



Plenary sitting

A9-0333/2023

6.11.2023

REPORT

on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations during 2022
(2023/2047(INI))

Committee on Petitions

Rapporteur: Alex Agius Saliba

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	15
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE.....	31
FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE	32

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations during 2022
(2023/2047(INI))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations,
 - having regard to Articles 10 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to Articles 20, 24 and 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which reflect the importance the Treaty attaches to the right of EU citizens and residents to bring their concerns to the attention of Parliament,
 - having regard to Article 228 TFEU on the role and functions of the European Ombudsman,
 - having regard to Article 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union concerning the right to petition the European Parliament,
 - having regard to the provisions of the TFEU relating to the infringement procedure and, in particular, to Articles 258 and 260 thereof,
 - having regard to Rules 54 and 227(7) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Petitions (A9-0333/2023),
- A. whereas the purpose of the annual report on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations is to present an analysis of the petitions received in 2022 and of relations with other institutions, and to present an accurate picture of the objectives achieved in 2022;
- B. whereas in 2022, Parliament received 1 217 petitions, which represents a decrease of 12.6 % compared to the 1 392 petitions submitted in 2021 and a decrease of 22.6 % compared to the 1 573 petitions submitted in 2020;
- C. whereas in 2022, the number of users supporting one or more petitions on Parliament's Petitions Web Portal was 22 441, which represents a considerable decrease compared to the 209 272 users recorded in 2021 (which was itself a high increase compared to the 48 882 supporters recorded in 2020); whereas the number of clicks in support of petitions also decreased in 2022, reaching a total of 27 927 (in comparison with 217 876 in 2021 and 55 129 in 2020);
- D. whereas, however, the overall number of petitions remains modest in relation to the total population of the EU, revealing that efforts still need to be stepped up to increase citizens' awareness about their right to petition and its possible usefulness as a means of drawing the attention of the institutions and the Member States to matters that affect and

concern citizens directly; whereas, in exercising the right to petition, citizens expect that the EU institutions will provide added value in finding a solution to their problems; whereas it is very important to reply to petitioners in a timely manner and with reasoned answers in order to build citizens' trust in the Union;

- E. whereas the criteria for the admissibility of petitions are laid down in Article 227 TFEU and Rule 226 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, which require that petitions must be submitted by an EU citizen or by a natural or legal person who is resident or has a registered office in a Member State and is directly affected by matters falling within the EU's fields of activity;
- F. whereas, of the 1 217 petitions submitted in 2022, 357 were declared inadmissible and 5 were withdrawn; whereas the high percentage (29.46 %) of inadmissible petitions in 2022 confirms that there is still a widespread lack of clarity about the scope of the Union's areas of responsibility; whereas in order to reduce the number of inadmissible petitions, efforts still need to be made to clarify further the scope of the EU's fields of activity; whereas to remedy this situation, communication with citizens needs to be encouraged and improved;
- G. whereas each petition is considered and examined carefully, efficiently and transparently;
- H. whereas petitioners tend to be citizens engaged in safeguarding fundamental rights and in the improvement and future well-being of our societies; whereas the experience of these citizens in regard to the processing of their petitions is very influential in determining their perception of the EU institutions, knowledge about the actions taken at EU level and respect for the right to petition as enshrined in EU law;
- I. whereas the right to petition the European Parliament is one of the fundamental rights of EU citizens; whereas the right to petition provides EU citizens and residents with an open, democratic and transparent mechanism to address their elected representatives directly and is therefore essential to enable citizens to participate actively and effectively in the life of the Union; whereas the processing of petitions is very influential in determining the petitioners' perception of the EU institutions and the trust they put in the Union and its policies; whereas, therefore, it is essential to maintain high standards when implementing this right and processing petitions; whereas, through petitions, EU citizens can complain about failures to implement EU law and help detect breaches of EU law;
- J. whereas the right to petition offers Parliament the opportunity to address and respond to complaints and concerns relating to issues in the EU's fields of activity; whereas the right to petition enables Parliament and the other EU institutions, in particular the Commission as guardian of the Treaties, to enhance their responsiveness to alleged non-compliance with EU legislation in the Member States; whereas petitions are therefore a useful source of information on instances of misapplication or breaches of EU law, as well as on shortcomings and loopholes in existing EU law, and, thus, enable Parliament and the other EU institutions to assess the transposition and application of EU law and its impact on the rights of EU citizens and residents;
- K. whereas an inter-service working group on sign language was established in Parliament

in order to implement measures to fulfil the request made in petition 1056/2016 to allow for the tabling of petitions in national sign languages used in the European Union;

- L. whereas the European Parliament is the only EU institution directly elected by EU citizens; whereas Parliament has long been at the forefront of the development of the petitions process internationally and has the most open and transparent petitions process in Europe, allowing petitioners to participate fully in its activities;
- M. whereas the Committee on Petitions carefully examines and deals with each petition submitted to Parliament; whereas each petitioner receives a reply informing them about the decision on admissibility and follow-up actions taken by the committee within a reasonable period of time, in their own language or in the language used in the petition; whereas each petitioner is entitled to request that their petition be reopened on the basis of any relevant new development; whereas the Commission has reiterated its refusal to take action on issues raised in individual petitions when they do not reflect structural problems and in these cases refer to the national courts to apply Union law;
- N. whereas according to Article 17 TEU, the Commission must ensure the correct application of the Treaties and of measures adopted pursuant to them; whereas the Commission's strategic approach in addressing issues raised in petitions must be fully consistent with the Treaties in order to guarantee their effective follow-up;
- O. whereas the Committee on Petitions is the only body that is in direct contact with EU citizens and is thus able to inform them about action taken at European, national or local level;
- P. whereas the activities of the Committee on Petitions are based on the input provided by petitioners; whereas the information submitted by petitioners in their petitions and at committee meetings, along with the Commission's assessment and the replies of the Member States and other bodies, are crucial for the work of the committee; whereas admissible petitions also provide valuable contributions to the work of the other parliamentary committees, given that they are forwarded by the Committee on Petitions to other committees for an opinion or for information; whereas, therefore, petitions may play a role in the legislative process by providing other parliamentary committees with valuable input for their legislative work in their respective fields of competence;
- Q. whereas the Committee on Petitions attaches paramount importance to the examination and public discussion of petitions at its meetings; whereas petitioners have the right to present their petitions and frequently take the floor in the discussion, thereby actively contributing to the work of the committee; whereas in 2022, the Committee on Petitions held 12 committee meetings (excluding its constitutive meeting), at which 143 petitions were discussed with 133 petitioners present and most of them actively participating by taking the floor;
- R. whereas the number of petitions received in 2022 asking for full compliance with EU environmental law and for associated effective and rapid measures, in line with the precautionary principle, in order to protect ecosystems and habitats of Union concern amounted to a total of 258 (21.2 %), thus representing the main theme of concern for petitioners; whereas the other main subjects of concern raised in petitions related to fundamental rights (17.4 %), justice (15.6 %) and external relations (10.4 %);

