

Ask EP

Citizens' Enquiries Unit

Insight

The [Citizens' Enquiries Unit](#) (Ask EP) replies to citizens' requests for information on the European Parliament's activities, powers and organisation, always with the aim of giving them a better understanding of Parliament and its work. 'Ask EP — Insight' is a review whose main objective is to pass on citizens' concerns to Members of the European Parliament and the institution as a whole.



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Towards a new Commission

The election of the new Commission has been a recurrent subject of interest for citizens in the past months, the hearings of the Commissioners-designate in particular being a frequent topic of enquiry. There have been practical questions, such as requesting the schedule of the hearings or enquiring if one can attend the hearings in person.

Citizens also addressed the EP to strongly express their opinions on the nomination of certain Commissioners-designate. Some complained about the suitability of their appointment and feared that they may not be up to the job. Others showed their support of individual nominees and requested the EP to approve the proposed Commission.

Other questions of a more general nature have been raised, such as how the new Commission President is elected.

More information

[#EPHearings2014: Meet the Commissioners-designate!](#)

[New Commission](#)

Ukraine: tensions with Russia, association with the EU

The European Parliament's consent to the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine on 16 September allowed citizens to comment on the EU's role regarding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the violence in eastern Ukraine.

In the aftermath of the crash of the Malaysia Airlines plane MH17 in Ukraine on 17 July 2014, many citizens sent messages of grief and outrage to the European Parliament. This loss of lives brought home the brutal reality of the conflict in the region and caused strong, albeit mixed, reactions from the public.

Reaction to Russia's intervention

A majority of concerns were aimed towards Russia and its intervention in Ukraine. Citizens demanded that sanctions be imposed on Russia, and asked for a no tolerance attitude to be applied. Questions were also asked on the European Union's policy towards Ukraine in general, in particular the relationship between the EU, Ukraine and Russia.

Above all, they urged the European Union to take more determined action to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

Other citizens writing to the Parliament were critical of the EU, feeling that it lacks real power to intervene effectively. Accusations were also made of hypocritical behaviour of some European governments regarding the sanctions imposed on Russia, such as the fact that the import and export of military equipment from and towards Russia continued.

There were also citizens who defended Russia's actions, asked for the sanctions to be lifted and pleaded with the EU to steer clear of situations which they esteem do not concern it.

More information

[MEPs welcome signs of hope in Ukraine and urge the EU to stand up to Russia](#)

[President Schulz on the vote on EU-Ukraine Association Agreement](#)

Scottish referendum

Before

Prior to the Scottish referendum held on 18 September, the most frequently asked question was whether the Scottish nation would retain its membership of the EU, in the event of a positive outcome and Scotland becoming an independent nation. Complaints were also received from nationals living abroad, not eligible to participate in the referendum, that their democratic right to vote has been denied.

After

In the days following the referendum, some citizens turned to the EP to express their dismay about alleged electoral fraud, thus throwing doubt on the authenticity of the results. They asked the EU to launch an independent investigation into this alleged rigging of the votes.

More information

[President Martin Schulz on the result of the referendum](#)

Opposition against TTIP/CETA

The European Parliament continued to receive a considerable number of letters and messages on the free trade agreements EU-USA (TTIP) and EU-Canada (CETA).

Citizens writing to the Parliament expressed their concerns about the agreements. The points of criticism ranged from the negotiation procedure (lack of transparency and democratic legitimacy, dominating influence of lobbyists and multinationals) to the feared consequences of the agreements (decrease of the current European social, consumer, environmental and data protection standards). Most citizens referred to the Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) as a serious challenge to democracy since investors and companies might sue EU governments.

More information

[EPRS: Towards an EU-US trade and investment deal](#)

[MEPs split over free trade deal with Canada](#)

Violence escalation in Gaza

In summer 2014, the long-lasting conflict between Israel and Palestine culminated in an escalation of violence in Gaza. Citizens turned to the European Parliament asking the EU to intervene and to stop the violence.

In their correspondence with the Parliament, most citizens expressed a clear position on whom to blame for the escalation of violence. Some condemned the Israeli military operations, deplored the high number of civilian deaths, among them many children, and expressed support for the Palestinian people and their fight for an independent state. Others held the Palestinian organisation Hamas responsible for the recent escalation of violence and underlined Israel's right of self-defence. Some citizens referred to the historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to emphasise their point of view.

More information

[EP answer: Israeli-Palestinian conflict: violence escalation in Gaza](#)

When closing this edition...

