

Ask EP

Citizens' Enquiries Unit

Insight

The [Citizens' Enquiries Unit](#) (Ask EP) replies to citizens' requests for information on the European Parliament's activities, powers and organisation, always with the aim of giving them a better understanding of Parliament and its work.

'Ask EP — Insight' is a review whose main objective is to pass on citizens' concerns to Members of the European Parliament and the institution as a whole.

European elections 2014

With the European elections just around the corner, citizens continue to turn to the EP with many different requests. The most frequently asked questions are of a general or practical nature, such as how one can introduce their vote and what deadlines need to be respected for registration. Many are also concerned about their voting rights when living abroad and certain express their discontent at the complexity of different national voting regulations.

Other recurrent issues are the conditions under which political parties could run for election, how citizens themselves could become an MEP and the number of eligible voters in the EU. Over and above the questions raised, citizens also turn to the EP to express their state of mind and preoccupations of what improvements the elections can bring. Others express their hope for changes on the political scene to create a favourable future for Europe as a whole.

More information

[EP elections website](#)



Ukraine at a crossroads

The first quarter of 2014 began with the same burning issue for citizens as the end of 2013: the ongoing crisis and the future in store for the Ukrainian people. Once again, the comments and reactions from citizens are mixed, with a variety of opinions expressed.

Some citizens continue to write to the European Union in an appeal for help. They urge the Parliament to take clear action and impose targeted sanctions such as travel bans and freezing the EU assets of those responsible for the deaths of Ukrainian demonstrators.

Other citizens express criticism towards the European Union for giving financial support to Ukraine and take a firm stand against any EU accession perspectives. They are firmly against the EU supporting what they see as extremists at the head of the Ukraine Government.

With the spiralling of events ending in the military intervention by Russia in Crimea, some members of the public vehemently oppose the Russian invasion, seeing it as a

clear violation of international law and they implore the EP to take a firm stance against Russia's actions.

With Ukraine on the brink of a potential civil war, other citizens call for solutions to be sought through dialogue rather than confrontation. Many express their fear of a potential new world war flaring up and urge a peaceful resolution to the conflict to be found.

Another influx of correspondence reflects an appeal for respect of the will of the citizens of Crimea and the acceptance of the desire of those in Crimea who wish to belong to Russia.

More information

[Top story: Ukraine — What lies ahead](#)

[Ukraine timeline: from Euromaidan to the illegal referendum in Crimea](#)

[EP President: We must be careful not to sleepwalk into an ever escalating conflict](#)

Secessions within the EU?

As the Scottish referendum will take place this coming autumn and there are numerous discussions on whether to hold one on Catalonia, the future of these two regions is a cause of concern for many citizens.

The most frequently asked question concerning the referendum to be held on Scotland is whether the Scottish nation would remain part of the European Union.

On a similar vein, citizens are also writing to the European Parliament concerning the potential secession of Catalonia. Some turn to the Parliament to ask for their support in pushing the referendum through and others, like their Scottish counterparts, wonder what would be the consequences of independence and what bearing it would have on their membership of the European Union.

More information

[European Commission answer of November 2013 on the separation of a part of an EU Member State](#)

Swiss immigration referendum

Following the referendum in Switzerland on 9 February, in which a narrow majority of voters approved the proposal to impose immigration quotas, citizens from both Switzerland and the EU wrote to the European Parliament to share their views on this decision and comment on the reactions from the European Union.

Some citizens criticised the EU's intention to reconsider its overall relationship with Switzerland in case the country limits the free movement of EU citizens.

Others asked the European Parliament to take a tough stance towards Switzerland and counter any attempts by Switzerland to restrict the freedoms agreed upon with the European Union.

More information

[EU cannot accept cherry-picking by Switzerland](#)

[EP President: Switzerland faces many negotiations if it limits freedom of movement](#)

Concerns about GMO

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which are a recurrent topic in citizens' correspondence with the EP, have been in the spotlight again in early 2014 as both Parliament and Council voted on the market authorisation of genetically modified maize "Pioneer 1507".

Some citizens expressed general concerns about the cultivation and consumption of genetically modified plants. They demanded that the market authorisation for "Pioneer 1507" maize be denied.

Other citizens requested information about the decision-making process applicable to the market authorisation of genetically modified organisms. Some of them showed bewilderment at the fact that the authorisation process could go ahead despite the negative resolution of the European Parliament.

