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P8_TA(2017)0487

EU Citizenship Report 2017: Strengthening citizens' rights in a Union of democratic change**European Parliament resolution of 12 December 2017 on the EU Citizenship Report 2017: Strengthening Citizens' Rights in a Union of Democratic Change (2017/2069(INI))**

(2018/C 369/02)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission report of 24 January 2017 entitled 'Strengthening Citizens' Rights in a Union of Democratic Change — EU Citizenship Report 2017' (COM(2017)0030),
- having regard to the Commission report of 24 January 2017 drawn up pursuant to Article 25 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on progress towards effective EU citizenship 2013-2016 (COM(2017)0032),
- having regard to the results of the 2015 public consultation on EU citizenship conducted by the Commission, and to the results of the 2015 Eurobarometer surveys on electoral rights and on citizenship,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to Articles 2, 6 and 9-12 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), to Articles 18-25 of the TFEU and to Articles 11, 21 and 39-46 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,
- having regard to respect for the rule of law, as enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU,
- having regard to Article 3(2) of the TEU enshrining the right of freedom of movement of persons,
- having regard to the right to petition enshrined in Article 44 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,
- having regard to Article 165 of the TFEU,
- having regard to the right to petition enshrined in Article 227 of the TFEU,
- having regard to Protocol No 1 on the role of national parliaments in the European Union,
- having regard to Protocol No 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 29 February 2016 on the single market strategy⁽¹⁾ and especially to the document on the outcome of the informal meeting of SOLVIT Centres held in Lisbon on 18 September 2015⁽²⁾,

⁽¹⁾ Council document 6622/16.

⁽²⁾ Council document 14268/15.

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- having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2014 on ‘The EU Citizenship Report 2013. EU citizens: your rights, your future’ ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 April 2016 on ‘Learning EU at school’ ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 October 2016 on ‘Monitoring the application of Union law: 2014 Annual Report’ ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 February 2017 with recommendations to the Commission on cross border aspects of adoptions ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 March 2017 ⁽⁵⁾ on the implementation of the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme,
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a Council Regulation on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction (recast) (COM(2016)0411),
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Petitions on the activities of the Committee’s Working Group on Child Welfare Issues ⁽⁶⁾, and particularly its conclusions,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2016 on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015 ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Petitions of 23 March 2017 ⁽⁸⁾ and to the opinion of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of 1 June 2017 ⁽⁹⁾ concerning the report from the Commission monitoring the application of EU law 2015,
- having regard to the hearings organised by the Committee on Petitions in 2016 and 2017, and especially to: the joint public hearing of 11 May 2017 co-organised by LIBE, PETI and EMPL entitled ‘The situation and rights of EU Citizens in the UK’; the public hearing of 11 October 2016 entitled ‘Obstacles to EU citizens’ freedom to move and work in the Internal Market’; the public hearing of 4 May 2017 entitled ‘Fighting against discrimination and protecting minorities’; the joint public hearing of 15 March 2016 organised by the Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers and the European Parliament’s LIBE, PETI, AFCE and JURI committees entitled ‘Union Citizenship in practice’; and the joint hearing on statelessness organised by the LIBE and PETI committees on 29 June 2017,
- having regard to the PETI hearing of 23 February 2016 entitled ‘Broadening the scope of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 51)?’, the hearing of 21 June 2016 on ‘Transparency and freedom of information within the EU institutions’ and that one of 22 June 2017 on ‘Restoring citizens’ confidence and trust in the European Project’, together with the previous hearings held in this legislative term on the ‘Right to Petition’ (23 June 2015) and on ‘The European Citizens’ Initiative’ (26 February 2015),
- having regard to the studies commissioned in 2016 and 2017 by Parliament’s Policy Department C at the request of the Committee on Petitions, entitled ‘Obstacles to the right of free movement and residence for EU citizens and their families’, ‘Discrimination(s) as emerging from the petitions received’, ‘The impact of Brexit in relation to the right to petition and on the competences, responsibilities and activities of the Committee on Petitions’ and ‘The protection role of the Committee on Petitions in the context of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 378, 9.11.2017, p. 146.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0106.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0385.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0013.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0063.