- S. whereas when adopting its meeting agenda, the Committee on Petitions pays attention to all admissible petitions independently of the topic of the petition or its origin, in particular to topics with significant relevance for discussion at EU level; whereas there is a need in all Member States to raise awareness on the right to petition the European Parliament, in particular on thematic areas that generate fewer petitions, in order to guarantee a better geographical coverage of the petitions received;
- T. whereas 79 % of the petitions received in 2022 were submitted via Parliament's Petitions Web Portal, which is a slight increase compared to 2021 (78.6 %), thus confirming again that it is by far the most used channel for citizens to submit petitions to Parliament;
- U. whereas, in 2022, the Petitions Web Portal was further improved to make it more user-friendly, more secure and more accessible to petitioners; whereas all petitions were prepared and published in a timely manner, within a few days of their adoption, and all internal and external requests for support regarding the use and content of the Petitions Web Portal were replied to successfully, in a timely manner and in all languages; whereas version 2.0 of the Petitions Web Portal was further deployed and a chatbot was set up for it;
- V. whereas, in 2022, the Committee on Petitions held seven fact-finding visits; whereas this represents a large increase compared to the single fact-finding visit organised in 2021; whereas this can be explained by the need in 2021 to minimise health risks for Parliament's Members and staff in the context of the spread of COVID-19 and therefore by the consecutive postponement of two fact-finding visits to 2022;
- W. whereas under Parliament's Rules of Procedure, the Committee on Petitions is responsible for relations with the European Ombudsman, who investigates complaints about maladministration within the institutions and bodies of the EU; whereas the current European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, presented her annual report for 2021 to the Committee on Petitions at its meeting of 8 September 2022;
- X. whereas the Committee on Petitions is a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen, which also includes the European Ombudsman, national and regional ombudsmen and similar bodies in the Member States, the candidate countries and other European Economic Area countries, and which aims to promote the exchange of information about EU law and policy, and to share best practices;
- Y. whereas further improving citizen's participation is a key element for bringing the EU closer to its citizens; whereas on 26-27 January 2022, the Committee on Petitions adopted the report entitled 'Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens' Initiative'¹, concluding that the Conference on the Future of Europe should result in the improvement of the instruments of participatory democracy; whereas Parliament adopted a resolution on the basis of the Committee on Petitions' report on 9 March 2022; whereas the Committee on Petitions considers the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) an important instrument of participatory democracy, which enables citizens to become actively involved in

¹ Adopted by Parliament on 9 March 2022 as a resolution (OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 110).

shaping the Union's policies and legislation;

1. Emphasises the fundamental role of the Committee on Petitions in protecting and promoting the rights of EU citizens and residents by ensuring that petitioners' concerns and complaints are examined in a timely, effective, appropriate and non-discriminatory manner, and that the petitioners are informed about the actions taken and progress made on their petitions, and that they are resolved through an open, democratic and transparent petition process;
2. Reiterates the importance of a continuous public debate on the Union's fields of activity in order to ensure that citizens are correctly informed about the scope of the Union's competences and the different levels of decision-making; reiterates its call, in this regard, for broader awareness raising campaigns in all the official languages of the EU, through the active involvement of communications services, to help increase citizens' awareness of their right to submit a petition to the European Parliament, as well as of the scope of the Union's responsibilities and the competences of the Committee on Petitions, with a view to reducing the number of inadmissible petitions and better responding to citizens' concerns;
3. Reiterates that it is important that the Commission revises its strategic approach on the handling of petitions in order to ensure an adequate follow-up of all petitions denouncing violations of EU law, including those raised in individual petitions; calls on the Commission to provide legal clarification on the key concepts that are laid down in its strategic approach, such as an 'issue of wider principle' and 'systemic failure to enforce EU law', which are regularly used in its follow-up on petitions; encourages the Commission to carry out thorough investigations and a more timely and proactive dialogue with national authorities, with a view to rapidly ending the alleged violations of EU law denounced by petitioners, with a particular focus on petitions denouncing breaches of rights for a large number of citizens and residents in the EU or further violations of EU law linked to systemic shortcomings;
4. Points out that petitions constitute a unique opportunity for Parliament and the other EU institutions to directly connect with EU citizens and maintain a regular dialogue with them, particularly in cases where they are affected by the misapplication or breach of EU law; stresses the need for enhanced cooperation between the EU institutions and national, regional and local authorities on inquiries regarding the implementation of and compliance with EU law; believes that such cooperation is crucial to address and resolve citizens' concerns over the application of EU law and that it contributes to strengthening the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the Union, as well as the participation of citizens and residents in democratic processes; calls, therefore, for the participation of Member States' representatives in committee meetings and for timely and detailed responses to requests for clarification or information sent by the Committee on Petitions to national authorities;
5. Recalls the European dimension of the Committee on Petitions, which can be addressed by citizens and residents from all 27 Member States on issues that fall within the scope of the EU Treaties and EU law; believes that the committee has a special responsibility to uphold this European dimension and to demonstrate the added value of European unity and integration; is of the opinion that the treatment of petitions during committee

meetings, as well as the organisation of fact-finding visits based on petitions, should be geographically balanced; believes, in this respect, that the European Parliament should increase its efforts to promote the role and work of its Committee on Petitions and raise awareness among all EU citizens and residents of the right to address a petition to the European Parliament; believes that the political groups represented in the Committee on Petitions should, whenever possible, consider consensus and balance with regard to selecting and treating petitions;

6. Recalls that petitions contribute considerably to the Commission's role as guardian of the Treaties by providing citizens with an additional tool to notify alleged breaches of EU law; stresses that cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and the Commission through timely and detailed answers from the Commission that are based on thorough examinations of the issues raised in petitions, are essential to ensure the successful treatment of petitions;
7. Notes that answers provided by the Commission are not always formulated in a way that petitioners can understand; calls therefore on the Commission to raise awareness among its staff about the need to use plain, simple, empathetic and appropriate language in order to convey clearly understandable responses to the petitioners; encourages the Commission to delegate the role of presenting the Commission's positions in the meetings of the Committee on Petitions to more senior and high-ranking staff; calls on the Commission to be more involved in the work of the Committee on Petitions and, in particular, to respond in a timely manner to the problems raised by petitioners;
8. Notes the lack of systematic follow-up in the Commission's communication with the Committee on Petitions regarding infringement procedures that are related to issues raised in petitions and that are often lengthy and opaque; notes that a large number of ongoing infringement procedures, including those related to issues raised in many petitions, have been delayed in the pre-contentious phase for many years, with no referral to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) for the concerned Member States; welcomes, as a best practice and benchmark to improve the overall strategy on the enforcement of EU law, the Commission's approach of setting a target of 12 months to refer infringement cases to the CJEU, which is already the practice for persistent failure by a Member State to transpose a legislative directive; considers that stronger cooperation between the Commission and Parliament would better address Member States' violations of EU law in pre-infringement cases; believes that it is essential for national authorities to be aware of the consequences when there is no redress to the breach of Union law, as demonstrated by the petitions, including cases of incomplete or partial implementation of the CJEU's judgments; is of the opinion that effective redress to the victims of the breaches of EU legislation increases citizens' trust in the Union and its policies; reiterates its call on the Commission to regularly update the Committee on Petitions on developments in infringement proceedings and to ensure that the Committee on Petitions gets access to the relevant Commission documents on infringement procedures and legislative initiatives that were launched based on the petitions received, and on EU Pilot procedures; is of the opinion that the highest level of transparency and regular feedback on the handling of ongoing infringement procedures by the Commission would be beneficial for the committee's follow-up on open petitions;

9. Calls on the Commission to assess whether national authorities are taking the necessary measures to respond to citizens' concerns, as expressed in their petitions where cases of failure to comply with EU law occur, and to launch infringement procedures where necessary; believes that early action by the Commission in cases of breaches of EU law is crucial to prevent such breaches from becoming systemic in nature;
10. Recalls that the e-Petition database is an essential internal tool that allows the members of the Committee on Petitions to access all necessary information in order to follow up on the state of play of each petition and to be able to make informed decisions on the treatment of the petitions; notes that the e-Petition database also plays an important role in communication with petitioners and calls for Parliament to allocate resources in order to further develop the document flow aspects of the tool to make communication with petitioners easier and faster;
11. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to create an interinstitutional IT tool with Parliament, and urges its swift implementation, as a means of sharing information and documents on all follow-up actions taken on petitions, such as infringement procedures, legislative proposals or replies by national authorities, thus enhancing the transparency and efficiency of the petitions' treatment, which, in a wider context, would contribute to increasing citizens' trust in the EU institutions and European project; encourages the Commission to use other tools as well in order to provide comprehensive information to the Committee on Petitions, including its annual report on monitoring the application of EU law, which should provide an exhaustive analysis of the link between petitions, infringement procedures and legislative and non-legislative measures taken following petitions received, thus addressing the lack of transposition and incorrect application of EU law by Member States; underlines the need to strengthen the relevance of the Committee on Petitions' work by strengthening the use of petitions and the overall follow-up actions on petitions received to better address potential shortcomings in the application and implementation of EU law, including through the petitions network of the European Parliament;
12. Recalls that cooperation with other committees in Parliament is essential for the comprehensive treatment of petitions; notes that in 2022, 56 petitions were sent to other committees for opinion and 734 for information; regrets that, of the 56 opinions requested, only 25 opinions were received; recalls that petitioners are informed of decisions to request opinions from other committees for the treatment of their petitions; underlines that the parliamentary committees should step up their efforts to actively contribute to the examination of petitions – by providing their expertise – and thus enable Parliament to respond more swiftly and comprehensively to citizens' concerns;
13. Believes that the petitions network is a useful tool for facilitating the follow-up of petitions in parliamentary and legislative work; trusts that regular meetings of the petitions network are crucial in order to ensure more visibility for the Committee on Petition's activities and better understanding of its work and mission and to strengthen cooperation with the other parliamentary committees; believes that the exchange of information about specific petitions relevant to ongoing legislative work could be improved;
14. Underlines that the Committee on Petitions expressed its position on important issues

raised in petitions by adopting its report on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations during 2021², its report entitled 'Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens' Initiative', its report entitled 'EU Citizenship Report 2020: empowering citizens and protecting their rights'³, its opinion entitled 'Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws'⁴ and its opinion of 15 March 2022 on the Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report⁵;