More information

[Food safety: MEPs oppose authorising new genetically modified maize](#)

EU-US trade agreement

For several months, the free trade negotiations between the EU and the US have been of general interest. Citizens writing to the Parliament express their deep concerns regarding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Most citizens call for the Parliament to ensure transparent negotiations and to preserve the high European consumer and environmental standards. In view of the revelations of US electronic mass surveillance of EU individuals, citizens express particular worries about data protection.

Citizens also refer to the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), especially regarding the Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). They are worried that due to ISDS multinational companies might dominate EU markets and sue EU governments.

More information

[EP Answer: EU-US free trade agreement \(TTIP / TAFTA\)](#)

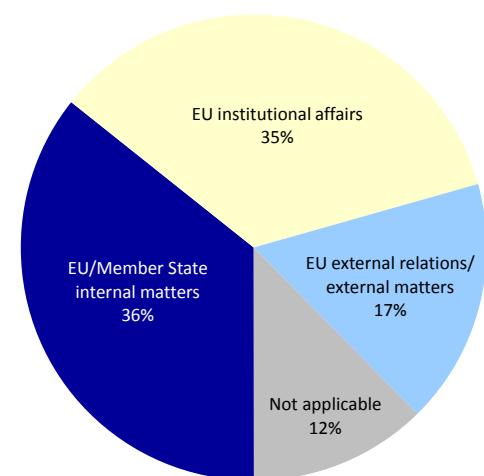
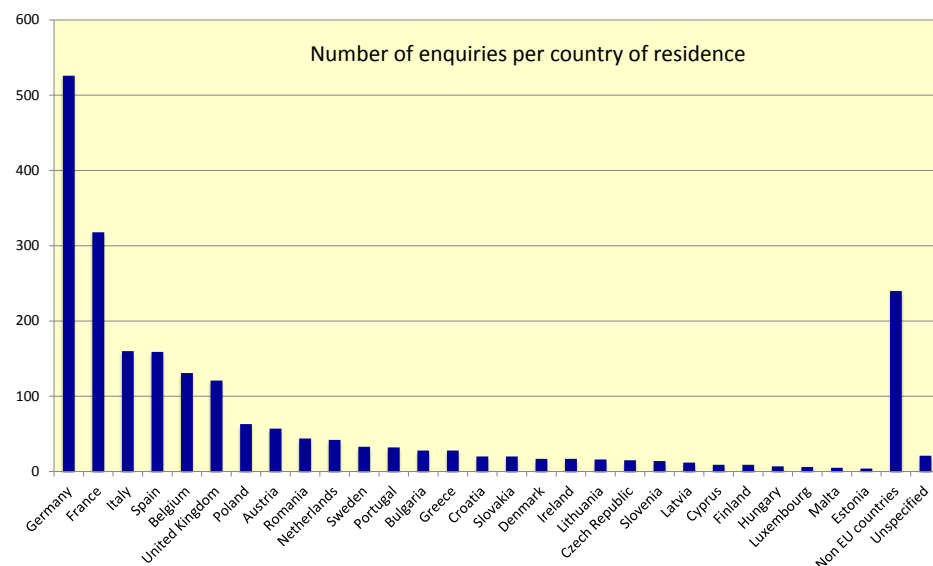
Statistics for the 1st quarter of 2014

In the first quarter of 2014, Ask EP treated a total of 2174 enquiries emanating from every Member State, as well as non-EU countries.

As in the past, the largest percentage of queries concentrated on internal matters. Civil liberties, justice and home affairs topped this category.

Those relating to institutional affairs increased significantly this quarter. This is a clear indication of the elevated public interest in the upcoming EP elections.

The number of enquiries regarding EU external relations and external matters represented 17% of the total received this quarter. The majority of these dealt with foreign affairs issues.



| EU/Member State internal matters | | EU institutional affairs | |
|---|-----|--|-----|
| Civil liberties and home affairs | 40% | EP relations with citizens | 38% |
| Economy, finance and industry | 11% | EP structure and functioning | 20% |
| Employment and social affairs | 10% | EP elections | 16% |
| Culture and education | 10% | Members of the European Parliament | 10% |
| Agriculture, fisheries and animal welfare | 7% | Treaties and constitutional affairs | 4% |
| Public health | 6% | Miscellaneous | 12% |
| Consumer protection and food safety | 4% | EU external relations/external matters | |
| Transport and tourism | 3% | Democracy and elections | 38% |
| Environment | 3% | Relations with third countries and international organisations | 31% |
| Internal market and competition | 3% | Human rights | 9% |
| Energy | 1% | International trade | 7% |
| Research and technology | 1% | Miscellaneous | 14% |
| Regional development | 1% | | |