Thursday 17 December 2020

P9_TA(2020)0383

Deliberations of the Committee on Petitions 2019

European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on the outcome of the Committee on Petitions' deliberations during 2019 (2020/2044(INI))

(2021/C 445/20)

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 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 (A9-0230/2020),

A. whereas following the European elections which took place from 23 to 26 May 2019 and the constitution of the new Parliament on 2 July 2019, the Committee on Petitions held its constitutive meeting on 10 July 2019;

B. whereas in 2019 Parliament received 1 357 petitions, which represents an increase of 11,23 % on the 1 220 petitions submitted in 2018 and reveals that despite the European election recess period, EU citizens and residents continued to exercise their right to petition;

C. whereas in 2019 the number of users supporting one or more petitions on Parliament's Petitions Web Portal increased as compared to 2018 and reached a total of 28 075; whereas the number of clicks in support of petitions was 31 679;

D. whereas of the petitions submitted in 2019, 41 were co-signed by one or more citizens, 8 by more than 100 citizens and 3 by more than 10 000 citizens;

E. whereas the number of petitions remained modest in relation to the total population of the EU; whereas the overall number of petitions received indicates that greater efforts and appropriate measures are necessary to raise citizens' awareness on the right to petition; whereas citizens in exercising the right to petition expect that the EU institutions will provide added value in finding a solution to their problems;

F. whereas of the 1 357 petitions submitted in 2019, 938 were declared admissible, 406 were declared inadmissible and 13 were withdrawn; whereas the relatively high percentage (30 %) of inadmissible petitions in 2019 reveals that there is still a widespread lack of clarity about the EU's fields of activity; whereas in this sense, it is necessary to address this problem with information campaigns dedicated to clarifying the competences of the Union as well as the procedure for submitting petitions to the European Parliament;

G. 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 EU citizens or residents directly affected by matters falling within the European Union's fields of activity;

H. whereas the right to petition the European Parliament is one of the fundamental rights of EU citizens; whereas the right to petition offers EU citizens and residents an open, democratic and transparent mechanism for addressing their elected representatives directly, and is therefore an important element of active citizens' participation in the EU's fields of activity;

I. whereas democratic governance based on transparency, effective protection of fundamental rights and the inclusion of EU citizens' requests in the EU political agenda are needed in order to increase citizens' direct participation and to improve the quality of the EU decision-making process; whereas a democratic and transparent governance should be also considered a cornerstone for enhancing the effectiveness and citizen-friendliness of the work of the Committee on Petitions;

J. whereas the right to petition should enhance Parliament's responsiveness to complaints and concerns relating to respect for EU fundamental rights and compliance with EU legislation in the Member States; whereas petitions are, among other things, a very useful source of information on instances of misapplication or breaches of EU law; whereas petitions enable Parliament and other EU institutions to assess the transposition and application of EU law and its impact on EU citizens and residents, and to detect shortcomings and inconsistencies of EU law undermining the goal of ensuring full protection of citizens' fundamental rights;

K. whereas citizens usually turn to the Committee on Petitions as a last resort when other bodies and institutions are deemed to be unable to resolve their concerns;

L. 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 in its activities;

M. whereas each petition is carefully examined by the Committee on Petitions; whereas each petitioner has the right to receive a reply and information on the decision on admissibility and follow-up actions taken by the committee, within a reasonable period of time and in their own language or in the language used in the petition;

N. whereas the activities of the Committee on Petitions are based on the input and contributions received from petitioners; whereas the information provided by the petitioners along with the expertise delivered by the Commission, the Member States and other bodies are essential for the work of the committee; whereas admissible petitions often provide valuable input for the work of other parliamentary committees and intergroups;

O. whereas a considerable number of petitions are discussed publicly in meetings of the Committee on Petitions; whereas petitioners are frequently invited to present their petitions and play a full part in the discussion, thereby contributing actively to the work of the committee; whereas in 2019, the Committee on Petitions held 9 ordinary committee meetings, where 250 petitions were discussed with 239 petitioners present, while 126 petitioners participated actively by taking the floor; whereas the role of the committee in empowering European citizens is an important contribution to reinforcing the image and authority of Parliament;

