

European Year of Citizens (2013)

2011/0217(COD) - 11/08/2011 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish the European Year of Citizens (2013).

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

BACKGROUND: in 2009, an estimated 11.9 million Union citizens were living in another Member State than their own and many more might exercise this right at some point in their lives: a Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2009 showed that more than one third (35%) of European citizens would consider working in another Member State. However, **close to one in five Europeans see too many obstacles to working in another Member State**. Lack of information is (together with language difficulties) is the most important barrier to cross-border commuting, which constitutes, besides trans-national migration, the main form of geographic labour mobility within the EU. Recent surveys have also shown that the information citizens need in order to exercise their right to free movement is not strictly limited to the conditions for using this right as such: amongst the administrative issues which people had looked at prior to moving to another Member State, the two items mentioned most often were social security and welfare and the recognition of academic diplomas.

It is clear that citizens who wish to study, work, retire, live in another Member State need to be adequately informed about the different rights available to them in cross-border situations and to be able to effectively enjoy them in practice. Without this knowledge citizens are not able to make informed decisions about making use of their free movement rights. More broadly, citizens' awareness of their rights to free movement and more generally of their rights as Union citizens is crucial to enable individuals, businesses and society as a whole to benefit from the full range of opportunities available in the single market.

The significant gaps in citizens' awareness of their rights were demonstrated by a 2010 Eurobarometer survey which showed that, although Europeans are broadly aware of their status as Union citizens (79% claim some familiarity with the term 'citizen of the European Union'), they lack concrete knowledge about the exact meaning of rights attached to this status. More specifically, only 43% know the meaning of the term 'citizen of the European Union' and almost half of European citizens (48%) indicate that they are not well informed about their rights.

In the [EU Citizenship Report 2010](#) "Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens' rights", the Commission identified main obstacles which citizens still encounter in their daily lives when they seek to exercise their rights as Union citizens and outlined 25 concrete actions to remove these obstacles. In the context of this exercise, the Commission concluded that Union citizens are prevented from enjoying their rights because they lack awareness of them and announced its intention to step up the dissemination of information to Union citizens about their rights as such and in particular about their free movement rights. The designation of 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, leading to the organisation of targeted events on EU citizenship and citizen-related EU policies during this year, is thus listed in the EU Citizenship Report 2010 as one of the actions to implement in order to remedy this lack of awareness.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: an ex-ante evaluation was carried out, which indicated amongst other matters, that the actions to be implemented in the proposed European Year do not go beyond what is necessary to achieve its objectives. The proposal respects therefore the principle of proportionality.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 21(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). Although Member States retain the primary responsibility for raising citizens' awareness of their rights as Union citizens, adequate actions to address this problem require multilateral partnerships, transnational exchanges of

information and experience and Union-wide awareness-raising and dissemination of good practices. Therefore, the objectives of the proposed European Year can be better achieved at Union level.

CONTENT: the year 2013 shall be designated as the European Year of Citizens.

The **overall purpose** of the proposed European Year of Citizens is to ensure that all Union citizens are aware of the rights available to them in a cross-border context by virtue of their Union citizenship status, so as to enable them to make informed decisions about whether to make use of their right to free movement and to facilitate the effective exercise of this right.

The European Year will aim, more specifically, at:

- raising Union citizens' awareness of their right to move and reside freely within the European Union and more generally the rights guaranteed to Union citizens in cross-border situations, including their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union;
- raising Union citizens' awareness of how they can tangibly benefit from EU rights and policies while living in another Member State, and at stimulating their active participation in civic fora on Union policies and issues;
- stimulating a debate about the impact and potential of the right to free movement, as an inalienable aspect of Union citizenship, in particular in terms of strengthening societal cohesion and mutual understanding between Union citizens and the bond between citizens and the Union.

Initiatives involved: the measures to be taken to achieve these objectives may include the following initiatives organised at Union, national, regional or local level linked to the objectives of the European Year:

- information, education and awareness raising campaigns targeted at the general public and more specific audiences;
- exchange of information, sharing of experience and good practices of national, regional, local administrations and other organisations;
- conferences and events to promote debate and raise awareness of the importance and benefits of the right to free movement and residence and more generally citizens' rights as Union citizens;
- use of the existing multilingual participatory tools to stimulate citizens' contributions in giving tangible effect to their rights and more generally in achieving the objectives of the European Year;
- strengthening of the role and visibility of the multilingual Europe Direct and Your Europe web portal as key elements of a 'one-stop-shop' information system on Union citizens' rights;
- strengthening of the role and visibility of problem solving tools, such as SOLVIT, to allow Union citizens to better make use of and defend their rights.

Coordination at Union level: the Commission shall cooperate closely with Member States and bodies and associations which represent local and regional interests, in particular the Committee of Regions. It will also cooperate closely with the European Economic and Social Committee. It will convene meetings of representatives of European organisations or bodies active in the field of defending citizens' rights and stakeholders to assist the Commission in implementing the European Year at Union level.

Evaluation: by 31 December 2014, the Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in the Decision.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: no additional funding is sought for the European Year. The flexibility for annual priority setting based on the budget lines and programmes of the Directorate General for Communication provides sufficient financial margin for running the Year on a EUR 1 million scale.