



Committee of the Regions

CIVEX-V-044

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OPINION

EU Citizenship Report 2013

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- underlines that free movement is a cornerstone for the EU's further economic and political development, opens professional and learning opportunities for EU citizens and creates closer bonds between Europeans and thus is a central element of Union citizenship;
- observes that EU citizenship separates the concept of citizenship from the national state and shifts the emphasis from individual membership of a political community to residence, to equal protection of individual, political and social rights, and to free movement as a European citizen;
- emphasises the importance of creating a real area of freedom, security and justice to serve citizens, in a world where people are more mobile, and notes that ensuring the smooth exercise by EU citizens of their right to free movement and residence is crucial, because it is the EU Treaty right which citizens value the most and see as the most important achievement of EU integration;
- notes that the difficulties faced by EU citizens in exercising their rights are not so much due to a legislative deficit at European level as to issues of transposing and implementing legislation at national level and points out that regional and local authorities will be asked to play a key role in the participatory processes to be put in place, so as to implement a real bottom-up approach in which citizens can make a substantial contribution to defining EU policies that give positive effect to their rights;
- commends the European Commission's proposal to use an e-training tool for local authorities to address the lack of knowledge of European citizens' rights at local and regional level and would like to work actively with the European Commission on designing and promoting this tool in the Member States;
- calls on every single Member State to make it easier for their citizens to exercise the right to vote and right to stand as candidates in national elections, irrespective of whether they reside or are staying in the country in question and believes that the time is ripe to begin or continue dialogue on extending EU citizens' right to vote to include regional and national elections of the country of residence.

Rapporteur

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Reference document

European Commission, *EU Citizenship Report 2013 – EU citizens: your rights, your future*
COM(2013) 269 final

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions - EU Citizenship Report 2013

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. notes that European citizenship, irrespective of the ways in which national citizenship is recognised, not only enables different national identities to coexist within the European Union and citizens to be involved in the process of European integration, but helps to build European democracy;
2. underlines that free movement is a cornerstone for the EU's further economic and political development, opens professional and learning opportunities for EU citizens and creates closer bonds between Europeans and thus is a central element of Union citizenship;
3. highlights the need to focus also on the economic dimension in order to secure an economically strong Europe, which would be able to strengthen the social dimension of EU citizenship, in view of the ever-worsening debt crisis and increase in unemployment affecting more and more EU citizens, especially young people;
4. accepts that a proportion of Europe's citizens feel remote from decision-making at European level and repeats that decisions must be taken as transparently as possible and as close as possible to ordinary people;
5. knows that because local and regional authorities are close to citizens, they are ideally placed to promote a better understanding of EU citizenship and to highlight it and make people more aware of its real benefits for individuals;
6. stresses the need for closer integration to be accompanied by more democratic legitimacy at a time when economic and monetary union is deepening and the possibility of strengthening political union through a revision of the treaties is being discussed;

Political and legal framework for European citizenship

7. notes that a fundamental and highly symbolic stage in the development of a European identity and European democracy was the introduction in the Maastricht Treaty of "European citizenship", granted to every citizen of every Member State of the European Union, and which with the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty was considered to complement national citizenship;
8. also points out that the new legislative arrangements brought in by the Treaty of Lisbon signalled a consolidation of European citizenship, which now extends (and does not just complement), without replacing, national citizenship; European citizenship is not meant to be

an expression of pre-existing ties that hold the political system together, but a framework of rules that transform freedom of movement between Member States into a system of rights rather than one of exclusions;