⁽⁶⁾ PE 601.177v04-00.

⁽⁷⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0512.

⁽⁸⁾ PE 597.698v03-00. See also report A8-0265/2017.

⁽⁹⁾ PE 603.107v02-00. See also report A8-0265/2017.

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- having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Petitions and the opinions of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the Committee on Culture and Education, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A8-0385/2017),
- A. whereas EU citizenship and its related rights were initially introduced in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht and were further enhanced by the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in December 2009, as well as by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
 - B. whereas the exercise of citizenship calls for a prior guarantee and enjoyment of all human rights, and especially economic, social and cultural rights;
 - C. whereas a holistic approach designed to pursue the objectives laid down in the EU Treaties, such as full employment and social progress, is vital in order to permit the genuine enjoyment of the rights and freedoms arising from EU citizenship;
 - D. whereas access to EU citizenship is gained through nationality of a Member State, which is regulated by national laws; whereas at the same time, rights and duties emerge from this institution which are laid down by EU law and do not depend on the Member States; whereas for the above reason it is equally true that these rights and obligations cannot be limited in an unjustified manner by the Member States, including by their sub-state authorities; whereas in the context of access to national citizenship, Member States should be governed by the principles of EU law, such as those of proportionality and non-discrimination, which are both well elaborated in the case law of the ECJ; whereas according to the Treaties every EU citizen must receive equal attention from the EU institutions;
 - E. whereas EU citizens trust in the Member States, including their sub-state authorities, to apply both Community law and their national laws, this being a precondition for the effective exercise of rights deriving from the EU citizenship which they hold;
 - F. whereas efforts to promote EU citizenship are linked to improvements in the quality of democracy within the Union, to the practical enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, and to the opportunity for every citizen to participate in the democratic life of the Union;
 - G. whereas any unilateral change in the borders of a Member State constitutes, at the very least, a violation of Articles 2, 3 (2) and 4(2) of the TEU, as well as jeopardising enjoyment of all the rights deriving from EU citizenship;
 - H. whereas the Treaty of Lisbon consolidated the inalienable rights and guarantees of EU citizenship, including, inter alia, the freedom to travel, work and study in another Member State, to participate in European political life, to promote equality and respect for diversity and to be protected from discrimination, especially that practised on the basis of nationality; whereas the ever-increasing exercise of the right to freely move within the EU in the course of the past decades has had as a consequence the emergence of mixed families with different nationalities, often including children; whereas while this is a positive trend for the consolidation of EU citizenship as an institution in itself, it also entails specific needs and poses challenges in different areas, including legal aspects;
 - I. whereas the prospect of the UK's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit) has highlighted the importance of EU citizenship rights and their crucial role in the everyday lives of millions of EU citizens, and has raised awareness in the EU about the potential loss of rights entailed by Brexit on both sides, with special regard to the 3 million EU citizens resident in the UK and the 1,2 million UK citizens resident in the EU;
 - J. whereas on the heels of events in the United Kingdom, the refugee humanitarian crisis, the high levels of unemployment and poverty, and the rise in xenophobia and racism in the EU have undermined confidence in the EU system and the European project as a whole;

