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**European citizens stick together against Brexit**

[The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) on Permanent European Union Citizenship](https://eci.ec.europa.eu/002/public/#/initiative) must reach one million signatures by 23 July 2019. If nothing is done and Brexit goes ahead on 29 March 2019, 66 million British citizens will be stripped of their European Citizenship, whilst an EU citizenry of 512 million will shrink to 446 million. This effects 5 million people-3.4 million EU citizens in the UK and 1.6 million British citizens in the EU, or over one quarter of all those who have taken advantage of their rights to freedom of movement on a more permanent basis. Why this denial of European identity? Why accept a situation where everyone loses? **Once conferred, European citizenship should not be taken away.**

EU authorities and national governments should receive a clear message that deprivation of a citizenship status on such a massive scale is not only questionable, it is also unacceptable to many of us Europeans.

The EU has stated that citizenship is outside their mandate to negotiate the withdrawal of the UK from the EU under Article 50 of Treaty on the European Union (TEU). It has thus been left to us, the citizens of the EU, to correct this deliberate oversight — and this ECI is the only legal instrument we have to do so. If this ECI reaches the threshold of one million signatures, the EU Commission will have to consider whether the negotiators took the right policy option when they decided to disentangle rights from the status attached to them

So far, over 101, 000 people have shown their support, with signatures from all EU 28 Member States. 80% of the signatures come from the UK, maybe because it is those who are about to lose a status who value it the most. **This should however be a warning to European citizens in other EU countries not to take for granted a transnational citizenship which seemingly can be taken away without their consent.**

European citizenship tends to be everyone’s and no-one’s responsibility — so we need your support! To have achieved over 100,000 signatures so far without any financial and logistical backing is significant. That is why we are not only asking you as a European citizen to sign, we are also asking you to alert your family, friends and wider network to do the same. This is an ECI by citizens for citizens without the support of large organisations. We depend on individuals. We are also looking for volunteers, particularly in the following countries: Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Romania. To be valid, an ECI has to be supported not only by 1 million signatures but also reach a minimum threshold in 7 countries.

As signatures build, we will go back to the European Parliament where an amendment was tabled in favour of associate citizenship for the UK, and a resolution was passed on 29 March 2017 supporting the idea of mitigating the loss of rights under Article 20 TFEU, which is the article establishing Union citizenship. The cause of European citizenship may have been excluded from the Article 50 TEU negotiations but it does have support in the European Parliament.

Here are four additional reasons to question the *status quo*:

* **Did UK citizens really vote to give up their EU citizenship in the 2016 Referendum on Membership of the EU?** By implication they may have done, but not explicitly. EU citizenship was not raised in the document sent by the Government to every household, or by the Remain and Leave campaigns. Furthermore, among those who were not allowed to vote were the 1.6 million UK citizens resident in the EU, who have lived outside of the country for more than 15 years. Even if one believes a majority voted to renounce EU citizenship, standards of international and human rights law suggest that solutions should be found to safeguard the identity and rights of the minority.
* **Should holding the citizenship of an EU Member State be the only route to EU citizenship?** The only way for UK citizens to currently keep their European citizenship is to acquire the nationality of another EU Member State. The German Government, for example, has passed legislation to make this easier. Those married to an EU citizen or with other family connections may also be eligible for naturalisation, but with varying chances of success. For example, there are those in the UK who have Anglo-Irish citizenship. Where does this leave those who see themselves as European citizens in the UK but who do not have recourse to one of these solutions and will therefore be stripped of their European citizenship?
* **If European citizenship is no longer recognised, will it be possible to preserve European rights?** The Withdrawal Agreement codifies EU Law on freedom of movement, based on the legislation on recognition of residence rights, access to social security and recognition of professional qualifications. However, an agreement on paper is one thing, enforcing it is another. The UK Government is determined to abolish European freedom of movement as well as any distinction between EU citizens and immigrants from the rest of the world; whilst the EU will turn UK citizens into third country nationals and will challenge their right to move freely around the EU. There is therefore a flagrant contradiction between status and rights, which over time will make the Withdrawal Agreement redundant and bring about a harder Brexit among fellow Europeans than for goods and services. Freedom of movement gives way to a weak set of mobility arrangements in the political declaration on the future relationship between the EU and the UK.
* **Lastly, is this really the Europe we want?** Would it not be better to conceive an expanding rather than a shrinking European citizenship? One that is possibly based on residence within the EU; and even one which is extended to Europeans in neighbouring countries? That may not yet be on the agenda of national governments — too pre-occupied guarding their national sovereignty over protecting interests which we all share and which call for an international citizenship — but it is part of civil society’s aim for a more inclusive Europe – and the wider world.

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