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17. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to include, where relevant, a 'caste-based discrimination clause' in all trade and association agreements;
18. Recommends that the EU promote non-discriminatory and inclusive policies and procedures in business operations with caste-affected countries, including affirmative action for Dalits and similarly affected people in the labour market and the private sector;
19. Calls for the EU to promote regular, broad consultation with civil society on caste-based discrimination and to allocate adequate resources to civil society organisations for fighting caste discrimination;
20. Calls for the EU to promote a caste-sensitive post-2015 development agenda, with the reduction of inequalities based on or aggravated by caste as a crucial and measurable goal, ensuring that caste discrimination is explicitly addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty, and as a root cause of structural inequalities;
21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations Human Rights Council.

P7_TA(2013)0421

Annual report on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2012

European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2012 (2013/2013(INI))

(2016/C 181/14)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to previous resolutions on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions,
 - having regard to Articles 10 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to Articles 24, 227, 228, 258 and 260 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
 - having regard to Rules 48 and 202(8) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Petitions (A7-0299/2013),
- A. whereas, subject to Protocol 30 of the Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union has already acquired legally binding force through the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon; whereas the same Treaty also establishes the legal basis for the EU to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights and to introduce the European Citizens' Initiative;
 - B. whereas the Committee on Petitions has a duty to review constantly and, where possible, to enhance its role, notably with regard to the development of democratic principles, such as the increased participation of citizens in the EU decision-making process and the enhancement of transparency and accountability; whereas, in its regular activity, the Committee works closely with Member States, the Commission, the European Ombudsman and other bodies in order to ensure that EU law is fully respected in both letter and spirit;

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- C. whereas in 2012 the Committee on Petitions registered 1 986 petitions, mostly referring to the themes of fundamental rights, the environmentthe internal market, and economic and social crisis; whereas 1 406 petitions were declared admissible, and of those 853 were forwarded to the Commission for further investigation pursuant to Articles 258 and 260 of the Treaty, and 580 petitions were declared inadmissible; whereas the subject matters of at least five petitions submitted in 2012 were brought before the Court of Justice pursuant to Articles 258 and 260 of the Treaty; whereas the Judgment of 14 September 2011 in Case T-308/07 made it clear that procedural decisions by Parliament in petition cases are also subject to judicial review; whereas, regarding the statistical analysis contained in this report, the highest number of petitions refer to the EU as a whole (27,3 %), followed by Spanish (15,0 %), German (12,5 %) and Italian (8,6 %) cases;
- D. whereas, in the field of fundamental rights, the Committee devoted much attention in 2012 to the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of children, consumer rights, property rights, the rights of free movement without discrimination on any grounds, protecting freedom of expression and privacy, and the right of access to documents and information, as well as the rights to freedom of political association and to join a trade union; whereas the situation of economic crisis has prompted a number of petitions concerning social problems, such as housing, employment and banking sector malpractices towards savers;
- E. whereas petitions submitted by citizens give evidence that there is persisting discrimination against citizens as a result of disability, belonging to a minority or certain ethnic group, gender, age or sexual orientation;
- F. whereas EU initiatives to fight discrimination, such as the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, must be promptly adopted into national strategies and continuously reviewed and monitored in light of evolving economic and social situations;
- G. whereas, in relation to the protection of the environment, the threat posed by pollution and environmental malpractice can never be overstated, due to the ensuing risks to biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as public health risks, all of which are long-lasting and often life-threatening; whereas regarding biodiversity, some Member States have not yet determined the totality of minimum Natura 2000 protection areas nor fully implemented their effective protection; whereas due account should be taken of the aims of combating pollution and climate change; whereas the Committee devoted much attention in 2012 to the implementation of legislation on waste and water, as well as to the assessment of the impact of projects and activities on the environment and on public health;
- H. whereas we must conserve our natural resources with a view to safeguarding the earth's future; whereas the precautionary principle must be applied in respect of technological innovations such as GMOs and nanotechnology;
- I. whereas on the waste management issue, the fact-finding visit to Italy highlighted the urgent need for all Italian authorities involved to find a sustainable solution for the waste management needs of the province of Rome ensuring respect for citizens' health and dignity; whereas, despite the end of the emergency situation in the city of Naples, many challenges on a comprehensive approach to waste management remain in the Campania region in connection with the waste hierarchy set in Directive 2008/98/EC (the Waste Framework Directive) and the CJEU ruling of March 2010;
- J. whereas, although the Commission can fully check compliance with EU law only when a final decision has been taken by national authorities, it is important — particularly in relation to environmental matters — to verify at an early stage that local, regional and national authorities correctly apply all relevant procedural requirements under EU law, including implementation of the precautionary principle;

