



Manifesto

ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP IS ABOUT PURSUING EUROPEAN COLLECTIVE GOALS AND VALUES ENshrined IN THE TREATIES

The European Commission has proposed to designate 2013 as the «European Year of Citizens» to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the European Union Citizenship under the Maastricht Treaty.

Major European civil society organisations and networks have joined their forces and created the EYC2013 Alliance¹ to put forward proposals aimed at placing European citizenship at the heart of the EU political agenda. Relying on the experience and the expertise of its members who continuously act for citizenship to become a permanent and transversal dimension of European public policies decision-making, implementation and assessment, the EYC2013 Alliance will promote activities aiming to have an impact on the building of a citizen-friendly European Union which would no longer be reduced to merely economic preoccupations and would facilitate and support various expressions and mobilisation of active citizenship.

We shall accompany an EU citizenship building process which, beyond an individual rights-based approach, tackles the Europeans' sense of belonging to a common European future.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP WITHIN EUROPEAN DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK

Active Citizenship has come to be interpreted in many ways in the European Union and the year 2011 was designated the European Year of Active Citizenship through Voluntary Activity, even though better known as the European Year of Volunteering. Voluntary activities are an expression of active citizenship, but they can also be carried on without reference to involvement in public affairs, community and society.

For us, active citizenship means primarily active involvement of citizens as participation in the life of their communities, and thus in democracy, in terms of activity and decision-making. Active Citizenship is more than giving to charity, voting at elections or volunteering. Definitions of participation that focus on political participation or a narrow understanding of volunteering fail to capture the diversity of people's engagement across Europe. To give active European citizenship its full meaning and scope, and to help downsize the gap between citizens and the EU institutions, it is necessary to take account of the new prospects opened up by Article 11 of the Treaty on the European Union for citizens' participation in the democratic life of the European Union.

For us, active citizenship is:

- a democratic citizenship which is based on citizens' legal status and includes all aspects of life in a democratic society relating to a vast range of topics such as, inter alia, education, culture, sustainable development, non discrimination, inclusion of ethnic minorities, participation in society of people with disabilities, gender equality including the equal representation of women and men in decision making, etc;
- a democratic citizenship which guarantees that citizens and civil society organisations have a say in the EU policy-shaping and decision-making processes by electing their representatives to the European Parliament. With the prospect of the upcoming elections in 2014 and at a time when we are facing an ever growing gap between the European Union and its citizens, as confirmed by the turnout in the latest European elections and by surveys which repeatedly show citizens' lack of awareness of European citizenship and identity¹, the stakes could not be higher;
- a democratic citizenship which implies that European institutions enjoy public confidence and can secure active involvement of citizens and organised civil society players in the decision-making processes at all levels, from local and national to European one; therefore, the adoption of an inter-institutional agreement for a structured framework for European civil dialogue would give a permanent practical substance to such an active and participatory citizenship alongside with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, besides the European Citizens' Initiative.
- a democratic citizenship which perforce must also operate at Member States' level, so that the structures for citizens' engagement are accessible and form part of every citizen's experience. While benefiting of their rights and taking their responsibilities, EU citizens as well as all residents from acceding, candidate countries and beyond, should be fully involved in the activities of the EY2013 that should foster their involvement in local governance issue, through enhancing cooperation also with local authorities as one of the main stakeholders of the EY2013;
- a democratic citizenship that guarantees that all citizens can participate in the life of their communities and the shaping of public policies, including the most disadvantaged groups which are more than often the most remote from the European building process. One cannot exercise her/his civic and political citizenship rights unless in capacity to enjoy the social and economic citizenship rights and the European Union should not miss out the contribution of the most disadvantaged.

A lifetime process

Participation in elections

Civil dialogue

Participation in local governance

Social citizenship

In order for citizens to engage with policy development, effective mechanisms need to be put in place to provide diversified and objective information and education for citizens. The capacity of local groups and organised civil society to engage both with citizens and institutions also needs to be developed. This capacity-building would be a major pillar of citizens' empowerment as is the direct approach of the Citizens' Initiative and would promote more engagement in the European project. Internet and the development of social networks provide new tools through which and places where people, especially young people, gather and act across borders.

Such an approach meets the expectations of the EYC2013 Alliance members who represent major stakeholders from organised civil society, standing for citizens' concerns and voicing citizens' opinions in a wide range of European policy areas.

