European Citizenship

What does European Citizenship mean?

Every national from the EU’s 28 member countries is automatically citizen of the European Union. **The EU citizenship does not replace national citizenship** – since you cannot be EU citizenship without being a citizen of one of the Member States – but **complements it with a set of special rights.**¹ These rights influence all European citizens’ everyday life, thus when you travel, study, work, vote or marry in another Member State or just simply do shopping online from companies established in other Member States, you fully enjoy your Citizens’ rights.

What rights do you have as an EU citizen?²

1. **Not to be discriminated on the basis of nationality;**
2. **To move and reside freely within the EU:** You can read more details about this right in the Free movement of people’s Chapter.
3. **To vote for and stand as a candidate in European Parliament and municipal elections** in your Member State of residence, under the same conditions as nationals of that State: Citizens vote every 5 years for a new European Parliament which then represents citizens’ interest.
4. **To be protected by the embassy or consulate of any other EU country in case your home country is not represented in that non-EU country.** This means that assistance is provided under the same conditions as a citizen of that country, in situations including death, accident or illness, arrest or detention, violent crime and repatriation.
5. **To petition the European Parliament in matters which come within the Union’s fields of activity and which affects the petitioner directly³ and complain against EU institutions and bodies to the European Ombudsman⁴;**
6. **Equal access to the EU Civil Service** (i.e. to all staff serving the Institutions of the EU: the Commission, EU Council of Ministers, the European Council, the European Parliament) and

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¹ EU Citizenship First 20 Year, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia, March 2013.
³ Here you can find more details about the petition process: [https://petiport.secure.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/home](https://petiport.secure.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/home)
⁴ Here you can find more details about the European Ombudsman: [www.ombudsman.europa.eu](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu)
the right to contact and receive an answer from any EU institution in one of the EU's official languages. Moreover, EU legislation has to be available in all 24 official languages, and every Member of the European Parliament has the right to speak in his or her own language in parliamentary debates. It also guarantees that everyone is able to follow and access the Parliament’s work.

7. To access the documents of all EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies with exceptions for the Court of Justice, the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank. In case you would like to access to a particular EU legislative proposal, just search for it in the EUR-Lex database and follow its life cycle from the moment it is launched until it becomes law.

8. To organise or support a citizens’ initiative together with other EU citizens to call for new EU legislation.

What should you do to launch a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI)?

In case you meet a European problem, which might require a European solution, this instrument can contribute to ask the Commission to propose a new EU legislation. Collect at least one million signatures of EU citizens agreeing with your initiative within one year of registration, from at least seven of the 28 Member States. A minimum number of signatories is required in each of those seven Member States. A citizens' initiative is possible in any field where the Commission has the power to propose legislation, for example environment, agriculture, transport or public health. In order to launch a citizens' initiative, citizens must form a "citizens' committee" of at least seven EU citizens resident in at least seven different Member States. The members of the citizens' committee must be EU citizens old enough to vote in the European Parliament elections (18 except in Austria, where the voting age is 16). The citizens' committee must register its initiative on this website before starting to collect statements of support from citizens. Once the registration is confirmed, organisers have one year to collect signatures. In case they have success, they will meet with the Commission within three months and can present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament. The Commission will adopt a formal response, in case it is positive, the normal legislative procedure kicks off.
How many initiatives could collect the required number of statements of support and meet all the criteria?

The following three initiatives have successfully gathered the required number of signatories so far.

- "Right2Water" was the first European Citizens’ Initiative submitted to the European Commission in December, 2013. Organisers of the initiative invited the Commission to propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation as recognised by the United Nations, and promoting the provision of water and sanitation as essential public services for all. The Commission adopted a Communication on 19/03/2014 taking actions in response to the aims of the initiative, namely that ‘Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!’.

- "One of us" was supported by 1.9 million Europeans with the aim at ‘juridical protection of the dignity, the right to life and of the integrity of every human being from conception in the

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5 You can read more about the initiative and its consequences here: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/followup_actions/citizens_initiative_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/followup_actions/citizens_initiative_en.htm)
areas of EU competence in which such protection is of particular importance’. In response, the European Commission has adopted a Communication on 28/05/2014, however it decided not to follow up on the call of the initiators.⁶

- "Stop Vivisection" has collected more than 1,150,000 certified signatures asking people to support paradigm shift in biomedical and toxicological research. The initiative has been submitted to the European Commission in March, 2015 with the aim to abrogate directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes and to present a new proposal. In response, the Commission has adopted a Communication 03/06/2015 in which it concludes that although the Commission agrees with terminating gradually animal testing in Europe, its approach for achieving that objective differs from the one proposed in this Citizens' Initiative. Therefore, it did not submit a proposal to repeal Directive 2010/63/EU and did not propose the adoption of a new legislative framework.⁷

How could this all come about? – A bit of history

The rights and duties of the citizens in the Member States have been increased gradually in the EU, with such milestones as the freedom of movement (since 1957) and the direct voting rights in European Parliament elections (since 1979).

