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.

Ailing economic situation in the European Union

Citizens’ preoccupation with the current economic climate has remained a recurring theme in the first quarter of 2013. In particular, the enquiries received by CITES concerned the economic crisis in the European Union as a whole and the financial situation in Cyprus.

The proposed bail-out of the Cypriot banking sector was a major concern of many citizens. There is an underlying fear that people will be unable to recuperate their life-savings due to the proposed taxes on bank deposits. The handling of the economic crisis by the Eurogroup was also the subject of criticism.

Furthermore, comments were received on specific matters such as unemployment in Spain, pensions in Greece, taxation in Italy and the establishment of a free zone in Sardinia.

Multiannual Financial Framework

One of the other frequently asked questions was the status of the vote on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020. Some enquiries were purely factual, for example to know when the MFF would be adopted, others were to question the budget itself.

Citizens have also written in regarding the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived 2014-2020. There is a certain concern that sufficient funding would be available for its objectives to be fulfilled.

In addition, CITES has continued to receive general proposals from citizens on how, in their view, the European Union’s financial crisis should be solved.

More information

Human rights issues

Human rights violations continue to concern citizens. This quarter, CITES received many comments, protests and requests for action on a variety of subjects.

These included the detention and treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli prisons as well as the hunger strikes by some Palestinian prisoners, urging the international community to take action. Furthermore, some citizens commented on the two-state solution being proposed in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Citizens also wrote to the European Parliament about the ongoing situations in Syria, Mali and Tunisia, as well as the policies of the Russian authorities towards homosexuals and femininity.

More information

Governments criticised

Governments of some Member States came under fire this quarter. In their correspondence, citizens protested against decisions made by EU countries and, in some cases, wanted more action and intervention from the EP.

The political situation in Hungary was one of the most criticised, in particular the changes to the constitution adopted in March. Citizens expressed their concern about the amended rules on the powers of the Hungarian constitutional court. They were also worried about minority rights and what they perceived to be an increasing influence of the government on the media and other institutions of the country.

More information

Schulz regrets hasty adoption of constitutional changes in Hungary

More information

EP leaders comment on Cyprus banks’ deal

European Union Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020
Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (2014-2020)

More information

EP’s resolution on the case of Arafat Jaradat and the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails
Privatisation of water services

CITES received many enquiries, principally from Germany, on the subject of privatisation of water services. Although the context of these enquiries was the proposed amendment to the directive on the procurement in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors, it was the water services, presently not privatised in Germany, which elicited a reaction from citizens.

Enquiries ranged from requests for the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee’s report and other documentation on the subject, to protests regarding the implications of implementing the proposals. CITES provided links to the report and its progress through parliamentary procedure as well as information about the current citizens’ initiative requiring governments to ensure and provide all citizens with sufficient and clean drinking water and sanitation.

More information

Citizen’s initiative
Procedure file in the Legislative Observatory

Animal welfare: citizens care

During this quarter, citizens contacted CITES on several animal welfare issues. Among these were an online video on the mistreatment of horses, the plight of Tania, an Asian elephant being kept in isolation in a zoo in Romania, and the ongoing problem of stray dogs in this country.

More information

EP’s resolution on the establishment of an EU legal framework for the protection of pets and stray animals

Gender stereotypes

The EP resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU evoked comments from citizens concerning pornography on the Internet. Some of those writing criticised the EP for interference in this matter whereas others felt that this resolution did not go far enough in the quest to eliminate pornography in the media.

More information

Procedure file in the Legislative Observatory

Statistics for the first quarter of 2013 — activities of the EP make up almost one third

In this first quarter of 2013, CITES treated a total of 1,893 enquiries from citizens of all the Member States as well as outside of the European Union.

Activities within the EU and its Member States (internal matters) made up the largest percentage of correspondence received. 47% of these enquiries were on the subject of civil liberties, justice and home affairs.

Those relating to institutional affairs amounted to a third of all enquiries treated. A consistent 92% of this correspondence focused on the activities of the EP.

Human rights and animal welfare constituted a large portion of the enquiries regarding EU external relations/external matters.

The items contained herein are produced by CITES and are provided for general information purposes only. The opinions expressed are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the EP. Reproduction and further distribution is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Editorial team: F. Bubenheimer, L. Forde, P. Heath, C. Lázaro. To request more information on the articles in the CITES Quarterly Review and make comments, please contact us: CITESReviewContact@europarl.europa.eu. CITES Quarterly Review can be downloaded as PDF, but for environmental reasons, please do not print this unless it is strictly necessary.