9. remarks that twenty years after the Maastricht Treaty set out the rights of EU citizens, those rights are not always part of people's everyday reality. Ordinary EU citizens attested to this in a broad public consultation on European citizenship in which 12 000 citizens gave examples of red tape that they still faced, for example in exercising their right to free movement¹. Eurobarometer surveys on citizens' rights² and electoral rights³, a series of direct discussions between citizens and national and European policy-makers, and a number of questions about European rights put by the general public to the Europe Direct information service all confirm that more needs to be done in this area;
10. emphasises that the rights referred to in the report are rights granted by the EU Treaties to citizens of the European Union, but that many of these rights are fundamental rights enjoyed also by third-country nationals;
11. observes that the relationship between European citizenship and citizenship of the Member States remains ambiguous. On the one hand, EU citizenship is directly dependent on citizenship of the Member States, which is the sole criterion for acquiring EU citizenship, as laid down by the relevant national law. This characteristic of EU citizenship limits its role to being an additional source of rights linked to citizenship of the Member States. On the other hand, EU citizenship separates the concept of citizenship from the national state and shifts the emphasis from individual membership of a political community to residence, to equal protection of individual, political and social rights, and to free movement as a European citizen;
12. notes that the acquisition of the citizenship of a member state – and through that EU citizenship - can be a key mechanism for integrating third-country nationals into European societies and as such must be sufficiently accessible to immigrants who have been legally established in the EU for a long time. Granting citizenship to such immigrants is an important way of integrating them into European societies;
13. points out that in an opinion on EU citizenship adopted in 2010 the Committee already called on the European Union to make its policy and decision-making systems more democratic and transparent. It also asked for mechanisms to be introduced that could promote a two-way political dialogue, and for the principle of participatory democracy to be put into practice;

1 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/eu-citizen-brochure_en.pdf.

2 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_365_en.pdf.

3 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_364_en.pdf.

14. notes that in its report the European Commission evaluates progress to date and endeavours to keep its promises to promote EU citizenship by proposing twelve key actions;
15. points out, however, that the proposals contained in the report mainly concern the economic dimension of the EU and only secondarily the political or social aspects of European integration. For example, it does not contain clear and specific proposals for strengthening the rights of patients or for cross-border delivery of health services, enhancing multiculturalism, promoting a more "social Europe" (e.g. by combating poverty and social exclusion) or the gradual creation of a European identity;
16. notes that the measures announced in the report appear at first sight to be compatible with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, but that it is essential for the European Commission to justify in detail each specific measure when it makes a formal proposal, since certain proposals might require closer examination (e.g. issuing of optional uniform European documents). In addition, the measures envisaged should not entail an excessive administrative or financial burden for the national, regional and local authorities concerned;
17. points out that with a view to the upcoming European elections in 2014, the report must be read in the light of the relevant recent communication and related report of the European Commission⁴. These texts are intended to enhance democratic procedures and representative democracy in the EU by boosting participation in the European elections;
18. recalls that the CoR was closely associated to the preparation of the report and that it takes into account the findings and proposals of a survey commissioned by the CoR on the role of local and regional authorities in promoting Union citizenship and citizens' rights⁵;

Conditions for effective citizenship

19. recommends that measures be taken to provide education and training on citizenship, to ensure that citizens are able to exercise their rights and obligations in a free and informed way, to strengthen the social dimension of citizenship in view of the worsening economic crisis, and to remove any obstacles limiting European citizens' ability to exercise their right of free movement;
20. emphasises the importance of creating a real area of freedom, security and justice to serve citizens, in a world where people are more mobile⁶, and notes that ensuring the smooth

⁴ [COM\(2013\) 126 final](#), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *Preparing for the 2014 European elections: further enhancing their democratic and efficient conduct* and [C\(2013\) 1303 final](#), Commission Recommendation on *Enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament*.

⁵ Committee of the Regions survey (2012) on *Local and regional authorities promoting EU citizenship and citizens' rights*. A summary of the survey is available at: <http://cor.europa.eu/en/events/forums/Pages/ey2013-toolkit.aspx>.

⁶ CdR 201/2009.

exercise by EU citizens of their right to free movement and residence is crucial, because it is the EU Treaty right which citizens value the most and see as the most important achievement of EU integration. In this context it is not enough just to establish rights; it is also essential to ensure that all levels of governance work together to make sure that they can be exercised without hindrance by those who hold them;