However, 1 November 1993 – when the Treaty of Maastricht entered into force – was the day after which we can speak about a new legal status, called "citizens of the European Union". This was the first and still is a unique opportunity, since no other citizens in the world enjoy transnational rights to participate actively in the shaping of legislation across nation states.⁸

As the rights of every individual within the EU were established in different forms and were not visible and explicit enough for citizens, the EU decided to include all fundamental values and civil, political, economic and social rights protected in the EU in a single document. This document is the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights containing six headings: Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens’ rights and Justice. The Charter became part of the EU Treaties with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, in December 2009.⁹

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⁸ European Economic and Social Committee: European Passport to Active Citizenship, Brussels, 2015.
⁹ Pascal Fontaine: Europe in 12 lessons
In addition, the Lisbon Treaty contributed to strengthen the concept of EU citizenship, bring the Union closer to its citizens and facilitate active debate across Europe in the following ways:

- It introduced a new form of public participation for European citizens, the above-mentioned Citizens’ Initiative with the aim at encouraging public debate on European-wide important issues;
- By giving stronger power for the European Parliament – i.e. for the representatives of the Union’s citizens –, it intended to support participatory democracy by giving greater say for European citizens on the decision-making process of the Union;
- It extended the right of public access to EU institutions’ documents and it required a greater openness and transparency;
- The citizenship rights have been renewed through a clearer form.

What are the challenges the European Citizenship face?

Although many symbols – such as the European flag, the euro, the European anthem (Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’), the EU motto (‘United in diversity’), the European passport, the EU driving licences, and the ‘Europe Day (9 May) – remind us a shared European identity, people cannot feel they ‘belong to’ the European Union. This phenomenon can be changed if EU citizens become aware of what the EU is doing and understand why. One way of achieving this would be the explanation of EU affairs in much clear and simple language.

Every five years, the citizens of the European Union have the opportunity to elect a new European Parliament. However, the participation in the elections is reducing year by year. The 2014’s elections – with 42.54% of people voting – was the lowest voter turnout for a European Parliament election. The reasons behind why people decided that it wasn’t worth exercising their democratic right should be analysed and solved by raising awareness and offering new approaches.

According to the Lisbon Treaty European citizens have the right of public access to documents of all the Union institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies. However, in practice this right to transparency is still failed to take fully into account in many cases, that is why a new regulation is needed but the European Parliament and the Commission have not reached a compromise yet.10

Although the objectives of the European Citizenship (ECI) is bringing citizens closer to the EU and supporting participatory democracy, the decreasing use of this possibility and the low rate of

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successful initiatives demonstrate that the system does not work as well as it was planned. The reasons behind can be, for example, too many requirements, long and endless procedure, quality of the Commission response etc.\textsuperscript{11}

The 2010 EU Citizenship Report concluded that **EU citizens are not benefiting fully from their rights because they are not aware of them.**\textsuperscript{12} Although this tendency has improved, in 2015 still only two fifths of Europeans (42\%) feel informed (either ‘very well informed’ or ‘fairly well informed’) about their rights as a citizen of the European Union.\textsuperscript{13}

According to our survey, EU citizens feel they cannot influence EU politics which are overcomplicated, Brussels and EU institutions are far away. Less than 33\% of the surveyed EU citizens feel their voice count in the European Union, while 56\% strongly disagree or tend to disagree with this statement.\textsuperscript{14} This phenomenon is called the ‘Democratic deficit’.

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\textsuperscript{11} European Parliament: Towards a revision of the European Citizens’ Initiative?, 2015
\textsuperscript{12} EU CITIZENSHIP REPORT 2010 - Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens’ rights: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/com_2010_603_en.pdf
\textsuperscript{14} In framework of the EU3doms project we surveyed citizens’ opinion about EU related issues in four EU Member states (HU, RO, AT, SI) and one candidate state (SRB). The data is own calculation’s result based on the questionnaire.
The EU institutions and Member States need to do much more to make people feel personally involved in EU decision-making, rebuild their reputation through less bureaucracy and corruption.

