













Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2020/2275(INI)	Procedure completed
Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens? Initiative		
Subject		
1 European citizenship		
1.20 Citizen's rights		
1.20.03 Right of petition		
1.20.04 European Ombudsman		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Petitions	 VEDRENNE Marie-Pierre	22/02/2021
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 EVREN Agnès	
		 MAESTRE Cristina	
		 EVI Eleonora	
		 TERHEŞ Cristian	
		 GANCIA Gianna	
		 PELLETTIER Anne-Sophie	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Constitutional Affairs (Associated committee)	 SCHOLZ Helmut	27/01/2021
European Commission	Commission DG Migration and Home Affairs	Commissioner ŠEFČOVIČ Maroš	

Key events

21/01/2021	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
21/01/2021	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		
27/01/2022	Vote in committee		
03/02/2022	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0018/2022	Summary
07/03/2022	Debate in Parliament		
08/03/2022	Results of vote in Parliament		
09/03/2022	Decision by Parliament	T9-0066/2022	Summary

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2020/2275(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 57_o; Rules of Procedure EP 55
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	PETI/9/04948

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE695.340	16/07/2021	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE697.540	27/09/2021	EP	
Committee opinion	AFCO	PE697.604	11/11/2021	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0018/2022	03/02/2022	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0066/2022	09/03/2022	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2022)271	14/07/2022	EC	

Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens? Initiative

The Committee on Petitions adopted an own-initiative report by Marie-Pierre VEDRENNE (Renew Europe, FR) on engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens Initiative.

The right to petition

The report pointed out that the right to petition is the oldest instrument involving the direct participation of citizens at EU level and that it is the easiest and most direct way for citizens to contact the EU institutions. It recalled that the number of received petitions vis-à-vis the EU population remains modest and that significant differences exist between Member States, regions and languages when it comes to exercising the right to petition.

Regretting that the Commission refusing to take action on issues raised in individual petitions constitutes a breach of the current EU Treaties provisions, Members called on the Commission to revise its current strategic approach in handling petitions in a timely manner, as it results in leaving untreated, inter alia, issues concerning serious violations of EU law detrimental to the protection of citizens rights.

They urged Parliament and the Commission to adopt a binding interinstitutional agreement on the handling of petitions in order to ensure a clear, predictable and transparent legal framework aimed at consistently implementing the right to petition established in the EU Treaties and effectively protecting citizens fundamental rights.

More information should be provided to citizens on the right to petition and EU institutions should provide clear information regarding the right to petition and to systematically encourage recourse to this instrument.

The report suggested that the position of the Committee on Petitions should be strengthened within Parliament and in its interinstitutional relations, as it is the only committee that communicates directly with citizens. Members called for more staff and resources to be allocated to the Committee on Petitions, given the extent of its work.

Members also called for the Petitions Web Portal to be improved to make it more visible to the public, more user-friendly, easier and more intuitive to navigate and accessible to all citizens, especially to persons with disabilities.

The function of the European Ombudsman

The report stressed that citizens complaints to the Ombudsman represent an essential element of participatory democracy and of the legitimacy of the Unions decision-making process. Members specifically called on the Ombudsman to look more closely at the manner in which EU funds and the EU budget are spent. They also strongly believe that the Ombudsman should be allocated an increased budget, providing her with the necessary resources to effectively handle the increased workload and to continue to work competently at the service of European citizens.

The report congratulated the Ombudsman on the remarkable work she has done on the accessibility of EU documents and called on her to continue her efforts in this direction because timely access to documents in the EUs 24 official languages is essential to ensure the proper engagement of citizens and civil society in the decision-making process.

The European Citizens Initiative

The report emphasised that the initiative represents an exceptional opportunity for the citizens of the Union to identify and to put the issues or matters that they are concerned by onto the European political agenda, to articulate their aspirations and to call for the EU to act and legislate, and that its use must be encouraged and supported by all available means.

Members called on the Commission to:

- show genuine consideration and commitment to meeting citizens expectations in relation to valid ECIs;
- carry out a thorough assessment of the proposals of each valid ECI, and to comply fully with its legal obligation to set out its reasons for taking or not taking action, which it should do in a clear, comprehensible and detailed manner.

The report recalled Parliaments obligation to assess each valid ECI and called for its role to be further enhanced and for its links with civil society organisations to be enhanced with regard to specific valid ECIs and their implementation by the Commission.

Members believe that in the specific cases in which the Commission fails to publish its intentions within the given deadline or set outs in a communication that it intends not to take action on an ECI which has met the procedural requirements, Parliament could decide to follow up on the ECI with a legislative own-initiative report (INL). The Commission should commit to submitting a legislative proposal following Parliaments adoption of any such INL.