Role of regional and local authorities

21. notes that an important conclusion of the 2010 report was that the difficulties faced by EU citizens in exercising their rights are not so much due to a legislative deficit at European level as to issues of transposing and implementing legislation at national level. In view of this, the Committee points out that the Commission's report does not focus specifically on the contribution that regional and local authorities can make to the effectiveness and quality of European citizenship;
22. points out that regional and local authorities will be asked to play a key role in the participatory processes to be put in place, so as to implement a real bottom-up approach in which citizens can make a substantial contribution to defining EU policies that give positive effect to their rights;
23. emphasises that local and regional authorities can help in managing problems relating to movement and residence of European citizens, and in issues concerning the entry of migrants, and recognises that local authorities are able to reach groups that often have lower levels of participation in the political process, such as young people and migrants;
24. commends the European Commission's proposal to use an e-training tool for local authorities to address the lack of knowledge of European citizens' rights at local and regional level - which often leads to people receiving incorrect information and makes it more difficult for them to exercise their rights. Since CoR members are well placed to understand the needs and capabilities of local government officials in their regions, the Committee would like to work actively with the European Commission on designing and promoting this tool in the Member States;
25. welcomes the Commission's new initiatives to remove obstacles to the exercise of the rights associated with EU citizenship, while also pointing out that there is still a gap in the Member States between prevailing legal provisions and the everyday reality for citizens, especially in cross-border contexts, and that this fact should receive more attention;

Dimensions of EU citizenship⁷

Active citizenship

26. believes that the consolidation of European citizenship can be underpinned by promoting active participation in the life of local communities of citizens, especially young people, who move around more within the EU;

Social citizenship

27. believes it is essential to boost European-level initiatives in support of social citizenship, given that access to social rights is in some cases associated with Member State requirements and criteria that favour various forms of discrimination, running counter to the principle of equality and equal treatment provided for under European law;
28. notes that the European Commission's report contains a number of measures to strengthen social citizenship, including the positive step of introducing a quality framework for traineeships, but which in our view only make sense as guidelines;
29. firmly supports the effective consolidation of the right to free movement, especially movement of young people, given the continuing increase in unemployment in the Member States;

Civic citizenship

30. points out that measures are still needed in relation to civic citizenship. By way of illustration, a Special Eurobarometer survey⁸ found only half of respondents to be aware of the existence and responsibilities of the European Ombudsman, and they were also poorly informed about the right to submit a petition to the European Parliament⁹;
31. recommends here that local and regional authorities organise specific and effective measures to raise European citizens' awareness of the European Ombudsman and of the right to petition the European Parliament, with support from the relevant European funds;

⁷

These categories were proposed in the CoR opinion on the *EU Citizenship Report 2010: Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens' rights* (rapporteur: Roberto Pella (IT/EPP), CdR 355/2010 fin) and have been adopted for the present opinion.

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See Committee of the Regions study (2012) on *The role of Local and Regional Authorities in Promoting EU Citizenship and Citizens' Rights*. A summary of the survey is available at: <http://cor.europa.eu/en/events/forums/Pages/ey2013-toolkit.aspx>, p. 12.

⁹

Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Political citizenship

32. points out that rates of participation in European elections have shown a steady decline since 1979, falling to 43% in 2009¹⁰, which corroborates the finding that Europe's citizens feel their opinions are not taken into account in European decision-making (Eurobarometer reports 68% of respondents expressing this concern);
33. draws attention to good practice¹¹ based on which local and regional authorities, supported by the appropriate European funding, can organise programmes and campaigns at local and regional level to inform local people about their right not only to vote, but also to stand as candidates in the European elections. Local authorities can also play a role in informing and raising awareness among schoolchildren and students, preparing them to actively exercise their electoral rights;
34. emphasises the need to further consolidate the political rights of third-country nationals and urges the Member States not to apply excessively restrictive conditions for acquiring citizenship of their countries. In previous opinions, the Committee of the Regions has recognised the aspiration of immigrants residing legally in the Member States to acquire Union citizenship, while also expressing the view that participation of legal immigrants in political life is a key factor in facilitating their integration into local communities;
35. calls on every single Member State to make it easier for their citizens to exercise the right to vote and right to stand as candidates in national elections, irrespective of whether they reside or are staying in the country in question. Exercising the right to free movement within the EU should not entail the forfeiting of political rights;
36. believes that the time is ripe to begin or continue dialogue on extending EU citizens' right to vote to include regional and national elections of the country of residence, without prejudice to the national sovereignty of each Member State (*jus domicili*);
37. notes that the concept of European citizenship could boost the process of EU enlargement. Enlargement is not just a process of economic and legal adaptation to the EU *acquis*, but also requires policy measures in the enlargement countries to strengthen democratic structures and the rule of law. The prospect of European citizenship could give such measures tangible significance;

¹⁰ Committee of the Regions study (2012) on *The role of Local and Regional Authorities in Promoting EU Citizenship and Citizens' Rights*, p. 11.