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- K. whereas the right to freedom of movement and its exercise are central to EU citizenship and complement the other freedoms of the EU internal market; whereas young Europeans are particularly attached to freedom of movement, which is ranked among EU citizens, in terms of recognition and popularity, as the EU's most positive achievement after ensuring peace;
- L. whereas freedom of movement and the exercising thereof have been violated by various Member States which have expelled EU citizens from their territory or threatened to do so, as reported in a number of petitions;
- M. whereas, as petitions and complaints addressed to the Commission and to SOLVIT have shown, EU citizens face notable difficulties in exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms, owing to serious economic and employment problems, aggravated by administrative burdens and bureaucracy in Member States, and to misinformation and/or lack of cooperation on the part of Member State authorities;
- N. whereas the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation, as enshrined in Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is the primary expression of EU citizenship; whereas it is also crucial for the successful exercise of freedom of movement, as evidenced in petitions;
- O. whereas respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities is one of the EU's founding values as enshrined in the Treaties; whereas approximately 8 % of EU citizens belong to a national minority and approximately 10 % speak a regional or minority language; whereas the effective protection of minorities needs to be strengthened;
- P. whereas strengthening citizens' rights and democratic institutions includes combating discrimination and gender inequality, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Q. whereas women's under-representation in decision-making positions, especially in the political sphere and in business at board level, hinders capability development and weakens women's participation in the democratic life of the EU;
- R. whereas women's participation and leadership in political decision-making is still affected by various obstacles, such as the persistence of gender-based stereotypes and the consequences of the recent economic crisis together with its negative repercussions on gender equality issues;
- S. whereas significant gaps remain in terms of protecting victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence across the EU in cases of cross-border family disputes;
- T. whereas discrimination faced by women across the EU is an obstacle to equality; whereas women remain under-represented as voters as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, the civil service, academia, the media or the private sector; whereas the widespread multiple discrimination faced by women and the disproportionate number of women facing poverty and social exclusion are obstacles to the full exercise of their citizenship rights;
- U. whereas the right to petition the European Parliament, as laid down in Articles 20 and 227 of the TFEU and in Article 44 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is one of the pillars of EU citizenship, ranks as the second best-known of EU citizenship rights, and must create an interface between citizens and the European institutions through a process that must be open, democratic and transparent;
- V. whereas the fundamental rights of EU citizens could be guaranteed by means of a new approach regarding the interpretation of Article 51 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights;

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- W. whereas European citizens are directly represented in the European Parliament and have the democratic right to stand and vote in European elections, even when residing in another Member State; whereas the right of European citizens who have exercised their right of freedom of movement to vote in European and local elections is not facilitated and promoted equally in all Member States; whereas various petitions have pointed out the existence of bureaucratic hurdles and of shortcomings of an administrative or other nature regarding the exercise of the right to vote in national or regional elections of their home Member State for those who reside in another Member State; whereas some citizens are being hindered in the exercise of this democratic right, such as persons with disabilities in Member States which have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) but have not complied with their obligation to reform their electoral laws to enable persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote;
- X. whereas citizens have the right to organise or support, together with other EU citizens from all Member States, a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which should enable them to help set the EU's legislative agenda; whereas the ECI is an important instrument of direct democracy enabling citizens to become actively involved in the framing of EU policies and legislation; whereas it should be transparent and effective; whereas the exercise of this right has not been satisfactory thus far;
- Y. whereas the creation of the Schengen area and the integration of the Schengen *acquis* into the EU framework have greatly enhanced freedom of movement within the EU and constitute one of the greatest achievements of the European integration process; whereas the Council of the European Union, in its conclusions Nos 9166/3/11 and 9167/3/11 of 9 June 2011, confirmed the successful conclusion of the evaluation process and the technical readiness of Bulgaria and Romania to accede to the Schengen area;
- Z. whereas security is one of EU citizens' greatest concerns; whereas the EU should make its citizens feel that their freedom is protected and their security ensured across its territory while ensuring that their freedoms and rights are equally respected and protected; whereas terrorism is a global threat that needs to be dealt with effectively at local, national and EU level in order to ensure the security of European citizens;
- AA. whereas, according to the Commission's impact assessment (SEC(2011)1556) accompanying the proposal leading to the adoption of Council Directive (EU) 2015/637 of 20 April 2015 on the coordination and cooperation measures to facilitate consular protection for unrepresented citizens of the Union in third countries⁽¹⁾, almost seven million EU citizens travel to or live in places outside the EU where their own country does not have an embassy or consulate; whereas the number of unrepresented EU citizens is expected to increase to at least ten million by 2020; whereas EU citizens resident in the territory of a non-EU country where their Member State of origin does not have representation are entitled to the protection of the diplomatic and consular authorities of any other Member State on the same conditions as that state's nationals;
1. Takes note of the Commission's 2017 EU Citizenship Report, which contains an enumeration of new priorities by field of activity for the years ahead; recalls that the correct application of EU law is a shared responsibility of the Member States and the EU institutions; underlines in that respect the crucial role the Commission plays as the guardian of the Treaties in the implementation of Articles 258 to 260 of the TFEU; expresses the need for priorities to effectively answer citizens' concerns and for well-defined, concrete commitments and actions for the next three years; urges the Commission to speed up its EU law enforcement policy by using all available tools and mechanisms;
2. Notes that the rights to petition, to refer cases to the European Ombudsman and to access documents and registers are fundamental, tangible elements of EU citizenship and increase the transparency of decision-making; expresses, therefore, its wish that these rights be promoted and highlighted as key elements of the Commission's EU Citizenship Report and properly reflected there;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 106, 24.4.2015, p. 1.

