

Brussels, 27 October, 2010

## European Commission adopts plan to bring concrete benefits to EU citizens on the move

### Why is the Commission adopting this plan?

The EU's Single Market provides huge benefits to citizens. With 27 Member States and a market of 500 million consumers, EU citizens take advantage of the Single Market when they travel, study, work, marry, buy or inherit property, vote, receive medical treatment or just shop online from companies established in other Member States. However, gaps still remain between the existing legal rules and obstacles that citizens face in their daily lives, particularly in cross-border situations.

The importance of making EU citizenship more effective in practice has been stressed on several occasions. Alain Lamassoure, in his report "[The citizen and the application of Community law](#)" of 8 June 2008, described various administrative barriers facing Europeans when they seek to exercise their rights. The report concluded that European policies should be built around citizens' rights and needs and should deliver concrete results.

In 2009, about 11.9 million EU citizens were living outside their home Member State. The number of complaints and enquiries that the Commission receives from citizens every year is rising: in 2009 the Europe Direct Contact Centre received 25,721 enquires on cross-border issues, including travelling, buying and selling, studying, working and living in other Member States. Today's plan responds to many of these concerns.

### What is the procedure now?

The Commission will launch a debate with other EU institutions, notably the European Parliament and the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and with civil society, on how EU citizens can get the most out of citizenship. The Commission will then present in 2013 (a European year dedicated to citizens) an assessment of the actions contained in today's Citizenship Report.

### How does the plan affect EU citizens' daily lives?

The following are examples of five initiatives that will help citizens get the most out of EU citizenship:

#### 1. Car registration

EU citizens are often faced with cumbersome administration when they move from one Member State to another and try to register a car. Problems also occur when people buy a car in one country and transfer it to another. They may be faced with double payment of registration tax because national laws on taxation of the first registration are applied in an uncoordinated manner.

The Commission will simplify the formalities and conditions for the registration of cars previously registered in another Member State by proposing a legislative instrument in 2011. It will also take action in cases where the tax treatment of cars is discriminatory and propose ways to eliminate double registration taxes on cars.

*For example, Aurel, a resident in the Netherlands, has retired and decides to change his permanent residence to Greece, where he has a holiday house. He had previously bought and registered his car in Netherlands. When moving to Greece, he will have to re-register his car in Greece and pay registration tax there. The amount of registration tax to be paid will take account of the age of the vehicle. However, he will not be able to obtain a partial refund of the registration tax previously paid in the Netherlands, meaning that his car will be subject to registration tax twice.*

## **2. Bringing the benefit of cross-border healthcare and eHealth technologies to citizens**

The Commission is proposing to ensure more effective access to cross-border healthcare by providing clearer rules on reimbursements and transparent information about healthcare available in other countries, by improving trust in the safety and quality of cross-border care and by helping patients exercise their rights to reimbursement for health treatment in any EU country.

Patients do not always have access to relevant information on essential aspects of cross-border healthcare, including their rights to reimbursement for healthcare provided in other Member States. This creates uncertainty and distrust and hampers patients' exercise of their right to seek medical treatment in another EU country.

*For example, Dorota, who is Polish, finds out she needs a heart operation. She would prefer to have the operation in Latvia, so that her son can take care of her during her convalescence. However, she does not know whether she is entitled to healthcare there and, if so, how she can get reimbursed for the operation and the home telemonitoring that she will need afterwards.*

Cross-border healthcare can also be eased with digital services. The Commission will promote the widespread use of telemedicine services by 2020 by equipping Europeans with secure online access to their medical health data. It will also define a minimum common set of patient data for interoperability of patient records to be accessed or exchanged electronically across Member States by 2012.

E-Health technologies can reduce inequalities in access to treatment, improve the quality of care, make access to personal health data easier and safer for patients, minimise the risk of medical errors or contribute to the early detection of health problems. For instance, home telemonitoring of heart patients can improve survival rates by 15%. ePrescriptions can reduce errors in drugs dosage by 15%. Research has shown that over 5.6 million hospital admissions for chronic conditions could be avoided if patients used telemedicine home monitoring services.

Today, many legal and organisational barriers (e.g. fragmentation of rules on the protection of personal data across the EU, reimbursement schemes and lack of pan-European interoperability), hamper the roll-out of eHealth technologies in Europe and may make it hard for EU citizens to seek health treatment when they travel or live abroad.

*For example, Luisa who is Portuguese, suffers from a rare heart condition. She has heard of a Centre of Excellence in Germany on heart conditions and she would like to see a doctor from this clinic. The Centre of Excellence offers the possibility of having teleconsultations between its physicians and its clients. Luisa would like to have a teleconsultation, especially considering that it is not advisable for her to travel in her condition. However, she is not sure if she would be reimbursed for the service.*

### 3. Consular protection

EU citizens who travel to a non-EU country in which their home country does not have an embassy or consulate have the right to receive consular protection from any other Member State as if they were a national of that nation.

