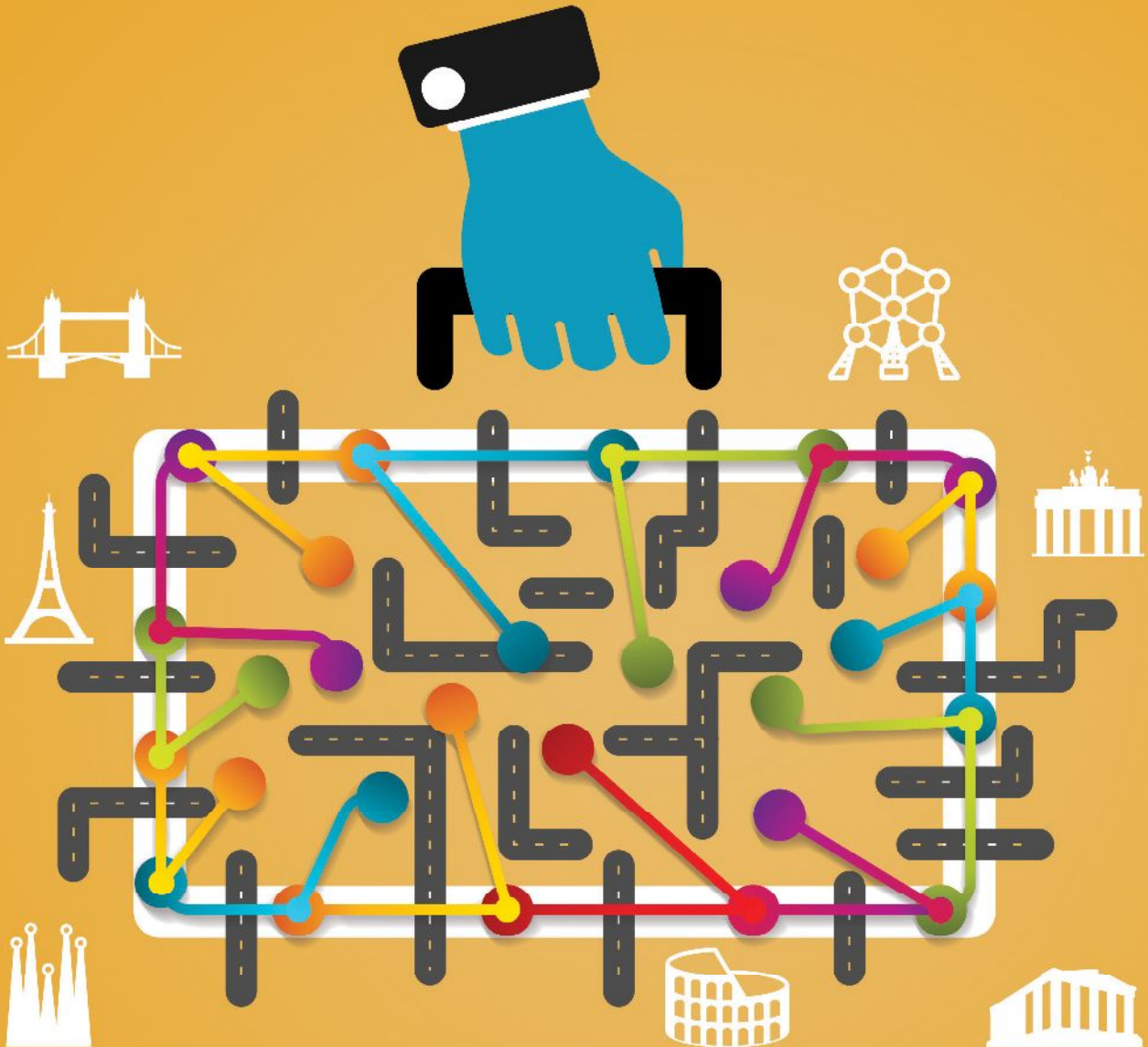


THE NEW EUROPEAN

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FREE MOVEMENT BETWEEN THEORY AND REALITY



Free movement

A core principle of EU citizenship

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European Movement International

**What do we mean when we talk about free movement?
The President of EMI gives an overview to understand the most important
- and endangered - of the EU principles.**

FOLLOWING THE DISCUSSIONS in some Member States of the European Union to limit the freedom of movement, the European Movement International (EMI) called for the safeguarding of this fundamental right for all European citizens in a resolution adopted at its Members Council on 11 April 2014 in Athens, Greece. One year later and the freedom of movement is once again being questioned, most notably in response to the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the Copenhagen shootings. This worrying tendency painfully affects the very core of European citizenship.

