

Long-term British expats could soon win right to vote in UK general elections

Written by Martin Banks on 27 February 2018 in News
News

Campaigners have welcomed plans to abolish the rule which bans UK voters overseas from voting in British general elections after they have been abroad for period of 15 years or more.



Ballot box | *Photo credit: Press Association*

They were commenting to news that the overseas electors bill had passed the second reading stage in the UK House of Commons.

Speaking on Tuesday, Roger Casale, the founder of citizens' rights group New Europeans, said, "This is great news."

He told this website, "The goal of abolishing the 15-year rule does at last seem to be in sight. I am

happy above all for all Britons abroad who do not want to lose their democratic voice and the right to vote.”

The Conservatives first included the measure in their manifesto in 2015, following pressure from civil society groups like New Europeans, Conservatives Abroad and Labour International.

However, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron did not abolish the 15-year rule before the EU referendum and as a result, over 1.5 million British citizens living in Europe were not able to vote.

In 2017, the measure looked like being slipped from the Conservative manifesto before an intervention from Casale, who succeeded in having the pledge reinstated.

Lobbying by New Europeans and others managed to persuade the Labour party to remain neutral rather than oppose the measure.

Casale said, “Abolishing the 15-year rule will be only half the battle of course as there is still a huge job to be done to persuade even eligible electors abroad to register to vote.

“In 2014, New Europeans exposed massive shortcomings in terms of the efforts of electoral registration officers and the electoral commission in promoting voter registration of overseas voters.

“Since this time, registration has improved from its baseline in 2014 of 0.25 per cent. However, it is still only at two per cent of those eligible to vote.”

Further comment came from Samia Badani, of New Europeans, who said, “Abolishing the 15-year rule will help as many did not bother to register if they thought they would lose franchise - however, there is still a long way to go.”

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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[Justice and Rights](#) [1]

Categories

[Public order, justice and rights](#) [2]

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- [2] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/public-order-justice-and-rights>
- [3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/society-and-welfare>