Implementation of the Treaty provisions related to the EU citizenship

2018/2111(INI) - 12/02/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 459 votes to 170 with 49 abstentions a resolution on the implementation of the Treaty provisions related to EU citizenship.

Parliament stressed that the rights, values and principles on which the Union is based, which are highlighted in Articles 2 and 6 TEU, put the citizen at the very centre of the European project. The debate on the future of Europe therefore also implies a reflection on the strength of common identity.

Members pointed out that the EU has had difficulties in facing numerous crises with important socioeconomic consequences, which have led to the emergence of populist and nationalist ideologies based on exclusive identities and supremacist criteria that contradict European values. The unsatisfactory management of the various crises has increased citizens' disappointment in some of the results of the EU integration project.

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that EU citizenship is regarded as a cherished privilege among citizens, including by restoring confidence in the EU project, giving primacy to the promotion of all citizens' rights, including civil, political and social rights among others, improving the quality of democracy within the Union, the practical enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms and the opportunity for every citizen to participate in the democratic life of the Union, while providing for a greater involvement of civil society in decision-making and implementation processes.

Moreover, the prospect of Brexit has highlighted the importance of EU citizenship rights, especially among young Europeans, and their role in the lives of millions of EU citizens, and has also raised awareness in the EU concerning the potential loss of such rights on both sides.

Political rights

Members expressed concern at the trend to decline in voter turnout in both national and European Parliament elections, especially among young people. They were convinced that the strengthening of the EU public sphere and the full implementation of European citizenship have the potential to help reverse that decline by increasing citizens' sense of belonging to a European community and boosting representative democracy.

Education

Parliament stressed that the development of EU curricula in educational systems should be a priority for continuing to build on the potential of EU citizenship. It emphasised that quality civic education for all ages is crucial for the confident exercise of citizens' democratic rights and the proper functioning of a democratic society, stating that only continuous educational effort can ensure increased participation in elections at the European level. It recommended the use of Articles 165, 166 and 167 TFUE as a legal basis for exploring the potential of education, vocational training and youth policies.

Freedom of movement

While welcoming the benefits that free movement brings to EU citizens and Member States' economies, the resolution underlined the problem of incorrect or confusing information on visa requirements for

family members or on residence rights. It insisted that Member States should ensure the removal of unnecessary barriers to the right of entry/residence, in particular for third-country nationals who are family members of EU citizens.

Members were also concerned about the difficulties encountered by citizens in getting their professional qualifications recognised across Europe and the discrimination in finding employment, in accessing various services such as renting a car or an apartment or certain banking services, and in the fields of education and taxation.

The loss of electoral rights arising from residence in another Member State could discourage citizens from moving to another Member State.

Recommendations

Parliament strongly encouraged the European political parties and their party members to ensure a genderbalanced representation of candidates by means of zipped lists or other equivalent methods.

The Commission was called on to:

- extend rights in order to allow EU citizens to choose whether to vote in their Member State of nationality or of residence and that this be extended to include all elections, in line with the constitutional possibilities of each Member State;

- develop and implement e-democracy tools, such as online platforms, to involve citizens more directly in EU democratic life, thus fostering their engagement;

- step up the promotion of democratic participation by intensifying its dialogue with citizens, enhancing citizens' understanding of the role of EU legislation in their daily lives, and underlining their right to vote in and stand for election at local, national and European level;

- come forward with a proposal enhancing the role of Europe Direct offices;

- come forward with a proposal for the implementation of Parliament's recommendations on an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

European Citizens Initiative and political parties

Members considered that the revision of the legal framework governing the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) presents an opportunity to enhance citizens' participation in EU policy making by rendering the instrument less bureaucratic and more accessible. They also called for individual citizens of the EU to be given the opportunity to apply directly for membership in political parties at European level.

Parliament proposed to Member States that they establish a European public holiday on 9 May in order to reinforce a European feeling of belonging and create space for civic movements and activities.

Lastly, Parliament recalled the Commission guidance on the application of Union data protection law in the electoral context and its communication of 12 September 2018 on securing free and fair elections in Europe, and underlined the need for a defined EU policy to tackle anti-European propaganda and targeted misinformation. Members called for every effort to be made in order to ensure elections free from any abusive interference.