

European Union Citizenship

All people who hold nationality in any of the 27 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.

However, the idea of European citizenship goes further. 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. 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. 501 million people.

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.

Quotes

'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

'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

- http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/index_en.htm