# Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the parliamentary year 2004-2005

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Michael CASHMAN (PES, UK) on the work of the Petitions Committee during the parliamentary year March 2004 - December 2005.

The report highlighted the need to ensure that "response times … become shorter, investigations even more effective and its service … equally available to all citizens of the EU". With 1609 complaints received in 18 months, MEPs proposed that the committee's numbers be increased to 50 full Members, to enable Parliament "to better respond to the expectations of petitioners", particularly as citizens of the enlarged EU become better acquainted with the petition process. They said that the committee played a "vital role" in reconnecting with the citizens of the EU and contributed to a strengthening of democratic control over Community legislation and its implementation.

The report underlined the significant role played by the Commission in providing preliminary analyses of petitions, and called for further cooperation between Parliament, the Ombudsman and the Commission in order to fulfil their "common objectives" of improving European administration and developing better quality and "more citizen-inspired" legislation. There was also a need for the Council to be more involved in the activities of the Petitions Committee.

MEPs underlined the importance of nationally-led information campaigns to promote better understanding among the public "of the substance of EC legislation, policies and objectives", and said that this could also help to reduce the number of unfounded petitions (around a third of all petitions are declared inadmissible as they have nothing to do with the activities of the EU). They also called for measures to be taken at both EU and national level to increase EU citizens' awareness of their right to petition the European Parliament.

The committee expressed concern at the "unreasonable and excessive" amount of time which the Commission takes to pursue and conclude infringement proceedings. It also voiced dissatisfaction at the frequent examples of non-compliance by Member States with decisions of the Court of Justice. The report said that this situation "undermines the credibility of the formulation and coherent application of EC law, and that it brings discredit on the objectives of the EU". MEPs therefore supported a firmer policy towards the Member States aimed at bringing them before the Court of Justice so that "lump sums and penalty payments" can be imposed on them. In addition, they stressed Parliament's right to turn to the Court of Justice where serious infringements of Community law are revealed in the course of the examination of a petition. Lastly, the report encouraged the sending of fact-finding missions to the Member States to investigate issues raised by petitioners, saying that such missions "offer a clearer view of often complex problems on the ground" and can help raise awareness among the competent authorities and thereby "increase the pressure to find effective and pragmatic solutions in the interest of the citizens".