EU Citizenship Report 2013. EU citizens: your rights, your future

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report by Nikolaos SALAVRAKOS (EFD, EL) on the EU Citizenship Report 2013. EU citizens: your rights, your future in response to the Commission communication on the same subject.

Firstly, the report recalled that the Lisbon Treaty enhanced the concept of EU citizenship and its derived rights. Given that public confidence in the European Union has fallen and European citizens are living through a difficult period caused by a severe economic and social crisis, Members considered that the 2014 European elections represent an opportunity to strengthen public trust in the political system and strengthen the voice and the role of citizens.

Awareness-raising and education: Members welcomed the Commission's EU Citizenship Report 2013 announcing twelve new actions in six areas aimed at strengthening EU citizens' rights. A large majority of the 25 measures announced in the Commission's EU Citizenship Report 2010 have in the meantime been completed by the Commission and other EU institutions. National, regional and local authorities are urged to promote a better understanding of EU citizenship and to explain its practical benefits for individuals. Member States are also urged to step up their efforts to spread knowledge of the SOLVIT network to citizens and companies.

Member States are encouraged to give more space to **political education on EU affairs in their school curricula**, to adapt teachers' training accordingly and, in this respect, to provide the necessary know-how and resources. According to Members, education is essential as a means of enabling individuals to participate fully in democratic, social and cultural life and therefore considers that substantial cuts should not be made in the funds allocated to education.

The importance of the organised civil society is stressed in strengthening an active European citizenship. Members reiterated their call for the establishment of the **European Association Statute**, as this may facilitate the construction of projects between citizens of different EU Member States within a transnational organisation and highlighted the need to create a **structured framework for European civil dialogue** which would give practical substance to participatory citizenship.

Proper implementation: the report stressed the vital role played by the Member States in correctly implementing European legislation. However, it stated that progress still remains to be made in this area. A practical **toolkit** on EU citizens' rights tailored to local and regional authorities would further improve correct implementation. The report expected that the **new petitions web portal**, which will be available at the beginning of 2014, will turn the petitioning process into an appealing, transparent and user-friendly instrument, also for people with disabilities.

The Commission is called upon to:

- regularly monitor the way in which the administrative formalities related to entry and residence of EU citizens and their relatives are processed in the Member States;
- play an active role in ensuring that procedures implemented by Member States fully comply with the values and human rights recognised in the EU Treaties;
- closely monitor the situation and take appropriate measures to remove potential obstacles, such as excessive bureaucracy, imposed at the national level in the way of this fundamental freedom.

Member States that disenfranchise their own nationals who choose to live in another Member State for an extended period of time are urged to put an end to this practice and revise their legislation accordingly to provide full citizenship rights during the whole process. They should also take all steps to effectively help and assist citizens who wish to vote or stand as candidates in states other than their own. The need for EU citizens to exercise their right to vote in the national elections of their country of origin from the Member State in which they reside is highlighted.

European political parties and their national affiliates are called upon to organise **transparent electoral campaigns** ahead of the 2014 European elections and to effectively tackle the problems of falling voter participation rates and the widening gap between citizens and the EU institutions. Members considered the nomination of Europe-wide candidates for the post of Commission President by European political parties as an important step towards building a genuine European public space. They also stressed the importance of informing citizens that they are entitled to **vote in municipal and European elections** if they live outside their home country.

The EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies are called upon to further **improve transparency** and make access to documents easy and user-friendly, as this enables citizens to participate more closely in the decision-making process.

The report welcomed the recent adoption of the two main EU programmes to fund activities in the field of EU citizenship from 2014 to 2020: the 'Rights and Citizenship' and the 'Europe for Citizens' programmes but considered it highly regrettable that the financial envelope for the latter especially, which supports projects on active European citizenship, has been drastically cut by Member States' governments as compared to the 2007-2013 period.

Lastly, Member States are called upon to:

- better inform EU citizens as to their rights and duties and to facilitate entitlement to these rights being respected equally both in their country of origin and in any other Member State;
- put in place coordination and cooperation measures in order to efficiently tackle the issues of double car registration taxes, tax discrimination and double taxation in a cross-border context and to take better account of the realities of cross-border worker mobility;
- set up as quickly as possible in each Member State a **one-stop-shop to coordinate projects with a cross-border impact**, for instance those with a social impact such as emergency services, with particular reference to projects that have an environmental impact, such as wind farms, where on occasion no consultation is held with residents on both sides of the border and no impact study is conducted.