

**Tony Simpson is an European Citizens' Initiative organiser, which goal is to encourage the European Commission to ensure the Europeans from losing the EU citizenship. He agreed to answer to some our questions about his idea.**

**Infoludek.pl: Can you tell our readers something about yourself? What's your story, what do you do for a living?**

**Tony Simpson\*:** I'm a publisher living in Nottingham in the English Midlands, where we have good friends in the local Polish community. Since 1980, I have worked at the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which operates internationally to promote peace, human rights and social justice. I have Irish and UK nationality, and hope that my three children will also have both. My wife is not eligible for Irish citizenship at the moment.

**What got you thinking about starting this initiative? Were you afraid of losing something?**

I was at a conference in the United States when the referendum result was announced in June 2016. The Canadian and US participants couldn't understand how people could vote to isolate themselves in this way and, in the process, surrender citizenship and its associated rights and responsibilities. I had always appreciated EU citizenship as something beyond national citizenship. So I checked the European Parliament's website for EU citizens rights and found that, under the Treaties, we have the right to make a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to invite the Commission to introduce legislation in an appropriate area for which it has powers under the Treaties. So, with colleagues at the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, we decided to go for it. Yes, many UK nationals will lose significant and meaningful rights if Brexit happens.

**You probably faced some people disagreeing with your initiative. What were their arguments? How did you respond to them?**

Some UK nationals tell us there is no such thing as EU citizenship, notwithstanding what the EU treaties say. When presented with the evidence, they are often reluctant to change their minds. There have been some vigorous arguments on social media about this. More concerning is that some EU citizens see the Permanent EU Citizenship primarily as a way for some UK nationals to retain EU citizenship after Brexit. We should be so lucky! That was the clear objective of our first initiative, 'Retaining European Citizenship, which closed in May 2018 with 24,000 endorsements. The aim of the subsequent Permanent EU Citizenship initiative is to highlight the risk to all EU Citizens in all 28 member states, that there is their RISK that EU citizenship can be withdrawn. If it can happen in the UK, it can happen elsewhere.

**How do you promote a huge, cross-country initiative like this? How do you know what to do?**

For practicalities, help is available via European Commission's webpages (<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/basic-facts>). The first task is to find seven willing EU citizens residing in seven different member states. We were able to do that because of long involvement in the European peace movement and other campaigns associated with the Bertrand

Russell Peace Foundation. The Commission provides translations of the Initiative in 24 languages, as well as offering online collection, so that helps. There is also a lively alternative provision for online collection via the civil society ECI campaign, which affords more opportunity to grow your ECI campaigns organically by maintaining contact with supporters. This is not possible via the Commission's online collection. So we've learnt as we go along, and receive valuable help, support and encouragement from the ECIT Foundation (European citizens rights, involvement and Trust) among several. We haven't specifically sought help from commercial bodies, although some are sympathetic to the aims of the Initiative.

**4. How do you feel about the media coverage and society's reception of your initiative? Are you satisfied with the impact it has? Do you think it's enough to get 1 million signs of approval?**

In the first two weeks of online collection, the Permanent EU Citizenship initiative received almost 80,000 endorsements. This was an extraordinary wave of support, particularly from the UK but also from Romania, Belgium, Netherlands and elsewhere in the Union. Poland was eighth out of 28 member states with 71 additional endorsements during the last four weeks, making 745 against a minimum threshold of 38,250. This is about 2%, so there is a long way to go. Overall, we have about 10% of the total of one million. So we need a tidal wave of endorsements. Media interest was initially encouraging, but we have struggled to break through into a wider discussion about the rights and responsibilities of EU citizenship. So this interest from Polish media is encouraging, and we hope you are ahead of the curve!

**\*Tony Simpson is a publisher living in Nottingham in the English Midlands, where you can find local polish community. He's also a member of Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which operates internationally to promote peace, human rights and social justice.**