



Citizens' rights and the environment are key priorities for petitions committee

Committees: Committee on Petitions

Defending citizens' rights in the fields of justice, property and free movement and protecting the environment are the main concerns of the EP petitions committee, says its 2011 activity report, approved on Thursday. MEPs also call for full clarification of the committee's involvement in hearings on successful citizens' initiatives.

The 2011 report provides an overview of the activities of the Petitions Committee. "The Petitions Committee deals with a very wide range of topics from the commuter route of bats to property problems in Spain. This resolution illustrates the way we respond to the concerns of EU citizens. The work of my colleagues deserves a wide audience", commented the rapporteur, Giles Chichester (ECR, UK), following the vote.

Fundamental rights and environment

The protection of EU citizens' fundamental rights continues to be one of Parliament's top concerns. The right to property, access to justice and freedom of movement (i.e. access to the labour market and social security schemes in other EU countries) were key areas of the Committee on Petitions' work last year.

Many of the complaints received by Parliament from citizens in 2011 related to environmental issues (e.g. when a national authority failed to protect special conservation areas). Problems concerning the application of the waste management, birds, habitats and environmental impact assessment directives came up frequently and the committee calls on EU countries with waste management trouble spots to act decisively and swiftly.

The resolution also deplores the negligence of some EU countries with regard to transposing and enforcing European environmental laws.

Key role in dealing with citizens' initiatives

Parliament has decided that the Committee on Petitions will hold joint public hearings with the lead committee for European citizens' initiatives accepted by the Commission. MEPs see this as "confirmation of its role as the body with the most experience of direct contact with citizens" and call on the Conference of Presidents (EP President and political group leaders) to clarify the committees' responsibilities in this respect. The petitions committee also stresses that the difference between a petition and a citizens' initiative needs to be clearly explained to the public.

Background

Any European Union citizen or resident may, individually or in association with others, submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject which comes within the European Union's fields of activity and which affects them directly.

The EP received 1,414 petitions in 2011, compared to 1,655 in 2010. 416 petitions (29.4%) were declared inadmissible. This shows that efforts are still needed to inform citizens of the limits to the scope for action by Parliament in response to petitions, say MEPs. Last year

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the environment, fundamental rights and the internal market continued to be the main topics raised by petitioners. The share of complaints regarding the environment rose from 10% in 2009 to 16% in 2011.

The highest number of petitions focused on the EU as a whole, with Spain in second place followed by Germany, Italy and Romania. Germans remained the most active petitioners by nationality, followed by Spaniards, Italians, Poles and Romanians.

The resolution was adopted by a show of hands.

In the chair: Erminia Mazzoni (EPP, IT)
Rapporteur: Giles Chichester (ECR, UK)
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