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3. Highlights the fact that the effective exercise of the right to petition has been facilitated thanks to the improved processing of petitions in the European Parliament and the launch in late 2014 of the Committee on Petitions portal, which allows petitions to be submitted in an uncomplicated fashion and managed more efficiently, as illustrated elsewhere by the respective Annual Reports of the Committee on Petitions; calls for the conclusion without delay of the implementation of the next steps of the project as foreseen, since this will allow a far more interactive follow-up of the petition process by petitioners and supporters;

4. Underlines that the successful exercise of citizenship rights presupposes that all rights and freedoms enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are upheld by Member States; highlights the fact that the adoption of democratic and participatory governance, the greatest possible level of transparency and the direct involvement of all citizens in decision-making processes ultimately reinforce EU citizenship; calls on the Member States to better inform EU citizens as to their rights and duties and to facilitate equal access to and equal respect for these rights both in their country of origin and in other Member States; highlights existing opt-outs from parts of the EU Treaties by some Member States which lead to de facto differences in citizens' rights;

5. Expresses strong regret that for almost a decade now no significant progress has been made in the adoption of the EU-wide Anti-Discrimination Directive; calls on all EU institutions and the Member States to relaunch the relevant negotiations as a matter of the utmost priority; notes the Commission's undertaking to actively support the conclusion of these negotiations;

6. Is of the view that the effectiveness of EU policies in the field of anti-discrimination should be increased and remaining obstacles removed; recommends that the Commission update the first two anti-discrimination directives, namely Council Directive 2000/43/EC and Council Directive 2000/78/EC, to bring them into line with the current version of the Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;

7. Calls for the adoption of an effective legislative framework and coordination measures at EU and Member State level to ensure high levels of social protection and stable, properly paid jobs; considers this approach to be vital in order to strengthen the fundamental rights and freedoms arising from EU citizenship;

8. Stresses that the austerity measures adopted at EU and Member State level have aggravated economic and social inequalities, thus severely limiting the practical exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms arising from EU citizenship;

9. Recalls its amendments adopted on 14 September 2017 ⁽¹⁾ and the Commission's proposal on a comprehensive directive on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States as regards the accessibility requirements for products and services (COM(2015)0615), including different modes of transportation; recommends that legislators expedite their activities with regard to the adoption of a European Accessibility Act; welcomes the interinstitutional agreement reached on the implementation of the Marrakech Treaty on EU copyright law, which has been advocated by the Committee on Petitions since 2011, and reiterates its call for the swift ratification of the Marrakech Treaty by the EU and its Member States; calls on all Member States to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and to sign the Protocol thereto; supports the widening of the use of the mutually recognised EU disability card to as many Member States as possible; encourages them to facilitate the mobility of persons with disabilities and functional limitations in the EU; stresses the need to improve the accessibility of EU websites for persons with disabilities;

10. Invites the Commission to take more active steps to fight discrimination against LGBTI persons and to combat homophobia by defining concrete action to be taken at national and European level; calls at the same time for the EU institutions to monitor LGBTI rights closely and to promote the recognition of cross-border rights for LGBTI persons and their families in the EU;

11. Recalls that the principle of equality between women and men can only be implemented through strategic gender mainstreaming in all EU policies, including through its Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019; calls on the Commission to facilitate full access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services in all Member States; calls on the Commission to take meaningful measures to eliminate discrimination and combat discriminatory statements that are

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0347.

