

Group again asks for clarity on citizens' rights

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News

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier is being urged to back calls to grant “unilateral guarantees” to Britons living and working in Europe.



Michel Barnier | *Photo credit: Press Association*

The demand to Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, comes with rights campaigners saying that the estimated 1.5 million British citizens in mainland Europe have been left “quite exposed”.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May has confirmed that the UK will offer “unilateral guarantees” for the 3.5 million EU27 citizens who live and work in the UK, but little or nothing has been said about Britons in Europe being offered similar guarantees.

New Europeans, a campaign group, has now written to Barnier to renew its call for a parallel declaration to secure the rights of British citizens resident in EU member states.

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The letter asks Barnier “to initiate the necessary steps which would allow the EU to grant guarantees of the rights of British citizens resident in EU member states and to do so unilaterally.

“New Europeans has long called for such an approach based also on arguments which we have put to the European Parliament and the House of Lords at formal committee hearings. We have shown that not to grant rights unilaterally risks a structural violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.”

It goes on, “All EU member states are signatories the European Convention on Human Rights. As the preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights proclaims, ‘the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity’.

“The EU and its member states aspire to and should always abide by the highest international standards. As an organisation that represents the voice of citizens in their capacity as EU citizens, and not just citizens of nations, we look to the EU to be a guarantor of the rights of all EU citizens and third country nationals resident in EU member states.”

The letter adds, “On 21 September, Theresa May confirmed that the UK government will grant unilateral guarantees to EU27 citizens in the UK.”

It asks, “Will you now do the same in respect of British nationals resident in the EU? We would have wished the EU to have moved first on this issue.

“We write to you not as a British organisation though we were founded in London but as a European civil rights movement based in Brussels.

“We would be making the same argument, if it was Greek or French citizens who were about to be deprived of their EU citizenship for example. It is not because the people concerned are British. It is because they are EU citizens that we ask this.”

The letter goes on, “The EU cannot allow itself to get into the position where it stands back and allows the rights of 1.5 million and more of its own citizens be stripped of their citizenship rights, through no fault of their own and as a result of a referendum which now appears to have been manipulated by illegal interference and conditioned by lies.

“We want a European Union we can be proud of. That means a parallel statement to the one made (at long last) by Theresa May confirming that the EU will grant guarantees unilaterally to 1.5 million British citizens in the EU.”

The letter was sent by Roger Casale, Secretary General of New Europeans.

Speaking on Monday, he said, “We have specifically said initiate the necessary steps and this can certainly include a conversation with European Council President Donald Tusk about changing the

mandate, or it may involve handing back the brief on citizens' rights to the Council.

"Certainly, a way needs to be found to give such a declaration now. We have long argued that the EU can and should grant the rights of UK citizens in the EU unilaterally and we regret that the EU did not take the opportunity to act first."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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