The Commission will make the right of EU citizens to consular protection more effective. It will further reinforce the right to consular protection for EU citizens by strengthening the legal framework and increasing awareness among citizens and consular officials. In 2011, it will propose legislative measures to improve coordination and cooperation and better inform citizens. The Commission will set up a website that will provide information and contacts of the Member States' embassies or consulates in third countries.

The number of EU citizens travelling to third countries has increased from over 80 million trips in 2005 to over 90 million in 2008<sup>1</sup>. More than 30 million EU citizens live permanently in a third country, but only in three countries (United States, China and Russia) all 27 Member States are represented. With more and more Europeans travelling for business or pleasure to third countries<sup>2</sup>, there is a rising need for consular assistance of unrepresented EU citizens.

Currently few legal rules are in place but EU citizens have high expectations as regards the ambit of the help provided. A recent Eurobarometer survey showed that a majority (62%) would expect the same kind of help no matter which Member State they ask for help, whereas almost a third (28%) expect at least a minimum level of assistance provided by any Member State.

*For example, Natasha, a Slovenian citizen, was a victim of an armed robbery during her holiday in the Caribbean. She was injured and her passport and money were stolen. She is wondering how to quickly find an English-speaking doctor and how to get the necessary funds and travel documents for a return flight following her recovery.*

### 4. Package travel

The Commission will make a legislative proposal in 2011 to modernise the current rules for the protection of consumers buying package travel (the so-called Package Travel Directive which dates back to 1990), especially over the internet.

Nowadays, 56% of Europeans use the internet and low-cost air carriers to organise their holidays themselves by buying so-called "dynamic packages" rather than purchasing pre-defined packages. However, these European holidaymakers are not covered by the existing EU rules protecting buyers of package travel, even if 67% of consumers surveyed who bought a "dynamic package" wrongly believed that they were protected. In the UK, for example, more than 98% of leisure travel bookings were protected in 1998. Nine years later, the proportion had dropped to 57%. At the moment, it is less than 50%. A dynamic package that goes wrong means a loss on average of almost €600 for the consumer. Globally, users of dynamic packages in the 27 EU Member States are losing more than €1 billion a year.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat database on population, section on tourism; data include holiday and business trips of more than one day.

<sup>2</sup> The World Tourism Organisation expects further significant growth for the period 2010-2020.

*For example, Dagmara books a holiday (flight, hotel accommodation for four nights and car rental) through the internet. She discovers that the bathroom has no water and complains at the reception desk. The receptionist tells her that there are no more available rooms. She calls the internet company where she made the booking and is told that she has to solve this problem with the hotel herself. She wastes three hours trying to solve the problem and pays an additional €500 for a room in another hotel. She later finds out that, if her holiday package had been covered by the EU rules, the organiser would have been financially responsible and obliged to offer her assistance, e.g. an alternative room or hotel.*

The Commission will also propose additional ways to strengthen the rights of passengers in all modes of transport and to enforce the rights of air passengers (e.g. in case of long delays and cancellations).

## **5. Improving information for EU citizens**

67% of respondents to a Eurobarometer survey published today have indicated that they are “not well informed” or “not informed at all” about their rights as EU citizens. Another 72% say they would like to know more about their rights as EU citizens.

The Commission is developing a **one-stop-shop information point on EU rights**: the **Your Europe** web portal, which provides clear and practical information on EU rights and how to make use of them. Portal visitors are automatically dispatched to more specialised advice and help services where needed.

A **free-phone number**, which gives access to Europe Direct, where a staff member will answer questions in any EU language, and **500 local information centres** across the EU (the Europe Direct Information Centres), which can provide detailed information and respond to questions.

Flash Eurobarometer 292: Electoral rights of EU citizens

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/flash\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/flash_arch_en.htm)

Flash Eurobarometer 294: European Union Citizenship

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/flash\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/flash_arch_en.htm)

Qualitative Study: European Citizenship: cross-border mobility

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali_en.htm)

## ANNEX

### EU CITIZENSHIP REPORT 2010:

#### 25 ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE DAILY LIFE OF EU CITIZENS

The Commission:

