



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

European Commission proposes to make 2013 the "European Year of Citizens"

Brussels, 11 August 2011 – Union citizenship and the rights that go with it are one of the key pillars of the European Union. As we mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Union citizenship under the Maastricht Treaty, on 1 November 1993, the European Commission has today proposed to designate 2013 as the "European Year of Citizens".

20 years after the creation of Union citizenship, tangible progress has been made that directly affects the lives of millions. To take just one example: nowadays travelling abroad entails cheaper travel costs, hassle-free border crossings, package holiday guarantees, access to healthcare systems and cheaper calls when you phone home. These are just some of the benefits derived from EU citizenship. The Commission's goal is to make sure that we remove the remaining hurdles people face when exercising their rights abroad.

"Free movement is the most cherished right in the European Union. It is synonymous with Union citizenship. Businesses and citizens are reaping huge rewards as the EU steadily breaks down internal barriers to the free movement of goods, services and people. I want to build on our achievements so that all EU citizens feel comfortable when travelling, shopping, studying or settling in another EU Member State", said Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU-Commissioner responsible for Justice and Citizenship. *"If Europeans do not know their rights, they cannot effectively exercise them. Today 48% of Europeans feel that they are not well informed about their rights. The European Year of Citizens will help us change this. It will be a good opportunity to remind people what the European Union can do for every one of us."*

Background

Freedom of movement is the most cherished right of EU citizenship (see [press release No. 14/2011](#)). Indeed, more and more Europeans benefit from this right and live in another EU Member State: in 2009, an estimated 11.9 million citizens were living in a Member State other than their own; in 2010 this figure grew to 12.3 million ([STAT/11/105](#)). Thanks to EU citizenship – which does not replace national citizenship but is additional to it – EU-citizens have access to a broad range of rights across all EU-Member States, including rights as consumers to access goods and services in other Member States, and the right as citizens to access education, to obtain recognition of their professional qualifications, to access healthcare, to acquire or preserve social security rights or the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections in their Member State of residence.

Yet whilst more than one third (35%) of workers would consider taking a job in another Member State, nearly one in five still considers that there are too many obstacles to actually doing so. Together with language difficulties, a chronic lack of information is the most important barrier to cross-border commuting. A survey from 2010 showed that too many people still do not feel adequately informed about the different rights available to them: only 43% know the meaning of the term 'citizen of the European Union' and almost half of European citizens (48%) indicate that they are 'not well informed' about their rights (see Annex).

In addition, the [EU Citizenship Report 2010](#) (see [IP/10/1390](#) and [MEMO/10/525](#)) showed that, in fact, many barriers remain that prevent or discourage people from moving abroad. The report outlined 25 concrete actions to remove these remaining obstacles. One of these is to "strengthen citizens' awareness of their EU citizenship status, their rights and meaning in their daily lives by proposing the designation of 2013 as the European Year of Citizens and by organising targeted events on EU citizenship and citizen-related policies during this Year". The European Year of Citizens will be characterised by a follow up to the EU Citizenship Report: in 2013, the Commission will publish an action plan for completing the removal of the remaining obstacles that hinder citizens from enjoying their rights as Union citizens.

By designating 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, the European Commission is delivering on the promise made in the EU Citizenship Report and answering the [European Parliament's call for such a year](#).

The purpose of the European Year of Citizens is to facilitate Union citizens' exercising their right to move and reside freely within the EU by ensuring they can easily access information about their rights. More specifically, the aim of the Year is to:

- raise citizens' awareness of their right to reside freely within the European Union;
- raise citizens' awareness of how they can benefit from EU rights and policies and to stimulate their active participation in Union policy-making;
- stimulate debate about the impact and potential of the right to free movement, in particular in terms of strengthening cohesion and people's mutual understanding of one another.

To mark the European Year of Citizens 2013, a range of events, conferences and seminars will be organised across the EU at Union, national, regional or local level. The Commission is also planning to strengthen the visibility of the multilingual Europe Direct and Your Europe web portals as key elements of a 'one-stop-shop' information system on Union citizens' rights, as well as the role and visibility of problem solving tools, such as [SOLVIT](#), to allow Union citizens to better make use of and defend their rights.