P. whereas the main subjects of concern raised in petitions submitted in 2019 pertained to environmental matters (in particular, issues concerning pollution, protection and preservation and waste management), fundamental rights (notably the rights of the child, voting rights and EU citizens' rights, in particular in the context of Brexit), constitutional affairs (in particular questions related to the European elections and to the UK's withdrawal from the EU), health (in particular issues relating to healthcare and to the impact of hazards and toxic substances), transport (notably air and rail passengers' rights, cross-national connections and seasonal time changes), the internal market (in particular questions relating to consumers' rights and freedom of movement of persons), employment (in particular access to the job market and precarious contracts), and culture and education (in particular access to education for children with disabilities and harassment at school), in addition to many other areas of activity;

Q. whereas 73,9 % of the petitions received (1 003 petitions) in 2019 were submitted via Parliament's Petitions Web Portal, as compared to 70,7 % (863 petitions) in 2018;

R. whereas in 2019 the Petitions Web Portal was further developed into a responsive web design version, compliant with the new 'look and feel' of the European Parliament's website (Europarl); whereas it has therefore become more user-friendly and accessible for citizens, who can now use it on any device, optimised to apply the European standard EN 301 549; whereas it is also partially compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 level AA standard; whereas the new privacy statement has been uploaded in all language versions in the email templates and

on the registration page, and audio Captcha for registration of user accounts has been enabled; whereas the Petitions Web Portal and ePetition have been further integrated by improving their synchronisation mechanism; whereas a large number of individual support requests have been handled successfully;

S. whereas it should be noted that owing to the European election recess period, no fact-finding visits took place for petitions for which an inquiry was ongoing during 2019; whereas the committee carried out the follow-up assessments of a number of previous fact-finding visits and adopted the reports on two which took place in 2018; whereas a number of fact-finding visits have been scheduled for 2020;

T. whereas the Committee on Petitions considers the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to be an important instrument of participatory democracy, which enables citizens to become actively involved in shaping the Union's policies and legislation; whereas there has been a lack of effective communication concerning the ECI;

U. whereas the media play a key role in any democratic system and provide more transparency to the process of the Committee on Petitions; whereas a quality press is an essential element for the whole European Union; whereas there is confusion in some European media as regards the role and powers of the Committee on Petitions;

V. whereas under the Rules of Procedure, the Committee on Petitions is responsible for relations with the European Ombudsman, who investigates complaints of maladministration within the institutions and bodies of the European Union; whereas in 2019 the Committee on Petitions played a key role in the organisation of the election of the European Ombudsman by holding a public hearing of the candidates under Rule 231 of the Rules of Procedure; whereas on 18 December 2019 Emily O'Reilly was re-elected European Ombudsman for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term;

W. whereas its resolution of 17 January 2019 on the Ombudsman's strategic inquiry OI/2/2017 on the transparency of legislative discussions in the preparatory bodies of the Council of the EU [1] expressed support for the Ombudsman in her inquiry and called on the Council to take all measures necessary to implement as swiftly as possible the recommendations of the Ombudsman; whereas the Council has not responded either to the Ombudsman or to Parliament's resolution, and has not taken any steps towards implementation;

X. whereas in 2019 the relations between the Committee on Petitions and the European Ombudsman were further strengthened, as demonstrated by the active participation of the Ombudsman in the meetings of the committee; whereas following its resolution of 12 February 2019 on Regulations and general conditions governing the performance of the Ombudsman's duties [2], Emily O'Reilly took part in the committee's meeting of 2 April 2019 for an exchange of views on her proposed new prerogatives, and presented her Annual Report for 2018 to the Committee on Petitions at its meeting on 4 September 2019;

Y. 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 of 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;

Z. whereas the activities of the Petitions Network should be improved by ensuring a more effective cooperation among committees dealing with petitions; whereas the Petitions Network should strengthen the dialogue and collaboration with the Commission and other EU institutions aiming at guaranteeing that issues raised by citizens in petitions are adequately addressed and resolved;

AA. whereas in her political guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024, President von der Leyen committed to respond with a legislative act to resolutions of Parliament based on Article 225 TFEU, with a view to giving Parliament a stronger role in initiating EU legislation; whereas the Committee on Petitions should play a strategic role in creating a direct connection between Parliament's right of legislative initiative and the issues raised by citizens through petitions;

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[1] OJ C 411, 27.11.2020, p. 149.
[2] OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 182.