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- K. whereas the work of the committee has led to water being declared a public good by Parliament; whereas the European Citizens' Initiative 'Right to water' has been the first to reach the threshold of one million signatures from European citizens;
- L. whereas further irreparable losses of biodiversity must be averted, especially inside Natura 2000 designated sites; whereas Member States have undertaken to ensure the protection of special conservation areas under Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) and Directive 79/409/EEC (the Birds Directive);
- M. whereas in its resolution of 13 December 2012 on a new sustainable and competitive steel industry, based on a petition received ⁽¹⁾, Parliament advocated the 'polluter pays' principle;
- N. whereas in spite of the Interinstitutional Agreement between Parliament and the Commission, the latter appears reluctant to provide prompt information on the nature of its deliberations, as well as decisions taken, in infringement proceedings related to petitions and concerning the implementation of environmental legislation; whereas this is a major source of concern given the irreversible damage and destruction that could be inflicted on our ecosystems and health; whereas the European institutions ought to supply more information and be more transparent with regard to EU citizens;
- O. whereas 2013 has been designated the European Year of Citizens, and it is precisely the citizens and residents of the EU, individually or in association with others, who are well placed both to assess the effectiveness of European legislation as it is applied, and to signal possible loopholes which impair the proper implementation of legislation and the full exercise of rights; whereas due account should be taken of the contents of the 'European Consumer Agenda to boost confidence and growth'; whereas a fundamental precondition for this is that information about European legislation should be made available to citizens in a practical fashion;
- P. whereas, for that reason, the Committee on Petitions devoted a great amount of time and effort in 2012 to discussing the meaning of European citizenship, which is closely associated with a complete freedom of movement and residence within the EU, as defined in Part III TFEU, but which also comprises many other rights and is of benefit to citizens who do not leave their home country; whereas petitions give evidence that Union citizens and residents still face widespread and tangible obstacles to exercising their cross-border rights in particular, a situation which has a direct and daily impact on the lives and welfare of thousands of households;
- Q. whereas the petitions process can be complementary to other European instruments available to citizens, such as the option to address complaints to the European Ombudsman or to the Commission; whereas the Committee on Petitions works closely with the European Ombudsman, other Parliament committees, European bodies, agents and networks, and Member States;
- R. whereas the petitions process can, and should, remain complementary to other mechanisms of redress available to citizens, such as lodging complaints with the Commission or the European Ombudsman; whereas SOLVIT, in particular, is an important tool which may be used by EU citizens in order to find speedy solutions to problems caused by the misapplication of internal market law by public authorities; whereas progress must therefore be made in jointly resolving legal cases brought by consumers and their associations; whereas the single web portal 'Exercise your rights' contains important information for citizens who wish to lodge complaints on the rightful application of EU law;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0510.

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- S. whereas the field of action, and the *modus operandi*, of the right to petition granted to all EU citizens and residents under the terms of the Treaty differs from other remedies available to citizens, such as, for instance, the submission of complaints to the Commission or to the Ombudsman;
- T. whereas it is necessary to increase citizen participation in the EU decision-making process, with a view to reinforcing its legitimacy and accountability;
- U. whereas a new instrument for a participatory democracy, the 'European Citizens Initiative', entered into force on 1 April 2012 and registered a total of sixteen initiatives during the course of the year; whereas relevant concerns have been raised by various initiators of European Citizens' Initiatives on the technical barriers encountered for the actual collection of signatures; whereas the Committee on Petitions will play a primordial role in the organisation of the public hearings for successful initiatives;
- V. whereas it remains evident that there is both a lack of clearly structured and widely publicised information and a lack of awareness amongst EU citizens about their rights; whereas these constitute decisive obstacles to exercising active EU citizenship; whereas, in this connection, the Member States should comply in a more comprehensive manner with their obligation to provide information and cultivate awareness;
- W. whereas European citizens and residents are legitimately entitled to expect that the issues they raise with the Committee on Petitions may find a solution without undue delay within the legal framework of the European Union, and in particular that the Members of the committee will defend the petitioner's natural environment, health, freedom of movement, dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms; whereas the efficiency of the committee's work is largely the result of swiftness of operation and thoroughness of its Secretariat, and this could be improved further, in particular by optimising the time taken to process petitions and by systematising the procedure for their assessment; whereas, in view of the ever-increasing number of petitions received annually, more resources and increased committee-meeting time should be devoted for this purpose; whereas there is a need for continuity in processing petitions, despite the changes in legislative periods and the resulting changes in personnel; whereas several petitions have been submitted by victims of the Franco regime and concerning abducted children in Spain;
- X. whereas certain petitions are pending between the Commission, Parliament, the European Court of Justice and national authorities without any solution found, leaving the petitioners on uncertain ground with no sign of a conclusion;
- Y. Whereas there has been a considerable increase in the number of petitions concerned with violations of the principles of fundamental democratic rights and the rule of law protected by the Treaty on European Union in the Member States, which shows that European citizens have increasing faith in the Community institutions to uphold their fundamental rights;
- Z. whereas individuals and local communities, as well as voluntary organisations and businesses, are well placed to assess the effectiveness of European legislation as it applies to them, and to signal possible loopholes that need to be analysed in order to ensure better, more uniform and comparable implementation of EU law in all the Member States;
- 1. Takes note that petitions received in 2012 from European Union citizens and residents focused on alleged breaches of EU law in the fields of fundamental rights, the environment, the internal market and property rights; considers that petitions give evidence that there are still frequent and widespread instances of incomplete transposition or of misapplication of EU law;

