European Union Citizenship

Introduction

All people who hold nationality in any of the 28 EU member states are also EU citizens. This means that while they are citizens of their home country, with the rights and responsibilities that citizenship involves, they are also citizens of the European Union, with extra rights and duties. This can be a difficult idea to grasp. While it is fairly easy to understand how one is a citizen of a state, how do you define citizenship of an international organisation such as the EU? While certain key elements of EU citizenship are laid out in the EU treaties, wider questions exist about what it really means for the people of Europe. Can there be such a thing as a European ‘identity’ – do symbols such as a European flag or anthem actually help people to feel more European?

History

The idea of EU citizenship was first presented in the Maastricht Treaty (1992). This ‘resolved to establish a citizenship common to nationals of all [EU] countries’. To this end, it laid out a clear set of rights open to all nationals of EU member states and looked forward to a time when these rights might be expanded further. European Community residents had already been carrying a symbol of shared European identity since 1988 when the first burgundy-coloured passports were issued by all member states in an attempt to standardise travel documents across the area. In 1999, the idea of citizenship gained another boost, when the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that EU citizenship should be a ‘fundamental status of nationals of member states’. The Lisbon Treaty (2007) reinforced the idea set out in Maastricht.

How does EU Citizenship work?

The Treaty of Rome (1957) set out the idea of freedom of movement – that people should be allowed to move freely across national borders. The Maastricht Treaty built upon this principle and set out four rights that are open to all nationals of EU member states: the right to move and reside within EU territory; the right to vote and stand for election at the local and European level in any member state; the right to protection from the diplomatic authorities of any member state when travelling outside the EU, and the right to petition the European Parliament.

Some argue that the idea of European citizenship runs deeper than this, that it is part of broader attempts to forge a unified European identity. One symbol of this identity is the European flag (12 gold stars on a blue background), which was adopted in 1985. The EU also has an official anthem, the ‘Ode to Joy’ from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. However, unlike the failed Constitutional Treaty (2004), the Lisbon Treaty (2007) made no specific references to an ‘official’ European anthem or flag.

Facts and Figures

- 9 May was chosen as Europe Day because it was the date in 1950 on which the French politician Robert Schuman first proposed the idea of European co-operation, which eventually grew into the European Union.
- The EU has a population of c. 500 million people.
How does a General Election actually work?

The UK is a liberal democracy. This means that we democratically elect politicians, who represent our interests. It also involves that individual rights are protected. The type of liberal democracy we have is a constitutional monarchy, where the powers of the monarch are limited by the terms and conditions put down in the constitution.

Parliamentary system

The UK has a parliamentary system of democratic governance. Unlike presidential and semi-presidential systems, there is an interconnection between the legislative (law-making) and executive (law-enforcing) branches of government in a parliamentary system.

In the UK, this means that the executive (consisting of the Queen and the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) is accountable to the legislature or Parliament (House of Commons, House of Lords and devolved Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland).

Appointed Prime Minister (or chancellor) as Head of Government and a monarch (or ceremonial president) as Head of State.

First-Past-the-Post

Members of Parliament in the House of Commons are elected using the first-past-the-post electoral system. Each of the 650 voting constituencies in the UK are represented by an MP. During the general and most local elections, the candidate with most of the votes becomes the local representative. Candidates campaign door-to-door, hold debates and publish manifestos (comparable to shopping list of what they are planning to do once they are in power). Eligible voters, about 46m in the UK, receive their polling card once they register online, or they can vote by post.

Party with most of the votes is invited by the Queen to form a government. If there is no clear winner, there is a hung Parliament. In this case, a minority or coalition government can be formed. A minority government does not have an overall majority in Parliament. A coalition government means that two or more political parties agree to share power in government. If that does not work out, new elections may be called.

Arguments

For

- Giving people EU citizenship gives them concrete rights that benefit everyone.
- The idea of EU citizenship contributes to bringing the peoples of Europe closer together. This not only benefits the process of European integration, but supports peace and understanding across the continent.
- Despite a history scarred by conflict, Europeans do have much in common and it is good to celebrate this.
- The principle of European citizenship encourages people to move around the EU to study or find work.

Against

- Citizenship has long been linked to national identity. An important part of the way in which people define who they are relates to the country in which they live. This cannot be transformed through a treaty.
- European citizenship is meaningless – although there are broad similarities between the identities of European states, there are more significant differences.
- The symbols of EU citizenship are a means of challenging the existing symbols of national identity.

“\textit{In all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention from its institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. Every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to national citizenship and shall not replace it.}”

Treaty of Lisbon, Title II Article 8 2007

“\textit{Let me say quite clearly that I can see no conflict between being a British citizen, a proud British citizen even, and a committed European. I carry a German passport and I am a committed European – and I feel no conflict.}”

Monika Wulf-Mathies, EU Regional Affairs Commissioner, 1995-1999

Links