



Building bridges: providing citizens with the 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.



Democratic crisis in Egypt

In the wake of the demonstrations that took place at the end of June in Tahrir Square in Cairo, the ensuing political unrest throughout Egypt sparked a wave of correspondence from citizens to the European Parliament during the third quarter of 2013.

Violence in the streets

Among the letters received, the most predominant preoccupation of citizens centred on the acts of violence which spilled over into the streets of Cairo. What started out as peaceful demonstrations ended in violent clashes between demonstrators and Egyptian security forces. Citizens described how unarmed civilians were the victims of brutal violence, how hostages were taken and Coptic churches and mosques were attacked and burned. Citizens lamented the chaos and despair that reigned on the streets since the ouster of the Egyptian President.

The desire to express their perception of the situation in Egypt is what mostly pushed people to write to the European Parliament. Most of them perceived the intervention as a people's revolution, intended to defend the country against what they called an

authoritarian regime. Many citizens were particularly outraged at the portrayal of events by the western media. As far as they were concerned, they did not consider the intervention to be a military coup.

Hope for democracy

Some citizens thus appealed to the EP for help and requested that Egyptians be supported in their fight for freedom and in finding a peaceful and durable solution to the crisis. Others, however, took a firm stance against any type of interference from the EU or any other state, claiming the situation to be an internal matter. The underlying thread, however, in each citizen's message, was a call for a rapid return to a fair and democratic society, where rule of law and respect for human rights prevail.

More information

[EP resolution of 12 September 2013 on the situation in Egypt](#)

[MEPs debate the situation in Egypt with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton](#)

[Martin Schulz on the situation in Egypt](#)

Stray dogs in Romania

In the aftermath of a deadly dog attack on a four-year-old boy in Romania, the government's adoption of a new law for the mass euthanasia of stray dogs has created an overwhelming reaction from citizens throughout Europe.

Animal rights activists abhor what they see as brutal treatment of dogs and plead for an improvement to be made in stray animal management strategies. Enforcement of this new law also evoked general comments from citizens concerning the management of EU funds allocated to that Member State.

More information

[EP's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals](#)

[European Parliament resolution of 4 July 2012 on the establishment of an EU legal framework for the protection of pets and stray animals](#)

US spying allegations

The US National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance programmes, and in particular the alleged bugging of EU institution premises, was the subject of another influx of letters from citizens during the summer period.

One of the main issues reflected by citizens was their fear that their fundamental right to privacy could have been violated. Another line of enquiry was to request the European Parliament to take action and to conduct a full investigation into whether there was any truth in the allegations. Some even suggested that all EU-US relations should be put on hold until results of the enquiry were made known.

The fate of whistle-blower, Edward Snowden, triggered further reaction from citizens. In particular, citizens enquired as to what role the European Parliament played in the granting of his request for asylum.

More information

[EP resolution of 4 July 2013 on the US National Security Agency surveillance programme, surveillance bodies in various Member States and their impact on EU citizens' privacy](#)

Free trade with Canada and the United States

In the past months, an unprecedented amount of correspondence has been received from Canada. There was opposition to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which is currently being negotiated between the European Commission and the Government of Canada.



Citizens primarily expressed concerns about detrimental environmental effects of the agreement, in particular with regard to rules that would allow investors from

Canada to directly sue governments in the European Union, or vice versa. There was fear that this would limit the political room to manoeuvre, as companies would be able to seek damages e.g. in cases of tighter environmental legislation hampering their businesses.

Citizens also commented on the recently launched negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the United States (TTIP). In the context of the NSA surveillance revelations, they expressed particular worries about data protection and questioned the benefits of the planned agreement.

More information

[European Parliament resolution of 8 June 2011 on EU-Canada trade relations](#)

[Trade relations between the EU and Canada \(European Commission\)](#)

[EP resolution of 23 May 2013 on EU trade and investment negotiations with the USA](#)

Tobacco products directive

The proposed directive on tobacco and related products, and especially the amendments adopted by the ENVI committee, spurred smokers and consumers of electronic cigarettes to write to the EP and express their opposition ahead of the plenary vote scheduled for this autumn.

It was mainly e-cigarette users who expressed worries about the classification of all electronic cigarettes and nicotine liquids as medicinal products, fearing this would make them more expensive and difficult to access.