15. Stresses the huge increase in the number of petitions submitted on external relations issues compared to previous years; notes that this could be explained by the geopolitical context in 2022 and in particular the Russian aggression against Ukraine; notes that the Committee on Petitions took account of citizen's concerns about security, humanitarian aid, sanctions, security of food supply, military and financial support to Ukraine, conflict resolution, visa policy, energy supply and the integration of Ukraine in the EU, among other issues, putting a number of petitions dealing in particular with questions related to the situation of refugees, children's rights and food supply on the agenda; underlines that, in particular, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs should take note of those petitions for their deliberations concerning Ukraine;
16. Takes note that health, which was one of the main areas of concern for petitioners in 2021, mainly due to health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, appeared to become less important in 2022, owing to the fact that the number of petitions on COVID-19 that the Committee on Petitions examined and replied to in 2022 decreased compared to 2021;
17. Draws attention to the significant number of petitions discussed in relation to various aspects of the protection of the rights of rainbow families in the EU, in particular the different stances regarding the free movement and mutual recognition rights of LGBTI+ families in the EU; recalls the public hearing on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation that the Committee on Petitions organised on 1 December 2022, which assessed the legal difficulties that rainbow families encounter in their daily lives in Member States and discussed the situation relating to the mutual recognition of parenthood and marriages, as well as questions of child custody;
18. Points out that petitions related to the rights of national minorities remained on the agenda of the Committee on Petitions, especially in the areas of discriminatory practices concerning their right to education in their mother tongue and the use of languages; points to the public hearing on cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU organised by the Committee on Petitions on 20 April 2022, which considered the various issues affecting the use of minority language and the possibilities of safeguarding and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU; considers necessary the EU's

² Adopted by Parliament as a resolution on 15 December 2022 (OJ C 177, 17.5.2023, p. 129).

³ Adopted by Parliament as a resolution on 10 March 2022 (OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 202).

⁴ Opinion adopted as part of procedure 2021/2166(INI), concluding with the adoption of the European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2022 on Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws (OJ C 47, 7.2.2023, p. 250).

⁵ Opinion adopted as part of procedure 2021/2180(INI), concluding with the adoption of the European Parliament resolution of 19 May 2022 on the Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report (OJ C 479, 16.12.2022, p. 18).

support for the teaching and use of regional and minority languages;

19. Notes that environmental issues remained an area of serious concern for petitioners in 2022, with more than 20 % of petitions dedicated to environmental issues; notes that some of these petitions allege incorrect implementation by the Member States of EU legislation, with some Member States already facing infringement procedures for the breach of EU environmental laws; notes that numerous petitions raise complaints, among other things, about air quality, noise pollution, waste management and the deterioration of unique ecosystems and species, including Europe's last old-growth and primary forests and invaluable wetlands and peatlands; point out the breaches of EU legislation, including the Water Framework Directive⁶, the Birds Directive⁷ and the Habitats Directive⁸; calls, in this context, on the Commission, in cases where the failure to implement EU environmental legislation has been detected, to launch without delay an infringement procedure that should be finalised within a reasonable time frame in order to prevent further deterioration of the environment; points to the work that the Committee on Petitions continued to carry out in 2022 on the impact of mining activities on the environment, putting a number of petitions received on this topic on the agenda; draws attention to some energy projects, especially relating to wind farms, and to the related public hearing of 15 June 2022 on the social and environmental impacts of renewable energy; highlights the high number of petitions on the management and protection of brown bear and wolf populations in the EU that need the full cooperation of all relevant authorities on the local, regional, national and EU levels to seek effective solutions to large carnivore conservation and management;
20. Draws attention to the public hearing of the Committee on Petitions of 25 March 2022 on an EU Green Prosecutor, which assessed the shortcomings and challenges in the enforcement of EU environmental criminal law on the basis of petitions received, as well as new tools to tackle environmental crime, including the possible creation of a European Green Prosecutor's Office, and paved the way for the adoption of an opinion by the committee; points out, in this regard, the opinion of the Committee on Petitions on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of the environment through criminal law and replacing Directive 2008/99/EC;
21. Stresses the importance of delivering on EU citizens' expectations regarding the protection of the environment, and in particular of taking action in the field of illegal logging; underlines, in this regard, the follow-up actions by Parliament on Petitions Nos 0289/2015, 0625/2018, 1248/2019, 0408/2020, 0722/2020 and 1056/2021, raising concerns over increasing illegal logging and specific cases of practices that are in breach of EU environmental legislation in a number of Member States; points, in this regard, to the European Parliament resolution of 23 June 2022 on illegal logging in the EU⁹, adopted on the basis of a motion for a resolution by the Committee on Petitions, in

⁶ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1).

⁷ Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7).

⁸ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7).

⁹ OJ C 32, 27.1.2023, p. 20.

addition to its question for oral answer and to a fact-finding visit concerning alleged breaches of EU environmental law;

22. Stresses moreover the importance of reflecting on EU citizens' demands with regard to the significant number of petitions received in 2022 calling for improvements to animal welfare standards, including the transport of live animal, restrictions to fast-growth broilers and the negative impact of cages and other welfare conditions for farmed animals; reminds the Commission, in this regard, to implement without delay its commitment in line with its communication in response to the ECI 'End the Cage Age'¹⁰ and to propose a legislative proposal on animal welfare;
23. Urges the Commission, again, together with the Member States, to ensure the correct implementation of EU legislation in the environmental field;
24. Stresses the important contribution made by the Committee on Petitions to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, as revealed by its treatment of a number of petitions on this sensitive topic; points, in this regard, to the opinion of the Committee on Petitions entitled 'Towards equal rights for people with disabilities', adopted on 13 July 2022¹¹; recalls the annual workshop of 30 November 2022 on the rights of persons with disabilities, which the Committee on Petitions held to focus on disability assessment, mutual recognition and the EU Disability Card, which shed light on the obstacles reported in petitions by persons with disabilities when they move across the EU; recalls that the Commission should address the cases where the national authorities refuse to recognise the right to social security benefits for disabled people, thus leaving them without the necessary means to cover their basic needs;
25. Urges the relevant parliamentary services to continue their efforts and finalise the inter-service working group on sign language project in the shortest possible time frame in order to meet the requests of petition 1056/2016 to allow for the tabling of petitions in international and national sign languages used in the EU and thereby make the fundamental right to petition more accessible for sign language users;
26. Highlights the need to punctually provide international sign language interpretation services and easy-to-read language translations for committee meetings, plenary meetings and other major Parliament meetings and events in order to make them accessible for persons with disabilities;
27. Underlines the specific protection role played by the Committee on Petitions within the EU in the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; points to the committee's important ongoing work in connection with petitions concerning issues related to disabilities; stresses the increase in the number of petitions on disability in 2022 in comparison with previous years, especially 2021, from which the number more than doubled; notes that discrimination and access to education and employment remain among the main challenges faced by persons with disabilities; points out that the Committee on Petitions gave special attention to the questions of sheltered workshops, social inclusion of people with disabilities and the improvement of

¹⁰ OJ C 274, 9.7.2021, p. 1.

