

Strengthening citizens' rights in a Union of democratic change. EU citizenship report 2017

2017/2069(INI) - 12/12/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 430 votes to 169 with 48 abstentions a resolution on the EU Citizenship Report 2017: Strengthening Citizens Rights in a Union of Democratic Change.

It began by recalling that EU citizenship and its related rights were initially introduced in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht and were further enhanced by the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in December 2009, as well as by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. It took note of the Commission's 2017 EU Citizenship Report, which contains an enumeration of new priorities by field of activity for the years ahead, while urging the Commission to speed up its work on the implementation policy of Union law using all available tools and mechanisms.

Challenges: Members remarked that the prospect of the UK's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit) has highlighted the importance of EU citizenship rights and their crucial role in the everyday lives of millions of EU citizens, and has raised awareness in the EU about the potential loss of rights entailed by Brexit on both sides, with special regard to the 3 million EU citizens resident in the UK and the 1.2 million UK citizens resident in the EU. They acknowledged that on the heels of events in the United Kingdom, the refugee humanitarian crisis, the devastating social and economic impact of austerity policies, the high levels of unemployment and poverty, and the rise in xenophobia and racism in the EU have undermined confidence in the EU system and the European project as a whole.

Information on rights: Parliament called on Member States to better inform EU citizens as to their rights and duties and to facilitate equal access to and equal respect for these rights both in their country of origin and in other Member States. It emphasised the existence of exemption clauses granted to certain Member States that give rise to de facto differences in the rights of citizens.

It acknowledged the Commission's efforts to make multiple information and assistance outlets about the EU and the rights it confers on its citizens, such as the Europe Direct network, the Your Europe portal and the e-justice portal, and the proposed Single Digital Gateway available and more accessible, in order to better inform individuals exercising their rights as EU citizens. Members supported the Commission's commitment to organising an EU-wide awareness and information campaign on the rights of EU citizens.

Parliament called for a clear definition of a European policy against anti-European propaganda and false information and proposed that a minimum time in public broadcast media in all Member States be dedicated to content related to EU affairs. It also encouraged Member States to give more space to civic education with a particular focus on EU citizenship and European issues in their school curricula and to adapt teacher training accordingly.

Anti-discrimination: Parliament expressed strong regret that for almost a decade now no significant progress has been made in the adoption of the [EU-wide Anti-Discrimination Directive](#). It was of the view that the negotiations should recommence and the effectiveness of EU policies in the field of anti-discrimination should be increased and remaining obstacles removed. It stressed that discrimination due to sex, nationality, sexual orientation, age, language, ethnic origin must be eliminated. It also highlighted the topics of gender equality and protection of minority rights.

Participatory democracy: stressing the importance of encouraging participation in the European elections by giving greater prominence to European political parties, Members believed that the reform of the Electoral Act could be an opportunity for the Union to become more democratic, noting that this view is shared by thousands of Europeans. They asked the Commission to act on complaints regarding the exercise of the right to vote in European and municipal elections, to devise a concrete action plan for the introduction of electronic voting in the European Parliament elections 2019 starting at the earliest feasible date, and to make that system more widely available to all EU citizens. EU citizens who move to and reside in another Member State should have the possibility to exercise their right to vote in the national elections of their country of origin.

Members called for changes to the conditions of legal admissibility, registration requirements and procedures for examining a European Citizens' Initiative. They also proposed, with the aim of strengthening Union citizenship and the exercise of that citizenship, that the Commission should encourage local authorities to designate councillors responsible for European affairs, since this is the level that is closest to the citizens.

Free movement: Parliament called for specific measures for removing obstacles to free movement. It asked the Commission to regularly monitor the application of [Directive 2004/38/EC](#) and to take appropriate measures to remove potential obstacles to freedom of movement. Member States were urged to guarantee that their national legislation is sufficiently clear and detailed to ensure that the right of free movement of citizens and their families is respected, to proceed with the proper training of the competent national authorities in this respect.