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2. Notes that fundamental rights remain a key subject of the petitions submitted, notably raising issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities, children's rights, property rights, the right of free movement, including the portability of social security entitlements, without encountering any form of discrimination on any grounds, the protection of freedom of expression and privacy, freedom of association, and the right of access to documents and information; calls on Member States to apply correctly and respect those rights as set out in the Treaty and calls on the Commission to take the necessary measures to oblige non-compliant Member States to close the gap between national laws and the fundamental rights of EU citizens; considers that special attention should be given to the right to historical memory and the rights to truth, justice and redress for families which suffered under Franco's dictatorship, as well as to the right of Spain's abducted children to know the identity of their biological parents;

3. Considers that an interactive guide to be placed on the internet by the European Parliament, in line with what the European Ombudsman has placed on the Internet, could reduce the number of petitions submitted relating to subject matter which does not fall within the field of activity of the EU;

4. Confirms the key role of the Committee on Petitions in identifying non-judicial remedies for citizens, thereby providing a reality check on the way in which the European Union is seen by the people of Europe, enabling conclusions to be drawn regarding whether European legislation actually delivers the expected results and responds to the expectations people have of the Union;

5. Calls on the Committee on Petitions to examine the effects on the admissibility of petitions of the Equal Rights Trust case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, which gives, even in the case of purely national law, Union citizens a higher level of protection in the event of a national ruling having a bearing on the exercise of their EU-citizenship rights; calls for an investigation of the obstacles which actually exist for Union citizens in obtaining a reliable interpretation of European legislation in cases before national courts by applying for a preliminary ruling from the Court;

6. As part of the efforts to improve the work of the Committee, calls for a procedure involving fact-finding missions which on the one hand ensures the right of all members of a fact-finding mission to present the facts from their point of view, while also guaranteeing all committee members the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process with regard to the conclusions to be drawn by the Committee on Petitions;

7. Is determined to make the petition procedure more efficient, transparent, and impartial, while preserving the participatory rights of the members of the Committee on Petitions, so that the handling of petitions will stand up to judicial review even at a procedural level;

8. Draws attention to persisting discrimination against citizens on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, belonging to a minority group, age or sexual orientation; warns, in particular, that the Roma population across the EU continues to face obstacles to inclusion; calls, therefore, on the Commission to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation in this area, to provide adequate funding for the implementation of national strategies for Roma inclusion, and to monitor actively whether these strategies are being effectively implemented in Member States;

9. Calls on the Commission to come up with a proposal for legislation to solve finally the problems relating to the mutual recognition by Member States of civil status documents and their effects, while at the same time respecting the social policy traditions of the individual Member States in accordance with the subsidiarity principle;

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10. Repeats its previous calls to Member States to ensure freedom of movement for all EU citizens and their families, without discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or nationality; repeats its call to Member States to implement fully the rights granted under Articles 2 and 3 of Directive 2004/38/EC not only to different-sex spouses, but also to the registered partner, member of the household or partner with whom an EU citizen has a duly attested, stable relationship, including members of same-sex couples, on the basis of the principles of mutual recognition, equality, non-discrimination, dignity and respect for private and family life; calls on the Commission, in that connection, to ensure that the directive is strictly applied and ultimately reviewed accordingly for this purpose, if necessary, and to ensure that Treaty infringement proceedings are brought where necessary against Member States which fail to apply it;