¹¹ Opinion adopted as part of procedure 2022/2026(INI), concluding with the adoption of the European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2022 towards equal rights for persons with disabilities (OJ C 177, 17.5.2023, p. 13).

voting conditions, in particular for persons with disabilities;

28. Recalls the fact that relations with the European Ombudsman are one of the responsibilities conferred by Parliament's Rules of Procedure on the Committee on Petitions; welcomes Parliament's constructive cooperation with the European Ombudsman with whom the Committee on Petitions shares the objective of ensuring the transparency, professionalism and integrity of the EU institutions vis-à-vis EU citizens, with regard to the adoption and implementation of EU laws in areas of vital importance for people's lives, such as fundamental rights, environmental protection, consumer protection and workers' rights;
29. Acknowledges the European Ombudsman's regular contributions to the work of the Committee on Petitions throughout the year; firmly believes that the Union's institutions, bodies and agencies must ensure adequate, consistent and effective follow-up to all recommendations from the Ombudsman;
30. Stresses that the ECI is an important instrument for active citizenship and public participation; underlines the need to improve the Commission's commitments in its responses to valid ECIs in order to foster citizens' trust in the ECI as the most significant instrument for participatory democracy; welcomes the discussion in several meetings of some unsuccessful ECIs as petitions, which gave citizens the opportunity to present their ideas and hold a constructive debate, as well as facilitating the participation of EU citizens in the democratic process of the Union; takes note of the significant number of new ECIs registered by the Commission in 2022, which shows that citizens are seizing the opportunity to use participatory instruments to have a say in policy and lawmaking processes; calls on the Commission to give due consideration to the parliamentary resolutions adopted on ECIs and to better engage with citizens by ensuring adequate follow-up to successful ECIs;
31. Recalls that the petitioners are able to participate not only in the deliberations on petitions that they have submitted, but also in the fact-finding visits that are based on those petitions; believes, in this regard, that providing petitioners with the opportunity to have their travel expenses reimbursed when they take part in a fact-finding visit of the Committee on Petitions that concerns their petition would facilitate their participation; recalls that fact-finding visits represent an important part of the annual activities of the Committee on Petitions and that, in 2022, since the Committee on Petitions received many emotional petitions on children's rights and welfare, it carried out two fact-finding visits on this issue, despite the fact that most aspects regarding children's rights fall within national competences;
32. Underlines that the Petitions Web Portal is an essential tool for ensuring a smooth, efficient and transparent petitions process; welcomes, in this regard, the improvements to data protection and security features which have made the portal more user-friendly and secure for citizens; stresses that efforts must be continued to make the portal more accessible, including to persons with disabilities; notes that the Petitions Web Portal has been one of the European Parliament's most visited websites, thus serving as a first point of contact for many EU citizens with the European Parliament;
33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of the Committee on

Petitions to the Council, the Commission, the European Ombudsman, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the Member States' committees on petitions and national ombudsmen or similar competent bodies.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Pursuant to Rule 227 (7) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, the Committee on Petitions shall report annually on the outcome of its deliberations. The report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the work carried out by the committee in 2022 and includes a statistical analysis of the petitions received and processed as well as a stocktaking of other parliamentary activities such as the adoption of reports and opinions, the organisation of hearings and the committee's relations with other EU institutions. It is worth recalling that the core work of the Committee on Petitions generates from the right to petition the European Parliament exercised by EU citizens and residents under Article 227 TFEU and is not directly linked to the work programme of the Commission.

In 2022, all the measures put in place in the European Parliament in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic aiming at ensuring Parliament's core functions, while avoiding health risks for its Members and staff, were lifted. This concerned the decisions enabling, *inter alia*, all Committees and interparliamentary delegations to organise their meetings, including hearings and workshops under the remote participation regime. As a consequence, committee meetings in 2022 took place in Parliament's premises, with the participation of MEPs as well as Commission's representatives in person. Petitioners have had the possibility to participate remotely or in person.

Statistical analysis of petitions received in 2022 compared to 2021

According to the statistics, the European Parliament received 1217 petitions in 2022 which represents a decrease by 12, 6% compared to the 1392 petitions submitted in 2021 and by 22,6% compared to the 1573 petitions registered in 2020. The number of petitions on COVID-19 has significantly decreased compared to the two previous years: 45 petitions in 2022 compared to 242 petitions in 2021 and 209 in 2020.

Users of the Petitions Web Portal have the possibility to support petitions. In 2022, 22 441 users acted as supporters as compared to 209 272 in 2021. It follows, that in 2022 the number of users supporting petitions in the web portal decreased considerably in comparison with the previous year. The number of supports also decreased in 2022, reaching 27 927 compared to 217 876 in 2021.

In 2022, 12 petitions were co-signed by more than one citizen. Of the 12 petitions signed by more than one citizen, only 5 were signed by more than 100 citizens; of those 5 petitions, only 1 was signed by more than 1000 citizens and none by more than 10000 citizens.

Format of petitions

In 2022, more than 79% of the petitions were submitted via the Petitions Web Portal while almost 21% of petitions were submitted by post. The figures in the two tables reveal that in 2022 the proportion of petitions submitted via the Petitions Web Portal slightly increased in comparison with 2021, the Petitions Web Portal remaining by far the most used channel for submitting citizens' petitions to the European Parliament.

2022

Petition Format	Number of petitions	%
Petitions portal	962	79.05
Letter	255	20.95

2021

Petition Format	Number of petitions	%
Petitions portal	1094	78.6
Letter	298	21.4

Status of petitions per calendar year¹

The following table shows the status of petitions from 2003 to 2022. It can be noted that in 2022, a very large majority of petitions were closed within a year after being received and examined by the committee. As a result of the comparison with the data on the status of petitions included in the annual reports from 2010 to 2021, it can be concluded that the majority of petitions are closed within a year after being received and examined. Except for the year 2016 and 2022, less than 20 % of the petitions received each year since 2004 and very small percentages (from 0.2 % to 7.2 %) of petitions from 2004 to 2014 remain open. Most of these open petitions relate to environmental issues and ongoing infringement proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union or to issues that members of the committee want to follow closely.

Status of petitions					
Year	Number of petitions	Open petitions		Closed petitions	
2022	1 217	327	26.9%	890	73.1%
2021	1 392	274	19.7%	1 118	80.3%
2020	1 573	273	17.4%	1 300	82.6%
2019	1 357	264	19.5%	1 093	80.5%
2018	1 220	242	19.8%	978	80.2%
2017	1 271	195	15.3%	1 076	84.7%
2016	1 569	361	23.0%	1 208	77.0%
2015	1 431	166	11.6%	1 265	88.4%
2014	2 715	168	6.2%	2 547	93.8%
2013	2 891	207	7.2%	2 684	92.8%
2012	1 986	39	2.0%	1 947	98.0%
2011	1 414	29	2.0%	1 385	98.0%
2010	1 656	20	1.2%	1 636	98.8%
2009	1 924	10	0.5%	1 914	99.5%
2008	1 886	15	0.8%	1 871	99.2 %
2007	1 506	16	1.1%	1 490	98.9%
2006	1 021	2	0.2%	1 019	99.8 %
2005	1 016	2	0.2%	1 014	99.8%
2004	1 002	2	0.2%	1 000	99.8%
2003	1 315	0	0%	1 315	100.0%

Outcome of petitions²

¹ The statistics on the status of petitions have been downloaded on 6 June 2023.

² The statistics on the outcome of petitions are continuously evolving, especially when it comes to the number of open and closed petitions. The data for 2022 has been downloaded on 7 June 2023.

2022

Outcome of petitions	Number	%
Admissible and Closed	527	43.48
Admissible and Open	327	26.98
Inadmissible	357	29.46
Withdrawn	5	0.08
Sent to EC for opinion	482	37.57
Sent for opinion to other bodies	12	0.94
Sent for information to other bodies	789	61.5

2021

Outcome of petitions	Number	%
Admissible and Closed	573	41.16
Admissible and Open	434	31.18
Inadmissible	368	26.5
Withdrawn	17	1.22
Sent to EC for opinion	554	44.90
Sent for opinion to other bodies	33	2.67
Sent for information to other bodies	647	43.37

The tables show that the percentage of petitions declared inadmissible in 2022 is slightly higher than the percentage of petitions declared inadmissible in 2021.

