

QUESTIONS TO THE COORDINATORS FOR ANNUAL REPORT

What is, in your opinion, the main achievement of the PETI Committee in the last 5 years?

The Petitions committee in this legislative period has attempted to make a step forward in providing adequate responses to the citizens in issues of their concern, on a huge variety of subjects. Our committee has provided the deserved dignity too often denied by national authorities to individuals or associations who exercised a responsible European citizenship denouncing possible breaches of EU law in their Member States of residence. Increasingly, as shown by the ever-growing amount of petitions received by the EP yearly, when citizens feel that national authorities do not respect their fundamental rights, do not defend the public interest or do not implement properly the EU law, they turn to the Petitions' committee of the European Parliament. Despite our limited powers to actually adopt concrete measures, in many cases we have fostered concrete reactions by the European Commission and national governments to adequate their laws and ensure their proper implementation in some cases, or to alter the initial plans in many others, for instance concerning the development of projects with an impact on the environment which in its initial design were not complying with the EU directives protecting biodiversity. Furthermore, the many public debates along these five years in our committee have certainly granted visibility from a European perspective to local cases all over the union, which has both encouraged citizens' participation on these causes in their constituencies and contributed to foster European citizenship. I believe nowadays the citizens see the European Parliament's committee on Petitions as a useful tool for democratic control, namely scrutinising the proper implementation of EU-related laws by their national governments.

What, if push comes to shove, would be the star-case you would choose to show PETI's mission and effectiveness?

The main field where in my opinion the committee has contributed to raise awareness and to somehow change, the approach by national authorities and the Commission has been environment and human health. We have been able to stress the importance of the application of a precautionary approach, for instance through injunction mechanisms, and the polluter-pays principle in environmental liability, as emerged out of our conclusions on the fact-finding visit of the chemical pollution in Huelva or our plenary resolution concerning the ILVA steel plant in Taranto. In this sense, it is relevant the tireless work done in the proper implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment directive, ending with a strong concrete contribution with many proposals of strengthening in the latest revision of the directive adopted by the European Parliament. In this task is only fair to acknowledge the determination and good cooperation of both Environment Commissioner Potocnik and the outgoing European Ombudsman Diamandouros, who himself submitted to our committee a Special Report concerning a bad implementation of the EIA directive in the enlargement of the Vienna airport. But confronted with confronted with a choice a single flagship I would highlight the work done in the field of waste management, as a result of many petitions from many different Member States, has been useful in promoting the implementation of waste management plans that foster the upper levels

of the waste hierarchy as set in the waste Framework Directive, overcoming the short-sighted approach of landfilling and incinerating, although there is still a lot of work to do in this field. The origin of such a work, which has been on-going along almost the whole legislative period, was the waste emergency situation in Naples, which unveiled a poor waste management in the whole Campania region. This question motivated two fact-finding visits of our committee in 2010 and 2012, a resolution adopted in plenary on the issue in early 2011, and an own-initiative report on the implementation of the waste management directive adopted in early 2012. The recommendations issued by the Petitions committee have contributed to an improvement of the situation, also due to a change of approach by the local authorities, although many challenges still persist in the region and in others such as Lazio. It is overall a slow process, as it entails a deep cultural change, but it is clearly that the work of the Petitions committee is playing a fundamental role in the steps ahead.

How would you like to see PETI's role develop in the next legislature and what do you think the impact of the new web-portal will be on its activity?

What is at stake in these last months before the end of the legislature and naturally in the new period is ensuring that the work of our committee remains independent of the particular interests of parties in national or regional governments; we must protect the work of our committee from political control and partisan interests. We also must overcome the current narrow-minded interpretation of the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the European Commission, and the role it should play when it comes to ensuring the implementation of EU legislation. We need the Commission to believe more in its primary role as guardian of the treaties when assessing the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, not looking into the pertinent matters only on a formal basis but also entering into the content and the spirit of the EU law. I am convinced that in order to achieve this purpose we can count on the work of the newly elected European Ombudsman, Ms. Emily O'Reilly. I must say I am very satisfied about her election by this Parliament in front of two current MEPs, as we secured the political independence of the position, and therefore a greater cooperation in ensuring good administration by the European institutions on a broader sense. In terms of content, it appears clear that the crisis has generated and unveiled critical social situations in many Member States, and it is important that the Petitions committee of the European Parliament, as the committee of the citizens' concerns, is sensitive enough towards the cases that we receive and we do our best to contribute in finding effective solutions. Moreover, in the next legislature I would like the PETI committee to continue being a space generating European citizenship. Not only as restoring dignity by giving voice to engaged citizens who are often left without effective possibilities of redress on the matters they legitimately raise, but furthermore deepening the European citizenship conception. In my opinion we can contribute to create a European demos by providing a space for European wide debates out of specific local cases, which often with many present similarities to others across the union. It is therefore sensitive to generate the conditions for a proper socialization of these realities. I believe the new web-portal will become a very useful interactive tool to share successful experiences, technical knowledge and successful approach in resolving real problems.