The proposed budget for the activities to take place during the 2013 European Year of Citizens is EUR 1 million.

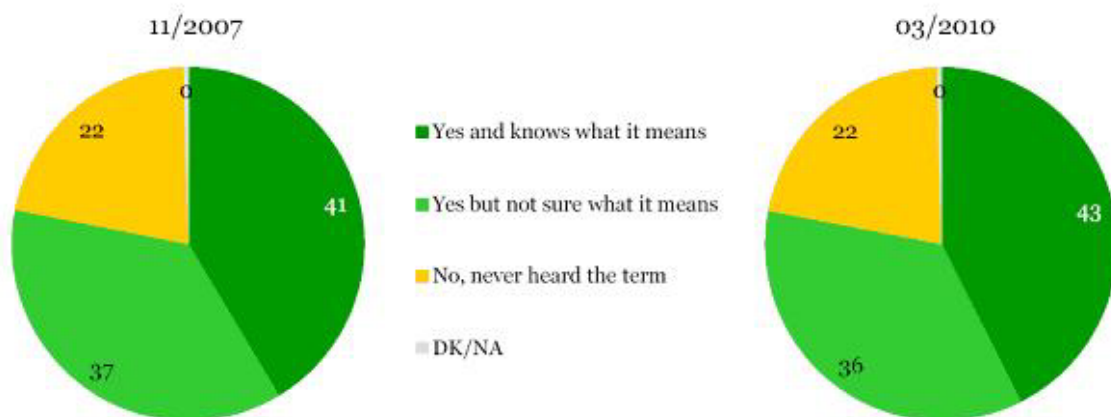
Today's Decision will need to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers according to the "ordinary legislative procedure" (co-decision). The Commission expects to work in close cooperation with the other EU institutions, notably the European Parliament, and with the Member States to make sure the Year has a strong and lasting impact.

For more information

Homepage of Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner:

<http://ec.europa.eu/reding>

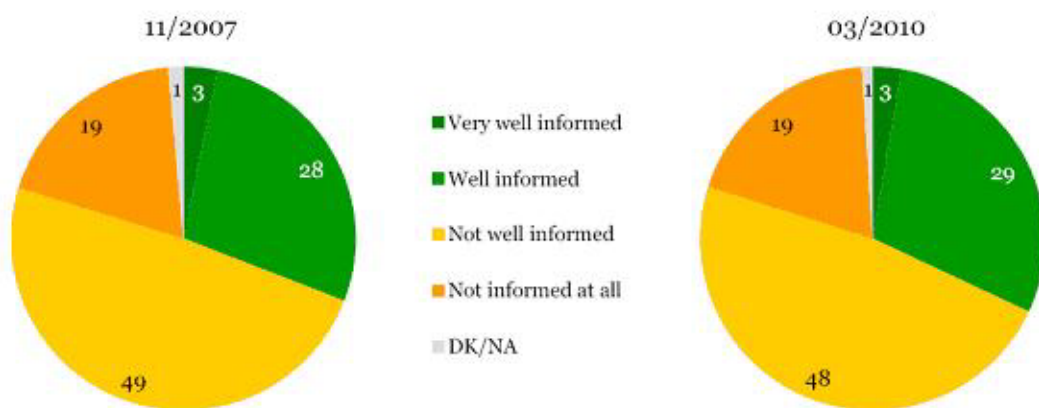
Familiarity with the term "citizen of the European Union", 2007-2010



Q1. This survey concerns the citizenship of the European Union. Are you familiar with the term "citizen of the European Union"?
Base: all respondents, % EU27

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 294 "European Union Citizenship", October 2010

Being informed about the rights as a citizen of the European Union, 2007-2010



Q2. How well do you feel that you are informed about your rights as a citizen of the European Union?
Base: all respondents, % EU27

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