

Promoting education and training in the European Year of Citizens

Promowanie kształcenia i doskonalenia w Europejskim Roku Obywateli

Key words: European Year 2013, active citizenship, European Union citizenship, education and training, *The Youth on the Move programme*.

Słowa kluczowe: Europejski Rok 2013, aktywne obywatelstwo, obywatelstwo Unii Europejskiej, kształcenie i doskonalenie, Program *Młodzież w Działaniu*.

Streszczenie

Pojęcie obywatelstwa Unii Europejskiej zostało wprowadzone traktatem z Maastricht w 1992 r. i stanowi nowy polityczny wymiar integracji europejskiej, wychodzący poza wymiar ekonomiczny. Każda osoba posiadająca obywatelstwo państwa członkowskiego UE jest automatycznie obywatelem Unii Europejskiej. Obywatelstwo UE nie zastępuje obywatelstwa krajowego, jednak przyznaje dodatkowe prawa mające zasadnicze znaczenie dla życia codziennego wszystkich obywateli UE, m.in. w kwestii kształcenia i szkolenia w innych krajach członkowskich UE, uznawania kwalifikacji, opieki zdrowotnej czy praw konsumentów. W *Europejskim Roku Obywateli 2013* Komisja Europejska zwraca uwagę i promuje prawa związane z obywatelstwem w UE, które często nie są znane ich posiadaczom. W całej Europie odbywają się debaty, konferencje i inne wydarzenia, których uczestnicy będą dyskutować na temat praw w UE i współtworzyć wizję Unii Europejskiej w roku 2020.

Background

The term of the European Union`s citizenship has been introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, and added a new political dimension to the hitherto economic dimension of the European integration. Every person holding the nationality of a EU Member State is also automatically a citizen of the European Union. EU citizenship does not replace a national citizenship, but gives a set of additional rights which are vital for the everyday life. At EU level, debates, conferences and other events are taking place and their participants discuss where we – as citizens – want the EU to be by 2020 – in terms of rights, policies and governance.

The article aims to promote the idea of the European year 2013 and makes an attempt at answering the following questions:

- Why a European Year of Citizens?
- What are your fundamental rights as a EU citizen, in particular concerning the education and training abroad?
- What are the objectives of the European Year 2013?

The European Year of Citizens – the European vision and context

The European Year of Citizens 2013 will focus on rights that every EU citizen has. The better the people of Europe understand their rights as EU citizens, the more informed their decisions will be. *The 2010 EU Citizenship Report* showed that EU citizens are prevented from enjoying their rights because they are not aware of them and very often not very informed about the rights they have.

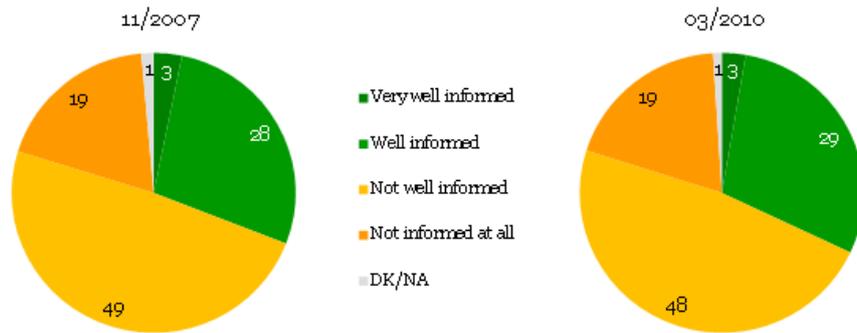


Fig. 1. Being informed about the rights as a citizen of the European Union, 2007–2010

Source: *EU Citizenship Report 2010*, COM(2010) 602 final, COM(2010) 605 final, Brussels, p. 69.

In the year of the Report (2010) it was decided at the EU Commission level to make 2013 the European Year of Citizenship to encourage the debate about the EU citizenship and inform EU citizens of their rights, in particular in relation to the right of Union citizens of free movement and residence within the territory of the Member States. The Year will provide an opportunity for people throughout Europe to: learn about the rights and opportunities open to them thanks to the EU citizenship; take part in debates on the barriers in using these rights and generate specific proposals for addressing them; participate in civic fora on EU policies and issues; prepare to vote in the 2014 European elections; engage in the EU’s democratic life.

