



## Building bridges: providing citizens with information they request

This quarterly review gives information compiled by the [Citizens' Enquiry Service](#) (CITES) garnered directly from citizens through the correspondence sent to the European Parliament which is received and treated by the Unit. CITES aims to give citizens, when asked, information about the EP, how it works and how legislation is formulated.

We provide one of the bridges between citizens and their representatives across which they can express themselves in writing and receive replies. The purpose of the review is to give an insight into the issues that were preoccupying citizens who wrote to our Unit.



The Hungarian Parliament © European Union, 2013

## Hungary in the spotlight

Political developments in Hungary, the EP's reaction to them, and a newspaper misquoting a statement by President Schulz all triggered citizens to write to the European Parliament and express a variety of views on the situation in the country.

Letters received at the beginning of this second quarter of 2013 predominantly voiced concerns about the constitutional changes the Hungarian Parliament had adopted in March. They questioned if the new rules were fully in line with fundamental values of the European Union, such as the independence of the judiciary, and asked the European Parliament to assure that common EU values were respected by the Hungarian government.

Following the EP's plenary debate of 17 April on the constitutional situation in Hungary, citizens also began to write in support of the Hungarian government and express their discontent with the criticism articulated by several MEPs.

In the wake of the World Jewish Congress, held in Budapest in May, and reports about anti-Semitic acts in the country, other citizens expressed concerns about the protection of minorities.

In the second half of May, another wave of correspondence was sparked by a Belgian newspaper which wrongly quoted a statement by Martin Schulz. This misquote, which put Hungary in a negative light never intended by the President, was widely reported in the Hungarian media and triggered citizens to complain.

In its responses to citizens, CITES clarified the issue of the misquoted statement, explaining that the spokesperson of President Schulz had asked the newspaper for a rectification. It also provided information about the plenary debate of 17 April, the report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs regarding the situation of fundamental rights in Hungary, and the EP's stance against anti-Semitism in general.

### More information

[MEPs voice concerns over constitutional changes in Hungary](#)

[MEPs call on Hungarian authorities to abide by EU values](#)

[Procedure file in the Legislative Observatory on the situation of fundamental rights in Hungary](#)

## Unrest in Turkey

The current political developments in Turkey have incited many citizens to write to the European Parliament in the course of the month of June. Demonstrations in Taksim Square and across the country were met with what the EP saw as disproportionate and excessive use of force by the police.

Most citizens, concerned by the escalation in violence and a wave of detentions, have turned to the European Parliament in a plea for help. A number of citizens, however, have voiced contempt over what they perceive as interference of the European Parliament in Turkish affairs.

### More information

[European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the situation in Turkey](#)

[Schulz on Turkey: protests are not a threat, but the expression of a vibrant civil society](#)

## Social effects of the crisis

The current economic crisis continues to preoccupy citizens. The rise in unemployment has focused both on young people seeking first time employment and those who have lost their jobs. Citizens have highlighted the fact that, due to an all-time high unemployment rate, there is a tendency for young people to head off to wealthier countries in search of employment.

Citizens have also expressed their concerns about the spread of poverty in crisis-hit Europe and their struggle to make ends meet at the end of each month. An underlying fear of potential discrimination in the allocation of benefits, and indeed of obtaining benefits at all, has led citizens to write to the EP.

Home loans, suffering as a direct consequence of the economic crisis, was another topic of enquiry this quarter. High interest rates and the transition of the Spanish IRPH (Mortgage Loan Reference Index) have incited citizens to write to us.

### More information

[EU Youth Employment Initiative](#)

[Home loans](#)



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## Agriculture and food

CITES received enquiries on two cases focusing on agriculture and food issues, which were introduced by Commissioner Dacian Cioloş, responsible for agriculture and rural development.

The first was the proposed EU regulation regarding seed and plant propagating material. Citizens writing to our unit felt that this reform would economically damage small gardening and agricultural companies, as well as organic farmers, with regard to the propagation of old and traditional seeds. They urged the EP to look closely into these specific aspects of the legislative package on animal and plant health.

The second case was the Commissioner's bid to change legislation to protect the authenticity of olive oil offered to customers in restaurants. In fact due to the strong reaction of the public as well as MEPs, the commissioner later retracted his proposal.

### More information

[European Commission animal and plant health legislative package](#)

## European elections 2014

In the past months, citizens have started to enquire about the European elections coming up in 2014. The most frequently asked question was about the conditions under which parties or individual candidates could run for election. Citizens also requested general information or made suggestions for a promotional campaign of the EP.