Conclusions

The report made the following conclusions regarding the three participatory instruments:

- the establishment and promotion of a large-scale, one-stop, accessible interinstitutional EU citizens website (and application, which should be easy to use) to provide information on all the rights and democratic instruments that enable the public to participate directly in and influence decision-making at EU level is called for;
- public awareness of the instruments should be raised, particularly among young people, to ensure that they become effective and useful tools for democratic participation;
- all the European institutions should maximise their communication efforts at local, regional and national level to ensure that as many citizens as possible know about and are encouraged to participate and be engaged in the three instruments.

Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens Initiative

The European Parliament adopted by 417 votes to 40, with 237 abstentions, a resolution on citizens' participation: on engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens Initiative.

The right of petition

Parliament stressed that the right of petition is the oldest instrument of direct citizen participation at EU level and that it is the most direct way for citizens to contact the EU institutions, to express their views on legislation and policy choices adopted at EU level and to lodge complaints about poor implementation. The number of petitions received in relation to the EU population remains modest and there are significant differences between Member States, regions and languages in the exercise of the right of petition. Members called for targeted information campaigns and civic education on EU citizenship rights.

Deploing the Commission's refusal to take action on individual petitions, Members called on the Commission to review its strategic approach to handling petitions, as it does not address, inter alia, issues relating to serious violations of EU law detrimental to the protection of citizens rights.

Stressing that the right to petition is an essential element of participatory democracy, Members urged Parliament and the Commission to adopt a binding inter-institutional agreement on the handling of petitions. They also called on the EU institutions to provide citizens with clear information on the right of petition and to systematically promote the use of this instrument.

Parliament called on the EU institutions and Parliament's committees, as well as Member States, to cooperate better with the Petitions Committee in order to respond effectively to petitioners and meet their demands. They also asked that the Petitions Web Portal be improved to

make it more visible to the public, more user-friendly, easier and more intuitive and accessible to all citizens, including people with disabilities.

The role of the European Ombudsman

Recalling that the right to complain to the Ombudsman strengthens citizens' commitment to and trust in the EU institutions, Members called on the Ombudsman to look more closely at how EU funds and the budget are spent and whether the Union's interests are not undermined by breaches of the rule of law or disrespect for the Union's principles and values, corruption or conflicts of interest, especially in the context of the European recovery plan, Next Generation EU. They also believe that the Ombudsman should be given a bigger budget.

Parliament congratulated the Ombudsman on the work done to promote a policy of multilingualism and called on her to continue her efforts in this direction, as timely access to documents in all 24 official EU languages is essential to ensure proper participation of citizens and civil society in the decision-making process.

The European Citizens Initiative (ECI)

The resolution emphasised that the initiative represents an exceptional opportunity for the citizens of the Union to identify and to put the issues or matters that they are concerned by onto the European political agenda, to articulate their aspirations and to call for the EU to act and legislate, and that its use must be encouraged and supported by all available means.

Recalling that only a handful of successful ECIs have been properly followed up by the Commission, Members called on the Commission to carry out a thorough assessment of the proposals made by each valid ECI and to comply fully with its legal obligation to set out in a clear, understandable and detailed manner its reasons for taking or not taking action.

The resolution called for Parliament's role to be further enhanced and for its links with civil society organisations to be enhanced with regard to specific valid ECIs and their implementation by the Commission.

Members believe that in the specific cases in which the Commission fails to publish its intentions within the given deadline or set out in a communication that it intends not to take action on an ECI which has met the procedural requirements, Parliament could decide to follow up on the ECI with a legislative own-initiative report (INL). The Commission should commit to submitting a legislative proposal following Parliament's adoption of any such INL.

Conclusions

The resolution made the following conclusions regarding the three participatory instruments:

- the establishment and promotion of a large-scale, one-stop, accessible interinstitutional EU citizens website (and application, which should be easy to use) to provide information on all the rights and democratic instruments that enable the public to participate directly in and influence decision-making at EU level is called for;
- regular collection of information on topics of interest to citizens and on recurrent issues;
- raising public awareness of these instruments, especially among young people, so that they become effective and useful tools for democratic participation
- the importance of teaching primary and secondary school pupils and university students about the three participatory instruments of the Union so that they are informed about the Union's decision-making process;
- the need to address the shortcomings of the EU petitions system, taking into account the special needs of people with disabilities and the difficulties faced by under-represented vulnerable groups;
- measures to ensure full transparency in the process of dealing with complaints and citizens' initiatives, as well as granting citizens access to all documents of the European institutions.