The European Year 2013 has been approved by a series of documents – from an initial proposal to the final decision:

- *Official Decision of the European Parliament and the Council setting up the European Year of Citizens 2013*;
- *European Parliament legislative resolution of 23 October 2012 on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year of Citizens (2013)*;
- *EU Citizenship Report 2010*;
- *European Parliament Resolution on fundamental rights in the European Union* (of 15 Dec 2010).

Level of awareness of the European Union citizenship

According to *The 2010 EU Citizenship Report*, most European citizens (79%) currently claim some familiarity with the term ‘citizen of the European Union’ (*Flash Eurobarometer 294 ‘EU Citizenship’*, March 2010). However, only 43% know the meaning of the term and 48% indicate that they are ‘not well informed’ about their rights as EU citizens. Indeed, less than one third (32%) consider themselves ‘well’ or ‘very well’ informed about their rights as EU citizens.

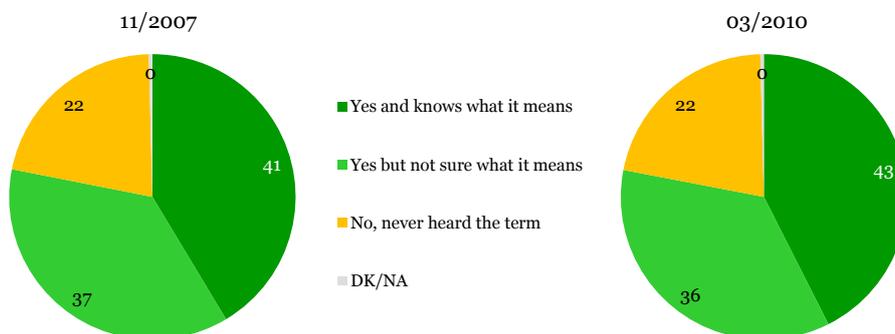


Fig. 2. Familiarity with the term „citizen of the European Union”, 2007–2010

Source: *EU Citizenship Report 2010*, COM(2010) 602 final, COM(2010) 605 final, Brussels, p. 69.

There is a wealth of information and problem-solving networks at EU level and, indeed, around 700 000 people start their search for information on the EU’s websites every day. However, a 2006 survey showed that almost 70% of Europeans were unaware of these networks, whilst those who did know about them were confused about where to send questions and what to expect. To make people

better informed about their rights, the European Union is developing *the Your Europe web* portal into a one-stop-shop information point on the rights of citizens and businesses in the EU, easy to use and accessible via the web (<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope>) and via a free phone number (Europe Direct Contact Centre) which will provide clear and practical information (*EU Citizenship Report 2010*, p. 66).

Fundamental rights of the EU citizens

More and more citizens are moving across national borders to EU countries other than their own, where they study, work, live and they face many obstacles and have difficulties in finding the applicable law. For the international couples, it is often difficult to know which courts have jurisdiction and which laws are applicable to their personal situation and financial aspects. According to the EU data, an increasing number of Europeans are acquiring real estate outside their home Member State or simply buy a car and they are frequently faced with cumbersome re-registration formalities and paperwork and, possibly, double payment of registration tax. Another issue is a health care: EU citizens who fall ill or suffer an injury while travelling for business or pleasure or staying for instance to study in another Member State have the right to receive the same access to health care as nationals of that Member State. Tourism is an increasingly important aspect of European citizens' lives: more and more are travelling, either for leisure or business (*EU Citizenship Report 2010*, COM(2010) 602 final, COM(2010) 605 final, Brussels, p.10-17).

EU Citizenship is not an empty concept but a concrete status to which a number of rights are attached. Basing on the EU documents (*European Year of Citizens* <http://europa.eu/citizens-2013/en>, access: 11.02.2013), below it has been listed the set of most significant rights:

