

Editorial

Europe in view

We've heard little about European citizenship in Brexit debates, neither before the referendum of June 2016, nor since. Yet the status, rights and responsibilities of European citizenship attach to all UK nationals, whether they wish it or not. Since the early 1990s, children in the UK and other member states of the European Union are born European citizens. These millions of young people grow up able to travel freely throughout some 30 countries, study in them, in some places without paying university fees, oftentimes receiving bursaries under the Erasmus programme to encourage them to move around the Union and acquire additional language skills.

Those of us who are older became European citizens in the 1990s, in addition to our status as UK citizens or citizens of other member states. Our passports have the words 'European Union' on the front cover and, as it says inside, we are entitled to seek assistance at the embassies of other EU member states whilst travelling, should our own national embassy not be accessible.

Not only can we move freely within the territory of Member States, we also have the right as European citizens to reside in them. Millions of people take advantage of this right. More than three million UK citizens reside in other EU Member States, while more than two million EU nationals reside in the UK. Reciprocal access to health care underpins such migration, as do receipts of pensions and other benefits in the country of residence.

Many UK citizens use their right as European citizens to work in other EU Member States and, correspondingly, one readily encounters German, French, Spanish, Italian, Irish, Polish, Lithuanian and all the other EU nationalities working in Nottingham, a small city in the English Midlands, which is increasingly internationally minded. As European citizens, EU nationals are entitled to vote and to stand as candidates in local and European elections in the Member State in which they reside. However, millions of EU nationals were excluded from voting in the 'Brexit' referendum of June 2016 in the UK, as were millions of UK nationals who reside elsewhere in the European Union.

Under what is called the European Citizens' Initiative, once the required million expressions of support have been gathered, Commission representatives meet the organisers to discuss in detail the legislative issues raised in the initiative. There is also an opportunity to present the

initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament. Might it be timely to launch a Citizens' Initiative on safeguarding people from being used as 'bargaining chips' in negotiations under the Treaties, such as those associated with Brexit? A draft text is attached. Many people's lives are beset with uncertainty following the advisory vote to leave. There is also great economic uncertainty.

Len McCluskey, leader of the Unite trade union, largest in the British Isles, has rightly warned of the dire threat to UK manufacturing and the wider economy posed by Brexit. Exclusion from the European Single Market and the European Customs Union will impact directly on the jobs of many people throughout the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, 20 per cent devaluation of sterling against the dollar and 15 per cent against the euro raises prices for households and businesses in the UK, and the resultant inflation will eat into personal incomes. Few people will have voted to leave the EU in the expectation that they will be poorer as a result.

But the European Union endures as a political project to keep the peace in a substantial part of the Eurasian continent. Fundamental as this is, the EU's record during recent times includes some substantial blemishes. For example, excluding Russia from negotiations about the EU's association agreement with Ukraine has ultimately resulted in continuing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, with many people killed, injured and displaced, whilst avowedly fascist formations are integrated into the Ukrainian military and police. On the constructive side, for 13 years now, the European Parliament has hosted annual conferences about the continuing plight of the stateless Kurds, under the auspices of the EU Turkey Civic Commission. Reports from the most recent of these conferences, in December 2016, will be found elsewhere in this issue of *The Spokesman*.

In May 2019 there will be direct elections to the European Parliament. Working back from that fixed date in the political calendar has given us the Brexit timetable, or so it seems. In March 2017, Mrs May is set to give notice that the United Kingdom will withdraw from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (see below). She and her interlocutors have expressed the hope that negotiations will be concluded within the two-year time frame specified in Article 50, so that the UK may depart the Union in the first half of 2019, before the elections to the European Parliament. Should the timetable slip, what will happen then? And is Article 50 revocable? Once triggered, can the UK subsequently change its mind and withdraw notice to quit? This fundamental question, to which the UK government doesn't know the answer, is being tested in the Irish courts.

Tony Simpson

Article 50—Treaty on European Union (TEU) 1. Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements. 2. A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament. 3. The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification referred to in paragraph 2, unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period. 4. For the purposes of paragraphs 2 and 3, the member of the European Council or of the Council representing the withdrawing Member State shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or Council or in decisions concerning it. A qualified majority shall be defined in accordance with Article 238(3)(b) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. 5. If a State which has withdrawn from the Union asks to rejoin, its request shall be subject to the procedure referred to in Article 49.

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Bargain not with people's lives

Under the European Citizens' Initiative, one million signatures, drawn proportionately from the 28 Member States, are required for a proposal to be considered by the European Commission. We invite comments on this draft text for such an Initiative.

‘To uphold the right of all Union citizens to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States under objective conditions of freedom and dignity (Directive 2004/38/EC), and to safeguard citizens of the Union from use as bargaining chips in any negotiations under Article 50 TEU, requests the Commission submit a proposal to retain the rights of EU citizenship for all those who have already exercised their freedom of movement prior to the departure of a Member State leaving the Union, as well as for those other nationals of the departing State who wish to retain their status as citizens of the Union.’