The percentage of admissible petitions (43.48 %), which were closed immediately by providing information to the petitioner in 2022 is slightly higher as compared to 2021. The percentage of petitions that have been kept open in 2022 (26.98%) have decreased compared to 2021 (31.18%).

It is also to be noted that in 2022, more than one third (37.57 %) of the admissible petitions were sent to the Commission for opinion.

Finally, the percentage of petitions sent to other bodies for opinion has decreased significantly in 2022 as compared to 2021.

Number of petitions by country

The following two tables illustrate in numbers and in percentage terms changes of petitions by country from 2021 to 2022. A large number of petitions submitted in both years concern the EU. It means that these petitions either raise EU-wide issues or call for common measures to be implemented throughout the EU. Petitions concerning the EU may also relate to one or more Member States and are therefore registered under both the EU and the concerned Member State(s). This explains why the sum of the petitions concerning the EU and of those only related to Member States exceeds the total number of petitions submitted in 2021 and 2022.

Additionally, it is worth stressing that the six countries mostly concerned by petitions remained the same in both years although the order of the most concerned countries has changed in 2022 compared to 2021 (Poland takes the seat occupied by Greece in 2021). The majority of petitions

submitted in 2022 concern Spain, but with a relevant decrease in terms of numbers in comparison with 2021. It is interesting to note the significant decrease in the number of petitions concerning Italy (from 129 to 101). Similarly, the number of petitions related to Greece decreased, by 1.5 (from 82 to 54). On the contrary, the number of petitions related to Poland increased (from 56 to 71) in comparison with 2021.

By contrast, petitions concerning Ireland decreased significantly in 2022 compared to petitions submitted in 2021 (from 24 to 8).

As regards the countries featuring at the bottom of the list, Czechia, Estonia and Slovakia are the least countries concerned in 2022, while in 2021 it was Estonia and Slovenia.

2022			2021		
Concerned Country	Petitions	%	Concerned Country	Petitions	%
European Union	566	46.7	European Union	577	41.4
Spain	199	16.4	Spain	237	17.0
Germany	139	11.5	Germany	136	9.7
Italy	101	8.3	Italy	129	9.2
Poland	71	5.9	Greece	82	5.9
Romania	59	4.9	Romania	58	4.1
Greece	54	4.5	Poland	56	4.0
France	39	3.2	France	36	2.6
Hungary	20	1.7	Hungary	27	1.9
Portugal	19	1.6	Ireland	24	1.7
Other EU countries	143	11.9	Other EU countries	199	14.2
Non-EU countries	226	18.6	Non-EU countries	124	8.9

Languages of petitions

In 2022 and in 2021, petitions were submitted in 22 of the official languages of the European Union. While English and German were the most used languages in both 2021 and 2020, in Spanish became the second most used languages in 2022 after English. The tables illustrate that English accounts for more than ¼ of the total of petitions submitted and that English, Spanish, German and Italian languages account for more than ¾ of the petitions received in 2022 and 2021 (76.2% and 77.1% respectively).

Slovenian, Czech and Croatian were the least used languages in 2022 while in 2021 it was Irish, Maltese and Slovak.

2022			2021		
Petition Language	Number of petitions	%	Petition Language	Number of petitions	%
English	325	26.7	English	401	28.8
Spanish	251	20.6	German	284	20.4
German	215	17.6	Spanish	231	16.6
Italian	138	11.3	Italian	158	11.3

French	58	4.8
Polish	56	4.6
Greek	43	3.5
Romanian	42	3.5
Others	89	7.3
Total	1217	100

Greek	72	5.1
French	55	3.9
Romanian	42	3.0
Polish	39	2.8
Others	110	8.0
Total	1392	100

Nationality of petitioners

As regards nationality, while petitions submitted by German citizens represented the highest number in 2021, Spanish citizens exceeded German and became the first nationality in submitting petitions in 2022, which confirmed the decreased already noticed in 2021 compared to 2020 in the number of petitions submitted by German citizens.

In addition, the tables below show a considerable rise in the number of petitions submitted by Polish and French nationals in 2022 in comparison with the previous year. More specifically, in 2022, petitions by Polish and French citizens increased respectively by 12.3% and 30.4%.

By contrast, the number of petitions by Italian and Greek citizens decreased significantly in 2022.

2022

Prime petitioner nationality	Number of petitions	%
Spain	266	21.9
Germany	251	20.7
Italy	159	13.1
Romania	78	6.4
Poland	73	6.0
France	60	5.0
Greece	60	5.0
Hungary	33	2.7
Portugal	26	2.1
Other EU nationalities	170	13.9
Non-EU nationalities	49	4.0

2021

Prime petitioner nationality	Number of petitions	%
Germany	318	22.7
Spain	254	18.1
Italy	205	14.6
Greece	88	6.2
Romania	78	5.5
Poland	65	4.6
France	46	3.2
Belgium	35	2.5
Bulgaria	34	2.4
Other EU nationalities	243	17.3
Non-EU nationalities	35	2.5

Main subjects of petitions

The tables below include the top ten petition themes. From the tables, it appears that the main themes differed from one year to another. While in 2021 fundamental rights, environment and health ranked the highest, in 2022 environment, fundamental rights and justice were the top three petition themes.

In 2022 the number of petitions raising concerns over external relations had a significant increase as it has more than doubled compared to 2021. This could be explained by the high

number of petitions related to the war in Ukraine submitted in 2022.

As regard petitions on health, in 2022 the committee received 115 petitions on this topic as compared to the 313 petitions registered under the same theme in 2021. The significant decrease might be explained by the reduced number of petitions on COVID-19 linked to the vaccination policy and the Covid certificate, which increased significantly the number of petitions dealing with health in 2021.

As far as fundamental rights is concerned, the number of petitions on this topic decreased by 35.9 % in 2022 compared to 2021. This might be due to the fact that in 2021, an important number of petitions (139) registered under the theme of fundamental rights raised concerns over the impact of national COVID-19-related emergency measures on citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom of movement, the right to work, the right of access to information and the right to education.

2022

Top 10 Petition themes	Number of petitions	%
Environment	258	21.2
Fundamental Rights	211	17.4
Justice	189	15.6
External Relations	126	10.4
Personal Matter	126	10.4
Health	115	9.5
Employment	73	6.0
Consumer's Right	66	5.4
Institutions	63	5.2
Energy	61	5.0

2021

Top 10 Petition themes	Number of petitions	%
Fundamental Rights	329	23.6
Environment	327	23,5
Health	313	22,5
Justice	172	12.3
Employment	94	6,7
Consumer's right	86	6.1
Internal Market	73	5.2
Transport	71	5.1
External relations	61	4.4
Education	54	3.9

Petitions Web Portal

In 2022, the Petitions Web Portal, launched in late 2014, was further improved to make it more user-friendly, more secure and more accessible to petitioners.

The main objective of the Petitions Portal "2.0"³ is to allow citizens, petitioners and supporters to notice and focus on the handling and outcome of petitions. The technical work has focused on merging the old Portal with the EP's web publishing tool, which will allow more timely and efficient updating of the content of the different pages. New and more intuitive menus and footers were also developed, as well as the creation of very comprehensive and accessible "Quick Start Guides" in all 24 European languages. Work has also been done on a new search engine to help users find a petition in the database even faster, and on a new and cleaner page layout. The PETIPortal Team has developed the idea of so-called spotlight/focus items, which

³ Version 2.6 of the Petitions Web Portal was deployed in 2022

will highlight some of the current petitions and create thematic links.

The PETI Secretariat also worked with DG ITEC and the Archive Unit on the archiving process of data for closed petitions older than 10 years. Moreover, the PETIportal Team ensured that all petitions were published within a few days of their adoption. In addition, petitioners' questions received via the PETIportal Chatbot or directly to the PETIportal Smart Helpdesk were answered in a timely and successful manner in all languages without any formal complaints.

