

Statement on UK citizens rights proposals from Guy Verhofstadt and parties listed below...

To be followed by an EU position paper.

UK offer falls far short of what citizens are entitled to.

While we accept the Brexit decision was a democratic choice, we were never convinced Brexit would be a positive development economically, certainly not for the standing of Europe and the UK in the world, and most importantly: not for citizens. The UK proposal on citizens' rights, only confirms this belief. The proposal falls short of its own ambitions to "put citizens first". If implemented, it would cast a dark cloud of vagueness and uncertainty over the lives of millions of Europeans. Comparing the UK's proposal with that of the EU's Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, the differences are striking. In the EU proposal, the British people and Europeans keep the same rights and the same level of protection they currently enjoy under European law. All rights acquired before the date of withdrawal will be directly enforceable, with life-long protection, full reciprocity and equal treatment. A position as simple and clear as it is fair. That is what a majority of the British people want, when they indicate they seek to keep their EU citizenship.

The UK response to our proposal came three weeks later. It was a damp squib. The British government proposes that - the day after Brexit - Europeans obtain the status of 'third country nationals'. These nationals would get fewer rights in the UK than British citizens are offered throughout the EU. Europeans will not only lose their right to vote in local elections, their future family members will also be subject to minimum income requirements, and it is unclear what the status of 'post-Brexit' babies will be. The British proposal carries a real risk of creating a second class of citizenship. It is even in contradiction with the 'Vote Leave' manifesto which promised it would treat EU citizens "no less favorably than at present".

On top of this lack of 'reciprocity', it seems that Britain wants to become the new champion of red tape. Each family member, including children, has to make separate applications for "settled status". Those who will not meet the five years residence requirement by the end of the grace period, will have to make two applications: a first one to apply for staying and another one to apply for "settled status". Moreover, no guarantees of equal treatment are provided between these applicants.

Red tape may be overcome: the real cause for concern lies in the continuing uncertainty. More than a year after the Brexit referendum, the British proposal leaves many unanswered questions. Will European students have to pay more - even after they have applied for the new academic year 2019-2020? Will doctors enjoy continued and guaranteed recognition of their qualifications in the UK? Why are frontier workers, who work in the UK but live in the EU, not mentioned at all? And why won't the UK government simply confirm that the cut-off date for all European citizens will not be sooner than the date of Brexit itself? While we have the greatest respect for the British legal system, courts apply the laws adopted by British politicians, who are currently unable to give sufficient guarantees for the years to come, let alone for a lifetime. British and European Citizens should be able to enforce their rights under a mechanism in which the European Court of Justice plays a full role.

In early 2019, MEPs will have a final say on the Brexit deal. In the coming months, we will work closely with the EU negotiator and the 27 member states to help steer negotiations. Our wish is to deliver an ambitious and progressive withdrawal agreement and we want to be clear that sufficient progress - especially on citizenship and the financial settlement - is needed before we can define the new relationship between the EU and the UK. Brexit negotiations must be completed by March 30, 2019; we will not support any extension to this deadline, because this

would require the UK to hold European elections in May 2019. That is simply unthinkable. The European Union has a common mission to extend, enhance and expand rights, not to reduce them. We will never endorse the retroactive removal of acquired rights. The European Parliament will reserve its right to reject any agreement that treats EU citizens, regardless of their nationality, less favorably than they are at present. For us, this is a question of basic fundamental rights and values, which are at the heart of the European project. Guy Verhofstadt, Chair of the Brexit Steering Group and Chair of the ALDE Group Manfred Weber, Chair of the EPP Group

Gianni Pittella, Chair of the S&D Group

Gabi Zimmer, Chair of the GUE/NGL Group

Ska Keller and Phillippe Lamberts, co-Chairs of the Greens/EFA Group

Elmar Brok, member of the Brexit Steering Group

Roberto Gualtieri, member of the Brexit Steering Group

Danuta Hubner, member of the Brexit Steering Group