Just as this edition was closing, the following subjects, of particular importance to citizens, were addressed to the European Parliament:

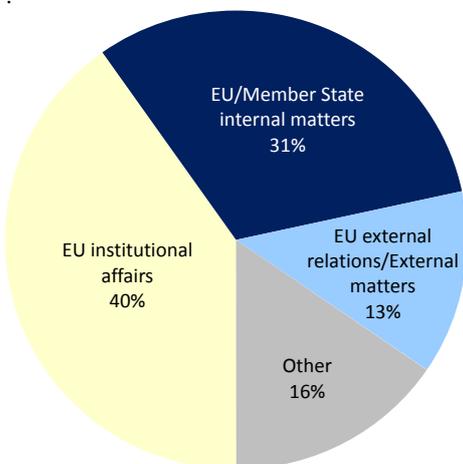
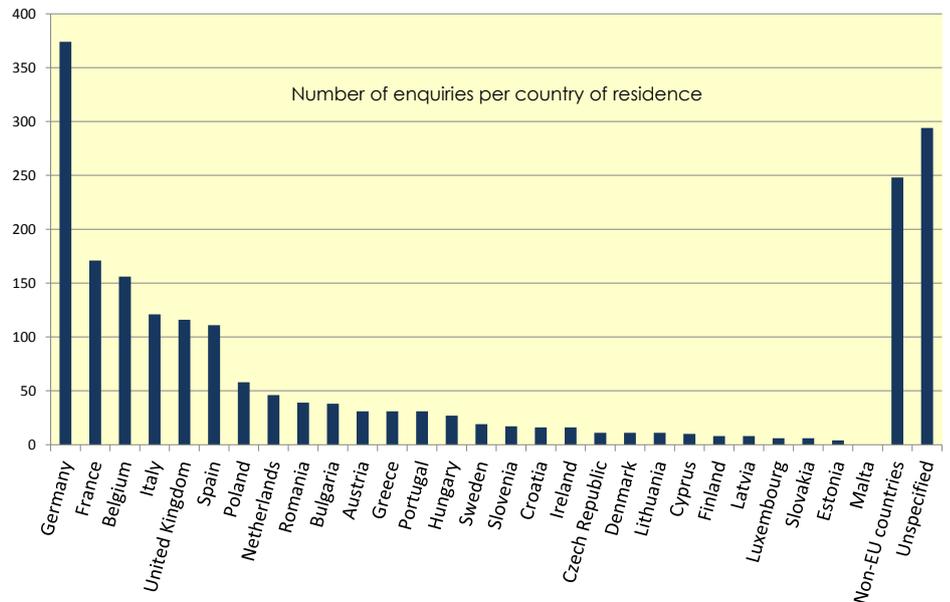
- EU immigration policy — anniversary of Lampedusa tragedy: [Lampedusa, 3 October 2014 — Speech by Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament](#)
- Official visit of his Holiness Pope Francis to the European Parliament in November 2014 [Press release on the Pope's official visit](#)
[Pope Francis invited to address the European Parliament](#)
- Sanction on an MEP's behaviour: [Schulz's decision on the inappropriate language of an MEP](#)
[Schulz on the intervention of an MEP during the Strasbourg plenary](#)
- 'Thousand-cow farm' project in France: [Parliamentary question and Commission answer on this issue](#)

Statistics for the third quarter of 2014

In the third quarter of 2014, the largest number of queries related to EU institutional affairs, accounting for 40% of enquiries received. The structure and functioning of the EP topped this category, followed by enquiries related to MEPs.

Correspondence relating to internal matters accounted for 31% of enquiries received. Once again civil liberties, justice and home affairs came top of this category, reflecting the number of correspondence received on fundamental right issues.

The number of enquiries regarding EU external relations and external matters represented 13% of the total received this quarter. The majority of these dealt with relations with third countries, such as Ukraine.



EU/Member State internal matters	
Civil liberties and home affairs	38%
Employment and social affairs	16%
Economy, finance and industry	11%
Culture and education	7%
Agriculture, fisheries and animal welfare	7%
Consumer protection and food safety	5%
Transport and tourism	4%
Public health	4%
Environment	3%
Energy	3%
Internal market and competition	1%
Miscellaneous	1%

EU institutional affairs	
EP structure and functioning	36%
EP Members (MEPs)	29%
EP relations with citizens	17%
Other EU institutions	4%
Miscellaneous	14%

EU external relations/external matters	
Relations with third countries and international organisations	48%
Security and defence	14%
Human rights	10%
International trade	8%
Miscellaneous	20%