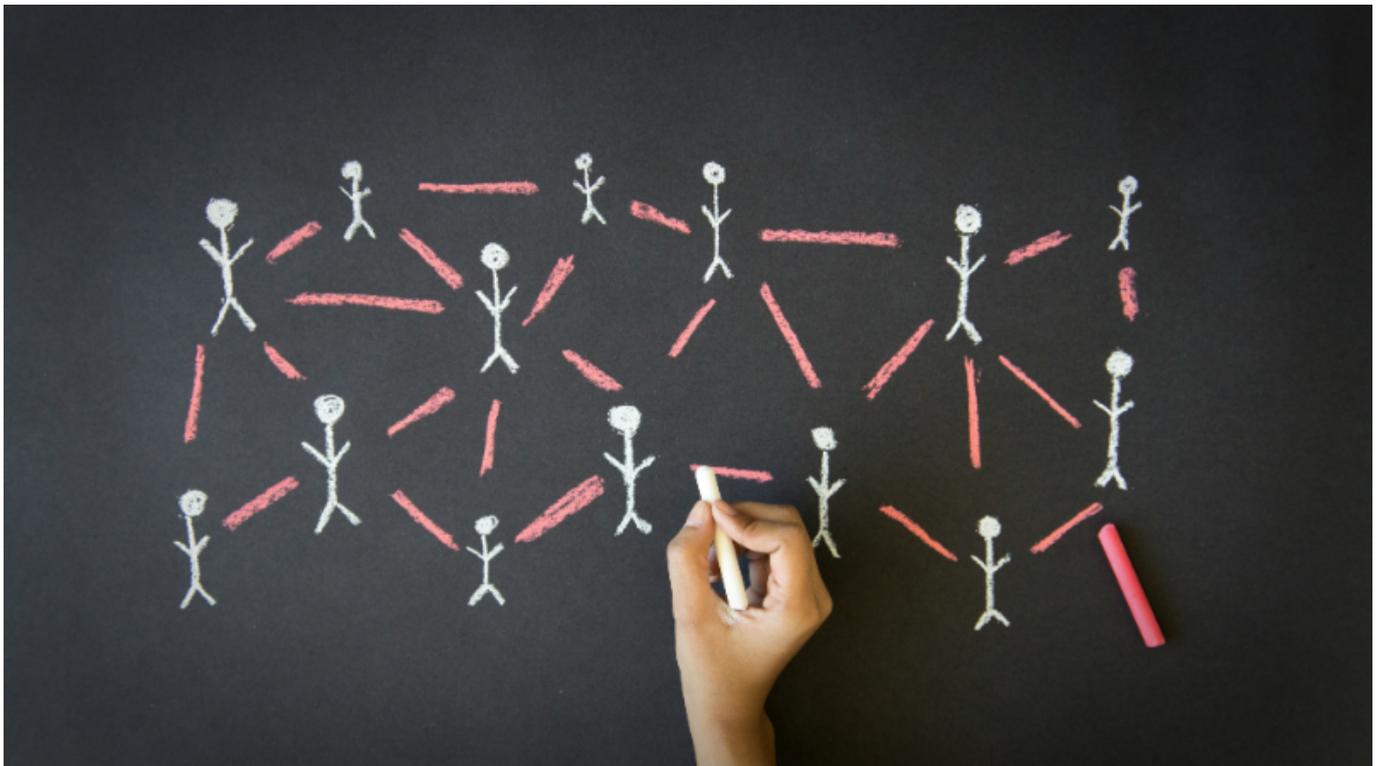


Campaigners call for all British citizens living in Belgium to be granted EU citizenship

Written by Martin Banks on 7 May 2018 in News
News

EU must act to secure the rights of all UK nationals living in the EU, not just those working for the EU institutions, argues former British MP.



Campaigners are calling for all British citizens living in Belgium to be granted Belgian citizenship.