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directed against women in the EU and which encourage gender stereotypes; reiterates the need for investment in citizenship and civic education and education on gender equality throughout Europe; draws attention to the gender pay and pension gaps in the EU, which undermine the possibility of genuine economic autonomy for millions of women; highlights the importance of the political participation of young people, particularly of women and girls, and calls for more action on the part of the Commission and the Member States in encouraging their participation.

12. Welcomes the Commission's proposal for the EU to sign and conclude its accession to the Istanbul Convention; regrets, however, that the limitation to two areas — matters relating to judicial cooperation in criminal cases, and asylum and non-refoulement — raises legal uncertainties as to the scope of the EU's accession; urges the Member States to speed up negotiations on the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention; calls on the Member States which have not yet done so to swiftly ratify this Convention, and on the Commission to propose a directive on combating violence against women; welcomes the submission by the Commission of the work-life balance package, and calls on all institutions to deliver on these measures as soon as possible; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote women's entry into and representation in leadership positions and to take specific action to address the needs of vulnerable citizens facing intersectional multiple discrimination, so that such citizens are able to exercise their citizenship rights, for example through appropriate strategies; calls on the Council to step up its efforts to unblock the Directive on Women on Boards; reaffirms its call on the Commission to adopt its Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 as a communication;

13. Recalls that traditional minorities have coexisted for centuries with majority cultures on the continent of Europe; underlines the need for the EU institutions to play a more active role in the protection of minorities, for instance by promoting awareness-raising meetings, seminars and resolutions as well as concrete administrative steps within the EU institutions; believes that the EU should set high standards for the protection of minorities, beginning with standards codified in international law instruments, such as those of the Council of Europe, and that these standards should be strongly embedded in a legal framework guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights throughout the EU; encourages all Member States to fully ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages without further delay, and to implement the Treaties in good faith; recalls, furthermore, the need to implement the principles developed in the framework of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); deplores any rhetoric that incites discrimination on the grounds of nationality; encourages national governments to find durable solutions and to promote a culture of linguistic diversity in all Member States and the EU as a whole, beyond the confines of the official EU languages, as both the Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights contain references to the protection of national minorities and to discrimination practised on the grounds of language;

14. Expresses its deep concern at the numbers of Roma in Europe who are victims of discriminatory birth registration and therefore have no identity documents and are denied access to essential basic services in their countries of residence and, consequently, are also denied enjoyment of any of their rights in the EU; calls on the Member States to take immediate corrective measures in this regard in order to safeguard the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights and of all the rights conferred by EU citizenship; calls on the Commission to assess and monitor the situation in the Member States and to initiate identification and protection of persons whose citizenship has not been recognised and who have no access to identity documents;

15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to propose specific measures for removing obstacles to free movement, in line with Parliament's resolutions of 15 March 2017 on obstacles to EU citizens' freedom to move and work in the internal market ⁽¹⁾ and of 28 April 2016 on safeguarding the best interests of the child across the EU on the basis of petitions addressed to the European Parliament ⁽²⁾;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0083.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0142.

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16. Calls on the Commission to regularly monitor the application of Directive 2004/38/EC in the Member States and to take appropriate measures to remove potential obstacles to freedom of movement; welcomes the e-learning tool on the right of free movement of Union citizens, which helps local authorities come to a better understanding of the rights and obligations that come with free movement;

17. Acknowledges the Commission's efforts to make multiple information and assistance outlets about the EU and the rights it confers on its citizens, such as the Europe Direct network, the Your Europe portal and the e-justice portal, available and more accessible, in order to better inform individuals exercising their rights as EU citizens; acknowledges the Commission's proposal for a Single Digital Gateway to give citizens easy, online access to information, assistance and problem-solving services regarding the exercise of rights within the single market;

