Citizenship of the Union. 3rd report

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The committee adopted the report by Carlos COELHO (EPP-ED, P) on the Commission report on citizenship of the Union. It took the view that the establishment of European citizenship was important to create a sense of adhering to a set of common democratic values and of being involved in the process of the European Union. It added that European citizenship was not a substitute for but rather supplemented and broadened national citizenship through the recognition of a set of rights common to all European citizens. The committee however deplored the continuing obstacles to the exercise of rights ensuing from EU citizenship, including those - which had long been enshrined in Community law - relating to the freedom of movement and residence of persons, and called on the Member States to take steps to remedy the situation. It said that the concept of European citizenship must be resolutely implemented in all of its dimensions - political, administrative, judicial, social and economic. MEPs were particularly concerned about the low level of participation in European elections, which could, if it continued, 'delegitimise' the European Parliament. They therefore urged the EU institutions and the Member States to take measures to make voters more aware of the importance of voting and to ensure optimum conditions for participation in the elections. Member States concerned should place citizens on electoral registers as quickly as possible. The Union also needed to obtain greater legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, respond to their needs, interests and values and function in a spirit of openness and transparency. Thus, the public should be better informed, in particular about their rights to vote and stand in European elections and their right to petition the EP and to submit complaints to the European Ombudsman. The EU's information policy should be stepped up and targeted as much as possible, and the new rules on public access to documents should also be fully implemented. On the judicial front, the committee pointed out that EU citizens were entitled to a high level of security but that it was also important to safeguard their human and civil rights. It therefore called for greater police and judicial cooperation, as well as the implementation of anti-discrimination directives and continued efforts to fight against racism and xenophobia and to promote equality between men and women. Member States should guarantee European citizens effective, equitable access to justice, which presupposed the adoption of minimum standards of criminal procedure. The committee also stressed that immigrants with a long-term residence permit should have rights which are as near as possible to those enjoyed by EU citizens.