To raise public awareness about the citizens’ rights the EU introduced several programmes, like the Europe for Citizens, however these actions do not reach as many citizens as they should. That is why, based on feedback from citizens – in the EU Citizenship report 2017 – the Commission announced to conduct an EU-wide information and awareness raising campaign on EU citizenship rights in 2017 and 2018.

As already the EU Citizenship Report in 2010 pointed out, the 2017’s report has also concluded that actions are required in the daily life for EU citizens, namely to simplify it in order to eliminate the gap still existed between the applicable legal rules and the reality, particularly in cross-border situations.

How can you get involved in European politics and shape the EU's political agenda?

Although almost the half of the surveyed citizens feel that they are aware of the means on how to influence EU decision-making. It may be useful to reiterate therefore we will deal with them in the next part. Interesting to see that Serbians feel in higher proportion that they are aware of the means
on how to influence EU decision-making than EU citizens in four Member States (Austria, Hungary, Slovenia and Romania).\textsuperscript{15}

Besides voting and/or being a candidate for the EU Parliament, launching a petition directed to the Parliament or an initiative directed to the Commission, you can influence EU policies in many ways. Become familiar with some of these various ways in the followings:

- **Join online debate forums** dedicated to European Union affairs where you discuss and post your views on Commissioners’ or MEPs’ blogs;
- **Contact the Commission or Parliament** directly, online or via one of their offices in your country\textsuperscript{16};
- **Share your opinion via "Your Voice in Europe" service** organized by the Commission. Interested citizens and stakeholders can share their views taking part in open consultations and public discussions on different policy fields from Agriculture to Transport. Thus, take the opportunity to participate in policy and law-making processes before the Commission finalises its proposals. You can even subscribe to email notifications about new roadmaps, and be invited to join formal consultation processes.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} In framework of the EU3doms project we surveyed citizens’ opinion about EU related issues in four EU Member states (HU, RO, AT, SI) and one candidate state (SRB). The data is own calculation’s result based on the questionnaire.
\textsuperscript{16} Pascal Fontaine: Europe in 12 lessons
\textsuperscript{17} Find more information and all upcoming public consultations here: [http://ec.europa.eu/info/law/contribute-law-making_en#initial-idea](http://ec.europa.eu/info/law/contribute-law-making_en#initial-idea)
Raise your voice, for instance, through the opportunities provided by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The EESC, as the "voice" of civil society, is eager to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of Europe’s citizens are heard. That is why it would like to involve European citizens through visits, competitions and other activities organized by the EESC. For example, the EESC selects 33 schools from the 28 Member States of the EU and the five EU candidate countries every year to take part in a debate related to the challenges Europe faces. The topic of YOUR EUROPE, YOUR SAY! 2017 is Europe at 60: Where to next? and the debate will be held in the end of March, 2017.18

Submit a project individually or in group to win the European Charlemagne Youth Prize! Young people aged between 16 and 30 from any EU Member States can participate in order to show active participation in the development of Europe. Projects should promote European and international understanding; foster the development of a shared sense of European identity and integration; and provide role models for youth living in Europe and offer good practices of Europeans living together as one community.19

One of the best ways to become more familiar with the EU’s decision-making system is applying for a traineeship at one of the EU institutions. Are you a university graduate or postgraduate (Master’s or PhD level)? If yes, there are many possibilities to become an intern at one of the EU institutions based in Brussels, Strasbourg or Luxembourg taking on trainees for three to five months. Check your opportunities here: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/working/graduates_en

Active Citizenship Through EU Programmes

In the followings, find out some examples of EU-wide schemes which promote active European citizenship:

The Europe for Citizens Programme supports initiatives which reflect on two main general objectives:

- To contribute to citizens' broader understanding of the EU, its history and diversity;
- To foster European citizenship and improve conditions for Democratic engagement and civic participation at Union level.

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18 Here you can read more about the EESC: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.home
19 In order to read more details about the prize, click the following link: http://www.charlemagneyouthprize.eu/
A budget of EUR 185 468 000 for the period 2014-2020 is allocated for projects targeting one of the specific priorities of the two programme areas: 1) European remembrance and 2) Democratic engagement and civic participation.\textsuperscript{20}

**The Erasmus+** is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport between 2014 and 2020. It is one of the most successful programmes of the EU since it provides opportunities for millions of Europeans to study, train gain experience, and volunteers abroad. Although it is not directly focusing on EU citizenship, it serves as a useful basis for promoting the right to free movement.\textsuperscript{21} You can read more details about this opportunity in the Free movement of people’s Chapter.

