



State of the Union Citizens' Rights 2019: *The Post-Election EU Citizenship Agenda*

14 May 2019

Residence Palace, Rue de la Loi 155, 1040 Brussels

-REPORT-

On Tuesday 14 May, the European Citizens' Action Service (ECAS) held the second edition of its "State of the Union Citizens' Rights" event, an annual conference aimed at identifying challenges faced by EU citizens to their right to free movement and the solutions to overcoming them.

The conference was organised in the framework of the FAIR EU project, under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme of the European Commission, and under the Mobility and Political Rights Enhancement for EU Citizens (MORE for EU Citizens) project supported by the Thematic Fund on EU Mobile Citizens' Access to Rights of the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM).



Keynote speech and opening remarks

The tone of the conference was set with an opening speech by Member of Parliament (MEP) **Jean Lambert**, who underlined the importance of the political rights of EU mobile citizens. She explained that many citizens are either not fully aware of these rights or do not understand how they can exercise them. As a result, their involvement in the political life of their host Member States remains limited, leading to a democratic deficit. To illustrate this point, MEP Lambert highlighted the situation of EU mobile citizens in the UK, where the procedures for



registering on the electoral roll were particularly complicated and the deadlines were very tight. In reaction, she called on national and European decision-makers to take the necessary steps to simplify the electoral procedures. She believes that EU mobile citizens should be regularly informed about their right to political participation and should have a say on the policies that directly affect them in their host countries.

"We need immediate action after each election to rectify some of the voting problems and not just in the last minutes ahead of the next one".

-MEP Jean Lambert

Virginia Mercouri, Media Relations and Communications Management Consultant, presented the results of the World Café discussions, an effective and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue, which took place in the framework of Europe Day on May 9th. The aim of the event was to bring citizens together and collect their ideas on how Europeans can create a more democratic community. Ms Mercouri shared that citizens have an important role to play in the assessment of the democratic scrutiny and other activities undertaken by politicians. In this respect, elections are important, but they are not sufficient anymore as citizens are looking for more innovative ways to get involved. Therefore, Ms Mercouri emphasized that politicians should focus more on developing the tools for a participatory democracy, such as, for instance, crowdsourcing citizens' opinions.

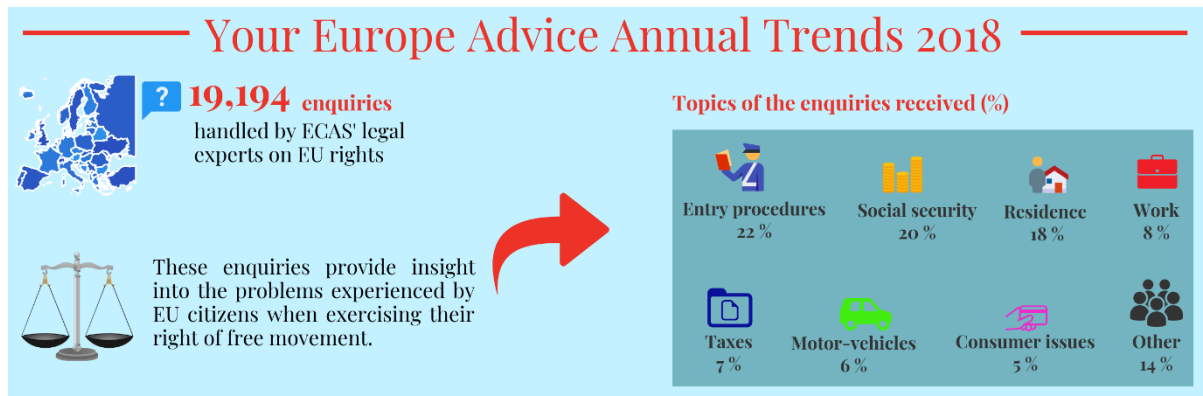


First panel:

The first panel of the conference, moderated by **Dr Derek S. Hutcheson**, Associate Professor in Political Science at Malmö University, further elaborated on the obstacles to freedom of movement and political participation that EU mobile citizens face in their host Member States.



Claire Damilano, Senior Legal Manager at ECAS, presented the key obstacles in those regards, based on the citizens' legal enquiries received through the European Commission's service [Your Europe Advice](#), which is managed by ECAS. She explained that in the last year, challenges with regards to residence procedures have been the most frequently reported ones by EU mobile citizens. While political rights are usually not of the biggest concern for this group, Ms Damilano pointed out that there has been a significant increase in the number of questions regarding the procedures and eligibility to participate in the EU elections.



Dr Jelena Dzankic, Coordinator of the GLOBALCIT network at European University Institute (EUI), explained that though there are around 14 million EU mobile citizens of voting age, their participation in the EU and local elections is very limited. Under the FAIR EU project, the EUI has specifically researched the obstacles to political participation in the EU28. Based on that research, Ms Dzankic shared that the main challenges

are related to: eligibility, voter registration, voting methods, outreach and information, and political environment. For instance, EU mobile citizens find the registration processes in their host countries complicated and unclear, and they are rarely informed on how they should proceed. Furthermore, the registration deadlines are often far from the actual elections date, obliging EU mobile citizens to register before the actual electoral campaign starts. There is also a lack of information on their political rights and they are rarely targeted by the political parties in the host states.

