



# Yours Directly

*The Europe Direct networks newsletter*

## *Making citizens' rights a tangible reality*

*People matter in the life of the European Union. No political project can advance while leaving the people behind. Our Union can only exist and prosper if citizens adhere to it and support it. The European project has people, European women, men and children firmly at its centre. It has become about the political commitment to make their daily lives better and easier. Most recently, the Lisbon Treaty has marked a real watershed: it underscores the vital role of citizens in advancing the European project. It gives them new opportunities to speak to the European institutions. And it challenges the EU institutions to create a real Citizens' Europe.*

*By creating a 'justice, fundamental rights and citizenship portfolio' at the Commission, President Barroso has entrusted me to make EU proposals meaningful to citizens. I am determined to make citizens' rights a tangible reality and to remove the existing obstacles preventing citizens from enjoying their rights. So what are we doing to make a Citizens' Europe a tangible reality? And what is the role the Europe Direct network plays in bringing this to fruition?*

*Just as we need to eliminate fragmentation in EU policy-making, so too should we eliminate red tape in communication. We will remedy this through a streamlined and more coherent system: a one-stop-shop bringing together the virtual Your Europe portal, the centralised Europe Direct Contact Centre with its toll-free number, plus the 500 Europe Direct Information Centres.*

*You, my friends, together with the Commission Representations, are the front line. You are the public face, the eyes, ears and mouth of our policies and of the rights of citizens on the ground. I very much look forward to witnessing the results of your new mandate in proactively reaching out to people from all walks of life in our Member States. And I count on the Representations to make sure that the different networks work closely together to give citizens a seamless service.*

*There is no doubt about it: the Europe Direct network has a crucial role to play in providing a direct link to people in their own country, speaking to them in a way that is both relevant and understandable to them.*

*You are the key partners in decentralising communication. You are close to people and know what issues they are concerned about and what kind of information will interest them. You can explain in simple language through familiar channels how EU policies affect their daily lives in their local communities. You can ensure they are more aware of their rights and how to enjoy them.*

*A Citizens' Europe – a Europe for and by the people – can only be built successfully if we ensure that people can exercise their rights, in full knowledge of what those rights are and how they benefit them. Your role, as representatives of the Europe Direct Network, cannot be underestimated in this task. I count on you.*

Excerpt from the speech by Viviane Reding,  
Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Commissioner,  
delivered at the annual general meeting  
of the Europe Direct Information Centres,  
Antwerp, 25-27 October 2010



### **In this issue:**

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## ► Citizenship without frontiers

For almost two decades, since the 1992 [Maastricht Treaty](#), Europeans have enjoyed a kind of double citizenship: that of their home country and that of the EU. But how exactly does EU citizenship differ from its national counterpart?

EU citizenship is supposed to complement and expand national citizenship beyond national borders to cover the entire Union. In addition, EU citizenship grants all Europeans an additional set of rights, guaranteed by the various EU treaties – including most recently and concretely, the Lisbon Treaty – and the [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#).

However, despite the importance of these rights, many Europeans are not aware of them. For example, a [2010 Eurobarometer survey](#) showed that only 42% of Europeans know their rights although, on a positive note, 72% would like to know more.

In addition, European citizens face a number of hurdles and barriers in exercising some of their cross-border rights, as highlighted in the first-ever [European Citizenship Report](#), including the property rights of international couples, cross-border taxation issues, insufficient protection of those facing criminal proceedings in another Member State, and more.

The report outlines 25 measures to be implemented over the next three years with a view to making life easier for European citizens dealing with other Member States, including tourists, expatriates, workers, consumers, international couples, consumers and car owners. The proposed measures include new data-exchange systems to facilitate the transfer of social security rights; extra safeguards for holidaymakers and air passengers; more robust out-of-court resolution mechanisms for cross-border consumer disputes; new legislation clarifying which laws apply to jointly owned homes and bank accounts; and the streamlining of registration for cars purchased in another Member State.

In a related development, the current EU's '[Europe for Citizens](#)' programme – which seeks to promote active European citizenship and awareness of the role and impact of the EU – is gradually approaching its 2013 end date. In a bid to make the 2014-2020 edition of the programme more responsive to citizens' needs, the European Commission has launched a [public consultation](#) to help identify its general objectives, delivery mechanism, themes and financial issues.

## ► Good practice and life of the networks

### You have the right to remain communicative

In order for EU citizens to be able to exercise their rights, they need to be aware of what these rights are and how they can safeguard them. How the Europe Direct networks can help achieve this was the focus of the annual general meeting (AGM) which took place in Belgium's second city, Antwerp, on 25-27 October 2010.

The three-day event included a keynote speech by Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Commissioner, Viviane Reding, a high-level panel debate on citizens' rights, the sharing of good practice, how to develop innovative communication ideas, and more.

