

The strange case of citizenship without a country

European citizenship is the first instance of citizenship not tied to a place, state or country. For the time being, a EU passport is only a utopian idea, yet the citizens of the 27 member states enjoy the privileges and comply with the rules decided in Brussels.

by Giovanni Moro

Exactly 20 years after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has decided to designate 2013 as the European Year of Citizens. The main problem, however, is that we're not sure what it is we're supposed to celebrate.

Indeed, on this occasion, in addition to the earlier criticisms of European citizenship voiced by the opposing extremes of federalism (EU citizenship is a pale copy of national citizenship) and confederalism (it is an attack on national sovereignty and is nonsense: "One cannot belong to a treaty"), we are now confronted with equally limited and abstract representations.

Nowadays there are two main schools of thought. The first translates European citizenship exclusively into the five rights established in the Maastricht Treaty – to move and live freely, diplomatic protection, voting or standing in European Parliament elections and in municipal elections in one's country of residency, petitioning the EU Parliament and submitting a claim to the European Ombudsman. This line is promoted by the European Commission. The second considers European citizenship as an ideal that hasn't even begun to take shape yet, a view that is backed by the Civil Society in Brussels. The juxtaposition is therefore essentially between Five-Right Citi-

zenship and Still-To-Come Citizenship. To be honest, nothing worth celebrating.

Instead, this European Year could provide an opportunity to get a better understanding of what has happened since Maastricht. In order to achieve this, it is essential to view EU citizenship not just as a legal status included in the Treaties, but as a set of laws, values, conflicts and practices that have developed during the course of the legislative and policy-making activity of the European Union – which can be found in the community's *acquis* – and in the way people have made this citizenship their own and have used it and changed it over time.

In terms of the novelty, it is worth noting that European citizenship is the first that does not depend on a state authority. It includes rights that follow no 'national logic' (such as free movement) and others that base citizenship on the principle of residence rather than blood or land (such as the ability to participate in elections in the municipality where one resides). It expresses a principle of belonging that is not based on a cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity, but rather on diversity and the shared will to put human rights above all else and not repeat the tragedies of the 20th century. It also allows citizens to participate by being directly involved in the daily operations required to define and implement EU policies. None of this can be found in the paradigm of citizenship built around nation-states in the last 200 years, while for those who are wondering about the future of citizenship in a globalised world, the EU experiment is a unique case in point.

As far as European citizenship's capacity to evolve is concerned, it is worth mentioning that the catalogue of rights has expanded not only as a result of new treaties. It has also grown through the rulings of the European Court of Justice (which has extended welfare rights initially introduced for workers to non-productive

categories such as disabled people and children) and the actions of civic movements (to whom we owe a package of rights for sick citizens, now guaranteed throughout Europe). One must also remember that a European identity has gradually developed as part of a multiple identity, alongside the national one, with a more civic rather than cultural agenda. In practical terms, freedom of movement and the single currency, with all its symbols and meanings, are its mainstays, and act as the common denominator even when reviled.

As for direct participation, one mustn't forget the number of civic movements that have grown around specifically European objectives (such as the group that called for changes to the Bolkestein Directive on the liberalisation of public services). Participation in political life is also achieved thanks to a new right allowing citizens

to propose legislation, a process that has currently led to 15 concrete proposals. Those behind the proposals are currently collecting the one million signatures required to submit a recommendation to the European Commission.

Of course, EU citizenship will always be branded by its origins, which are partly economic and partly political. For instance, the right to free movement – an economic principle – is countered by the right to non-discrimination, which is clearly a political concern. However, EU citizenship has not yet found an answer to immigration, nor has it managed to counterbalance technocratic and economic approaches that invariably deem welfare a cost rather than a resource. Nevertheless, rather than belittling the five basic rights or dreaming of it as an unattainable ideal, it might be wise to put this citizenship to good use. **E**

Maastricht, December 1991. Euro Summit. Hans van den Broek, Jacques Delors, Wim Kok and Ruud Lubbers at four in the morning after having signed the agreement.



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