The most familiar programme initiated by the European Union is Erasmus+ among EU as well as Serbian citizens. More than 90% of the people questioned have heard about it. Interesting that more Serbian citizens than surveyed EU Member States’ citizens have heard about both the European Strategy for the Danube Region and the Europe for Citizens Programme. While more than 86% of Serbian respondents have heard about Europe for Citizens Programme, this rate is less than 60% among the participants from EU Member States.\textsuperscript{22}

![Bar chart showing programme awareness](chart.png)

**The Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme** defends the rights and freedoms that people are entitled to under EU law. Besides it strengthens gender equality, combats all forms of discrimination,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Here you can read more information about Europe for Citizens Programme: [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/europe-for-citizens-programme/index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/europe-for-citizens-programme/index_en.htm)
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Here you can read more information about Erasmus+ Programme: [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/)
  \item \textsuperscript{22} In framework of the EU3doms project we surveyed citizens’ opinion about EU related issues in four EU Member states (HU, RO, AT, SI) and one candidate state (SRB). The data is own calculation’s result based on the questionnaire.
\end{itemize}
and fights racism, it also aims to promote EU citizenship rights. The programme provides funding to NGOs, public authorities and other organisations for activities that further these aims.  

**Where can you find more information about your rights and the concept of the European citizenship?**

As you already know, you have the right to ask for and receive information about basically everything happening within the European Union, moreover, for free.

In person or via phone or e-mail:

- If you have question about the EU, contact your **Europe Direct information centre (EDIC)** or **European Points**, which are working in every Member States. Check here the nearest in the region or town where you live: [http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en](http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en)
- If you need help finding detailed information on European law, integration, policies and institutions, find the nearest **European documentation centre (EDC)** here: [http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en](http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en)
- If you would like to know more about how to vote in European parliamentary elections, contact one of the **EP Information Offices** working in every Member State
- **European Commission Representations** are the voice of Commission in the Member States and aim to communicate EU affairs at both national and local levels. Find out [here](http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en) the representation of your country.
- In case you have **problems related to the maladministration in the institutions and bodies of the European Union**, make a complaint to the **European Ombudsman** working in Strasbourg.

Through the Internet:

- Do you need an **online bookshop, library and archive of EU publications** dating back to 1952 where the PDF and e-book versions are free of charge? Just click on the [EU Bookshop website](http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en).
- Do you need practical **information about your rights when moving, living, studying, training, working, shopping or simply travelling abroad** in your own language? If yes, visit the website [Your Europe](http://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en).

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What does this all look like in practice? - Meet Ana and Tom, two youngsters from Europe

Ana is from Serbia, she is engaged in volunteer work and actively involved in her local community. Therefore, she was very happy when she knew that the civil society project of the organization where she works was selected in the framework of Europe for Citizens Programme. Since Serbia can fully participate in the Europe for Citizens Programme, Anja has the opportunity to meet young people from different European countries to talk about the voluntarism, active participation and their role in development of communities.

Tom is Austrian and he is very committed to the issue of animal protection. That is why when he heard about the "Stop Vivisection" Citizens’ Initiative he read through the suggestions of the initiative and decided to sign it.

Ana would like to study abroad but she was not sure what kinds of possibilities she has as a Serbian citizen to study in the EU. That is why she wrote to the EU Info Point in Novi Sad which is the official information centre for distribution of all kinds of information about European Union that citizens are interested in. She received a very useful response with a collection of all opportunities in the topic of studying abroad. Then she decided to apply to an Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Scholarship Programme.

Ana and Tom met in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Scholarship Programme (EMJMS) in which framework they studied at four different countries – Serbia, Austria, Hungary and China – and at the end of the programme they received a joint Master degree.

During the European Parliament election, 2014 Tom was spending his Hungarian semester of the EMJMS programme but he wanted to use its democratic right to vote. As an EU national, he could vote under the same conditions as Hungarians, just he had to express his intention to do so and be put on the electoral roll in Hungary.

During his semester in China, Tom decided to visit Cambodia. He spent there 5 amazing days, however, he lost his ID card. Tom got scared because Austria does not have any diplomatic
representation in Cambodia. But then suddenly came to his mind that as a citizen of the EU he is ‘entitled to protection in the territory of a third country by the diplomatic or consular authorities of any other Member State, on the same conditions as the nationals of that State’. So he asked the Embassy of the French Republic for assistance.