1. Recalls that the Committee on Petitions, as the only committee directly communicating with the citizens, must enhance its key role in defending and promoting the rights of EU citizens and residents within the committee's competences, ensuring that petitioners' concerns and complaints are examined in timely fashion and resolved, through an open, democratic, agile and transparent petition process and a strengthened cooperation and dialogue with other EU institutions and national, regional and local authorities, and by avoiding a biased or politicised response to the petitioners;

2. Regrets that petitioners are still not sufficiently informed about the grounds for declaring a petition inadmissible; emphasises the importance of a continuous information campaign and public debate on the Union's fields of activity aimed at raising public awareness of the right to petition the European Parliament, providing clearer and more detailed information about the powers of the EU; stresses the need to adopt, as a matter of urgency, all necessary measures in order to implement a democratic EU governance based on transparency, enhanced protection of fundamental rights, and direct citizens' inclusion in the EU decision-making processes; considers it essential to find a way of better promoting the right to petition and making citizens aware of this right; proposes that information campaigns in the European Union be stepped up in order to ensure that EU citizens have better knowledge of the EU's competences and clarify the perception of the role of the Committee on Petitions in public opinion;

3. Calls for a more active press and communications service and a more active social media presence, in order to enhance the visibility of the work of the committee as well as to increase its responsiveness to public concerns and EU debates, by also highlighting those cases and success stories in which an issue raised by a petitioner was resolved with the support of the Committee on Petitions;

4. Proposes to carry out campaigns and outreach events targeting journalists and the media in order to prevent vague information and thus improve the relationship between the Committee on Petitions and the media; underlines that the media play a key role in reaching out to European citizens concerning the day-to-day work of the Committee on Petitions and can contribute through their activities to improving European citizens' knowledge of the work of the Committee on Petitions; stresses that it is the EU's task to encourage the provision to European citizens of accurate information;

5. Points out that petitions offer the opportunity to the European Parliament and other EU institutions to maintain a direct dialogue with EU citizens and legal residents who are affected by misapplication or breaches of EU law or by inconsistencies in EU legislation, and to fix problems which have been detected; welcomes, therefore, the fact that petitions are the entrance door of citizens in the European institutions; stresses the need for enhanced cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and lead committees, the EU institutions and national, regional and local authorities, on inquiries or proposals regarding implementation of and compliance with EU law;

6. Considers that in order to ensure that petitions are passed to the relevant and competent authorities, it is necessary to improve cooperation with national parliaments, Member State governments, relevant national institutions and Ombudsmen;

7. Recalls that petitions provide a valuable contribution to the Commission's role as guardian of the Treaties; reiterates that good cooperation between the Committee on Petitions and the Commission is crucial and that faster answers from the Commission are essential in the process of handling petitions; welcomes, in this regard, the commitment made by the Commission Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, Maroš Šefčovič, during his hearing as commissioner-designate, to further improve the Commission's handling of petitions and to ensure the submission of accurate answers within the three-month deadline; reiterates its call on the Commission to ensure transparency and access to documents in the framework of the EU Pilot procedures in relation to petitions received, and of the EU Pilot and infringement procedures that have already been concluded;

8. Calls on the Commission to commit to a more active involvement with 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;

9. Considers that the Commission should not place the responsibility to act on a petitioner alone when there is a problem detected with the application or breach of EU law; believes that the Commission must check whether national authorities are taking steps to solve the problem mentioned in the petition and must be ready to intervene in case of inefficiency of actions of national authorities;

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10. Stresses that transparency and public access to the documents of all EU institutions, including the Council, should be the rule in order to ensure the highest level of protection of the democratic rights of citizens; points out that the current Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 ([3]) no longer reflects the actual situation; calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for a recast of the 2001 Regulation, with a view to enhancing transparency and accountability by promoting good administrative practice;

11. Notes that the Committee on Petitions frequently receives complaints about rule of law violations by certain authorities; recalls that ensuring the effective, equal and uniform application of EU law is crucial for upholding the rule of law, which is one of the founding values of the Union and its Member States, pursuant to Article 2 TEU; while respecting the subsidiarity principle, calls on the Commission to respect the commitments made in its communication of 17 July 2019 entitled 'Strengthening the rule of law within the Union: A blueprint for action' (COM(2019)0343), in order to promote a culture of respect for the rule of law, reinforce cooperation with national authorities, and ensure an effective common response to actual threats within the Union;