- EU Citizenship Rights (The EU would like you to know about these rights that you have as an EU Citizen and to be able to fully enjoy them in your daily life. The EU Citizenship Report contributes to this endeavor. EU citizens' rights are spelled out in Part Two of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. They are also enshrined in Chapter V of Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU).
- The right to move and reside freely within the EU and not to be discriminated against on grounds of your nationality (As an EU citizen, you have the right to move and reside freely within the EU. Some conditions apply, for example, when entering another EU country you may be asked to show identification, and to live in another EU country for more than three months, you must meet certain conditions depending on whether you are working, studying, etc.)
- The right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections (When living in another EU country, you have the right, as an EU citizen, to vote and stand as candidate in municipal and European elections held in that country, under the same conditions as nationals).
- The right to petition (The right to petition allows you to raise concerns or complaints with the European Parliament. You can ask the Parliament to address either a personal need or grievance, or a matter of public interest. The subject must fall within the EU's sphere of activity, and must concern you directly).
- The right to complain to the Ombudsman (For grievances concerning 'mal-administration' by an EU institution or body, you can complain to the Ombudsman. You can also contact EU institutions and advisory bodies directly, and you are entitled to receive a reply in any of the EU's 23 official languages).
- The right to consular protection for unrepresented EU citizens (When in a non-EU country and in need of help, as an EU citizen you are entitled to consular protection from the embassy or consulate of any other EU country under the same conditions as nationals of that country. Assistance may be provided in situations including death, accident or illness, arrest or detention, violent crime and repatriation).
- The right to ask the Commission to propose new legislation (The European Citizens' Initiative allows you to ask the European Commission to prepare a proposal for a legal act. The petition must be signed by at least 1 million citizens from at least one quarter of EU countries).
- Fundamental rights (The EU is based on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities).

- Other cross-border rights (Accessing social security When moving within the EU, you only pay social security contributions in one country at a time, even if you are working in more than one. Generally, you will also receive social security benefits exclusively from this country as a job-seeker, as a worker, as a retired person).
- Getting healthcare abroad (Under the EU law, you can seek medical treatment in another EU country and may be entitled to have the costs reimbursed by your national health insurer).
- Studying abroad (As an EU national, you have the right to study in any EU country under the same conditions as nationals of that country).
- Online shopping (You are protected by EU law when shopping online in Europe).
- Passenger rights (If you have problems with international rail travel or flights departing from the EU or arriving in the EU with an EU carrier from a non-EU country, you may be entitled to a refund and possibly also compensation).
- Cheaper mobile phone calls (When you use your mobile phone in another EU country, there is a limit on what your operator can charge you).
- Safe, secure and affordable energies (As a consumer, you are now better protected and have the right to choose the best gas and electricity deal for you, thanks to the EU).

EU citizens' education and training abroad

As the EU citizens we are also entitled to study or train in another Member State and to have access to education under the same conditions as local students. In the context of the EU 2013, The Commission declares to give all young people in Europe the chance to spend part of their education in another Member State through the *Youth on the Move* initiative, by providing guidance on the rights of mobile students under EU rules and by working with Member States to achieve the target of at least 20% of those graduating from higher education having studied or trained for a period abroad by 2020. The Commission is facilitating study abroad also by promoting the comparability of academic diplomas through the *European Qualifications Framework (EU Citizenship Report 2010, COM(2010) 602 final, COM(2010) 605 final, Brussels, p.10-17)*. *The Youth on the Move* is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe, launched in 2010, as a part of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. *Youth on the Move* aims to improve young people's education and employability, to reduce high youth unemployment and to increase the youth-employment rate – in line with the wider EU target of achieving a 75% employment rate for the working-age population (20-64 years) – by:

- making education and training more relevant to young people's needs;
- encouraging more of them to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country;
- encouraging EU countries to take measures simplifying the transition from education to work (http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/about/index_en.htm, access: 28.02.2013).

This initiative should also aim to expand career and life-enhancing learning opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities and/or at risk of social exclusion. In particular, these young people should benefit from the expansion of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and from strengthened provisions for the recognition and validation of knowledge and skills acquired on non-formal and informal ways within national qualifications frameworks.

Conclusion

As we read in *The Commission staff working paper, European Year of Citizens 2013 - Ex-ante evaluation*, COM(2011) 489 final (p.21), The European Year 2013 would provide appropriate means and methods to raise awareness among people for Union citizens' right to free movement and the rights available to them under EU law in a cross-border context. These rights are relevant in economic, societal and political terms and have the potential to enhance citizens' sense of belonging to the EU. However, a gap still remains between the applicable legal rules and the reality confronting citizens in their daily lives, particularly in cross-border situations. In some cases, the existing rules need to be expanded or updated or even radically overhauled to keep pace with changing socio-economic or technological realities. The majority of actions identified to phase out obstacles fall into three main categories: effectively enforcing EU rights, making their enjoyment easier in practice, and raising awareness about them.

In the face of economic crisis, the need to empower European citizens and to strengthen the citizen dimension is more important than ever. The European Year 2013 will support the EU citizens in being more informed about their rights and furthermore in making choices on their personal and democratic life at all levels. For more information about the European Year of Citizens, please visit the official website of the European year 2013: <http://europa.eu/citizens-2013/en>.

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