18. Calls on the Commission to reinforce the SOLVIT network by improving the interaction between its services and national centres with a view to ensuring better follow-up of unresolved and repetitive cases and closer articulation between the different EU law enforcement tools such as EU PILOT and CHAP; invites the Member States, at the same time, to promote the SOLVIT network and its services, as well as other redress and citizen participation mechanisms, among EU citizens, both at Union level (e.g. via Parliament's Committee on Petitions, the European Ombudsman or the European Citizens' Initiative) and at national level (e.g. via regional or local ombudsmen, petitions committees or popular legislative initiatives);

19. Supports the Commission's commitment in the EU Citizenship Report 2017 to organise an EU-wide information and awareness-raising campaign on EU citizenship rights in order to help citizens better understand their rights; points out that citizens should have access to all information necessary for the genuine strengthening of European citizenship, and that such information should be presented in a clear and comprehensible way in order to enable them to make informed decisions on the exercise of their Treaty rights and rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; recommends the promotion of transparency and proactive consular support as the most appropriate tools to that end, as well as suitable publication of the information necessary to facilitate establishment for newcomers;

20. Recalls that access to health services, coordination of social security schemes and recognition of professional qualifications in other Member States are areas in which EU citizens often face difficulties, and calls for vigorous enforcement by the Commission with a view to redressing such situations;

21. Expresses its concern at the increase in political disaffection among the public; stresses the need to prioritise the fight against xenophobia, racism, discrimination and hate speech;

22. Acknowledges that action to enhance voter turnout in European elections is a shared responsibility of the EU and Member States; encourages the latter to promote democratic participation by better informing citizens of their right to stand and vote in local and European elections, through multiple channels and in accessible language, and by removing all barriers to their participation, such as economic, social or language discrimination, unfair practices or corruption; urges the Member States to remove accessibility obstacles for citizens with disabilities and to facilitate voting in all elections for citizens residing, working, or studying away from their usual voting location, for instance by embracing electronic identification and voting solutions;

23. Believes that the reform of the Electoral Act could be an opportunity for the Union to become more democratic; highlights the fact that thousands of Europeans share this view; recalls the need to promote participation in European elections by increasing the visibility of political parties at the European level and that strengthening the European character of the elections to the European Parliament is a shared responsibility of the EU and its Member States; encourages the Council to include gender-mainstreamed and gender-balanced lists in the revision of the abovementioned act; asks the Commission to act on complaints regarding the exercise of the right to vote in European and municipal elections, to devise a concrete action plan for the introduction of electronic voting in the European Parliament elections starting at the earliest feasible date, and to make that system more widely available to all EU citizens; urges the Member States to do all they can to encourage persons who do not possess the citizenship of any state and who reside permanently in the EU Member States to adopt the citizenship of the host Member State so that they can enjoy full EU citizenship rights; considers that EU citizens who move to and reside in another Member State should have the possibility to exercise their right to vote in the national

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elections of their country of origin; calls on Member States that disenfranchise nationals who choose to live for an extended period of time in another Member State to ease the conditions for these nationals and preserve their right to vote in national elections; urges the Commission to take the necessary steps to enable persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote without any form of discrimination; supports the possibility of introducing a European identity card in addition to national identification documents;

24. Notes the Commission's latest communication (COM(2017)0482) on the European Citizens' Initiative containing a proposal for the revision of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of 16 February 2011, with a view to improving its functioning; is hopeful that the revision of the regulation will result in an ECI instrument that is more transparent, effective and user-friendly, while ensuring democratic and broader participation of citizens in the European debate and agenda-setting; stresses the significant legislative role Parliament will play and the importance of good cooperation with the Commission during the revision of the regulation; calls on the Commission to include provisions aimed at revising the conditions for legal admissibility, the registration requirements and the examination procedures for an ECI;

25. Takes the view that in the interests of Union citizenship action by the Commission is needed to strengthen the European cultural dimension; encourages the 'Europe for Citizens' programme to finance more innovative projects with the potential for having a systemic impact; suggests developing the 'Getting to Know Europe' programme in parallel with and as a complement to 'Europe for Citizens';

