

An EU voter's wish list

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The forthcoming elections for the European Parliament focus the minds of voters. At least, it focuses my mind. Manifest are the imperfections of our Union. They are lamented by voters, media and national politicians alike. These limitations in what has been achieved in the past sixty years of European integration should not make us lose sight of the EU's accomplishments. The story of a new mode of governance for nations hitherto engulfed in conflict and strife, with both States and their citizens engaged in the EU's democratic process, is worth being told, over and over again.

Elected politicians should give ear to citizens' justified annoyance at the EU's shortcomings. Citizens' complaints may be a source of inspiration for improvements. Bottom-up solutions to avoidable irritants should be explored. Here is my wish-list for the new legislature and the new Commission. First, on labour mobility. Free movement of persons is a core element of European society. It also underpins the single currency: sharing a currency requires mobility of labour. Far too many obstacles are put in place when someone wishes to move to another Member State. A few examples: cars registered in

one Member State may not be used permanently within another and need to be registered there – abolish this bureaucratic hindrance deriving from petty cash considerations of governments! Pension portability is not assured. Without undertaking harmonisation of pension systems – which may cost years, faces stiff opposition and may never yield results – ensure simple pension transfer rules for those who are (self-)employed in another Member State than that of their nationality. Abolish tax obstacles by considering a 29th regime: anyone who moves to another Member State to work (employed or self-employed) should be eligible to a separate EU tax regime and not be subject to the tax rate of one of the 28 Member States. Set the EU income tax rate at an appropriate and attractive level so that citizens are encouraged to take the leap. Make the host State responsible for effecting the EU's tax receipts. Ensure that medical treatment in another Member State is easily accessible and not dependent on pre-payment, as is too often the case in States without a free public health system. Finally, encourage second language training from a very early age onwards, so as to encourage communication in a common language across Europe: good for labour mobility and for the EU spirit.

The crisis has seen Europe employ strict enforcement mechanisms in 'peripheral' States, as a condition for the granting of financial assistance to their governments. The 'troika' method was resented but effective. Why not transplant this method to overseeing compliance with other EU provisions than the conditionality for European financial assistance? Instead of the ECB, the IMF and the Commission three fellow Member States may form a 'troika'. Mandate representatives from three other Member States to check practical compliance with EU rules in each State. A few examples from the financial sector to conclude. End the ridiculous practical restrictions on bank payments within the Union: using the system for electronic road payments in Portugal shouldn't require an account at a Portuguese bank. When making safe payments

for purchases on the internet, one should not be automatically directed to the system established by one's own State's banks' club. There are probably numerous other examples of foolishness in what is supposed to be an integrated market. Addressing practical issues can make Europe functioning and becoming a reality in voters' lives.

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