12. Urges the Commission to take steps to ensure that the interpretation of the scope of Article 51 is as coherent and broad as possible; recalls that the expectations of most petitioners in relation to the rights conferred on them by the Charter are high and go beyond their current scope of application;

13. Believes that cooperation with other committees of Parliament is essential for the comprehensive treatment of petitions; notes that in 2019, 65 petitions were sent to other committees for opinion and 351 for information, and that 38 opinions and 9 acknowledgements of taking petitions into consideration in their work were received from other committees; also notes that in 2018, 47 petitions were sent to other committees for opinion and 660 for information, and that 30 opinions and 38 acknowledgements of taking petitions into consideration in their work were received from other committees; recalls that petitioners are informed of decisions to request opinions from other committees for the treatment of their petitions; therefore underlines the importance of the contribution of other committees in enabling Parliament to respond more swiftly and efficiently to citizens' concerns;

14. Trusts that the petitions network is a useful tool for raising awareness of the issues brought up in petitions and facilitating the treatment of petitions in other committees to which they are sent for opinion or for information; notes that there is a need for ensuring an adequate follow-up of petitions in parliamentary and legislative work; stresses that the petitions network could be considered as a strategic tool to foster the right of legislative initiative of the European Parliament enshrined in Article 225 TFEU, thus addressing the shortcomings and inconsistencies of EU law highlighted in petitions in order to ensure full protection of citizens' rights; believes that regular meetings of the petitions network are key for enhancing cooperation between parliamentary committees through exchange of information and sharing of best practices among the network members; stresses that a closer liaison between the committees may also improve efficiency as regards planning hearings and parliamentary studies on the same subjects; advocates drafting a mechanism to enable the Committee on Petitions to be directly involved in the legislative process;

15. Draws attention to the key annual reports adopted by the Committee on Petitions in 2019, notably the Annual Report on the Committee on Petitions' activities in 2018 ([4]) and the Annual Report on the European Ombudsman's work in 2018 ([5]);

16. Notes that the Committee on Petitions has expressed its opinion on important issues raised in petitions by contributing to parliamentary and legislative reports, notably on the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in the EU institutional framework ([6]) and on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on discontinuing seasonal changes of time and repealing Directive 2000/84/EC ([7]);

17. Underlines that many petitions have led to legislative or political action, whether in the form of reports or motions for resolutions, or of preliminary rulings or infringement procedures;

([3]) Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43).
([4]) Report adopted on 22 January 2019.
([5]) Report adopted on 12 November 2019.
([6]) Opinion adopted on 21 January 2019.
([7]) Opinion adopted on 20 February 2019.

18. Takes note that the environment was the main area of concern for petitioners in 2019; points in this regard to the motion for a resolution pursuant to Rule 227(2) on waste management, adopted on 21 March 2019 by the Committee on Petitions and on 4 April 2019 in plenary ([8]); stresses that waste management is one of the main global socio-economic and environmental challenges, and reiterates its call to maximise prevention, reuse, separate collection and recycling with a view to boosting the transition towards a circular economy; reiterates its call on the Commission to use the full potential of the early warning system as laid down in the revised waste directives; draws attention to the final report of the fact-finding visit to Valledora (Italy), adopted on 11 April 2019, and calls on the competent national, regional and local authorities to ensure the full and consistent implementation of all recommendations contained therein;

19. Draws attention to the hearing on 'Climate Change Denial' which the Committee on Petitions held on 21 March 2019 jointly with the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety; believes that the Committee on Petitions must continue to counter climate denialism, including by promoting the adoption of effective and dissuasive sanctions against interest groups lobbying the EU institutions whose activities are directly or indirectly related to climate change denial; stresses that it is of paramount importance to ensure that the future work of the Committee on Petitions guarantees a specific focus on climate change with a view to strengthening the overall activities of the EU institutions aimed at consistently implementing the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement;

