

AER position on the report « European Citizens' and Community Law Implementation» adopted at the meeting of the Standing Committee Institutional Affairs in Paris, 9 & 10 October 2008

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« On paper, a European citizen is entitled to the same treatment as a national citizen in all Union countries. But in practice, the possibility of obtaining recognition of qualifications, having health costs reimbursed or obtaining social aid is very unequal, even chaotic. »

Alain Lamassoure, Interview, Europolitics, June 26, 2008

Summary: Poor implementation of European law

At the beginning of this year, French President Nicolas Sarkozy had commissioned Alain Lamassoure, MEP (EPP-ED), former Minister and National Secretary in charge of European Affairs at the UMP to draft a report on the application of EU community law for the citizens of Europe entitled : « European Citizens' and Community Law Implementation».

The report identifies concrete problems citizens face in their daily life due to their increased mobility within the European Union. Lamassoure states that while borders have been falling “harmonious living in that common space is impeded by countless obstacles”. The problems range from the mutual recognition of diploma, the issue of pensions to questions of marriage, divorce, child custody, the right to exercise a profession or the reimbursement of medical expenses.

In some cases a European Union law exists, but is not implemented at national, regional or local level. This is for example the case with the mutual recognition of qualifications, which all too often lies in the hands of universities and is therefore treated on a case-by-case basis. In other cases no law exists where a European law-making would be necessary, e.g. family law. Other issues include the processing of personal files and the lack of a “one-stop-shop” for the mobile European citizen where he could access relevant documents. Instead he is confronted with a confusing amount of different sources of information on EU law.

A stumbling block is also the low mobility of Europeans in the Union: “Despite the success of the Erasmus programme, more university exchanges are conducted with the rest of the world than among Europeans; and the major national media devote more air time to US politics alone than to European politics.”

For the first time in the history of the European Union this reports summarises on the one hand problems citizens face and on the other hand the lack of application of EU law on the ground. The report also sets out a list of 61 recommendations and remedies, among others:

Informing the citizen: A European citizen card similar to the blue card under consideration for third-country nationals should be considered. This would be a harmonised document for mobile Europeans to carry out formalities, a genuine *European social security card/European Citizen Card* covering family welfare, employment injuries, retirement insurance, identity, social security, qualifications etc. This card could be issued by a one-stop-shop, a single source of information

for citizens on European law, with a person to contact designated in each European institution, government, administration. A civil servant correspondent attached to each prefect should help the mobile citizen.

Cross-border regions and exchange: The role of cross-border regions is given special attention in the report. It suggests that a strong impetus should be given to co-operation between cross-border zones. Exchanges among students and teachers should also be encouraged, moving from 2% Erasmus students to 20%.

Legal affairs and co-operation: Recommendations set out the transposition of directives, the training of national judges in European law, administrative and judicial co-operation, the development of family law, the reflection on an international civil European law as well as the recognition of qualifications.

European Governance: The Commission, European Parliament as well as national Parliaments should change their working method starting with concrete problems of citizens and reducing bureaucracy for them. They should deepen the discussion on European Citizenship and encourage double nationality including an electoral regime bringing European deputies closer to citizens.

AER position: fostering one-stop-shop, co-operation and exchange to the benefit of the mobile European citizen

The AER welcomes this important report as an initiative to put the citizen in the centre of all policy actions. It is a valuable document that can contribute to communicate Europe better to its citizens. The AER wishes to underline the importance of three recommendations of particular importance to the regions which represent the political level below the nation state:

- **Europe Direct Centres as one-stop-shop:** The AER welcomes the idea of a citizen friendly one-stop-shop, virtually and real, and a person to contact on the regional level dealing with applicable EU-law. The AER suggests developing existing *Europe Direct Centres* further and turning them into true points of support for citizens facing difficulties in the application of EU-law, e.g. the recognition of diploma at their respective universities. Europe Direct Centres are often managed and financed by the regions, and sometimes co-financed by the Commission. The AER suggests equipping these Centres with the necessary financial means in order to create a single gateway truly benefiting the mobile citizen.
- The AER firmly supports **administrative co-operation** including the formation and training of personnel of regional administration in order reach excellence in governance. Regions need to be equipped with the necessary funding in order to build strong co-operative administrations. In this context, the AER also welcomes the proposal to further foster the European grouping for territorial co-operation including interregional co-operation.
- The AER is committed to any effort undertaken to foster **exchange** among universities, schools, teachers, and employees. The AER will continue to develop its program Eurodyssée offering young people the opportunity to carry out a traineeship experience in another region. The EU should foster activities of interregional groupings more financially, supportive of these cross-sectional political objectives.

The AER will put forward these points in a letter addressed to the French Presidency.

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