

Impact of the Committee on Petitions in the 9th legislative term

A significant number of petitions have led to legislative or political action, EU pilot cases, and sometimes even preliminary rulings or infringement proceedings. **Some highlights:**

Environment

Illegal logging: The European Parliament Resolution of June 2022 on illegal logging in the EU was adopted on the basis of a Motion for a Resolution by the Committee on Petitions and further to its question for oral answer and to a fact-finding visit on alleged breaches of EU environmental law. In May 2023, the Committee on Petitions also organised a fact-finding visit on the management of the brown bear population and the illegal logging in Romania. The delegation met with various interlocutors, including national and regional authorities, petitioners, NGOs, environmental activists and academics. The European Commission had opened an infringement procedure.

Deterioration of ecosystems: The Committee on Petitions undertook a fact-finding visit to Mar Manor (Murcia), Spain, in February 2022, in relation to several petitions raising the issue of the deterioration of the natural environment of the Mar Menor lagoon. The delegation met with petitioners, scientists, political representatives at the national, regional and local level and visited the most affected areas. In September 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised a fact-finding visit to Poland to follow up petitions concerning alleged breaches of EU environmental law in the Białowieża primeval forest, which is protected under Natura 2000. The delegation met the Vice Minister of Environment, as well as the petitioners, NGOs and experts, and visited the Białowieża forest to meet and discuss with the forest management and local authorities.

EU Green Prosecutor: In March 2022, the Committee on Petitions held, together with the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), a Public Hearing on "EU Green Prosecutor - a common toolbox for fighting environmental crime". The Hearing examined the shortcomings and challenges in the enforcement of EU environmental criminal law on the basis of petitions received, as well as new tools to fight environmental crime, including the possible creation of a European Green Prosecutor Office. It led to the Opinion on the proposal for a directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law (Environmental Crime Directive).

Plastics: In February 2021, the Committee on Petitions held, together with the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), a Joint Public Hearing on "Plastics and waste management in the circular economy". The Hearing focussed on the implementation of the current legislative framework on plastic waste, addressing the main challenges faced by the Member States, but also highlighting the opportunities offered by the legal framework to reduce the impact of plastic in the environment across Europe.

Mining activities: The Committee on Petitions has drawn attention to the consequences of reckless mining activities in different Member States, in breach of different EU environmental provisions, and with negative socio-economic consequences, for example in the fields of agriculture, rural tourism, and public health. In December 2021, the Committee on Petitions, in association with the

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), organised a hearing on the "Environmental and social impacts of mining activity in the EU" and commissioned a study on the subject. The hearing provided insight into the situation across the Union, legislative constraints and shortcomings, in order to give a structured response to the various petitions received by the Committee.

Climate Change: In March 2019, the Committee on Petitions held a Hearing on "Climate Change Denial" in order to explore the topic of climate change denial under different perspectives.

Health: As a follow-up to the petitions on the exposure to dangerous substances, the Committee on Petitions commissioned a study on "Endocrine Disruptors: From Scientific Evidence to Human Health Protection", which was presented at its meeting in April 2019.

Protection of species and habitats: On the basis of petitions received, the Committee on Petitions organised a Public Hearing on "The state of implementation of the Habitats Directive" in May 2023 to discuss with experts the shortcomings and challenges in the enforcement of the Habitats Directive and the ways to promote full compliance with the legislation. This event was organised in association with the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), when the 'Nature Restoration' Regulation was under discussion in the Parliament.

Fundamental rights / Democracy / Enforcement of EU Law

Oral Question on "Improving the strategic approach on the enforcement of EU Law": With this oral question, voted in October 2023, the Committee on Petitions asked the European Commission about its current approach to handling alleged breaches of EU law and the infringement procedure. The overall aim is to increase the effectiveness of enforcement actions and to ensure adequate follow-up to the potential breaches identified by citizens through petitions.

Official visit to Cyprus: Following a petition for the return of the closed area of the occupied town of Famagusta to its original inhabitants, and at the invitation of the exiled Mayor of Famagusta, the Chair of the Committee, Ms Dolors Montserrat, visited Cyprus in October 2023. The Chair witnessed first-hand the heart-breaking situation in Famagusta, in particular the sealed-off area of Varosha, and met with the Mayor, the President of the Republic and the President of the Parliament, expressing her unwavering support for the people of Famagusta. Following her visit, the Chair sent a letter to the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, conveying a clear message: Putting an end to the increasing violations of the status quo in Famagusta and returning the fenced-off area to its lawful inhabitants under the UN administration, as stipulated by EU and the UNSC Resolutions, should be embraced as a confidence-building measure to be pushed forward in the context of the EU-Turkey relations.

Debate on Rules of Law in Hungary, Poland and Spain: Over the years, several petitions concerning the Rule of Law in Hungary, Poland and Spain have been discussed. In January 2024, the Committee discussed eight petitions on the Amnesty

Law in Spain and its alleged incompatibility with the Spanish Constitution and the EU Treaties.

US' Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA): In 2016, the Committee on Petitions was seized with a number of petitions on the alleged violation of EU rights by FATCA and the extraterritorial effects of US laws in the EU. The Committee on Petitions held a Hearing on FATCA and its extraterritorial effects on EU citizens, and a delegation from the Committee conducted a fact-finding visit in Washington DC in July 2022, in order to hold an exchange of views with tax officials, Senators and Representatives in Congress and stakeholders.