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 implementation of and compliance with EU law. The committee and the Commission have a well-established and consistently maintained level of cooperation. The main contact point in the Commission is the Secretariat-General, which coordinates the distribution of petitions to the relevant Commission's services and transmits the Commission's replies to the secretariat of the committee. The Commission's services participate in the meetings of the Committee of Petitions when petitions are discussed in committee on the basis of the Commission's written reply or other documents received. While the Commission has stepped up its efforts to provide timely responses to requests for information made by the Committee on Petitions, the committee believes that the Commission should be more actively involved in the work of the Committee on Petitions in order to ensure that petitioners receive a precise response to their requests and complaints regarding the implementation of EU law.

Additionally, the committee reiterated its calls for regular updates on developments in infringement proceedings and for transparency and access to documents in relation to infringement and EU pilot procedures, which relate to open petitions. Finally, the committee remains critical as regards the Commission's new enforcement policy based on in its 2016 communication entitled 'EU Law: Better Results through Better Application' (C(2016)8600), which aims to direct citizens to the national level when complaints or petitions do not raise issues of wider principle or systematic failure to comply with EU law. In this regard, the committee considers that the Commission should check whether national authorities take the necessary steps to respond to citizens' concerns as expressed in their petitions.

As part of the annual cycle of the structured dialogue, the Committee on welcomed the remote participation of Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič at its meeting on 3 December 2021.

It is also worth noting the Commission's participation in the Committee on Petitions' events throughout the year, in particular the intervention of Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, during the public hearing organised by the Committee on Petitions in association with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs & Committee on Legal Affairs on the "Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation" at the meeting of 1 December 2022. Representatives of the Commission also participated in several PETI hearings in 2022: public hearing on "Challenges for mental health of new generation across EU" organised on 25 October (DG SANTE), hearing on "Cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU" held on 20 April (DG EAC) and the public hearing on "EU Green Prosecutor - a common toolbox for fighting environmental crime" that took place on 15 March (DG JUST). Finally, on 30 November 2022,

in the annual workshop on the rights of persons with disabilities focussing on Disability Assessment, Mutual Recognition and the EU Disability Card. Helena DALLI, European Commissioner for Equality intervened. Presentation of the Study on “Monitoring of nitrogen in water in the EU - Legal framework, effects of nitrate, design principles, effectiveness and future developments, DG ENV.

ECI

The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) is a European Union (EU) mechanism aimed at increasing direct democracy by enabling “EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies”. The initiative enables one million citizens of the European Union, who are nationals of at least seven member states, to call directly on the European Commission to propose a legal act in an area where the member states have conferred powers onto the EU level. If at the end of the procedure, the ECI initiative reaches the threshold, organisers are invited to a hearing organised by the committee for petitions, to present their initiative, and afterwards, Parliament may decide to debate further and adopt a resolution on plenary on the topic.

Article 230 of the Rules of Procedures of the European Parliament allows the Committee on Petitions to examine proposed citizens’ initiatives which have been registered in accordance with Article 4 of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011, but which cannot be submitted to the Commission in accordance with Article 9 of that Regulation since not all the relevant procedures and conditions laid down have been complied with, if it considers that follow-up is appropriate. On that basis, the Committee held on 8 September 2022 a debate on the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) “Voter without borders” with the participation of the organisers and a representative of the Commission and members of the committee. The ‘Voters Without Borders’ initiative addressed a demand for reinforcing European citizenship. The ECI representatives’ main objectives were to remove barriers to registration of EU citizens to vote and stand in European and local elections, as well as to reaffirm Universal Suffrage as a fundamental right of EU citizens, who, according to the organisers, should have the right to choose whether to vote in their country of residence or origin for all elections and referenda. Although the ECI ended without reaching the threshold of 1 million signatures, the Committee on Petitions could shed light on it and decide to send the initiative to the Committee on Constitutional Affairs for information and to ask the European Commission and the Council for an update on this topic.

Relations with the Council

Members of the Council’s Secretariat may attend the meetings of the Committee on Petitions. Regrettably, in 2022, the committee did not observed Council’s participation in the debates. In this respect, the committee considers that a more active cooperation with Member States would be necessary to unblock those petitions requiring prompt responses and reactions from the national authorities. Nevertheless, the committee notes the participation by some local or regional authorities in the discussion on petitions in committee meetings, which in 2022 concerned mainly Spanish-related topics. Also the committee acknowledges the efforts by some national authorities to participate in events organised by the Committee on Petitions. In this regard, it is worth recalling the participation of Martina Stepankova, deputy minister for EU funds and EU affairs, Ministry of labour and social affairs, Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in the annual workshop on the rights of persons with disabilities at the committee meeting of 30 November 2022.

Relations with the European Ombudsman

The Committee on Petitions has maintained constructive working relations with the office of the European Ombudsman.

On 8 September 2022, the committee heard the presentation of the European Ombudsman's Annual Report 2021 delivered by Ms Emily O'Reilly. The report documented the Ombudsman's work on improving public access to documents, including by publishing a guide for the EU institutions to help them fully meet their obligations in this area. It gave details on a range of inquiries. In 2021, the Ombudsman opened 338 inquiries – of which six were on her own initiative – with complaints related to transparency and accountability accounting for the biggest proportion of inquiries (29%), while the average length of time for an inquiry was less than four months. Ms O'Reilly thanked the European Parliament for its overwhelming approval of a new Statute that maintains the Office's powers, strengthens the legal basis of the Ombudsman and introduces safeguards that further guarantee the Office's independence.

It is also worth noting the intervention by the Ombudsman at the committee's annual workshop on the rights of persons with disabilities which took place on 30 November 2022.

Relations with the European Court of Auditors

Over recent years, the Committee on Petitions has built constructive working relations with the European Court of Auditors (ECA) and has actively contributed to its annual work programmes.

Relations with other EU bodies

On 15 March 2022, the Committee on Petitions heard a presentation on the European Economic and Social Committee's Opinion on 'Improving environmental protection through criminal law' by the Rapporteur, Mr Arnaud Schwartz.

Fact-finding visits

In 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised seven fact-finding visits. Two of them were postponed from previous years.

The committee held a fact-finding visit to the Mar Menor (Murcia), Spain, from 23 to 25 February 2022, in relation to several petitions that raised the issue of the deterioration of the natural area of Mar Menor. The delegation of the Committee on Petitions met the petitioners, political representatives at the national, regional and local levels. The delegation then visited the most affected areas and met scientists, social, business and trade organizations as well as the spokespersons of the parliamentary groups of the Regional Assembly and experts.

From 11 to 13 April 2022, the committee held a fact-finding visit to Palma de Mallorca, Balears (Spain), following-up on several petitions on alleged mistreatment of minors under foster care in Mallorca. On their first day, the delegation met the petitioners, families of the victims, journalists and political representatives at the regional level. Members also met political representatives at the local level, experts, the ombudsman for minors, the Prosecutor and the Police. The delegation visited the "Natzaret Fondation" specialized in taking care of minors in situations of exclusion.

A fact-finding visit to France (Hauts de France region) was organised from 23 to 25 May 2022, to examine aspects related to safe and secure parking areas in the EU, raised in Petition No. 0549/2021. In order to acquire first-hand knowledge of the challenging security and safety

situation of truck drivers, the members of the delegation met with the representatives of the gendarmerie of the Somme department, with petitioners. The delegation then proceeded to do field visits to see secure parking areas for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and to get an insight on how they operate and what challenges they face. The delegation also met with stakeholders, namely the secure parking organisation that conducts the audits, the motorway and parking operators and their national association. On the last day, the delegation visited the site where a truck driver was murdered and met with the leading state prosecutor of the region who is in charge of this case.

From Tuesday 14 June to Thursday 16 June, two Members of the Committee on Petitions participated in a joint ad hoc EMPL, LIBE and PETI delegation to attend the 15th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD COSP) that took place at the United Nations Headquarters, New York. The main goal of the delegation, which travelled to the Conference as part of the official EU delegation, was to attend the 15th session of the CRPD COSP (the main and the side events) as part of its monitoring functions as one of the members of the EU CRPD Framework, while at the same time voicing the Parliament's commitment to a full implementation of the CRPD. The members also took part in a series of bilateral and multilateral meetings with representatives of the civil society, high-ranking UN officials, diplomats and other interlocutors, where they exchanged views and discussed possible ways to better implement the CRPD and advance the rights of persons with disabilities within the Union and worldwide.