26. Proposes, with the aim of strengthening Union citizenship and the exercise of that citizenship, that the Commission should encourage local authorities to designate councillors responsible for European affairs, since this is the level that is closest to the citizens;

27. Recommends that the Commission introduce an entry register at all of its headquarters, including the representation offices in the Member States, to enable citizens to address any EU institution in writing or face to face with the proper guarantees;

28. Recommends that the Commission introduce, in cooperation with universal postal service providers, a messaging system with certification of content, date and sender, so that citizens can address the European institutions remotely in writing with the proper guarantees;

29. Expresses its conviction that the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information, enshrined in Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, free media and access to a plurality of voices in society and the media are indispensable parts of a healthy democracy and are therefore a constitutional foundation of EU membership as enshrined in Articles 2 and 6 of the TEU; underlines the need for a clearly-defined EU policy to tackle anti-European propaganda and false information, and to foster the independence of public media from governments; proposes that a minimum time in public broadcast media in all Member States be dedicated to content related to EU affairs; proposes that EU institutions proceed with the creation of European television channels broadcasting in all Member States and all EU official languages, and with educating citizens on media literacy from an early age; supports dissemination of press and multimedia productions in all official EU languages; underlines in this regard the need for further awareness-raising among European journalists;

30. Maintains that linguistic diversity and transparency are key tools for bringing citizens closer to the EU and involving them in its activities; notes that access to documents represents 30 % of the investigations completed by the European Ombudsman in 2016, and therefore recommends the promotion of the right to access documents and the translation of as many documents as possible into all official EU languages; supports the intensification of dialogue with citizens and encourages public debates in order to improve citizens' understanding of the impact of the EU on their daily lives and to allow them to take part in exchanges of views, through slots in television programmes for targeted audiences; calls for an horizontal directive on whistle-blowing which sets out appropriate channels and procedures for reporting cases;

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31. Supports the promotion of a culture of public service among EU and national institutions, and considers that the EU should lead by example through the highest administrative and transparency standards, in accordance with Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; proposes that local EU offices in the Member States be transformed into 'one-stop shops', offering comprehensive services for EU citizens, so as to reduce bureaucracy and the obstacles it poses to the exercise of EU citizenship rights; highlights the importance of the 'once only' project, which eliminates unnecessary burdens for European businesses that are asked to present the same data and documents repeatedly in their operations across borders;

32. Underlines that accessible education plays a vital role in informing future EU citizens about their rights; emphasises the importance of promoting the development of transferable skills that enhance intercultural understanding and active participation in diverse societies through the Erasmus+ programme; encourages the Member States to give more space to civic education focused in particular on EU citizenship and also on EU affairs in their school curricula, and to adapt teacher training accordingly; recalls the need to support teachers and education practitioners in integrating information about EU rights and citizenship into their teaching; stresses, in this context, the need to further promote and develop online platforms, in order for education professionals to be able to access innovative multilingual teaching materials which help them to inspire and motivate students in learning about the EU; urges the Commission to launch an Education for European Citizenship strategy incorporating proposed guidelines to develop a curriculum that could include school visits to EU institutions;

33. Recalls that, according to EU law as it stands, withdrawal of a Member State from the Union equates to the loss of European citizenship for its citizens; regrets that the UK's withdrawal from the EU will be the first instance in history of citizens being deprived of rights attributed to them through the EU Treaties; underlines that this loss of rights is expected to have a serious impact on their everyday lives; stresses that any agreement should be based on the principles of equity, symmetry, fair treatment, reciprocity and non-discrimination, as well as on full respect for the integrity of EU law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and its enforcement framework; urges both negotiating parties to give priority to all citizens affected and to safeguard their rights; calls on the negotiating parties to maintain all derivative social, economic and family rights, and in particular healthcare rights, to the fullest extent possible following the UK's withdrawal;

34. Proposes establishing a European public holiday on 9 May in order to reinforce a European feeling of belonging to the European family;