11. Observes that the environment remains another key subject of petitions, giving evidence that public authorities in the Member States repeatedly fail to ensure the preservation of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystems, and that the highest standards of public health are guaranteed; points, in particular, to the numerous petitions submitted on waste management, on water, on the possible dangers of nuclear energy and genetic engineering, on protected species, and on the assessment of the impact of projects and activities on the environment and on public health, such as shale gas extraction by means of fracking; urges the Commission to strengthen the environmental legislative framework on the environment and combating climate change and, specifically, its correct implementation; regrets that some Member States, despite their efforts, have not been able to find sustainable solutions for problems related to waste management;

12. Urges the Commission to take action to ensure that the Member States understand that water is a public good; takes the view that the precautionary principle must be stringently applied in respect of the use of biotechnology and nanotechnology in products that could seriously affect the health of consumers;

13. Expects that the reviewed Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, revising Directive 2011/92/EU, will not only be strengthened by providing clearer parameters but will, above all, be duly implemented by the Member States,

14. Takes the view that procedures must be developed for urgent petitions whereby fact-finding missions can also be carried out in the long 'white' period with no parliamentary business during the European elections and also — if the nature of the petition suggests— during the 'white' period in summer (e.g. Damüls, where the summer months were the only possible time for a fact-finding mission);

15. Welcomes the end of the emergency situation in Naples city and the new initiatives concerning waste management and expects that the persisting challenges in the Campania region will be duly addressed, namely by means of a comprehensive regional waste management plant in accordance with the EU Waste Framework Directive hierarchy and the CJEU ruling of 2010; still has serious concerns over the waste management approach in the Lazio Region, in particular regarding the follow-up to the close-down of the Malagrotta landfill site;

16. Notes, in addition, that citizens in the European Union continue to face barriers within the internal market, notably while exercising their freedom of movement as individuals, as providers and consumers of goods and services and as workers, such as, for instance, in the case of Romanian and Bulgarian workers who continue to face restrictions on the labour market in some Member States; signals, in particular, that cross-border judicial cooperation and effectiveness remains an area of primary concern; concludes, overall, that strengthened cross-border cooperation and harmonisation provides marked benefits for the protection of citizens' rights and economic stimulation;

17. Urges the Commission to take action to facilitate consumer access to information and communications technology, ensuring that the requisite security and transparency guarantees are in place, and in particular to make sure that the websites of public sector bodies are accessible;

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18. Points to the efforts made by this Committee to convey the request by many citizens for an EU legal framework that offers more thorough protection and improvements in animal welfare, including for pets and stray animals;

19. Stresses the importance of the creation of the Spanish Coastal Law Working Group, which could pave the way for other such initiatives, and which has been closely studying related petitions and the modification of the law; reiterates the importance of direct contact with the Spanish national authorities in this respect and stresses the urgent need for further intensified cooperation to find a better balance between property rights and their social function, and better solutions when the ultimate goal of the protection of the environment requires expropriation; expresses its fears that the new coastal law approved by the Spanish Parliament is not succeeding in resolving the concerns of petitioners, nor are there any plans for the further environmental protection of Spain's coastal areas;

20. Stresses the need to regulate coastal protection effectively, but notes that the coastal law is not consistent with the objectives sought, since it is affecting historic heritage and traditional communities, impacting negatively on the inhabitants of coastal villages who have always coexisted sustainably with the sea and its ecosystems;

21. Welcomes the Committee's conclusions from the fact-finding visit to Berlin on youth and family welfare matters, particularly in cross-border custody cases; notes, however, based on the continuing inflow of petitions of this nature, that it is clear the issue of cross-border custody cases is ongoing, and that similar cases have also been brought to the Committee's attention from other Member States, notably Denmark; further notes that in Denmark some of these cases have involved foreign nationals living in the country itself and that there have been proven instances of child abduction there (including from outside Denmark);

22. Takes the view that better governance and more efficient redress mechanisms are directly linked with transparency and access to information in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001;

23. Considers it important to enhance cooperation with Member States' parliaments and governments, based on reciprocity and, where necessary, to encourage Member States' authorities to transpose and apply EU legislation with full transparency; stresses the importance of the Commission's cooperation with the Member States and deplores the negligence of some Member States with regard to transposing and enforcing European environmental legislation;