So, what did participants take away from the AGM?

#### **Marzena Łączkowska – EDIC Ostrołęka (PL)**

"We sometimes communicate about citizens' rights but most people are interested in EU grants, jobs, and enterprise-related matters. Next year, we'll start organising activities on citizens' rights and volunteering for the European Year of Volunteering. The AGM is very useful.

"It enables us to see the good practices in other countries. I got some inspiration and ideas from the AGM. For example, they make some interesting use of TV in Italy. In Ostrołęka, we have a radio programme which features events in the rest of the EU. We're thinking of using that programme in our communication efforts."



**Cécile Dubois – European Commission**

“We’ve had quite a lot of traffic at the Your Europe stand. About half of the visitors knew and half didn’t. It was useful to get feedback from people who are using the service which will help us improve it. It was also nice to receive such positive feedback. For those who were unfamiliar with it, it was a good opportunity to raise their awareness and build up a network. Europe Direct is a major partner and we count on their co-operation.”

**Marja Aspelund – Director of Europe Information, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FI)**

“There are 20 EDICs in Finland. We do quite a lot of work on citizens’ rights, especially free movement. Young Finns are very mobile and broad-minded, and most of them speak at least one or two foreign languages, so they are drawn to travelling and living abroad. Erasmus is very popular and the majority of university students want to spend some time studying in another country, including my own son who is studying medicine. We’ve also organised numerous events around consumer protection. Euroscepticism is generally not so high in Finland and surveys show that, with the economic crisis, people now want more EU, which was surprising news. I found the sessions at the AGM very useful, especially the first day. I can see why we meet: to raise our spirits through the realisation that we are all doing the same work.”

**Regina Blania – EDIC Aachen (DE)**

“We do a lot of communication on citizens’ rights – I just didn’t realise they were citizens’ rights. We communicate a lot on mobility, working and studying abroad, and so on. We have a composer who composed a tune – a hymn to Europe – made up of elements from the 27 Member States. You can discuss Europe, but you also need to find a way to open people’s hearts. And music is just such a way. I am always surprised by how efficient and creative our colleagues in the ED networks are.”

**Sami Kaarto – EDIC Rural Oulu South (FI)**

“EU financing and grants are the most popular themes in our rural community of 90 000. However, there is also a strong interest in citizens’ rights. We organise seminars on citizens’ rights. We also cover this topic in our weekly e-newsletter which has about 500 subscribers. The main challenge is that people don’t really know their rights and they tend to be very Eurosceptical. One of my specialities is to organise study trips to Brussels so that locals can find out for themselves what goes on there.”

**Christiane Thömmes – EDIC Munich (DE)**

“At the AGM, we encountered some inspiring ideas, such as taking Erasmus students to visit schools. We want to try that. You have to communicate in a way that interests people. The term ‘citizens’ rights’ is very misleading and sounds so theoretical and abstract. You have to make it tangible and show people what’s in it for them.”

## Experience, the great teacher

Here, Europe Direct members share their experiences of communicating citizens’ rights.

### New frontiers in job creation

Dunkirk, in northern France, lies just 10kms from the Belgian border. Despite this proximity, the economic reality on either side of the border is very different. Dunkirk, where there is a concentration of heavy industries touched by the crisis, has an unemployment rate of some 12%. In contrast, neighbouring West Flanders, which has a booming agri-food sector, has a jobless rate of just 4% – and there are plenty of unfilled jobs available.



“Despite the availability of jobs only a few kilometres down the road, most people in Dunkirk don’t consider going to work in West Flanders because ‘it’s another country’, even though it won’t necessarily involve them moving house,” explains Nathalie Legros Bécuwe, director of EDIC Dunkirk.

To help address Dunkirk’s unemployment issue through cross-border mobility, the EDIC launched an awareness-raising campaign. “We inform local job-seekers about the job situation in West Flanders, Belgian legislation, and in which sectors jobs are available,” she describes.

This is complemented by a job-matching scheme – in collaboration with Pôle emploi, the state-run employment agency – and language training courses provided by the University of Dunkirk. “Knowing how to speak Dutch is important. But even a basic command of the language is often sufficient because the Flemish speak good French,” says Legros Bécuwe.

And the outcome? "We trained 600 unemployed people, which is quite impressive considering the resources at our disposal," notes Legros Bécuwe. "However, mobility is not deeply ingrained in the culture of Dunkirk, so only about half of the 600 actually crossed the border. But it was a start."

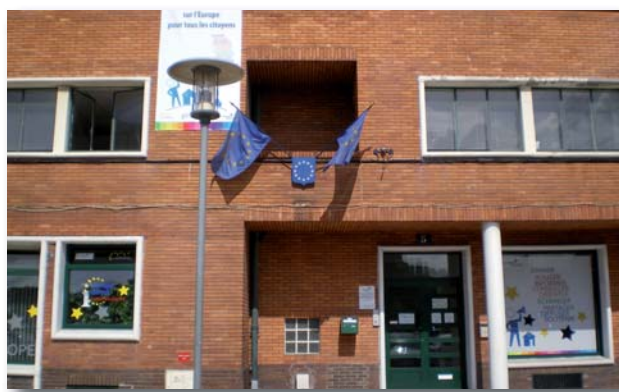
As part of its efforts to address poverty and social exclusion, EDIC Dunkirk also co-operated in the **Sixth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns**, which took place in Dunkirk in May 2010. The EDIC organised information events for 200 people from different socio-economic backgrounds on what the EU and European citizens are doing in the area of sustainable development, which culminated in a visit to Brussels.

### The mobility virus

In a bid to raise awareness of the EU and the benefits it brings, particularly among young people, EDIC Picardie (FR) invited locals to catch its Europe Bus.

On-board this vintage bus, young locals were able to meet young Europeans who have moved to the region thanks to an EU programme, such as **Erasmus**, **Leonardo da Vinci**, or the **European Voluntary Service**. "The bus promoted dialogue between young people from Amiens and their European peers," says Hédia Nasraoui, the EDIC's director. "Each time, we spoke about new themes: mobility, the European Parliament elections, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall."

By exposing young locals to such role models, it drives home the message that moving to other parts of Europe is not some improbable, or even difficult, prospect, that many do it, enjoy it and benefit from it. "These contacts with young Europeans make Europe more concrete



to local youth. It gives Europe a familiar human face," points out Nasraoui.

EDIC Picardie even has an in-house example of the benefits of mobility in action. Jörg Schiedel, who had volunteered on the bus while studying in Picardie on a Leonardo da Vinci grant, has returned and now works at the EDIC.



These events help the EDIC inform the public not only about the gains to be had from mobility but also about the importance of the EU project. They are also publicised in the local media. "We aim to encourage locals to catch the mobility virus," she elaborates.

### The EU for Roma

EDIC Murska Sobota (SI) issued a special leaflet targeted at the region's substantial Roma population explaining the EU in the local Roma dialect to raise awareness of the Union among the community, the rights it extends them as citizens, and how it can benefit them.

The publication contained basic information about the European Union, including its history, institutions, most significant achievements, the new Lisbon Treaty, and more. The Roma Union of Slovenia helped disseminate the leaflet which was published at the end of 2009.

The initiative attracted a lot of local and national media attention, and the Roma community also reacted positively as they felt it was very important for the Roma to learn more about all the prospects that the EU offers. "We believe that education is the key for improving the social and economic status of Roma," says Dejan Bogdan of EDIC Murska Sobota.

### Connecting to social Europe

EDIC Fundación Luis Vives (ES) organised its own 'Connect Yourself to Social Europe Week'. The four-day event targeted civil society, academia and the general public and aimed to highlight those EU issues which affect society.

During the event, the EDIC distributed three Spanish-language publications developed specifically for NGOs, which were also put online to enable those not attending to benefit from them. The publications dealt with how civil society can take action at EU level; what an NGO can do to influence European migration policies; and another on European environmental policies.

“Even though the people who attended this event were very participative, we did not attract the number of participants we were expecting,” notes the EDIC’s Vanessa Celano Tarantini. “We believe that the main reason was because Spanish people still don’t feel that they are very affected by European policies. This is why we strongly believe that it is very important to raise awareness of these issues and to approach the general public and social actors.”

#### Consumer affairs regional meeting

EDIC Duisburg (DE), in collaboration with the Commission Representation in Bonn, organised a meeting on consumer affairs targeted at Europe Direct Information Centres and European Documentation Centres. On 9 and 10 November 2010, 19 representatives from EDICs and EDCs in North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland Palatine,

Hesse and the Saarland met with a view to establishing closer links and identifying synergies between EDIC/EDCs and the Consumer Protection Centres (Verbraucherschutzzentralen, CPCs) in Germany.

Participants received an overview of the activities of the CPCs and how the Europe Direct networks could better co-operate with these centres for the benefit of consumers. A special session was dedicated to energy, and considered how CPCs help promote energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy resources and the functioning of the energy market. The head of the Commission’s regional Representation presented and discussed the Commission’s 2011 work programme.

#### Living in the EU forest

To mark the 25th anniversary of Portugal’s EU membership, EDIC Porto (PT) helped develop and implement the European Forest, made up of sculpted trees representing the 27 Member States and a comments tree. The forest represents the Union’s diversity, its respect of difference and the strength of the European project which has opened enormous possibilities for its citizens and granted them the fundamental liberties of free movement across the Union.



## ► Interview with Luc Van den Brande

### Europe's regional face

Former President of the Committee of the Regions, Luc Van den Brande, speaks to Yours Directly about the valuable roles regions play in shaping European policies to make them more responsive to Europeans' needs, of raising citizens' awareness of their rights and duties, and of bridging the gap between Brussels and ordinary Europeans.

#### ***What contribution do regions make to the European project?***

Europe begins in its regions and cities. It is in the villages, rural and urban areas, islands and mountains that citizens look towards the EU for answers to their everyday concerns. It is enterprises in the cities and regions – many of them SMEs – that provide the critical mass for our economy's competitiveness and are actually the key to our successful exit from the economic crisis. Finally, local and regional government is responsible for the implementation and application of a wide array of European legislation, amounting to approximately 70% of the legislation produced in Brussels.

Through the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives, cities and regions participate in a consultative capacity in the EU's decision-making and legislative processes.

#### ***How has their role and profile changed in recent years?***

Regions and cities have asserted a more active role in European policy-making. Since 1994, when the Committee of the Regions was established as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, regions have been making their voice heard on a wide variety of policy areas, ranging from education, culture and social policy, to transport, energy and the environment, as well as Cohesion Policy.

#### ***What impact will the Lisbon Treaty have on the regions?***

The Lisbon Treaty marks a very important step in strengthening the role of the regions within the European political edifice. The Treaty specifically recognises the respect of the principle of local and regional self-government and strengthens the 'subsidiarity principle', whereby decisions should be taken as close to the citizens as possible. One important regional concern which has made it into the Treaty, and which is particularly relevant in a time of economic crisis, is the concept of 'territorial cohesion'.

#### ***What role do and can the regions play in connecting the EU to its citizens?***

Regions and cities are the first port of call for citizens. Local and regional authorities can and do assume the

### ► About Luc Van den Brande



A member of the Committee of the Regions since its inception in 1994, Luc Van den Brande served as its president from 2008 to 2010 and currently chairs its [Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs](#). He was replaced by [Mercedes Bresso](#) from the Piemonte province in Italy.

A member of the Flemish Christian Democrats, CD&V, Van den Brande has also held a number of regional, national and European positions, including as president of the government of Flanders.

role of Europe's ambassadors in their respective territories. The Committee of the Regions has a special role in that regard, blending European with local and regional political discourse.

#### ***What are the main communication challenges facing the regions and how can the ED network help?***

The main challenge for regions is to foster active citizenship. Cities and regions, with the Committee of the Regions as their representative institution, and the Europe Direct network are privileged partners in making this change a reality. Due to their proximity to the grassroots level, they can immediately inform citizens about issues of common interest throughout the EU and raise their awareness of their rights (and obligations) as European citizens. That is why I see considerable potential in the Committee of the Regions and the Europe Direct network working closely together in the future.

*The full transcript of this interview is available on the intranet.*

### ► About the Committee of the Regions

With 344 members from EU's 27 Member States, the Committee of the Regions is the voice of Europe's regions and cities in Brussels. Established in 1994 under the Maastricht Treaty, the CoR seeks to give local governments a say in EU policies and legislation, especially as they are responsible for implementing most of them, and to bridge the gap between European citizens and the Union's institutions. Its work is based on subsidiarity, proximity and partnership.

## Communicators' toolkit

- 'Europe on the move: an opportunity and a challenge; migration in the European Union' (PDF, all languages)
- Video on European Support Office for Asylum Seekers
- Video clip on defending Roma rights
- Video clip on student mobility in Europe
- Video clip on how the Lisbon Treaty will affect the European Parliament
- Video clip on online privacy
- Consumer protection: 10 basic principles
- Your rights when travelling in Europe – FAQs
- Your rights when working abroad – FAQs
- Your rights when residing abroad – FAQs
- Your rights to education abroad – FAQs
- Your rights to healthcare abroad – FAQs
- Your rights as a consumer in other EU countries – FAQs
- Video on a day at DG COMM
- Video on Europe and you
- Video of Viviane Reding's interview on citizenship

## Upcoming events

- Ireland, 4-31 January 2011, 'From peaceful revolution to German unity': Organised by EDIC Dundalk, this exhibition will contain posters illustrating the call for democracy and means of protest within the German Democratic Republic that eventually culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- Italy, 13 January 2011, 'Workshop on fundamental rights': Targeted at young people under 16 years of age, this EDIC Modena workshop seeks to raise awareness and understanding of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and what it means in practice.
- Austria, 27 January 2011, 'Europa Café': This edition of the Europa Café, organised by EDIC Landes Oberösterreich, focuses on what benefits EU citizens and businesses can extract from the single market.
- Netherlands, 4 February 2011, 'Are you going abroad?': Organised by EDIC Utrecht, this event provides young people aged 16-25 with useful information on how to move abroad to study or do volunteer work.