Committee on Petitions. Annual report 1997-1998

1998/2005(INI) - 23/06/1998

The Committee adopted the report presented by Sandro FONTANA (EPP, I),on its activities for 1997-98. In his report Mr Fontana drew Parliament's attention to the importance of the right of petition as enshrined in the Treaties and to its role in the building of Europe. He emphasised that Parliament did not have any real power to initiate legislation, even though this is a characteristic power of parliaments in all the democratic countries of the world. The result, he said, was that EU legislation did not emerge from the grass roots, i.e. the electorate and their representatives elected by universal suffrage, but from on high, i.e. the Commissioners designated by the governments and the Council of Ministers. There was thus a serious democracy deficit, he argued, which would only be remedied "when we move beyond the present situation, under which Parliament only has powers of co-decision, to one in which it has genuine powers to initiate legislation". Hence the importance of a petitions committee which recorded the expectations and complaints voiced by the public with regard to EU directives and was able to suggest to Parliament and the Union ways in which these directives might be modified.Mr Fontana's report listed a number of cases illustrating how, thanks to the Petitions Committee, the Council had been obliged to alter certain directives which were a hindrance rather than a help to European integration. In this connection, Ms SCHMIDBAUER (PES, D) tabled an amendment, which was adopted unanimously, regretting that the Council had ignored not only the committee's requests concerning failures to implement, or infringements of, Community law but also its call for regular attendance by Council officials at committee meetings.