Dr Nando Sigona, Reader in International Migration and Forced Displacement at the University of Birmingham, presented the results of the Eurochildren study. The aim of the project is to map the presence of EU nationals in Britain and analyse how Brexit will affect EU families. He pointed out that about 3 percent of children living in the UK have at least one parent from the EU. Due to Brexit, some

of those families decided to leave the country, others applied for the settled status or for nationality. He further explained that the decision to apply for citizenship by naturalisation is not the culmination of a mythic path to integration, as one could assume, but it is rather a defensive mechanism and a way to 'take back control'. Dr Sigona shared that Brexit has had a very negative impact on EU mobile citizens, who lost trust in the British government and fear for their future.



Anna Zaremba, EU Rights Coordinator at ECAS, highlighted the results of the crowdsourcing exercise, which ECAS launched in September 2018. Based on the responses received, she explained that EU mobile citizens continue to experience obstacles to freedom of movement, particularly in regards to their residence rights and access to the local job market. In terms of political participation, EU citizens reported challenges mainly related to the lack of correct



information for the registration procedures and lengthy and cumbersome procedures to register on the roll. Ms Zaremba also provided several ideas and recommendations on how the procedures could be improved to enhance EU mobile citizens' political inclusion and the sense of belonging in their host Member State.

Sam van der Staak, Head of Europe Programme at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA International), presented the research on the role of national political parties active abroad. He explained that parties may get involved in the activities abroad for various reasons, including voters' mobilisation, funding, creating networks and receiving policy input, leadership recruitment and creating informal structures. He added that many parties see a great potential in their voters living abroad, e.g. in Romania, 13-20% of electorate live in another Member State. Parties active abroad may be either linked to their home party (have rights in the mother party or not) or act informally. Mr. Van der Staak also explained the challenges experienced by the parties active abroad, particularly those related to the laws on foreign campaigning and receiving funds from abroad. To be able to combat these challenges, he provided a set of recommendations for both the governments and political parties. The former should better regulate the functioning of parties abroad and improve the alignment of the legislation between (EU) countries, while the latter should intensify their investment

in the parties active abroad, and give them a stronger role in the internal decision-making processes. At the same time, political parties should be attentive and adapt their actions to the international sensitivities and local laws.

Second panel:

The second panel of the conference examined case studies on successful political participation and integration of EU mobile citizens in their host countries. It was moderated by **Camille Delbecq**, Project Manager at the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA).



Mauro Striano, Migration & Participation Policy Officer at FEANTSA, presented several services which were created in order to provide help and assistance to homeless EU mobile citizens, such as Crossroad in Sweden, Kompasset in Copenhagen, Frostschtzengel and Europa Brücke in Berlin and Public Interest Law Centre in London. Among else, they provide homeless citizens with basic services such as laundry, showers, breakfast and healthcare, but they also offer legal and administrative help and provide support for job searches. Mr Striano explained that those services bring positive changes, as they offer more choice to homeless people in need and make the issue of homelessness more visible and relevant for the local decision-makers. On the other hand, as he pointed out, monitoring of those services is quite challenging and it is difficult to assess their efficiency, also because many of them have been just launched.

André Duramois, Project Manager at Paris municipality, presented the INCLUDE project, which Paris is implementing in cooperation with European Civic Forum and the Young European Federalists. He explained that the aim of the project is to promote EU citizenship and the rights linked to it amongst all

Parisian EU citizens, improve civic participation of EU mobile citizens in Paris and identify best practices in this domain. The partners organise various activities and participate in different public events, driving their European Bus, in order to reach as many Europeans as possible and raise their awareness of EU citizenship. Mr. Duramois also told that a Parisian Council of Europeans has been created as a consultative body in the Council of Paris. It is composed of 61 members, representing the 28 nationalities of the EU, and its goal will be to provide recommendations and opinions to local decision-makers on topics such as tourism, organising international events and promoting EU citizenship.

Thomas Huddleston, Research Director at Migration Policy Group, presented the Vote Brussels campaign, organised in the formwork of the FAIR EU project, which aimed at increasing registration rates of EU mobile citizens for the local Belgian elections in 2018. The campaign was very successful, as it contributed to a significant increase in the registration rates (25,000 new voters in 6 months) and in the number of mobile citizens running for elections (300 EU candidates from all major Brussels parties). Given these positive results, Mr Huddleston provided the following recommendations on how to successfully conduct similar campaigns:



- Train volunteer “mobilisers”
- Coordinate & motivate volunteers
- Reach voters at existing events
- Use best official materials
- Make voting fun & motivational
- Use the media which is most commonly used by EU mobile citizens
- Work with EU candidates

Narcis George Matache, First Deputy in the Regional Council of North Denmark, talked about his experience as a campaigner and the first EU mobile citizen to run for local council in Aalborg. He explained the steps that are necessary in order to create a more inclusive society, in which people are aware of their political rights and are willing to participate. First phase start by a triggering event. Narcis found out in 2012 that he had political rights. The second step is related to the discovery of rights - other EU citizens are informed about their rights and are encouraged to vote. This leads to an increase in political participation. EU mobile citizens get more and more informed and aware, and they finally can have a say and influence the decision-making process. As a result, they feel and are more included in the host society. Finally, an EU mobile citizen becomes elected for the first time in the local council, leading to the creation of a truly bilingual political system.