24. Draws attention, in that regard, to the Eurobarometer of public opinion which indicates that only 36 % of EU citizens consider themselves well informed about their rights and only 24 % feel well informed about what they can do if their rights are not respected; stresses, therefore, the urgent need for improved access to information and for a clearer distinction between the functions of the various national and European institutions, so that petitions and complaints can be addressed to the right bodies;

25. Calls specifically on the Commission to make the 'Exercise your rights' web portal more user-friendly and to raise awareness amongst EU citizens of its existence;

26. Is determined to put in place a more practical and visible petitions web portal by the end of 2013, in order to facilitate access to the petitions process and to provide valuable information on petitions, its public dissemination and an interactive approach to the petitions process, as well as on other redress mechanisms; calls for the right of petition to be given greater visibility on the Parliament website homepage;

27. Emphasises that the Committee on Petitions, along with other institutions, bodies and instruments such as the European Citizens' Initiative, the European Ombudsman, the Commission, and the committees of inquiry, play an independent and clearly defined role as points of contact for each individual citizen; further stresses that the Committee on Petitions must continue to be a point of reference for citizens whose rights are allegedly being infringed;

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28. Welcomes the constructive cooperation between the Committee and the European Ombudsman, as for instance in the case of the Ombudsman's Special Report on Vienna Airport, regarding the appropriate application of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; supports the activities of the Ombudsman concerning instances of maladministration in the activities of EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies; expects this task to be continued on the grounds of full independence, as has been the case until now;

29. Points out that not all EU citizens have a national ombudsman with extensive powers, which means that not all EU citizens have the same access to redress; believes that with a national ombudsman in each Member State, the European Network of Ombudsmen would provide considerable support for the European Ombudsman;

30. Welcomes the continued cooperation with the Commission with regard to the examination of petitions in the field of the application of EU law by Member States; stresses, nevertheless, that the Committee expects to be kept well and promptly informed about developments concerning infringement proceedings; asks the Commission to give equal consideration to petitions and complaints as regards the functioning of infringement procedures; calls, in addition, upon the Commission also to provide the Committee with details and a statistical analysis of all complaints it investigates; stresses that, for the right of petition to be fully respected, a thorough analysis and answer from the Commission is fundamental when requested, providing an assessment not only of the formal or procedural issues but also on the essential content of the matter;

31. Emphasises that access to information held by the EU institutions, as specified by Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, is the primary interest of citizens aiming to understand better the decision-making process particularly when it concerns projects with an impact on the environment; takes the view that greater access to information on investigations and infringement files could be provided by the Commission without jeopardising the purpose of the investigations and that an overriding public interest might well justify access to these files, particularly in cases where fundamental rights, human or animal health and the protection of the environment against irreversible damage may be at stake, or where proceedings are under way regarding discrimination against a minority or violations of human dignity, as long as protection of trade secrets and sensitive information relating to court cases, competition cases and personnel files are safeguarded;

32. Asks for a precautionary and preventive approach by the Commission when assessing projects with a potential negative environmental or public health impact, in early cooperation with the Member States concerned; notes the possibility of injunction measures to be established during deliberations in cases where irreversible damage is anticipated;

33. Takes note, in particular, of the important contribution of the SOLVIT network in uncovering and resolving issues related to the implementation of internal market legislation; encourages the enhancement of this EU tool by ensuring that Member States provide adequate staffing to the SOLVIT National Centres; adds that collective action is needed to resolve disputes brought by consumers and their associations;

34. Underlines that, as confirmed by the Legal Service in its Opinion of 29 February 2012, the fields of activity of the European Union institutions, as contained in the Treaty, are wider than the mere sum of the competences exercised by the Union; takes into account the view of Parliament's Legal Service that Parliament is entitled to adopt internal administrative decisions which aim to establish a procedure for the processing of submissions from citizens; regrets in this respect the failure of the appropriate Parliament service to follow through on Parliament's Resolution of 21 November 2012 on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2011 ⁽¹⁾; takes note, finally, of the legal ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (Case T-280/09), specifying that a petition must be drafted in a sufficiently clear and precise manner so as to be properly understood, in light of the conditions set out in Article 227 TFEU;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0445.

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35. Urges Member States to transpose and apply EU legislation in full transparency and, with that objective in mind, considers it indispensable to improve the Commission's early cooperation with Member States' parliaments and governments, on a reciprocal basis;

36. Deplores the bureaucratic obstacles placed before European Citizens' Initiatives due to a lack of IT support; regrets, above all, that such a tool for citizens is being used so disparately in the various administrations, due to varying operating procedures in the Member States;

37. Welcomes the Year of European Citizenship in 2013; calls on all institutions and bodies both of the European Union and of the Member States to enhance and advertise more widely their service to European citizens and residents during this year, in light of the principles contained in the Treaties and the facts revealed in this report;

38. Notes that the petitions mechanism is not merely a service, but a right for all European citizens and residents; pledges to make the petition procedure more efficient, transparent, and impartial, while preserving the participatory rights of the Members of the Committee on Petitions, so that the handling of petitions stands up to judicial review even at a procedural level;

39. Emphasises the essential role of fact-finding visits in the petitions procedure, not just as a participatory parliamentary right, but also as an obligation in relation to petitioners; reaffirms, as already stated in this Committee's previous report, the need for more precise, written, procedural rules in relation to the preparation, implementation and evaluation of visits, ensuring on the one hand that all members of a fact-finding visit have the right to present the facts from their point of view while, on the other hand, guaranteeing all Committee Members the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process concerning the conclusions and recommendations to be drawn by the Committee on Petitions;

40. Calls on Parliament's Conference of Presidents to reinforce this Committee's investigatory role;

41. Considers the organisation of public hearings a useful way of studying issues raised by petitioners in depth; wishes to bring attention, for instance, to the public hearing held on the exploration and exploitation of unconventional energy sources, which took note of the concerns raised in this respect by EU citizens through their petitions; recognises Member States' right to choose their energy mix and the need for better EU-wide coordination when realising the threefold objectives of EU energy policy as a whole, namely competitiveness, sustainability and security of supply;

42. Looks forward to organising public hearings for successful European Citizens' Initiatives, alongside the legislative Committee responsible in accordance with Rule 197A of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure; reaffirms its belief that this new tool will strengthen the democratic institutions of the Union and will give meaning to the notion of European citizenship;

43. Is nevertheless concerned about the red tape and technical obstacles which have emerged during the first months of the practical application of the European Citizens' Initiative; calls, therefore, on the Commission to consider seriously bringing forward the date of the review prescribed in Article 22 of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011;

44. Stresses the need for regular review of the state of play with the European Citizens' Initiatives, with the aim of improving the procedure and enabling effective solutions to be found as swiftly as possible to any obstacles at every stage of the procedure;

45. Believes that the role and responsibilities of the Petitions Committee would be best performed, and its visibility, efficiency, accountability and transparency best enhanced, by improving its means for bringing issues of importance to European citizens to plenary, and upgrading its abilities to call witnesses, conduct investigations and organise hearings;

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46. Resolves to examine the extent to which amendments to the Rules of Procedure would be appropriate for the implementation of the above formal requirements concerning fact-finding visits and plenary resolutions under Article 202 of its Rules of Procedure;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of the Committee on Petitions to the Council, the Commission and the European Ombudsman, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States, their committees on petitions and their ombudsmen or similar competent bodies.

P7_TA(2013)0422

Recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria) and Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran)

European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria) and Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran) (2013/2872(RSP))

(2016/C 181/15)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolutions of 15 November 2007 on serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence and those of other religious communities⁽¹⁾, of 21 January 2010 on recent attacks on Christian communities⁽²⁾, of 6 May 2010 on the mass atrocities in Jos, Nigeria⁽³⁾, of 20 May 2010 on religious freedom in Pakistan⁽⁴⁾, of 25 November 2010 on Iraq: the death penalty (notably the case of Tariq Aziz) and attacks against Christian communities⁽⁵⁾, of 20 January 2011 on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion⁽⁶⁾, of 27 October 2011 on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities⁽⁷⁾, and of 13 December 2012 on the annual report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2011 and the European Union's policy on the matter⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2013 on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the statement of 23 September 2013 by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, condemning the attack on the Christian community in Peshawar, Pakistan,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 February 2011 on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, as well as the Council conclusions of 16 November 2009 underlining the strategic importance of freedom of religion or belief and of countering religious intolerance,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 474.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 305 E, 11.11.2010, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 81 E, 15.3.2011, p. 143.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 147.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 99 E, 3.4.2012, p. 115.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 136 E, 11.5.2012, p. 53.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 131 E, 8.5.2013, p. 108.

⁽⁸⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0503.

⁽⁹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0279.