

### Cooperation of the Committee on Petitions with the Committees of the European Parliament and impact on their work <sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

This study was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions. It was written and published by the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. The paper describes the methods and procedures of cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and other parliamentary committees on petitions sent for opinion and information and examines improvements brought by the establishment of the Petitions Network. The study analyses impact of petitions on the activities of the parliamentary committees and describes follow-up actions to integrate EU citizens concerns in the parliamentary work. It raises areas for improvement and proposes recommendations to strengthen cooperation between committees.

The study aims to demonstrate the usefulness and potential of cooperation between the Committee on Petitions (PETI Committee) and other European Parliament (EP) committees and analyse the impact of petitions submitted by EU citizens on the parliamentary activities of the committees of the European Parliament since the establishment of the Petitions Network. It covers the impact of petitions on the work of the EP committees during the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 and the effectiveness of each committee in resolving the issues raised by the petitioners.

The Guidelines for the treatment of Petitions by the Committees adopted by the EP Conference of Committee Chairs on 14 July 1998 lay out the first rules on cooperation between committees. They are complemented by the EP Rules of Procedure (Title IX) and the PETI Committee's guidelines. The July 1998 Guidelines on the treatment of petitions by the standing committees clarified those specific aspects of the procedure to deal with petitions by the standing committees but were not reviewed in the subsequent legislative periods.

Petitions declared admissible by the Committee on Petitions concern competencies of other parliamentary committees. Therefore successful cooperation between committees on issues raised by the petitioners is crucially important.

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<sup>1</sup> Full study in English:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/621929/IPOL\\_STU\(2021\)621929\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/621929/IPOL_STU(2021)621929_EN.pdf)



## Findings

Parliamentary committees are generally positive in their assessment of the relationship with the Committee on Petitions. The Petitions Network launched in the end of 2016 provides for enhanced cooperation between PETI and the specialised committees. The aim of the Network is to improve communication on petitions and facilitate exchange of best practice on how to bring citizens' concerns expressed in petitions into the legislative and political processes of the European Parliament.

Each parliamentary committee nominates a Member and a substitute Member to the Petitions Network, while an administrator from each committee secretariat represents the committee in the Petitions Network on staff level. Regular Petitions Network meetings on Members level provide an opportunity for Members of the European Parliament to share the impact of petitions on their work, while Petitions Network meetings on staff level enable organisational and logistical issues to be resolved through sharing best practice. As the Petitions Network meets twice a year, its meetings mainly serve to share information and experiences, while the day-to-day communication is carried out through phone calls and emails.

The Petitions Network significantly improved cooperation between the committees and helped to ensure that the petitions sent to other committees are relevant to their areas of work.

The Committee on Petitions may decide to send petitions declared admissible to other committees for information or opinion. Petitions sent for opinion require a written response from the receiving committee. The committee(s) responsible for the subject matter of a petition is expected to provide its expertise in order to allow due treatment of the petition and a response from the European Parliament. Petitions sent for information do not necessarily require a response. However, the committee in question might decide to follow up or to issue an opinion on petitions sent for information.

All committees observed that the petitions they received were generally relevant and useful for informing their work and provided them with important citizens' perspectives on topics of concern.

Procedures to process petitions vary between different committees. Most committees have a set procedure to process petitions received from the Committee on Petitions. Some committees have internal filing systems that allow petitions to be cross-referenced at a later date. Petitions sent by the Committee on Petitions are placed on the agenda of the coordinators' meeting. Petitions sent for information are added to the agenda of the coordinators' meeting for information purposes. Opinions are rarely issued on petitions sent for information. Coordinators make a decision on the appropriate action to take on petitions sent for opinion, which could be a reply to the PETI Committee or further action, such as examining the possibility of organising a hearing, or taking the petition into account in the consideration of any related legislative or non-legislative report. A committee may decide not to issue an opinion on a petition and inform the Committee on Petitions about this decision. In the opinion letter a committee may state that it has decided not to follow-up the petition. Therefore exchanging best practice in the different steps of the procedure in the Petitions Network is very valuable.

Petitions impact the work of other committees in a variety of ways. They may be placed on the committee meeting agenda and inform committee's debate on issues raised by the citizens. Petitions may present topic areas that are currently part of the parliamentary work of a committee and the competent committee may refer the Committee on Petitions to the position of the European Parliament on the issues raised by the petitioner presenting particular concern for the committee. Committees may follow-up a petition by referring to a public hearing held by one or several committees. In the opinion letter a committee may also provide information and context on the subject of the petition and then ask the Committee on Petitions to examine the issue further. Committees can also send the petition to another internal or external body for additional examination of the issue. Studies have been commissioned by the committees after the reception of petitions on a given subject.

## Recommendations

The study includes recommendations on how cooperation between the committees of the European Parliament could continue the consistent progress made in recent years:

- The existing guidelines on the treatment of petitions by the standing committees adopted in 1998 need to be updated. The rules on cooperation with other committees could also be included in the future revision of the European Parliament Rules of Procedure.
- It would be important to provide regular awareness-raising exercise for the Petitions Network members on the functionalities of the Petitions Web Portal including access to relevant documents (including Commission's Notices to Members). In addition a presentation or training on PETI Committee's internal procedure for petitions examination in the Petitions Network would improve cooperation between PETI and other committees.
- The current architecture of the ePetition database does not allow extraction of aggregated data on petitions sent to other committees. An improved data analysis function in the ePetition database could automate this process and improve the quality of data on petitions sent to other committees.
- The Petitions Network members of the committees contacted to provide an opinion on a petition should be systematically invited to attend PETI Committee meetings when those petitions are being discussed.

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PE 621.929

Print      ISBN 978-92-846-8630-8 | 10.2861/80610 | QA-01-21-313-EN-C  
PDF      ISBN 978-92-846-8636-0 | 10.2861/09770 | QA-01-21-313-EN-N