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Citizenship is – or should be – more than a legal status

What does it mean to be a European citizen? It is certainly not the same as being a citizen of the European Union, and it certainly is not only a question of legal status - according to ENACT.

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ENACTING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

Researchers working for the project ENACT are asking awkward questions on what it means to be a European citizen: Why do third country nationals or stateless persons residing in the EU not count as European citizens although they are well integrated in the social, economic and cultural space of the EU? If groups of Turkish citizens get involved in litigations at the European Court of Justice, make contacts with European officials and politicians, and address campaigns to European officials, politicians and public figures, are they not "acting" as European citizens – even though they are neither citizens nor residents of an EU member state?

Meeting with EU Officer Angela Liberatore © ENACT

IMPACT

The project ENACT has a strong focus on EU policy developments. The members of the project argue that European citizenship in its current narrow definition is a missed opportunity to further promote European integration. Many people who by their actions make valid claims to European citizenship are currently excluded instead of being integrated into the European project.

Before ENACT, any discussion of European citizenship was dominated by lawyers, who naturally stressed the legal aspect of citizenship. This has changed, thanks to the civil society organization "European Year of Citizens 2013 Alliance", choosing as its slogan "European citizenship is more than rights!". The European Commission is now explicitly seeking new research projects to investigate "how citizens claim and enact their rights".

ENACT presented its findings to a number of policy-makers and experts, for example during a workshop in Nijmegen (2011), a workshop in Istanbul (2010) and a policy conference in Brussels (2010), where numerous policy makers and political actors participated. The Council of Europe and the European Commission may well take up the idea that European citizenship is more than "just" citizenship of the EU. This could be the main impact of the project.

ENACT project members © ENACT

FACTS & FIGURES

Project Name	ENACT - Enacting European citizenship
Website	www.enacting-citizenship.eu
Research Area	Reassessing European Union citizenship, Democratic 'ownership' and participation
Coordinating Institution	The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK
Number of Partners	6
Start Date – End Date	1.1.2008 – 31.1.2011
Duration	36 months
Project Funding	1.197.910 €
Funding scheme	Small or medium-scale focused research project
Activity - FP7	The citizen in the European Union - Activity 5
Read more	Policy brief: www.enacting-citizenship.eu/index.php/sections/deliverables_item/399/ Project deliverables : www.enacting-citizenship.eu/index.php/sections/deliverables/cat/reports

Living European citizenship

If the project of European integration is to succeed, the researchers argue, the European Union has to accept that European citizenship is not only a question of legal status but of "acts of citizenship" as well: how people and institutions live, or "enact", European citizenship is (at least) as important as their legal status. Those people who are active citizens in their claims of belonging to Europe should be incorporated into the political and social life of the European Union regardless of their legal citizenship status.

Challenged notions of citizenship

The project ENACT has investigated groups who challenge traditional notions of European citizenship, for example Roma communities in Germany and Hungary, and Kurds in Turkey. By investigating how their acts succeed in making citizenly claims on the EU, the project shows that the concept of European citizenship should be extended to the wider economic, political and legal frameworks that have developed around the EU.

The members of the project have made their arguments heard at an impressive number of public debates, policy seminars and conferences (see 'IMPACT').