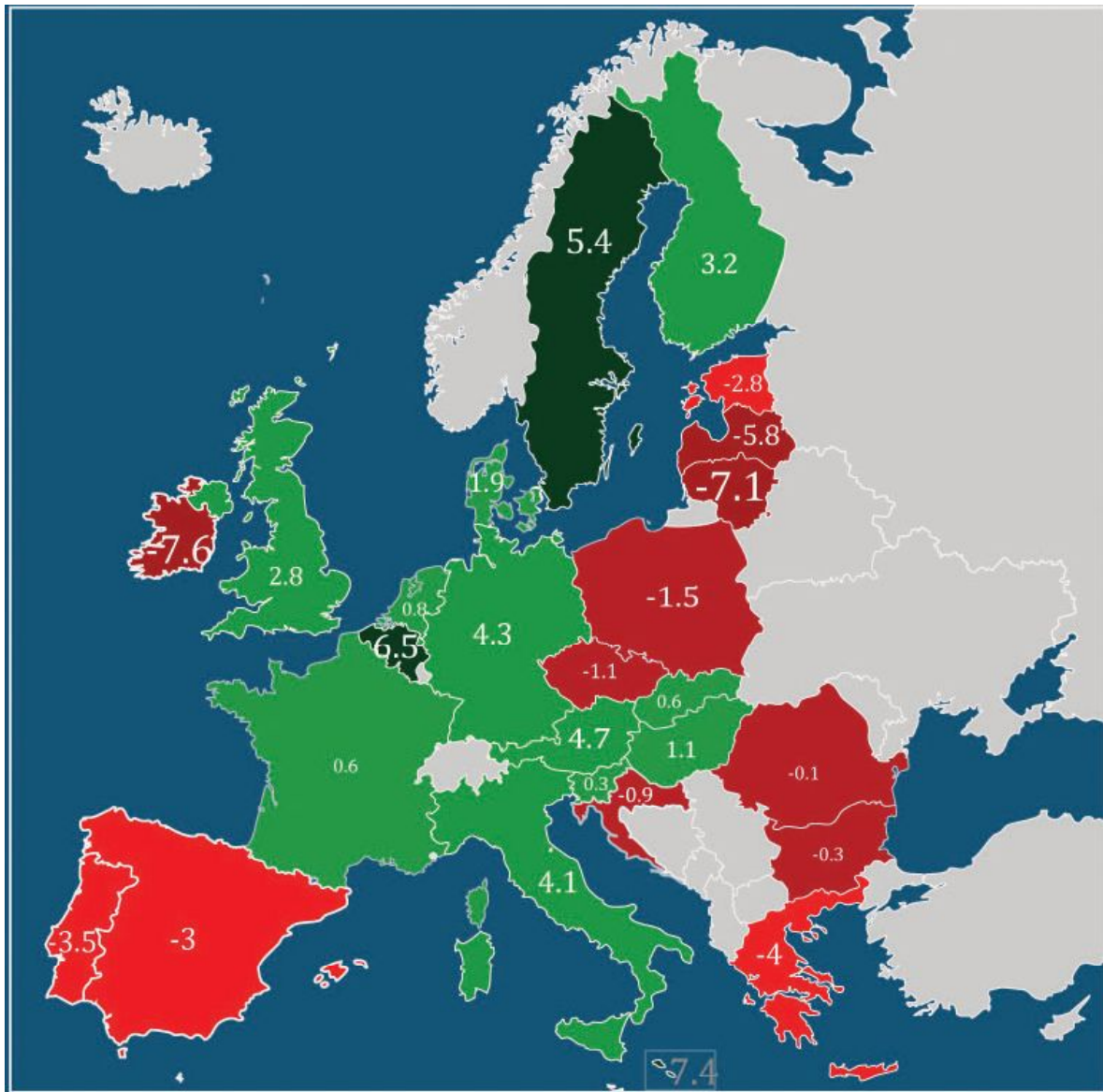
The right to work and move freely within the Union is a fundamental right of all European citizens, going hand in hand with the free movement of goods, services and capital. Together with the European fundamental values, these four freedoms constitute the foundations of European law and must be fully respected by all Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area (EEA).

