Petitions committee. 2002-2003 annual report

2003/2069(INI) - 10/06/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Laura GONZÁLEZ ÁLVAREZ (EUL /NGL, E) on the work of the Petitions Committee during the parliamentary year 2002-2003. As Mrs González Álvarez is no longer an MEP, the report will be tabled for plenary by María Luisa BERGAZ CONESA (EUL/NGL, E). MEPs pointed out that exercise of the right of petition embodied in the Treaties provided a comprehensive and consistent set of indicators for gauging public interest in Europe. Moreover, through petitions, the European Parliament was able to assess and, if necessary, publicly reveal loopholes in EU legislation or infringements by the Member States. The committee stressed the need to lay down new rules for the treatment of petitions so as to establish clear areas of responsibility with regard to other Community institutions (Commission and Council) and the national authorities, as indicated in the working document it had submitted to the Chairman of the Convention on the Future of Europe. The committee added that, with the redefinition of the right of petition under the new Constitution, common rules of conduct for all Community institutions and Member States must be established along the lines of the Code of Good Administrative Conduct drawn up by the European Ombudsman and endorsed by the EP. MEPs supported the creation of the SOLVIT system as an informal means of assisting individuals and companies to resolve problems relating to the internal market and they urged Member States to step up this integrated cooperation scheme to make SOLVIT operational on a large scale. The report expressed concern at the Council's persistent failure to send representatives to working meetings of the committee where the problems raised by the petition were aggravated by the lack of information or explanation by the Member State authorities, thereby causing delays and undermining the committee's decision-making effectiveness. It also said that there should be greater cooperation with the European Ombudsman. To that end, MEPs called for the necessary changes to be made to the EP's Rules of Procedure and the Ombudsman's Statute. With a view to the accession of new Member States to the EU, the committee called for firmer measures to ensure that the new European citizens are made aware of their right to petition Parliament, the Commission and the Ombudsman under Articles 21 and 194 of the Treaty. Lastly, it hoped that, throughout the Union, national petitions committees or other parliamentary committees would work together with the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions and at the same time provide a more homogeneous image of the level of protection of citizens' rights within the EU.