A delegation of the PETI Committee conducted a fact-finding visit in Washington DC from 18 to 22 July. The aim of the visit was to raise awareness and discuss about the impact of the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) on EU citizens and to hold an exchange of views with tax officials, Senators and Representatives in Congress and stakeholders to find concrete solutions for the problems of the numerous EU citizens and their family members impacted by the extraterritorial application of citizenship-based taxation. The fact-finding visit was a follow-up of Petitions Nos 1088/2016, 1470/2020, 0323/2021 and 0394/2021 relating to the effects of FATCA on EU citizens, especially those with dual EU-US nationality, including difficulties for US residents in the European Union to access some financial services and alleged infringements of EU rights and exemptions from some consumer protection legislation.

From 19 to 21 September 2022 the Committee on Petitions organised a Fact-finding visit to Poland. This mission was planned to take place in 2020, but was postponed due to travel restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic. Its aim was to follow-up on petitions concerning alleged breaches of EU environmental law in the primeval forest in Białowieża, which is protected under Natura 2000. It also aimed at following-up on petitions on access to education for disabled pupils in Poland. The PETI delegation travelled to Warsaw to meet the Vice Minister of Education and the Vice Minister of Environment, as well as the petitioners, NGOs and experts. Two field visits took place, one in an 'inclusive' school in Warsaw and another at the Białowieża forest, in order to discuss with the forest management and local authorities.

The last fact-finding visit of 2022 took place in Germany, from 3 to 4 November. This visit to a German Youth Welfare Office (Jugendamt) initially approved for 2020, had been postponed twice due to the spread of COVID-19. Many petitions submitted to the Committee concern cross-border family matters and the mission enabled Members to gain a better understanding of the German judicial system and the role of the "Jugendamt" (Youth Welfare Office) on these issues. Members had exchanges of views with petitioners and with representatives of ministries,

courts as well as youth welfare offices.

Public Hearings

In 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised six public hearings, partly jointly with other parliamentary committees. The public hearings covered a wide range of subjects raised in petitions.

On 15 March 2022, the Committee on Petitions held, jointly with the Committee on Legal Affairs, a Public Hearing on “EU Green Prosecutor - a common toolbox for fighting environmental crime”. The committee receives multiple petitions on man-made environmental issues which often point at the lack of efficiency and capacity of national authorities for detecting, investigation and prosecution of environmental crime. As revealed in petitions received, environmental crime jeopardises the EU Green Deal objectives, both in terms of negative environmental effects, and in terms of financial losses. It is associated with money laundering, corruption, forgery, trafficking, physical violence and murder, extending the effects far beyond the damage to the habitat. The hearing therefore explored the shortcomings and challenges in the enforcement of EU environmental criminal law on the basis of petitions received, as well as new tools to tackle environmental crime, including the possible creation of a European Green Prosecutor Office. In the first panel on current challenges in combating environmental crime in the EU, two speakers from the European Environmental Bureau explored the shortcomings and challenges in the enforcement of EU environmental criminal law on the basis of petitions received. A representative of Europol then discussed concrete examples of cross-border investigations to tackle environmental crime and the challenges in the relations with national authorities. The second panel dealt with new tools to tackle environmental crime. The European Commission presented its proposal for a new directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law and the French European Public Prosecutor shared his views on the possible creation of a European Green Prosecutor Office. This hearing contributed to prepare the committee in its work on drafting the opinion on the above-mentioned proposal for an environmental crime directive.

On 20 April 2022, the Committee held a Public hearing on “Cultural and Linguistic diversity in the EU”. A first panel focused on the promotion of European cultural and linguistic diversity within the EU legal framework. The second panel 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.

On 15 June 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised a public hearing on “Social and environmental impacts of renewable energies in Europe”. In the context of the Ukraine crisis and the political framework (energy sovereignty, European Green Deal and the Renewable Energy Directive revision), this public hearing focused on how renewable energies could replace the current electricity generation mix. It also tackled the need for environmental and social considerations to achieve public acceptance and to avoid rejection and putting the energy transition at risk. This hearing provided a structured response to the different petitions received so far by the committee: Petitions n° 0128-21, 1178-2020, 0441-2021, 0148-21, 0232-21, 0306-21, 0446-21, 0447-21 and 0482-21.

On 15 June 2022, a hearing on “The United Kingdom and Erasmus+” was held by the Committee on Culture and Education in association with the Committee on Petitions. The hearing assessed the impact of the UK's decision to withdraw from Erasmus+ on higher

education institutions and their students.

In the aftermath of the International Day of Mental Health of October 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised on 25 October 2022 a public hearing on “Challenges for mental health of new generation across EU”. This public hearing assessed the situation of children and youth in the field of mental health as childhood and adolescence are a time of special sensitivity. The EP Coordinator on Children’s Rights, Ms Ewa Kopacz, gave an overview of the mental health situation among young people in Europe. DG SANTE explained the key points of the Commission’s action and three experts provided relevant information on the following topics: the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children and young people, the challenges for mental health, in particular in education and at work, mental health conditions and human rights violations, discrimination and stigma, as well as the new challenges related to social media. This hearing provided a forum for exchanges on the issues raised by the different petitions received by the Committee, e.g. petitions 0956/2018, 1186/2018, 1205/2020, and 1553/2020.

On 1 December 2022, the Committee on Petitions held a public hearing entitled 'Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation', in association with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Legal Affairs. The hearing dealt with the legal difficulties that rainbow families encounter in their daily lives in Member States, de facto or de jure, and assessed the situation relating to the mutual recognition of parenthood and marriages, as well as questions of child custody. A first panel focused on the question of the equal treatment of LGBTI persons in the EU. The second panel addressed the question of the freedom of movement for same-sex couples and rainbow families in the EU. The Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, underlined that the EU Equality Strategy proposes to extend the list of EU crimes to cover hate crime, including homophobic hate speech.

Workshop

In 2022, the Committee on Petitions organised two workshops covering subject-matters raised in petitions.

On 10 October 2022, the Committee on Petitions held a Workshop on “Transparency and citizen engagement in the fight against corruption”. This workshop focused on transparency and disclosure policies, preventing corruption and promoting integrity in Europe, as well as the role of citizens and civil society in the fight against corruption.

On 30 November 2022, the Committee hosted the Annual Workshop on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This year, the workshop focused on 'Disability Assessment, Mutual Recognition and the EU Disability Card', dealing with the obstacles reported in petitions by persons with disabilities, when they move across the EU. The Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, presented the flagship initiative of the Commission for the introduction of a European disability card, which will facilitate the free movement of persons with disabilities. Members discussed the challenges linked to harmonisation and the mutual recognition of disability status by Member States, in order to guarantee the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities in Europe.

Studies

In 2022, the committee heard the presentations of the following studies commissioned by the

Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at its request:

- Study on “Monitoring of nitrogen in water in the EU - Legal framework, effects of nitrate, design principles, effectiveness and future developments”, presented by Ms Susanne WUIJTS, National Institute for Public Health and the Environment and Utrecht University, Centre for Water, Oceans and Sustainability Law) on 25 October 2022;

- Study on “Disability assessment, mutual recognition and the EU disability card - progress and opportunities”, presented by Mark PRIESTLEY, Professor of Disability Policy, University of Leeds, during the annual workshop on the rights of persons with disabilities on 30 November 2022. This study examines the progress made on mutual recognition of disability status, and the challenges this presents. Citizens' petitions raise concerns about the fact that there are different definitions and practices of disability assessment, among the Member States and in different policy fields and stress the need for mutual recognition. Harmonising assessment is difficult but common entry points are possible. The EU Disability Card provides an administrative model for mutual recognition.

Key issues

▪ *External relations*

It is worth noting the increase in 2022 in the number of petitions on external relations issues. This rise is in great part due to a high number of petitions submitted on issues related to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. They concern security, but also humanitarian aid, sanctions, security of food supply, military and financial support to Ukraine, conflict resolution, visa policy, energy supply, the integration of Ukraine in the EU.

▪ *Fundamental Rights*

Still in 2022, the committee received a high number of petitions on fundamental rights, including on the impact of mandatory measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 on the rule of law and democracy.

