to petition the European Parliament. The resolution pointed out that the petitions procedure strengthened the European Parliament's control functions. Member States obliged to supply information "without delay" The resolution reminded Member States of their obligation to provide the Commission, as the guardian of the Treaties, with comprehensive information without delay on issues raised in petitions. Since citizens and Union residents wanted to be more closely involved in shaping the Community, it had become even more important for their petitions to be considered quickly and carefully. Accordingly, the committee called for better and closer cooperation from the Commission in the consideration of petitions, which it should deal with more quickly. The resolution also pointed out that some petitioners did not have the private means to assert "their manifestly just interest in the petitions procedure" and that national legal aid systems often did not cover international legal disputes. The committee agreed that it might be necessary, in the case of some complicated legal questions, to obtain an independent legal opinion. The Committee on Budgets was asked to find an appropriate source of funding for this. In her explanatory statement, Mrs Annemarie KUHN said that for the committee the parliamentary year 1994-1995 was dominated by the need to fill the newly created post of European Ombudsman. None the less, the number of petitions received was ever increasing. In particular, the proportion of petitions identifying serious infringements of Community law rose steadily prompting the Commission to initiate legal proceedings.