20. Points to the studies on 'Cross-border nuclear safety, liability and cooperation in the European Union' and 'Endocrine Disruptors: From Scientific Evidence to Human Health Protection', which the Committee on Petitions commissioned as a follow-up to a significant number of petitions raising concerns over these matters and which were presented at its meetings on 20 February 2019 and on 2 April 2019; regrets the fact that environmental rules are not always correctly implemented in the Member States, as described in numerous petitions; stresses the importance of delivering on EU citizens' expectations on the protection of the environment, and therefore urges the Commission, together with the Member States, to ensure the correct implementation of EU legislation in this field; is convinced that the Commission must step up its activities to make sure that environmental assessments conducted by Member States for the authorisation of infrastructure projects concerning which petitioners have highlighted serious risks for human health and the environment are based on accurate and comprehensive analyses in full compliance with EU law;

21. Is seriously concerned about the severe health damage suffered by citizens — the highest negative impact being registered among children — who live in areas where huge amounts of carcinogenic substances are produced; strongly believes that the Commission must make full use of and consistently implement the provisions of Annex XIV to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 (REACH) regarding substances subject to authorisation as being carcinogenic, persistent and bio-accumulative, ensuring their substitution by non-toxic alternative substances, including by promoting industrial processes with this in view;

22. Draws attention to the large number of petitions on Brexit submitted in 2019, mostly calling for the protection of EU citizens' rights before and after Brexit; welcomes the excellent work done by the Committee on Petitions, which by giving voice to the concerns raised by these petitioners contributed to ensuring that citizens' rights remained one of Parliament's main priorities in the Brexit negotiations; stresses that there are many citizens — both in the EU and in the United Kingdom — who, in view of the uncertainty of a no-deal Brexit, have turned to the Committee on Petitions because of the fear of seeing their rights endangered due to the lack of agreement; points out that in order to preserve the rights enjoyed by EU citizens resident in a Member State other than their own, it can be helpful to have appropriate legislation in case the Member State changes its status vis-à-vis the EU;

23. Recalls the specific role of protection 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 relating to disabilities; notes that the number of petitions on disability decreased in 2019 in comparison with the previous year; notes however, that accessibility and discrimination remain among the main challenges faced by persons with disabilities; recalls that in 2019 the Committee on Petitions paid specific attention to the discussion of petitions on inclusive education for disabled children; calls for a new skills agenda, to be positioned at the very heart of Europe, and for concrete proposals on how to foster inclusiveness and facilitate the recognition and portability of skills within Europe;

([8]) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0338.

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24. Welcomes the fact that in 2019 the Committee on Petitions dealt with citizens' concerns regarding transparency and accountability of the EU institutions, as raised in several petitions; recalls in this regard that at its meeting of 2 April 2019 the committee hosted a workshop on 'Conflicts of Interest — Integrity, Accountability and Transparency in the EU institutions and agencies', which examined the achievements reached in relation to conflicts of interest, integrity, accountability, transparency, codes of conduct and revolving doors in the EU institutions and agencies; points to the important contribution made to the debate by the European Ombudsman, who gave a keynote speech on achievements and challenges for EU institutions;

25. Calls for the swift adoption of legal reforms aimed at dealing with lack of transparency of the EU decision-making process, conflicts of interest, and all ethical issues at EU level that affect the legislative process in relation to matters raised by citizens through petitions;

26. Draws attention to the majority support that the plenary of Parliament gave to the resolution of 17 January 2019 on the strategic investigation OI/2/2017 of the European Ombudsman on the transparency of legislative discussions in the preparatory bodies of the Council of the European Union ([9]); recalls that the Council, as co-legislator, is an indispensable institution for the citizens of the Union; regrets the fact that numerous Council discussions and meetings still take place behind closed doors; invites the Council to implement a policy of greater transparency in order to improve citizens' trust in public institutions; encourages the Council to publicise certain meetings and documents more widely in order to achieve a better communication with European citizens and with national parliaments;

27. Acknowledges the outcome of the public hearing held by the Committee on Petitions on 12 November 2019 on the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and its extraterritorial impact on EU citizens; deplores the fact that the Commission and Council seem to value international relations with the US more than the rights and interests of EU citizens, particularly in the case of FATCA, and calls on them to assume their responsibility and take immediate and meaningful action in support of the citizens concerned, as called for by Parliament in its resolution of 5 July 2018 on the adverse effects of the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act on EU citizens ([10]);