They were responding to comments by the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker who last week asked Belgium to offer citizenship to the hundreds of British EU officials after Brexit.

A group fighting to protect the rights of all citizens, post Brexit, says that Juncker's suggestion "is another example of the EU looking after its own."

After a speech in the European parliament by Belgian prime minister Charles Michel, Juncker asked the premiere to think of British officials in Belgium who face possible repatriation.

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Some 800 British nationals work for the European Commission in Brussels. Many have resided in the country for numerous years but are now troubled how Brexit will affect their right to remain in the country.

The situation is tentative as no definitive answer has been given about their status when they lose their EU citizenship following the UK's exit.

An EU citizen living in Belgium usually has the right to apply for citizenship after living in the country for a set time and meeting certain criteria. However, EU officials live and work within Belgium under diplomatic status: meaning they do not pay income tax which, according to experts, excludes them from applying for Belgian citizenship. Some applications by British EU officials have already been rejected on these grounds.

Roger Casale, of the campaign group New Europeans, has now written an open letter to Juncker asking for all UK citizens in Belgium to be granted the same rights as EU staff.

In the letter, Casale, a former Labour MP in the UK, writes, "Your well-meaning request that Belgium should grant citizenship to UK officials working for the European institutions has been under discussion for some time.

"I welcome the prospect of a solution being found for EU employees who are British. However, I worry that some will argue that your gesture reinforces the idea that this is another example of the EU looking after its own" **Roger Casale**

"When I spoke to a very senior German official at a Chatham House conference in Berlin in December 2016, he made clear that special arrangements for British citizens working for the EU were under consideration.

"I replied that the EU had a responsibility to all British citizens living in the EU and an opportunity to set an example at a time when moral leadership in world affairs was in short supply."

The letter, dated 7 May, goes on, "No doubt the European Commission and the European Council have been waiting to see if the British government offers anything in return for such a concession. There has never been the slightest prospect it would do so."

Casale stresses, "That is why the EU must act first to secure the rights of all Brits living in the EU, not just those who work for the EU institutions."

Casale writes, "I welcome the prospect of a solution being found for EU employees who are British. However, I worry that some will argue that your gesture reinforces the idea that this is another example of the EU looking after its own."

"The way to deal with that is to plead guilty as charged and to expand the category to include all Britons living in the EU and not just those who work for the EU."

"I welcome the prospect of a solution being found for EU employees who are British. However, I worry that some will argue that your gesture reinforces the idea that this is another example of the EU looking after its own" **Roger Casale**

"Britons in Europe are children of the EU just as much as they are UK subjects. To paraphrase your words, they all "deserve the EU's support"

Meanwhile, David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, says the two sides have made "substantial progress" in negotiations since triggering Article 50, and "it is vital we keep up the momentum as we turn to talks on the future security and economic partnerships we want with the EU."

He was speaking after publication of a new document by both the UK Government and European Commission which incorporates the economic and security partnerships outlined by UK Prime Minister Theresa May.

A UK government spokesman said, "The two negotiating teams will use the topics over coming rounds to guide their discussions on the framework for the UK and EU's future relationship."

Davis added, "This joint publication reflects the determination of both sides to achieve a broad partnership that stands the test of time. It is an important foundation for future discussions."

This, he says, includes the still thorny and yet-to-be-resolved issue of the Northern Irish border.

However, the Brexit cross party group Get Britain Out says that debate about " the farcical 'customs partnership' between the UK and the EU after Brexit has done nothing to resolve the Irish border issue."

"On top of this, they have reopened the issue of Customs Union membership, which appeared to have been closed months ago."

Fresh efforts to get the UK to stay in a Customs Union or equivalent after Brexit are, says the group, the "brain-child of Olly Robbins, Theresa May's Brexit adviser."

Jayne Adye, director of Get Britain Out, told this website, "It is unacceptable for an unelected civil servant to be able to dictate Government policy."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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[Public order, justice and rights](#) [13]

[Society and welfare](#) [14]



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