Equality and diversity

Cultural and Linguistic diversity: In April 2022, the Committee on Petitions held a Public Hearing on "Cultural and Linguistic diversity in the EU". The panels focused on the promotion of European cultural and linguistic diversity within the EU legal framework and concentrated on the added value of cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU. Discussions focused on how to promote and prevent the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, vital components of European cultural heritage.

LGBTI Equality in the EU: The Committee regularly receives petitions on the fundamental rights of LGBTI+ EU citizens, their different treatment in different Member States, the mutual recognition of legal parenthood in LGBTI+ families in the EU and the free movement within the EU. The Committee has initiated the European Parliament Resolution on LGBTI+ rights in the EU, which was adopted in September 2021.

Mutual recognition of parenthood and marriages: The Committee on Petitions recognised the serious obstacles faced by same-sex couples and 'rainbow families' in their daily lives and called for the mutual recognition of parenthood and marriage. In December 2022, a Public Hearing on "Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation" was organised in association with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI). Finally, the Commission presented its proposal for a Regulation aimed at harmonising at EU level the rules of private international law relating to parenthood. The European Parliament's legislative resolution on this proposal refers to the various petitions submitted by Union citizens highlighting the need for a legal framework for cross-border recognition of parenthood between Member States. A study on the Commission's proposal has also been commissioned for the Committee on Petitions.

Disability

EU Disability Card: The Committee on Petitions has acknowledged that currently there is no mutual recognition of disability status among the EU Member States and has repeatedly called for an EU Disability Card. The European Commission has put in place a pilot project on the introduction of an EU disability card with the aim to ensure equal access to benefits across borders for people with disabilities, mainly in the areas of culture, leisure, sport and transport. In September 2023, a legislative proposal to establish the European Disability Card and a European Parking Card for

people with disabilities has been presented by the Commission and is currently being negotiated by the EU co-legislators. The report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on this proposal highlights the many petitions calling for the introduction of an EU-wide recognised EU disability Card and Parking Card.

Working conditions

Honorary magistrates: Following several petitions sent to the Committee on Petitions, the Commission decided in July 2021 to open an infringement procedure against Italy. By sending a letter of formal notice to Italy, the Commission called on Italy to amend its legislation on the working conditions for honorary magistrates.

Teachers in the European Union: On the basis of several petitions received in recent years, the Committee on Petitions decided to express a common position on the current situation of teachers' working conditions in the EU and called on the European Commission to step up its efforts to improve the prestige and attractiveness of this profession in the EU and ultimately to ensure a high quality education for current and future generations of pupils. The Oral Question was debated in Plenary on 8 February 2024.

Small and medium sized enterprises

European Capital of Small Retail (ECSR): The idea of creating an ECSR was initially proposed by a petition that was unanimously supported by the Committee on Petitions and decisive for the successful vote of the European Parliament Resolution in January 2023. The Committee on Budget also successfully voted to include it as a Preparatory Action in the 2024 Budget, with a total budget of €3 million. The project to create an ECSR was officially presented by the European Commission in Barcelona in December 2023.

Transport / Free movement

Improving air passenger rights during COVID-19 crisis: The Committee on Petitions and the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) held a joint Hearing to assess how effectively air passenger rights were protected during the COVID-19 outbreak, highlighting that key rights were not protected despite the Commission's efforts. Petitions on air passengers' rights to reimbursement or compensation for flight cancellations in COVID-19 times led to a monitoring by the European Commission in all Member States. The monitoring led to the opening of infringement proceedings against Italy and Greece.

In this context, the Committee on Petitions adopted in November 2020 the "Motion for a Resolution on the Schengen system and measures taken during the COVID-19 crisis". Following the discussion of a petition denouncing the difficult situation of more than 4 million homeless people in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee also adopted a "Motion for a Resolution on tackling homelessness rates in the European Union".

Carry-on luggage in airplanes: In October 2023, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution calling for standardised dimensions for carry-on luggage by single vote based on the Committee on Petitions' Short Motion for Resolution. The Resolution attracted a record media interest across the Member States: 22 Member States covered the topic. There was a particularly lively coverage in the Spanish media, including radio and TV. Parliament's visibility was above average, especially online, where half of the articles referred to the EP in the title. In November 2023, the Commission adopted a proposal calling for "a small number of common sizes and weights to reduce the confusion".

Security and safety situation of truck drivers: A fact-finding visit to France (Hauts de France region) was organised in May 2022 to examine aspects related to safe and secure parking areas in the EU. The members of the delegation met with petitioners, stakeholders, in particular the secure parking organisation that carries out audits, the motorway and parking operators and their national association, as well as with the representatives of the gendarmerie of the Somme department.

Schengen: Over the years, the Committee on Petitions has received several petitions calling for the respect of the Schengen principles and the removal of "temporary" border controls for the benefit of all EU citizens. The Committee on Petitions organised a Hearing on "Schengen Borders: issues raised by petitioners" and decided in March 2023 to draft a "Short Motion for a Resolution on the accession to the Schengen area", which was adopted in Plenary in July 2023. The European Commission confirmed to the Committee on Petitions that it is prepared to use the legal means at its disposal if Member States prolong internal border controls in a disproportionate manner.

Brexit: The Committee on Petitions examined and discussed the impact of Brexit on Citizens' Rights on several occasions. In 2019, in particular, the Committee held an exchange of views with the European Parliament's Brexit Steering Group and gave voice to the concerns raised by petitioners, helping to ensure that citizens' rights remain one of Parliament's key priorities in the Brexit negotiations.