

## Citizens' rights groups tell heads of state to save their rights

Citizens' rights organisations British in Europe and the3million who represent the five million people most directly affected by Brexit demand an immediate end to crippling legal uncertainty in the wake of an agreed extension to the Brexit process until 31 October.

While the Withdrawal Agreement on citizens' rights has been gathering dust for over a year all 28 EU member states are busy making their own, widely differing preparations on how to treat the five million people who have crossed the Channel to live in another EU country.

These five million people demand an urgent explanation as to why EEA EFTA and Swiss citizens already have security about their rights, but they do not. They also plead with the EU to not waste the hard work that went into agreeing citizens' rights and uphold them even in case of no deal.

**Maïke Bohn, co-founder of the3million** – which represents the 3,6million EU 27 citizens living in the UK - said:

*'This extension does not guarantee that there will actually be a deal. Citizens' rights – the bit of Brexit that affects five million real people's lives on day one - were agreed between the UK and EU in December 2017. Yet a year and a half later we still don't know whether the agreement is worth the paper it's written on. This means five million people still can't be sure of the rights that will determine whether they will have jobs, study opportunities, healthcare and the ability to keep their families together in future.*

*It would be utter madness to risk throwing these painstakingly negotiated rights into the bin.'*

It is unlikely that any post-no-deal-Brexit agreement on citizens' rights would have the same scope and rights as the Citizens' Rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement - and it could take years to negotiate.

The current EU no-deal contingency plans for British citizens in the EU amount to little more than calling on Member States to 'be generous'. This approach also leaves the 3,6 million EU citizens in the UK at the mercy of the UK government, which has already announced that their rights will be cut in a no-deal scenario. Without the protection of an international treaty, future British governments will be free to reduce these rights even further. In addition, the campaign groups argue that dealing with areas like healthcare, pensions and social security will require a coordinated approach at EU-UK level.

**Jane Golding, Co-Chair of British in Europe** – which represents 1.3mn British citizens living on the continent - said:

*This may be the last chance before the European elections to show the five million people who used their free movement rights in good faith that they matter more than fish carcasses or Cheddar cheese. At almost a third of only 17 million Europeans who currently use their free movement rights, what message does it send for the future if the EU fails to protect their rights in this unprecedented situation? We need a binding commitment now from both sides that rescuing the hard won citizens' rights part of the Withdrawal agreement will be the contingency, instead of the current contingency plans providing for 28 separate unilateral solutions without international treaty protection'*

The two campaign groups have had unanimous support in the UK parliament and the Dutch parliament recently voted in favour of committing the Dutch government to ring-fencing the citizens' rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement.