

New 'Green Card' initiative would guarantee rights of EU citizens in the UK and Britons in the EU

Written by Roger Casale on 28 February 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

A GreenCard4Europe could break the impasse on citizens' rights, argues Roger Casale

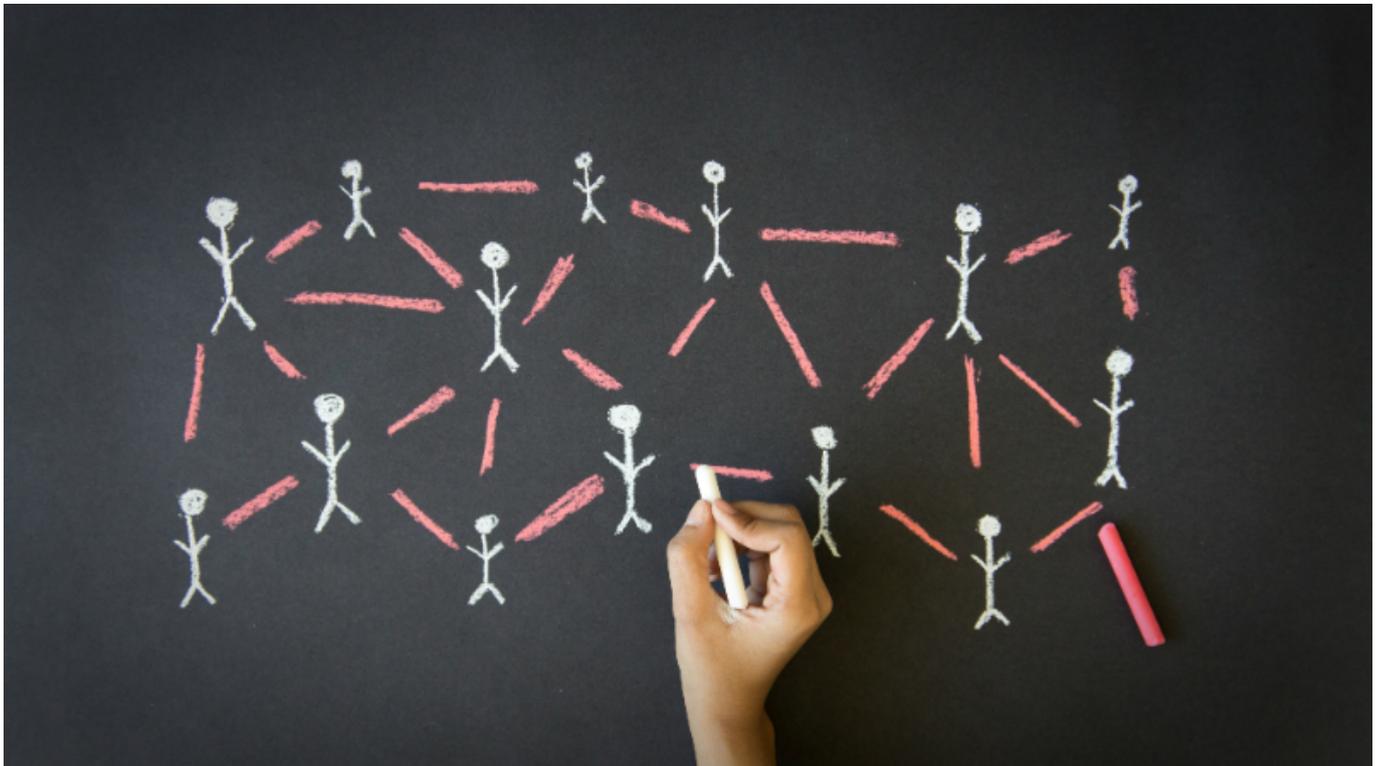


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Did the EU believe Britain would vote to leave? Not judging by how it has approached the citizens' rights brief.

Nearly two years on and there is still no certainty for citizens. The prolonged anxiety felt by hundreds of thousands of families whose lives are in limbo may lead to Article 8 claims against the UK at the European Court of Human Rights.

Meanwhile, the European Court of Justice is being asked to decide whether British citizens in the EU

can be stripped of any of their EU citizenship rights at all.

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If this is a divorce, European Brits are just as much children of the EU as they are children of the UK. The EU has a duty to protect them.

With greater foresight, the EU should have shown zero tolerance for any loss of rights by offering Britons in Europe comprehensive and unilateral guarantees as soon as the result was declared.

Had it done so, the EU would be basking in international esteem. Theresa May and her cabinet would have been shamed into action.

The clear message to the UK from Michel Barnier would then have been: "We are not going to use the lives of your citizens in the EU as collateral. However, we will not discuss the future trading relationship until you have guaranteed the rights of EU27 citizens in the UK."

Instead the EU has been dragged into tawdry negotiations about which rights transnational citizens will keep and which ones they should lose.

"If this is a divorce, European Brits are just as much children of the EU as they are children of the UK. The EU has a duty to protect them"

If the EU can still be the one that blinks first. The UK will follow suit. Despite its rhetoric about borders, the British government knows that the UK needs immigration from Europe, that historic skills shortages are worsening and that many businesses are relocating.

Attention could then shift to the arrangements for after Britain leaves.

It is high time both the EU and the UK looked beyond the referendum and started thinking about how they can facilitate EU-UK migration in the future.

The Green Card 4 Europe proposal addresses this challenge.

"The Green Card would guarantee EU citizens in the UK and Britons in the EU all the rights they previously enjoyed when Britain was an EU member. For Green Card holders, life would continue as before, despite the referendum"

The proposal won the Financial Times “Future of Europe” competition (in the migration section) and was published in the FT on 31 January 2017 to critical acclaim. Barnier is aware of the proposal.

The core idea is that EU27 citizens resident in the UK and Britons resident in the EU would carry a Green Card. It would be issued by the EU and it would look and feel like a driving licence or an EHIC card.

The Green Card would guarantee EU citizens in the UK and Britons in the EU all the rights they previously enjoyed when Britain was an EU member. For Green Card holders, life would continue as before, despite the referendum.

The proposal is currently being looked at by both the Commission and the European Parliament.

It is a simple, fair-minded, easy-to-implement, reciprocal proposal. Let’s do what we can to make sure it survives its first contact with the negotiations.

About the author

Roger Casale is a former British Labour MP and founder of New Europeans

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