In addition, the Committee paid paramount attention to sexual rights and freedoms. In this respect, it examined a series of petitions on the fundamental rights of LGBT-EU citizens. In particular, a public hearing on 'Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation' addressed different forms of discrimination of LGBTI persons in some Member States after the committee received several petitions that concern cases of LGBTI-free zones or attacks on LGBTI-rights in some Member States.

The committee adopted on 21 April 2022 an opinion *on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union – annual report for the years 2020-2021*.

Moreover, on 15 March 2022, the committee adopted *an opinion on the Commission's 2021 Rule of law report*.

▪ *Environmental issues*

In 2022, environmental issues remained high in citizens' concerns and the committee paid paramount attention to them. The protection of the environment was discussed in all committee meetings, on the basis of petitions. Topics such as noise pollution, including the environmental impact of wind farms and wind turbines, mining activities, air pollution and air quality and waste management were debated in committee. The committee also examined alleged infringement of the EU legislation on several subject matters such as pesticides, the creation of supplementary reserves for agricultural irrigation, deterioration of conditions in the Doñana National Park, on the environmental impact of the planned artificial island/project, on the allegedly illegal authorization of electricity installations from renewable energies.

In addition, the committee held fact-finding visits to the Mar Menor (Spain) in relation to several petitions that raised the issue of the deterioration of the natural area of Mar Menor and to the primeval forest in Białowieża (Poland) to follow-up on petitions concerning alleged breaches of EU environmental law. It also discussed extensively, during a public hearing, the setting-up of an EU Green Prosecutor, the social and environmental impacts of renewable energies.

The committee also focused on illegal logging during a fact-finding visit to Poland as well as through the tabling of an oral question and a motion for a resolution.

- *Disability issues*

The Committee on Petitions plays a specific protection role as regards compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) within the policymaking and legislative actions at EU level. Within this responsibility, the committee deals with petitions on disability issues. It is worth stressing that in 2022 the number of petitions on disability (28) increased in comparison with 2020 and 2021 (20 in 2020 and 13 in 2021). In 2022, the committee continued examining petitions on disability revealing that the main challenges remain discrimination, access to education and employment as well as inclusion. Special attention was given by the committee to Petition No 0070/2022 on the abolition of sheltered workshops, Petition No 0226/2021 on EU-wide introduction of laws to promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities, Petition No 1135/2021 on improvements to the voting conditions in the EU, in particular for elderly persons and persons with disabilities as well as on Petition No 1246/2021 on the use of the Dyslexie font for all EU documents and other media.

From Tuesday 14 June to Thursday 16 June, the Committee on Petitions took part in the EU delegation which attended the 15th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD COSP) that took place at the United Nations Headquarters, New York. The main goal of the delegation was to attend the Conference as part of its monitoring functions as one of the members of the EU CRPD Framework. It gave Parliament, and the committee the opportunity to voice the Parliament's commitment to a full implementation of the CRPD and to exchange views and discussed possible ways to better implement the CRPD and improve the rights of persons with disabilities within the Union and worldwide.

Although the EU signed the UN CRPD in 2009, discrimination in the field of education, employment, transport, still remain to be tackled. The Committee on Petitions adopted an Opinion at its meeting of 13-14 July 2022 on '*Towards equal rights for people with disabilities*'. Taking stock of the lessons to be learnt from the petitions addressed to the Parliament in this area, the committee contributed with an opinion to a Parliament's resolution which reaffirms the need to fully implement the CRPD in the EU, combat discrimination against people with disabilities, and to propose concrete measures to ensure their equal participation in social and political life.

Finally, on 30 November 2022, the Committee hosted the Annual Workshop on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, focussing on 'Disability Assessment, Mutual Recognition and the EU Disability Card'. The workshop dealt with the obstacles reported in petitions by persons with disabilities, when they move across the EU and was based on the study on "Disability assessment, mutual recognition and the EU disability card - progress and opportunities" (see above, sub-sections on workshop and studies).

Reports, Motions for Resolutions and Opinions

Despite the limited timeslots for committee meetings, the Committee on Petitions worked intensely to adopt a considerable number of parliamentary files.

The committee adopted the following reports:

- Report on Engaging with citizens: the right to petition, the right to refer to the European Ombudsman and the European Citizens' Initiative (2020/2275(INI)) - adopted on 26-27 January 2022;
- Report on EU Citizenship Report 2020 - Empowering citizens and protecting their rights (2021/2099(INI)) - adopted on 26-27 January 2022;
- Report of the fact-finding visit to Vitoria and Madrid, Spain "379 unsolved cases of murders perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA in Spain" 3-5 November 2021 - adopted on 20-21 April 2022;
- Report under Rule 227(7) on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions in 2021, Rapporteur: Lorant Vincze (EPP) - adopted 24-25 October 2022;
- Report of the fact-finding visit to the Mar Menor (Murcia) Spain from 23 to 25 February 2022, in relation to the environmental deterioration of Mar Menor - adopted 24-25 October 2022;
- Report of the fact-finding visit to Spain, Palma de Mallorca 11-13 April 2022 - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022;
- Report of the fact-finding visit to France (Hauts de France region) from 23 to 25 May 2022, to examine aspects related to safe and secure parking areas in the EU, raised in Petition No 0549/2021 - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022.

In addition, the committee adopted the following Motions for Resolutions:

- Short Motion for Resolution on Nitrate directives, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (Chair) - adopted on 14-15 March 2022;
- Motion for a Resolution on illegal logging in the EU, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat

- (Chair) - adopted on 16-17 May 2022;
- Short Motion for a Resolution on Improving EU regulation on wild and exotic animals to be kept as pets in the European Union through an EU positive list - adopted 24-25 October 2022;
- Short Motion for a Resolution on Digital divide: the social differences created by digitalisation, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (EPP) - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022;
- Short Motion for a Resolution on the creation of a European Capital of Local Trade, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (EPP) - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022.

Also, the committee adopted the following opinions:

- Opinion on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020 (2021/2009(INI)) - adopted on 26-27 January 2022;
- Opinion on the protection of the rights of the child in civil, administrative and family law proceedings (2021/2060(INI)) - adopted on 26-27 January 2022;
- Opinion on Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws (2021/2166(INI)) - adopted on 7 February 2022;
- Opinion on the Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report 2021/2180(INI), Rapporteur: Isabel Benjumea Benjumea (EPP) - adopted on 14-15 March 2022;
- Opinion on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union in 2020 and 2021, Rapporteur: Mario Furore (NI) - adopted on 20-21 April 2022;
- Opinion on 'Towards equal rights for people with disabilities' by 21 votes in favour - adopted on 13-14 July 2022;
- Opinion on Protection of the environment through criminal law and replacing Directive 2008/99/EC, Rapporteur: Vlad Gheorghe (Renew) - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022;
- Opinion on Implementation report on the Agreement on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (EPP) - adopted on 30 November - 1 December 2022.

Finally, the committee adopted the following texts:

- Oral Question on illegal logging in the EU, Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (Chair) - adopted on 16-17 May 2022;
- Amendments to the Budget 2023 - adopted on 13-14 July 2022.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	24.10.2023
Result of final vote	+ : 16 - : 0 0 : 3
Members present for the final vote	Alex Agius Saliba, Marc Angel, Margrete Auken, Alexander Bernhuber, Ryszard Czarnecki, Francesca Donato, Vlad Gheorghe, Peter Jahr, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro, Ana Miranda, Dolors Montserrat, Ulrike Müller, Emil Radev, Loránt Vincze, Michal Wiezik, Tatjana Ždanoka, Kosma Złotowski
Substitutes present for the final vote	Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold, Maite Pagazaurtundúa

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

16	+
NI	Tatjana Ždanoka
PPE	Alexander Bernhuber, Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold, Peter Jahr, Dolors Montserrat, Emil Radev, Loránt Vincze
Renew	Vlad Gheorghe, Ulrike Müller, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, Michal Wiezik
S&D	Alex Agius Saliba, Marc Angel, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro
Verts/ALE	Margrete Auken, Ana Miranda

0	-

3	0
ECR	Ryszard Czarnecki, Kosma Złotowski
NI	Francesca Donato

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention