



Mrs Theresa May
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Brussels, 06 February 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

On June 23rd last year, a majority of British voters chose to leave the European Union. The decision may be welcomed by some, regretted by others, but everyone acknowledges the right of the British people to decide on their own future.

However, the vote on June 23rd also affects close to three million people, EU citizens living in the UK, who did not have a vote. Many of these three million have been living in the UK for years or decades. They have fallen in love and married in the UK, they have children and sometimes grandchildren in the UK, some have adopted children in the UK. They study and work in the UK, or they have set up a business in the UK. They worked and retired in the UK, and they may be enjoying old age, sometimes in good health, sometimes frail. They have grown roots in the UK. Through their children, they have an inseparable bond with Britain. These three million people are three million valuable members of British society. They live in your country Mrs Prime Minister. Like all other UK citizens, your decisions will determine their fate.

You have announced that Brexit negotiations will start in March. We do not know what the outcome will be. But the people that have settled down in the UK are facing intense insecurity. They do not know what to expect, what their status will be. Many have decided to apply for permanent residence or citizenship. But the procedure turns out to be a nightmare. It is expensive and cumbersome (the application form has 85 pages, proof that bureaucracy is no EU monopoly), information is scarce, unclear and contradictory. The criteria are almost impossible to meet (for example: report every single trip abroad during your time in the UK. We got a mail from someone who has lived in the UK for 47 years. How is he supposed to meet this requirement?) and in some cases not in line with EU law. The countless mails we get from people, also show an image of public authorities being reluctant to help or provide information, in some cases their attitude is downright hostile. Almost as if the aim is to make as many people as possible leave the country.

The stories are heartbreaking. Some people received notice they have to leave the country within six weeks. People are frightened. Parents fearful of being separated from their children. Elderly people in bad health threatened with expulsion. People who have dedicated their entire life to a small business, at risk of losing everything they have ever worked for. People who cannot get a job or a mortgage loan, because of their insecure situation. They are afraid to travel abroad for work or family visits, worried that they may not be allowed back in. And yet their only crime is not to be a UK citizen. They came to your country Mrs May, because they loved the UK and its people, and were welcomed and their statuses were protected. They trusted the UK and its centuries old reputation of law and good administration. But now they find themselves treated like unwanted aliens, pariahs.

We will not argue here about the legality of the policy. We will raise that in another context and we are looking forward to having an exchange of views with you soon in the European Parliament. But we urge you to make sure that people who have been valuable members of British society get the decent and humane treatment they deserve. We ask you to reciprocate the dedication and contribution of these people to Britain, and make sure the authorities will do everything to provide clarity and certainty, and all the necessary assistance to help people to continue to live their lives without unnecessary disruption.

We also ask you to assure EU citizens living in the UK that their rights as EU citizens will be fully respected as long as the UK is a member of the European Union, even once Article 50 has been triggered.

Inversely, the one and a half million UK citizens living in other EU countries, equally deserve your support. We as MEPs will equally represent their interests and see to it they will not be penalised for a decision that affects them, but in which many of them had no part.

This is not a matter of party politics, or political strategy. It concerns real people, not pawns in the negotiations. This is about basic human values, about common decency. This is about treating people the way you yourself would want to be treated.

Mrs Prime Minister, we address this urgent appeal to you on behalf of the nearly three million EU citizens living in the UK, and the more than one and a half million Britons living in EU countries. There are almost five million real people, anxious and frightened about the future. We count on you to help them.

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