35. Urges the Member States to guarantee that their national legislation is sufficiently clear and detailed to ensure that the right of free movement of citizens and their families is respected, to proceed with the proper training of the competent national authorities in this respect and to disseminate accurate information to interested parties in a precise manner, and to foster good cooperation and a swift exchange of information with other national administrations, especially where cross-border insurance and retirement pensions are concerned; calls for better cooperation between host Member States and the relevant consulates which will ensure a proper network of assistance and fair treatment in cross-border cases, particularly where custody of children is involved; urges the Commission to submit a legislative proposal on the cross-border recognition of adoption orders;

36. Calls on the Council of the European Union and the European Council to allow all countries that fulfil the necessary technical criteria to become members of the Schengen area, thereby allowing all EU citizens to enjoy freedom of movement unhindered by border checks;

37. Recalls that the EU legislation on security should be up-to-date, effective and efficient in preventing, detecting and reacting to evolving security threats; calls for the urgent implementation of the European Agenda on Security, better enforcement of existing EU legal instruments in this field, and more efficient information exchange and coordination among Member States and with EU agencies; welcomes the Commission's initiatives to strengthen security cooperation between Member States; stresses the importance of fully respecting fundamental rights in the fight against terrorism; emphasises that harmonisation of internal and external EU action in the field of security is essential for the effective protection of EU citizens;

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38. Calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to intensify efforts to develop an effective and genuine security union that addresses all dimensions of the terrorist threat;
 39. Considers deradicalisation and the prevention of radicalisation to be an absolute priority for the EU, and strongly advocates the strengthening of specific cross-sectoral programmes targeting education, voluntary and cultural activities and youth work, as well as deradicalisation programmes in institutions, local communities, civil society, religious communities and regional administrations; believes that a comprehensive policy in this field should be accompanied by long-term proactive deradicalisation processes in the judicial sphere; stresses the need to develop strategies on social inclusion and policies tackling discrimination; calls on the Member States to address radicalisation holistically and to take advantage of the expertise of the Radicalisation Awareness Network set up on the initiative of the Commission; underlines that the prevention of radicalisation can also be supported through actions funded by EU programmes such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and Europe for Citizens;
 40. Calls for the full and effective implementation of Directive (EU) 2015/637 in order to ensure consular protection for EU citizens in third countries where their Member States are not represented;
 41. Calls on the Commission to make a proposal for a new, more secure format for an EU emergency travel document for unrepresented EU citizens outside the EU whose passport has been stolen, lost, destroyed or is temporarily unavailable, in order to guarantee that they can return home safely;
 42. Stresses that the victims of crime and terrorism must be guaranteed an appropriate level of rights without discrimination across the EU, and that they should be treated with respect and dignity and receive appropriate support in accordance with their individual needs and the needs of their families; underlines that a growing number of European citizens have suffered terrorist attacks in a country that is not their own, and therefore urgently calls for the establishment of protocols in Member States to help non-national Europeans in the event of a terrorist attack, in line with Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism; stresses the need for a specific directive on the protection of victims of terrorism;
 43. Regrets the existence of cross-border obstacles in civil or social matters, such as family law or pensions, that prevent many citizens from the full enjoyment of their EU citizenship;
 44. Regrets that the options for redress open to parents and children in the event of separation or divorce are not the same in each Member State, with the result that hundreds of parents in Europe have contacted the Committee on Petitions to urge it to be more active despite it having very limited competences in this area;
 45. Calls for reinforced cooperation between the Member States in order to ensure the protection of victims of gender-based violence and that the best interests of the child are taken into account in cases of cross-border family disputes;
 46. Welcomes the launch of the EU Solidarity Corps for young European citizens, and calls for this initiative to be properly funded so that quality jobs are not replaced by unpaid volunteering;
 47. Calls on the Member States to put in place coordination and cooperation measures in order to effectively tackle the issues of double taxation and tax discrimination in any cross-border context and to take better account of the realities of cross-border worker mobility; considers that double taxation issues are currently insufficiently addressed insofar as they are handled via existing bilateral tax conventions or unilateral action by a Member State, and that they require concerted and timely action at EU level;
 48. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the European Ombudsman and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
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