

'Petitions 1996-1997: the voice of the citizens' from Tribune pour l'Europe

Caption: Petitions: their evolution, a definition, and how they are used.

Source: Tribune pour l'Europe. Informations du Parlement européen. Juin 1997, n° 6. [s.l.]. ISSN 0255 - 8815. "Pétitions: 1996 - 1997", p. 1.

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Petitions 1996-1997: the voice of the citizens

Since its creation in 1987, the Committee on Petitions has received some 10 000 petitions expressing the points of view, the opinions or the wishes of more than 10 million signatories. A petition is understood to be any complaint, consultation, request for intervention or reaction to European Parliament resolutions or to decisions taken by other Community institutions or bodies, submitted by individuals or associations. From 16 March 1996 to 10 March 1997, the Committee on Petitions received 1 164 petitions compared with 1 169 the previous year. This reduction may be explained by the appointment of an Ombudsman, with whom the Committee on Petitions has an excellent working relationship. Twenty-one petitions carried more than 1 000 signatures, representing a total of 4 340 000 signatures. Of this total, five carried more than 10 000 signatures. However, the vast majority of petitions were submitted by individual petitioners. A fundamental right conferred by the Treaties, petitions allow public opinion on matters of Community policy to be taken into account and shortcomings in Community legislation, together with instances of non-application or non-transposition of Community law in the Member States to be uncovered. The European Parliament undertakes to provide an appropriate response to petitions as quickly as possible, and to implement, together with the European Commission, more efficient working procedures (upgrading and coordinating existing computer systems, making computerised information available to the European Union institutions and to the citizens via the Internet, etc.). Parliament is calling for regular and frequent publicity on the right to petition, the means of referral, the examination of petitions as well as on important petitions.

Any European Union citizen and any natural or legal person residing or having its headquarters in a Member State may, either individually or in association with other persons, submit a petition to the European Parliament on a subject which relates to the sphere of activities of the European Union and which concerns them directly. Petitions must bear the name, status, nationality and place of residence of each signatory. They must be written in one of the official languages of the European Union (Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish). Petitions received by the President of the European Parliament are forwarded to the Committee on Petitions. The Committee checks whether the subject of the petitions falls within the remit of the Community. If this is the case, the petition is declared admissible and becomes the subject of a detailed investigation. Following this investigation, the Committee on Petitions decides on what type of action should be taken.