¹¹ Op. cit. p. 11.

Administrative citizenship

38. reiterates that measures are needed to cut red tape at local and regional level to facilitate the practical exercise of European citizenship rights, in particular the right to free movement, and to eliminate all obstructive practices or other forms of discrimination entailing unequal treatment of EU citizens, particularly in the granting of residence rights. Local and regional authorities should be able to offer the right solutions based on a diagnosis of the problems they face;
39. appreciates that the measures announced by the Commission are some positive steps in this direction. Since some types of measure actively involve local authorities¹², the Committee calls for both an impact assessment of their effects and provision for funding from EU resources;
40. welcomes the proposals by the European Commission to promote easier recognition of car roadworthiness certificates across EU borders, and also the proposed harmonisation of requirements for technical checks on motor vehicles, which should be implemented as soon as possible and in a way to ensure that citizens can exercise their right to free movement, including moving vehicle registrations between countries, more easily;

Culture of citizenship

41. recommends stepping up cooperation initiatives to promote public information on the right to free movement, e.g. town twinning and various cross-border cooperation projects;
42. points out again¹³ that with a view to the European elections in 2014 it is very important to increase awareness among all EU citizens of their rights, in particular their electoral rights in the Member State where they reside, and to facilitate the exercise of those rights;

Ways of financing measures, networking facilities and cooperation

43. with a view to the new multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020, emphasises the major boost that the *Fundamental rights and citizenship* and *Europe for citizens* programmes could give to consolidating European citizenship and supporting activities to promote understanding and implementation of EU legislation and EU policies in the Member States;
44. calls for a simpler and more effective approach to funding programmes for European citizenship, with more precise identification of priorities that are compatible with policy decisions, and consideration given to outcomes, so that projects have more impact in terms of

¹² Specifically, these include increasing the availability of targeted and accessible information on the EU, making electronic training tools available to local authorities and providing citizen-friendly information to address people's issues.

¹³ See 2013 opinion on strengthening EU citizenship.

achieving strategic and political goals. For this to happen, it is essential the local and regional authorities be involved in the planning of measures, especially as regards training and drawing up annual work programmes.

Brussels, 28 November 2013

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of the Committee of the Regions

Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso

The Secretary-General
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Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	EU Citizenship Report 2013
Reference document	European Commission, EU Citizenship Report 2013 – EU citizens: your rights, your future COM(2013) 269 final
Legal basis	Article 307(1) TFEU
Procedural basis	Rule 39(a) RoP
Date of Commission letter	8 May 2013
Date of President's decision	23 May 2013
Commission responsible	Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)
Rapporteur	Mr Gkotsopoulos (EL/PES)
Discussed in commission	24 September 2013
Adopted by commission	24 September 2013
Result of the vote in commission	Unanimous
Adoption in plenary	28 November 2013
Previous Committee opinions	<p>CdR 167/2010 fin, opinion on the <i>European Citizens' Initiative</i>, rapporteur: Sonia Masini (IT/PES)</p> <p>CdR 355/2010 fin, opinion on the <i>EU Citizenship Report 2010: Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens' rights</i>, rapporteur: Roberto Pella (IT/EPP)</p> <p>CdR 13/2012 fin, opinion on <i>EU financial instruments in Justice and Citizenship</i>, rapporteur: Giuseppe Varacalli (IT/ALDE)</p> <p>CdR 1652/2012 fin, opinion on <i>Strengthening EU Citizenship: Promotion of EU Citizens' Electoral Rights</i>, rapporteur: György Gémesi (HU/EPP)</p> <p>CdR 2244/2012 fin, opinion on <i>The statute and funding of European Political Parties and European Political Foundations</i>, rapporteur: István Sértő-Radics (HU/ALDE)</p>
Date of subsidiarity monitoring network consultation	n/a