

Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2017

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Cecilia WIKSTRÖM (ALDE, SE) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2017.

This report gives an overview of the work of the committee in 2017.

In terms of statistics, according to the statistics, the European Parliament received 1271 petitions in 2017. This represents a decrease by 19 % compared to 2016 when Parliament received 1569 petitions. Users of the petitions web portal have the possibility to support petitions. In 2016, 6 132 users acted as supporters. In 2017, 15 540 users of the portal supported one or several petitions. These numbers show an increase by 153 %.

Key issues: Members noted that environmental issues were the main area of concern for petitioners in 2017 with issues being discussed in at least five of the committee meetings in 2017, very often in the presence of the petitioner. Subjects of discussion were the impact of mining activities on the environment, waste management, and water- und air pollution. They regretted the fact that environmental rules are not always properly implemented in the Member States, as described in the petitions.

Other key areas are:

- animal welfare: Members noted the large number of petitions on animal welfare. They considered it vital to launch a new EU strategy to bridge all the existing gaps, harmonise legislation and ensure full and effective protection of animal welfare, including animal transport, through a clear and comprehensive legislative framework;

- Brexit: the Committee on Petitions discussed the impact of Brexit on Citizen Rights raised in petitions at several occasions. The Committee sent a letter to the UK government highlighting the difficulties that the EU citizens face in the question of residency, including information on petitions received on the matter. The Committee on Petitions also contributed to various Parliaments resolutions on Brexit. Members also encouraged the Commission to urge the Member States to find solutions against the loss of voting rights and the disenfranchisement of EU citizens who freely move and reside within the European Union as well as the disenfranchisement of long-term residents. It expressed disappointment that the draft Withdrawal Agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom makes no reference to citizens political rights;

- disability issues: the Committee dealt with a number of petitions in this area. However, the number of submitted petitions on disability issues decreased by 0.5 percentage points from 0.7 % in 2016 to 0.2 % in 2017. Petitions show that main challenges for persons with disabilities are access to transport and the built environment and discrimination, in particular in employment.

Raising public awareness: the report noted that only a small number of EU citizens and residents are aware of the right to petition, confirming the need for greater efforts and appropriate measures to increase public awareness and achieve a substantial improvement regarding the exercise of this right. It also called for a more focused and active press and communication service and a more active social media presence, making the work of the committee more responsive to public concerns.

Members emphasised that the European Citizens Initiative should be both transparent and effective in order to serve as an important instrument for active citizenship and public participation. They regretted that this has not been the case in the past and that no tangible legislative outcome of previously successful initiatives has taken place.

Petitions web portal: the report underlined the importance of further developing the Petitions portal and the need to make it a two-way communication gateway and an easily accessible interactive tool, providing citizens of all EU Member States with access to all basic information regarding petitions and their treatment, opening up channels of communication and creating thematic communities for exchanges of documentation and best practice.

Members stressed the need to further minimise the administrative burden in how petitions are processed and the need to improve communication with petitioners by sending them notifications on the progress of their petition in their own language. Since the end of 2017, documents such as meeting agendas, minutes and Commission communications related to petitions are being automatically uploaded. Hence, these documents become publicly available and increase transparency of the committees work.

Relations with the Commission: the Commission remains the natural partner of the Committee on Petitions in processing petitions as the responsible EU institution for ensuring the application of and compliance with EU law. The report called for further progress regarding the timeliness of Commission replies. The committee reiterated its request for regular updates on developments in infringement proceedings and for timely access to relevant Commission documents on infringements and EU pilot procedures that relate to existing petitions.