1. will make it easier for **international couples** (either married or registered partners) to know **which courts have jurisdiction and which law applies to their property rights** (e.g. a jointly owned house) by proposing a legislative instrument in 2011;
2. will facilitate the **free circulation of civil status documents** (e.g. birth certificates) by proposing legislative instruments in 2013;
3. will enable citizens and legal practitioners to easily find **multilingual information on justice** via the European e-Justice web portal;
4. will further **improve the protection of persons suspected and accused in criminal proceedings**, including safeguarding suspects' access to a lawyer and communication with the outside world while in detention, by proposing two legislative instruments in 2011;
5. will improve the **protection of victims of crime** by proposing a package of measures, including a legislative instrument, in 2011;
6. will **simplify the formalities and conditions for the registration of cars** previously registered in another Member State by proposing a legislative instrument in 2011. It will also take action in cases where the tax treatment of cars is discriminatory and work on solutions to double registration taxes on cars which can hinder the free movement of citizens and goods;
7. is proposing ways to **facilitate access to cross-border health care** and is also putting in place pilot actions to equip Europeans with secure online access to their medical health data and to achieve widespread deployment of telemedicine services by 2020. The Commission will also recommend a minimum common set of patient data for interoperability of patient records to be accessed or exchanged electronically across Member States by 2012;
8. will increase the effectiveness of the **right of EU citizens to be assisted in third countries**, including in times of crisis, by the diplomatic and consular authorities of all Member States, by proposing legislative measures in 2011 and by better informing citizens via a dedicated website and targeted communication measures;
9. will **modernise the current rules for the protection of consumers buying package travel**, especially over the internet, and facilitate the purchase of package travel from other Member States by making a legislative proposal in 2011;
10. will seek to complete the legislative framework allowing to **ensure a set of common rights for passengers** travelling by any transport mode across the EU and ensure adequate enforcement of these rights, including the rights of air passengers (e.g. in case of long delays and cancellations). The Commission will also seek to ensure that transport hubs (e.g. airports, stations, ports) progressively become places where citizens can get easy access to information about their EU rights, especially when travelling within the EU;
11. will propose additional ways to ensure that **passengers with reduced mobility** can more easily access all means of transport and relevant infrastructure, will give, from 2010 onwards, an annual award to the most accessible European cities, will promote better access to services such as travel insurance and will develop and foster the use of EU wide standards on accessibility to the built environment, by proposing, in 2010, an EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020;
12. will propose ways to **increase consumer confidence in tourism products**, by organising awareness-raising campaigns for European tourists and by monitoring consumer satisfaction with various tourism services (e.g. transport, accommodation, travel etc.);

13. will set out in an understandable way the **rights of users of online services** by publishing a Code of EU Online Rights by 2012;
14. will facilitate **fast and inexpensive out-of-court resolution** of consumer problems in the EU by proposing a legislative instrument on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms in 2011, by exploring proposals for an EU-wide online dispute resolution system for eCommerce transactions by 2012 and by promoting wider use of mediation by 2013;
15. will facilitate **free movement of EU citizens and their third-country family members** by enforcing EU rules strictly, including on non-discrimination, by promoting good practices and increased knowledge of EU rules on the ground and by stepping up the dissemination of information to EU citizens about their free movement rights;
16. is **improving the provision of information** to citizens and is developing a new system of electronic exchange of data to reduce delays and difficulties in the exchange of social security information;
17. is asking Member States to ensure that in future, **publication of the results of the European Parliament elections** takes place at the same time in all Member States;
18. is asking Member States to ensure that **voting rights of EU citizens** in their Member State of residence are fully enforced, that EU citizens can be members of or found political parties in the Member State of residence and that Member States duly inform EU citizens of their electoral rights;
19. will propose the **simplification of the procedure for EU citizens when standing as candidates** in their Member State of residence, and will improve the current mechanism for preventing double voting in European Parliament elections, taking into account the timeframe and outcome of a future European Parliament electoral reform;
20. will launch a discussion to identify political **options to prevent EU citizens from losing their political rights** as a consequence of exercising their right to free movement;
21. is developing the **Your Europe web portal** into a one-stop-shop information point on the rights of citizens and businesses in the EU, easy to use and accessible via the web (<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope>) and via a free phone number (Europe Direct Contact Centre). It will provide clear and practical information and be a central port of call ("front office") which will dispatch enquiries to the various specialised assistance services ("back offices");
22. is **streamlining its information networks** in the Member States so that citizens easily find the right contact point at national, regional and local level. The Commission's Representations in the Member States, together with the 500 Europe Direct information centres, will improve the promotion of citizens' rights by 2012, including through a better cooperation and interaction with existing EU-level assistance and problem-solving services;
23. will **strengthen citizens' awareness of their EU citizenship status** and their rights and their 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 EU policies during this Year;
24. will make it **simpler for EU citizens and stakeholders to use the financial support** the Commission provides for the development of EU citizenship, by exploiting synergies among the available EU funding instruments and rationalisation;
25. will explore ways to **further strengthen information on European affairs**, characterised by independent, professional and high-quality reporting; in this context, the Commission will also explore options for a more sustainable financing of Euronews. The building up of a Brussels studio for Euronews will be encouraged.