### More information

[EP elections to become more European](#)

## Human rights and democracy

Citizens continue to express their concern on human rights issues in third countries. CITES received enquiries on the situation in Iran, Cuba, Russia, as well as other countries. The presidential election in Venezuela on 14 April also led citizens to write in, questioning the credibility of its outcome.

### More information

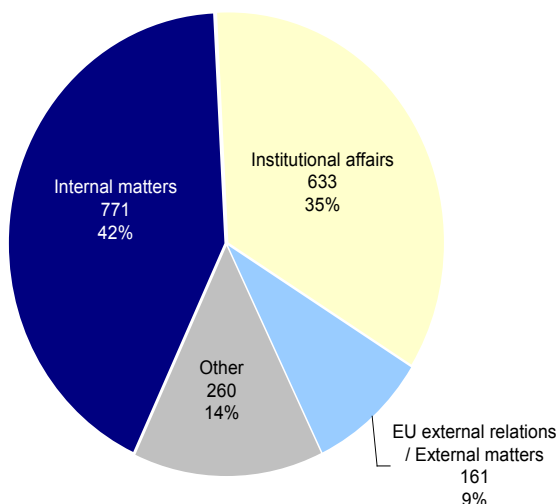
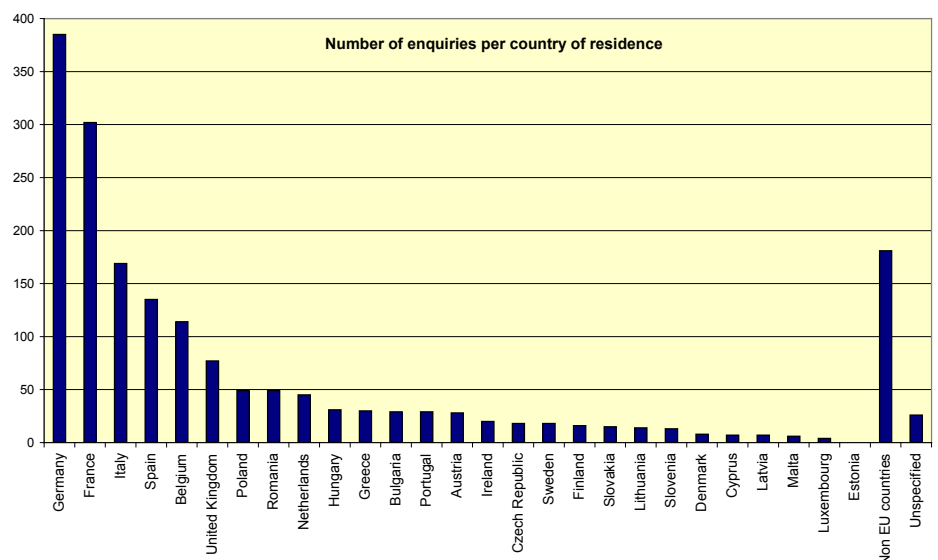
[EP resolution on the 22nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council](#)

## Statistics for the 2nd quarter of 2013

In this quarter, nearly a third of all enquiries from citizens treated by CITES dealt directly with the work and role of the European Parliament and its Members.

As with the last quarter, over 40% of enquiries concerned activities within the EU and its Member States. Civil liberties, justice and home affairs was by far the leading category followed by economy and finance and then employment and social affairs, showing that the financial crisis continues to affect the lives of citizens and incites them to write to the EP.

Human rights and foreign affairs constituted the majority of enquiries treated by CITES under its EU external relations/external matters category.



Internal matters		
Civil liberties, justice and home affairs	333	43%
Economy and finance	103	13%
Employment and social affairs	63	8%
Agriculture and animal welfare	58	8%
Environment	38	5%
Consumer protection	36	5%
Culture	30	4%
Transport	21	3%
Education	17	2%
Energy	17	2%
Public health	15	2%
Internal market	12	2%
Miscellaneous	28	4%

Institutional affairs		
European Parliament	562	89%
EU institutions and constitutional affairs	41	6%
Budget	16	3%
Enlargement	14	2%

EU external relations/external matters		
Human rights	67	42%
Foreign affairs	55	34%
International trade	8	5%
Agriculture and animal welfare	6	4%
Humanitarian aid and development	6	4%
Miscellaneous	19	12%

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