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Public consultation on European citizenship
POSITION PAPER
of
European House, Budapest

1 RIGHT TO MOVE AND RESIDE FREELY WITHIN THE EU

According to the various opinion polls (Eurobarometer and national) the right to move and reside freely within the EU is the most visible and recognised right of EU citizens. It really expresses that the European Union and European cooperation is something 'tangible' and visible. The problem is that even before COVID-19 some Member States of the Schengen Area introduced temporary or not so temporary border controls because of various national political considerations.

Also administrative procedures in the different Member States when citizens are moving from one MS to another are not at all standardised and sometimes difficult to follow. A new phenomenon in some MS is the return of its citizens from another MS: our experience is that it could pose extreme difficulties especially regarding social security and healthcare systems. The COVID-19 situation makes things even worse in this regard.

2 RIGHT TO VOTE AND STAND AS A CANDIDATE

It was good to see that the turnout at the 2019 EP elections was higher than at the previous one. This is definitely a positive development. We at European House had our own campaign to encourage people especially young ones to vote.

Although we would 'vote' for a single day for the voting period for the EP elections, we think it is not realistic at the moment and would result in a weaker turnout in 2024. MS argument to respect national traditions is something to respect.

We are more concerned by the failure of the Spitzenkandidat-system: unfortunately what happened in 2019 undermines the credibility of the European political class. People are right to question how to trust European leaders if they do not deliver what they have promised to do and still decide behind closed doors.

We are strongly in favour of setting up a European list at the 2024 EP elections. In addition we strongly support the 'Voters without borders' European citizens' initiative (ECI) aiming at guaranteeing full political rights for EU citizens regardless of their place of residence.

3 RIGHT TO CONSULAR PROTECTION

The right to consular protection is relatively unknown but it was good to see that in Spring 2020, during the first months of the pandemic EU Member States were able to coordinate their efforts in bringing home EU citizens from outside the EU. Citizens do not see EU Delegations as an 'Embassy', they do not have the right to issue a new/temporary travel document in case of loss or act promptly in urgent cases. It would be a good idea to give them these rights.

4 SIMPLIFYING MOBILITY AND LIFE IN EUROPE

Our experience is that as more and more EU citizens move to another MS to work it is more and more difficult and a lengthy process to have all necessary documents when retiring and claiming a pension. A simplified and standardised timeframe to address these issues would be welcomed. Citizens friendly legal arrangements should be created if a European-level civil umbrella organisation is set up in a MS. The same applies to transnational donations/giving and grant making.

5 EXERCISING EU CITIZENSHIP RIGHT

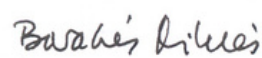
The lack of information at national level is one of the major reasons why citizens are not aware of their rights as EU citizens. It is not in the interest of national governments to 'advertise' that someone else (EU) is doing also something for them. It would be good to have an 'independent' (not national) information centre, a one-stop-shop where citizens could directly turn with such questions for advice. Today too many information bodies are dealing with such questions and what is everybody's business is nobody's business.

6 COVID

First of all thank you for reacting to the pandemic situation promptly and putting these questions into the questionnaire. Our feeling during the first wave of the pandemic (Spring 2020) was that the EU was falling apart. From a citizens point of view there were no coordination and the European Commission did not communicate enough the efforts they made. Member States closed and opened their borders based on their narrow national political interests. During the summer and autumn period the coordination is more visible but again the EU is seen mainly as a 'money-maker', with the message that 'Brussels will send us money' to cope with the situation.

On a Member State level the EU efforts of fighting against the pandemic (research programmes) or tackling disinformation is not visible enough as this is not in line with the political interests of national governments. More coordination, more integration is needed. After all this is the EU leitmotiv.

Budapest, 30 September 2020


Director