“European transnationals understood that politics work in Denmark and it can make their life better, they understood that participation means influence over decision-making and inclusion in the local society”.

-Narcis George Matache

The second panel was followed by the launch of the **Civic Observatory on the Rights of EU Citizens (CORE)**. **Assya Kavrakova**, Executive Director at ECAS, **Mauro Striano**, Migration & Participation Policy Officer at FEANTSA and **Pernilla Graversen**, Project Manager at Médecins du Monde, representing the three participating organisations, explained the objectives of the project and presented the planned activities. The overall aim of CORE is to monitor and take stock on an annual basis of legal and political developments in the field of EU citizenship through the implementation of joint initiatives and advocacy actions. The specific objective is to optimise the impact of the individual work of CORE's members by creating synergies in terms of expertise and upscaling the promotion of EU mobile citizens' rights.



Closing remarks

The conference was closed by **Marie-Hélène Boulanger**, Head of Unit of Union Citizenship and Free Movement at the European Commission, who highlighted the work done by the European Commission in the field of EU rights in the last few years. She emphasized that more than 80 percent of citizens are in favour of free movement and believe it is one of the most important achievements of the EU integration. At the same time, she believes citizens should know more about their rights. The initiatives Ms Boulanger mentioned include, for instance, the [report](#) on investor citizenship and residence schemes, which maps the existing practices and identifies certain risks such schemes imply for the EU, particularly in regards to security, money laundering, tax evasion and corruption. She also reminded that in September 2018, the Commission adopted the [Electoral package](#), which encouraged Member States to set up national election networks with an aim to alert on threats, exchange best practices, discuss common solutions to identified challenges and encourage common projects and exercises among national networks. The first meeting of the network took place in January 2019. Other important initiatives launched by the European Commission include the [proposal](#) on the security of identity cards

and residence documents issued to EU citizens and their family members and a Visa Handbook, which will provide guidelines on issuing visa to non-EU family members of EU citizens. Ms Boulanger also mentioned the [Single Digital Gateway](#), which will improve the access to the information, administrative procedures and assistance services that citizens and businesses need in order to be active in another EU country. Finally, she recognised the importance of ECAS' conference and other similar events, as she believes they provide important feedback to the Commission on the key problems experienced by EU citizens.

"From the Commission side we very much welcome this kind of an event so that we can gather some feedback and see where are the problems and how we can best improve the real exercise of the right to free movement, because what matters is that people can really do so and not just have this right in the books only."

-MEP Jean Lambert



AGENDA

9:00 – 9:30	Registration
9:30 – 9:45	Keynote Speech <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean Lambert, Member of the European Parliament • Virginia Mercouri: “How can we, Europeans, create a democratic community?” - input from the citizen dialogue hosted by the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium
9:45 – 11:00	<i>Panel 1: State of the art in the EU citizenship field: obstacles to free movement and political participation</i> <p>Moderator: Dr Derek S. Hutcheson, Associate Professor in Political Science, Malmö University</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claire Damilano, Senior Legal Manager, European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) • Dr Jelena Dzankic, Coordinator of the GLOBALCIT network, European University Institute (EUI) • Dr Nando Sigona, Reader in International Migration and Forced Displacement at the University of Birmingham and Research lead of Eurochildren study • Anna Zaremba, EU Rights Coordinator, ECAS • Sam van der Staak, Head of Europe Programme, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA International)
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 – 12:30	<i>Panel 2: Case studies on successful political participation and integration of EU mobile citizens in their host countries</i> <p>Moderator: Camille Delbecq, Project Manager, European Association for Local Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anthony Valcke, EU Rights Clinic • Mauro Striano, Migration & Participation Policy Officer, European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) • André Duramois, Project Manager, INCLUDE, Paris municipality • Thomas Huddleston, Research Director, Migration Policy Group • Narcis George Matache, Campaigner, First Deputy in the Regional Council of North Denmark
12:30 – 12:45	Launch of the Civic Observatory on the Rights of EU Citizens (CORE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assya Kavrakova, Executive Director, ECAS • Mauro Striano, Migration & Participation Policy Officer, FEANTSA • Pernilla Graversen, Project Manager, Médecins du Monde
12:45 – 13:00	Concluding remarks: Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Head of Unit, Union Citizenship and Free Movement, European Commission
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch