

HLG on administrative burdens – 24/1/2011

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- Ø Let me start by thanking you for the invitation to present to you today the EU Citizenship Report and the process launched with this report towards dismantling obstacles to the effective enjoyment of citizens' rights.

- Ø The EU Citizenship Report delivers on the commitment made by **President Barroso**, in his Political Guidelines for the new Commission of September 2009, to reinforce EU citizenship by giving concrete effect to citizens' rights. To this end, President Barroso announced that the Commission would present a comprehensive **report on the obstacles citizens still face** when making use of their rights as EU citizens across national borders and proposals to overcome these obstacles.

- Ø The **main assumption** of the EU Citizenship Report, presented last October, is that **EU citizenship guarantees all Europeans a broad range of rights** granted by EU law. In their everyday reality however, citizens still **face a great number of obstacles** when they seek to exercise these rights across national borders.

- Ø The report identified thus the most important persistent **gaps in awareness and accessibility of EU citizens' rights**, and outlined **25 concrete short- and medium-term actions** envisaged to remove these obstacles, with the overall aim to translate the concept of Citizenship into tangible benefits for European citizens.

- Ø This report adopted **the citizens' perspective**, addressing problems citizens face **in various roles throughout their lives**, whether as private individuals, as consumers of goods and services, as residents, students and professionals, or as political actors. The issues tackled range therefore from the insufficient protection of accused persons in criminal proceedings and cross border healthcare to taxation problems, problems related to the rights of passengers, obstacles to consumers obtaining effective redress or to the effective exercise of EU citizens' rights to vote and stand as candidates in European and local elections.

- Ø Such a multi-disciplinary approach was possible thanks to the **active involvement and contribution** in the report of **other COM departments** developing policies and tackling issues of direct concern to EU citizens.

- Ø In addition, the Citizenship report was issued in parallel with the **Single Market Act Communication**, so as to ensure **coherence between these two exercises, which have complementary objectives**: the Citizenship Report aims to remove persistent obstacles so as to facilitate the effective exercise of EU citizens' rights in their daily lives, whilst the Single Market Act tackles obstacles faced by Europeans as economic operators within the single market, for instance as entrepreneurs or workers, in order to re-launch the economy for the benefit of business, and implicitly also for the benefit of citizens.

Ø **The actions set out in the report** with a view to eliminating the obstacles identified **fall broadly into four categories:**

- In some areas, it is necessary to **propose new legislation or to update or complete existing rules;**
- in other areas, the focus is on **securing that the EU rules in place are fully enforced** on the ground;
- a third category are the actions aimed at **raising citizens' awareness** about their rights;
- And another important category comprises actions aimed at **making the exercise of individual rights simpler and easier, by streamlining administrative procedures, eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic formalities and reducing costs and administrative burdens** generated by national procedures and practices.

Ø By way of illustration, let me give you a few examples of the measures outlined in the report with the aim to **tackle the bureaucratic hurdles** faced by EU citizens in cross-border situations:

Ø One of the problems addressed are the cumbersome, costly and, to a certain extent, obsolete, formalities faced by citizens seeking the **cross-border recognition of their civil status documents**, as they may be obliged to provide for certified translations and additional proofs of authenticity, due to the differences among Member States' administrative systems and registries. To facilitate the free movement of such documents, it is envisaged to propose in 2013 legislative instruments for the elimination of legalisation formalities between Member States and the recognition of the

effects of certain civil status records (for instance relating to filiation, adoption, names).

- Ø Another major problem identified in the report are the **burdensome procedures and delays** faced by **EU citizens exercising their right to free movement**, for instance in order to obtain registration certificates for themselves or residence cards for their third-country family members. In this respect, our efforts are focusing on identifying and promoting best practices for a smooth and efficient administrative treatment of residence issues as well as for ensuring that front-desk officials at local/regional/national level have sufficient knowledge of the applicable EU rules and that the citizens themselves are adequately informed of their rights.

- Ø The report further points to the need to make it **simpler and quicker for people working in another EU country to transfer there their social security rights**, and refers to the development of a new system of electronic exchange of information between national administrations, the EESSI (electronic exchange of social security information), that should be fully operational by 1st May 2012.

- Ø The report also proposes to **cut red tape and simplify the formalities for the registration of cars** previously registered in another Member State, by proposing a legislative instrument by the end of 2011.

- Ø A further priority mentioned is to **facilitate the registration on the electoral rolls of EU citizens wishing to vote or stand as candidates** in European elections in their Member States of

residence **by simplifying conditions required by current EU rules and the mechanism provided for preventing double voting and double candidatures** (for instance, EU citizens who wish to stand as candidates must obtain from their Member States of origin proof that they have not been deprived of their electoral rights).

Ø The report also refers to the Commission's intention, announced in the Single Market Act Communication, to propose in 2012 a legislative instrument ensuring a **faster and less bureaucratic recognition of professional qualifications**.

Ø Work on all these issues is gathering momentum: notably, on 14 December 2010 we published a Green paper launching a public consultation on how to promote **free movement of public documents and recognition of the effects of civil status documents**. The results of this consultation, which will end in April 2012, will feed in the development of policy in this area, together with the legislative proposals scheduled for 2013.

Ø As you can see, in the context of this exercise, we are targeting primarily the bureaucratic formalities and complications that constitute important sources of frustration for European citizens and of uncertainty about the effectiveness of their rights, the administrative burdens that make freedom of movement less attractive for them and can even prevent them from fully enjoying their rights in cross-border situations.

Ø The solutions envisaged comprise a wide range of actions: **legislative initiatives** to eliminate or reduce red tape, measures

aimed at **facilitating and making more efficient the cooperation between national administrations**, the dissemination of **good practices with a view to streamlining procedures**, as well as **enhancing the awareness of national authorities** in charge of implementing citizens' rights as well as the awareness **of citizens themselves**.

Ø Beyond the implementation of the actions announced in this report, the Commission is **launching a broader process for the identification of persistent obstacles** to EU citizens' rights and a **debate with other EU institutions, national parliaments and other stakeholders**. Based on an evaluation of the progress accomplished and on the results of this debate, the Commission will present, **in 2013, a comprehensive action plan** aimed at completing the removal of obstacles still standing in the way of citizens' enjoyment of their rights.

Ø In the context of this process, we intend to tap into the ideas of all relevant stakeholders and look at the different measures and policies elaborated at national/regional/local level for the reduction of administrative burdens for citizens and more broadly for improving service delivery to citizens. As a first step, we will explore possibilities to cooperate with the **European Public Administration Network (EUPAN)**, which carries out substantial work on these issues as well as directly with Member States which are particularly active in this area.

Ø Moreover, as such policies are often part of broader programmes aimed at reducing burdens on citizens, businesses, public authorities and professionals, it is also necessary to draw on the results of such programmes and ensure coherence with them.

Ø And to this extent, I would very much welcome your input and insights from your unique perspective, in view of your central role in the Commission's work towards simplification and administrative burden reduction for businesses.