Citizens also criticised the proposed ban on flavoured tobacco products, in particular menthol cigarettes, claiming this would infringe on their personal freedom and lead to an increase in illicit trade of such products.

More information

[Public Health Committee MEPs toughen up plans to deter young people from smoking](#)

[Procedure file in the Legislative Observatory on the tobacco products directive](#)

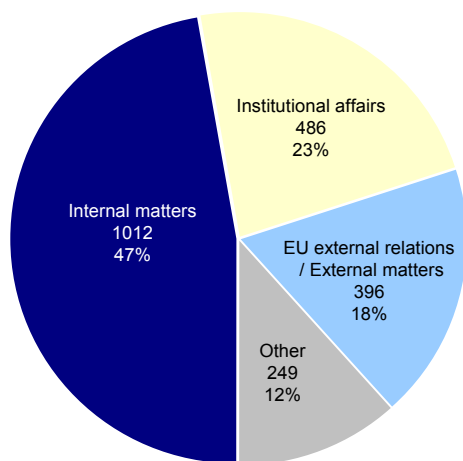
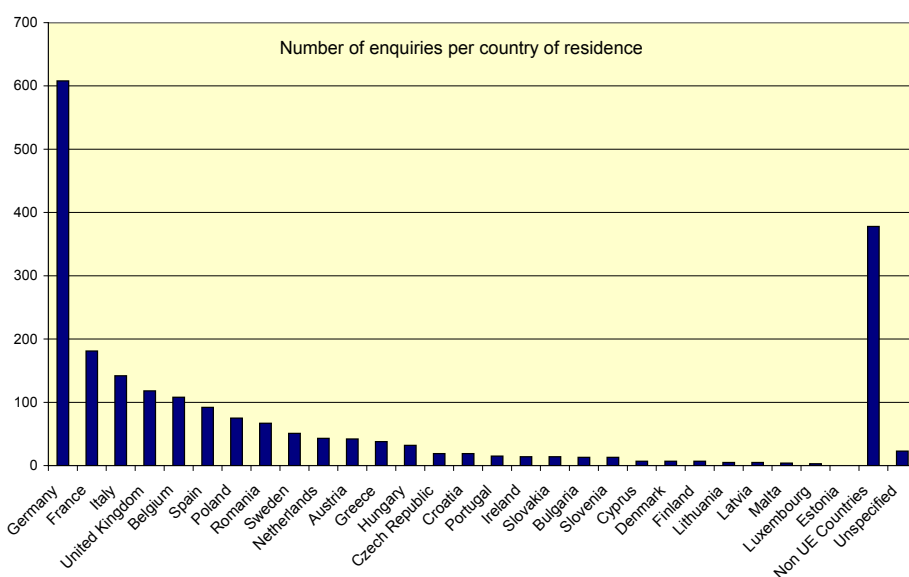
Statistics for the 3rd quarter of 2013

In the third quarter of 2013, CITES treated a total of 2143 enquiries emanating from nearly all the Member States as well as countries outside the EU.

As in the past, the largest percentage of queries concentrated on activities within the EU and its Member States. Agriculture and animal welfare topped the internal matters categories, reflecting the number of correspondence received on the situation of stray dogs in Romania.

The number of enquiries regarding EU external relations and external matters was on the up this quarter, accounting for almost one fifth of the total received. More than half of these dealt with foreign affairs issues.

Those relating to institutional affairs decreased slightly this quarter, but 90% of them still touched on EP-related issues.



Internal matters		
Agriculture and animal welfare	425	42%
Civil liberties, justice and home affairs	290	29%
Economy and finances	55	5%
Employment and social affairs	52	5%
Environment	45	4%
Public health	25	2%
Transport	24	2%
Education	20	2%
Energy	15	1%
Food safety	14	1%
Consumer protection	12	1%
Culture	11	1%
Miscellaneous	24	2%

Institutional affairs		
European Parliament	436	90%
EU institutions and constitutional affairs	30	6%
Budget	11	2%
Enlargement	9	2%

EU external relations/external matters		
Foreign affairs	236	60%
International trade	86	22%
Human rights	34	9%
Economy and finances	9	2%
Security and defence	6	2%
Miscellaneous	25	6%

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