¹ EU Citizenship report 2010.

WHAT DOES EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP MEAN TWENTY YEARS AFTER ITS CREATION?

This legal status guarantees the freedom of movement and some political rights deemed to contribute, along with the deepening of the single market for goods and services, to creating a sense of belonging to a community of people. Europe is part of the daily life of its citizens, but the rights and benefits stemming from this “single market citizenship” are at present essentially limited to mobility. Thus, they become effective only “abroad”. What about those who do not travel, study or work abroad and for whom the European citizenship can then be only an abstract and meaningless concept? What about residents who work, pay taxes, are involved in social or community activities but don’t have an EU Member States’ passport?

These very challenging questions reflect the fact that the concept of citizenship encompasses a two-way relationship between a community and its members. The Lisbon Treaty provides a broader framework for the development of European citizenship rooted in a «community of values», and reinforces its social and political dimensions by giving to the Charter of Fundamental Rights the same legal value as the European Union treaties and by creating the conditions for citizens and civil society organisations to be fully involved in the European processes.

The European Year of Citizens 2013 should reflect this rich approach, and the rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights must be implemented effectively and proper control mechanisms put in place. Also, European citizenship should be founded on the principle of residence and in the name of universality of rights all residents of the European Union should enjoy equality of treatment and the same right to participate in public life as EU citizens.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: THE WAY FORWARD

Participatory democracy meets the present-day needs of European democratic governance across the Union by supplementing and reinforcing representative democracy. Involving organised civil society in policy-shaping and the preparations of decisions strengthens the democratic legitimacy of public institutions, of their work and activities. The quality of civil dialogue - including social dialogue, which is its crucial element - is an indicator of the state of health of our democracies.

Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty has a decisive potential to be particularly important, as it has provided an institutional commitment to an “open, transparent and regular dialogue” between Europe’s governing bodies and civil society, aiming at ending the “democratic deficit” voiced by critics, while providing active European citizenship. Despite these advances, there remains much to be done to transform these commitments into concrete and sustainable practice.

Even though the Lisbon Treaty provide “citizens and representative associations” with the “opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views”, there is much discussion on how this should be achieved, leading some to remark that “effective consultation” is not yet being properly explored or employed.

We strongly believe that our Alliance is a proper tool to achieve EYC 2013 activities supporting an active and participatory citizenship articulated with representative democracy, paving the way to regenerate the European project in the present global crisis, a needed step ahead of 2014 European elections. It is a means for citizens and civil society organisations to visibly participate in European public debates and voice their opinions, and for European institutions to provide feed-back on how their concerns have been heard and taken into account.

In this framework, we aim at developing activities that shall raise citizens’ expectations in relation to participatory democracy and make them feel concerned by implementing article 11 objectives. This is our response to the current disaffection against the European institutions as the present economic crisis is turning in, and we call on the European political leaders to take action in this regard.

**European
Civic Forum**


**European Movement
Mouvement Européen**

social**platform**



**culture
ACTION
europe**



solidar





ⁱ European Civic Forum, European Movement International, the Social Platform, European Disability Forum, European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning – EUCIS-LLL, Culture Action Europe, European Youth Forum, European Foundation Center, European Public Health Alliance – EPHA, European Association for the Defense of Human Rights – AEDH, European Women’s Lobby, Eurochild, Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU – COFACE, CONCORD, Association Internationale de la Mutualité – AIM, AGE Platform, European Federation of Older People – EURAG, SOLIDAR, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities – EASPD, European Council of Associations of General Interest – CEDAG, European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless – FEANTSA, VolontEurope, European Volunteer Center – CEV, Conservation Volunteers Alliance – CVA, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (Europe Region), Association of local democracy agencies - ALDA, Central and Eastern European Citizens Network - CEE CN, Combined European Bureau for Social Development - CEBSD, European Community Organizing Network - ECON, EUCLID Network, European Network for Education and Training e.V. - EUNET, Confederation of European Senior Expert Services - CESES, JEF - Europe, Platform for Intercultural Europe, European Alternatives, European Network of National Civil Society Associations - ENNA, ATD Quart Monde, ISCA - International Sports and Culture Associations, ENGSO – European Non-governmental Sports Organisation, AEGEE-Europe – European Students Forum Association.