28. Points to the important ongoing work of the Committee on Petitions aimed at ensuring the protection of animal welfare in the EU, as demonstrated by the significant number of petitions on this topic discussed in its meetings in 2019; believes it is of paramount importance to launch a new EU strategy on animal welfare to bridge all the existing gaps and ensure full and effective protection of animal welfare through a clear and comprehensive legislative framework that is fully in line with the requirements of Article 13 TFEU; draws attention to the public hearing on 'Revaluation of the wolf population in the EU', which the Committee on Petitions held on 5 December 2019 jointly with the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and in association with the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, in order to give voice to citizens' concerns about the legal framework for the protection of the wolf as well as the impact of wolves and other large carnivores such as the brown bear population on the environment and rural communities; emphasises that in the framework of the Habitats Directive large carnivores are protected species in most of the Member States; calls on the Member States to make better use of the tools under the existing EU legislation to address possible conflicts concerning the conservation of protected large carnivores; invites the Commission to present as soon as possible an updated EU guidance on species protection rules in order to achieve a satisfactory coexistence between people and large carnivores in affected areas;

29. Considers it essential that citizens are able to be involved directly in the initiation of legislative proposals; stresses that the ECI is a fundamental instrument for active citizenship and public participation; welcomes the adoption on 17 April 2019 of the new rules for the ECI, which bring a number of structural and technical improvements aimed at making this instrument more user-friendly and accessible and facilitating increased participation of EU citizens in the legislative process of the Union; notes the significant number of new ECIs registered by the Commission in 2019, which shows that citizens are seizing the opportunity to use participatory instruments to have a say in policymaking and lawmaking processes; calls for more dissemination campaigns on the role of the ECI in order to promote the use of this resource by European citizens; regrets that so far the majority of successful ECIs did not end with a legislative proposal by the Commission; encourages the Commission to approach ECIs as openly and responsively as possible in order to make this instrument a real success of European participatory democracy in the eyes of the citizens; therefore calls on the Commission to initiate a legislative proposal on the basis of any successful ECI that was supported by the European Parliament;

([9]) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0045.
([10]) OJ C 118, 8.4.2020, p. 141.

30. Recalls 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 fruitful cooperation with the European Ombudsman, as well as its involvement in the European Network of Ombudsmen; underlines the excellent relations between the European Ombudsman and the Committee on Petitions; notes the key role played by the Committee on Petitions in ensuring that the public hearings of the candidates in the framework of the election procedure for the European Ombudsman in 2019 were conducted in a transparent and efficient manner;

31. Appreciates 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 consistent and effective follow-up to the recommendations of the Ombudsman;

32. Recalls that the Petitions Web Portal is an essential tool for ensuring a smooth, efficient and transparent petition process; welcomes, in this regard, its alignment with the 'look and feel' of the European Parliament's website (Europarl); recalls that since the end of 2017, documents such as agendas, minutes and communications from the Committee on Petitions have been automatically uploaded to the portal, providing citizens with a portal which is more responsive, transparent and accessible; stresses that efforts must be continued to make the portal more accessible to persons with disabilities, including developments which allow petitioners to submit petitions in the EU's national sign languages, in order to ensure that all citizens of the Union can exercise their right to petition the European Parliament as contained in Articles 20 and 24 TFEU and in Article 44 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; suggests ensuring more visibility for the Petitions Web Portal on the European Parliament's website; is of the opinion that the right to petition is directly linked to the institution's activities and deserves a visible and easily accessible place on the EP's website; calls for investigation into how to prevent the use of stolen or fake identities;

33. Underlines that, although the number of people supporting one or more petitions on Parliament's Petitions web portal has increased by comparison with 2018, some petitioners are still reporting technical problems with supporting several petitions;

34. Underlines that the ePetitions instrument is an important database for the Committee on Petitions to function, but calls for the improvement and modernisation of the interface in order to make it easier to use and more accessible;

35. Congratulates the secretariat of the Committee on Petitions for handling petitions efficiently and with great care, in accordance with the committee's guidelines and the petitions lifecycle in the EP administration;

36. 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, national Ombudsmen or similar competent bodies.