Studies show that the free movement of per-

sons within Europe stimulates economic growth. In contradiction to popular beliefs, the misuse of social benefit schemes is negligible and the benefits of immigrants to national budgets are much higher than the costs. The possibility for European citizens to seek work in other Member States without lengthy bureaucratic procedures allows businesses to react flexibly to gaps in the labour market, making use of migrants' capacities, which leads to more job creation. Furthermore, the cross-cultural interactions immigrants bring lead to enhanced innovation. Countries that make use of these qualities of labour migrants also compete best internationally. This means that both the economy and native workers profit from growth generated by labour migrants.

Safeguards to prevent the exploitation of national social security systems are already in place at the European level, and research shows that the vast majority of migrants from Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area move to other EU countries to work, contributing on average 34% more to the fiscal system

Receiving and sending countries in the EU



Net migration rate per 1000 inhabitants in the EU. Source: Bruegel based on Eurostat, 2012.

than they take out. Labour mobility within the single market is not only key for the economic recovery and success of Europe, but also one of the most appreciated benefits of the European Union directly affecting its citizens and businesses.

Increased labour mobility means higher employment

Thanks to these positive effects of the free movement of persons, increasing intra-EU mobility is part of the solution for tackling the high unemployment rate in Europe. Increased labour mobility can mitigate imbalances between the Member States' labour markets caused by the econo-

mic crisis as well as the ageing and shrinking workforce in some parts of Europe. While some regions in Europe suffer from extreme unemployment rates, economic progress in other regions is slowed down by a worrying shortage of skilled labour. For example, many companies in Germany, which has a historically low birth-rate, can only grow because they find skilled employees in other Member States, while many well-educated people in the Member States hit most severely by the crises are offered opportunities abroad.

Despite this, common misconceptions and anti-mobility rhetoric prevail, even amongst some political leaders. The populist rhetoric has a



strong impact on the public perception of the internal mobility of European citizens, which is often perceived as a factor endangering the economic situation in the respective Member States as well the social security of their citizens. It is a case in point that the most mobile European citizens from the central and eastern European Member States are often the target of populist and xenophobic campaigns conducted by far-right parties, such as the Dutch Freedom Party (PvV) and the British UK Independence Party (UKIP). Sadly, even mainstream governmental rhetoric increasingly infringes this founding principle of the European Union, as witnessed lately in the UK with Prime Minister David Cameron's stance towards immigration and movement of EU citizens. This attitude is even less comprehensible when one considers the UK's role as a strong advocate of the single market. After all, the single market can only exist if not only goods, services and capital can move freely, but also people.

At the same time, many people, especially those from the newer Member States, feel threatened by the anti-migrant sentiments, which discourage their ability to move Europe-wide. Even though they share the full beneficiaries of rights as European citizens, societal challenges may constitute a serious obstacle to a full democratic integration into a host community. A strongly negative political climate these days does not allow for the full exercise of rights deriving from European citizenship.

A fact-based and responsible debate

Clearly some municipalities are more affected by the challenges of free movement, and may struggle to cope with a fast influx of a large number of European citizens. This, however, is no reason to dispute the principle of free movement as such. Instead, it should be an incentive to support the individually affected municipalities in order to enable them to mitigate possible adverse effects and make full use of the potential provided by the newcomers. Furthermore, the best way to avoid poverty migration within the European Union is to reduce poverty and social exclusion in sending countries, instead of closing the borders of receiving states.

With extremist views arising in the very heart of Europe, all political actors and institutions in the European Union and its Member States must return to a fact-based and responsible debate and abstain from exploiting the issue of free movement of persons for populist campaigns, which sows xenophobic and Eurosceptic sentiments.



**European
Movement
International**

For more information on Em's positions you can visit its website: europeanmovement.eu