



# THE ROADS TO EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY **TRANSEUROPA CARAVANS**

Summary of the Electronic Report

**ENG**



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# TRANSEUROPA CARAVANS: THE ROADS TO EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Freedom of movement is one of the key rights of EU citizens. The population of mobile EU citizens has recently doubled, with over 17 million citizens living and working in another Member State in 2019. However, the level of voter registration of these citizens in municipal and European elections remains low. The low turnout for mobile citizens is worrying, as there is a real danger they do not exercise their electoral rights, being excluded from any democratic participation.

With this in mind, in the year of the 2019 European Parliament elections, a group of Transeuropa Caravans activists was trained as peer leaders on EU rights and responsibilities for mobile citizens across Europe. In spring and autumn 2019 the Caravans reached personally over 5000 people in almost 80 locations - 38 cities in 15 European countries! They travelled to meet European citizens directly, connect their stories and their struggles, and mobilize together to promote electoral rights and participation of EU mobile citizens throughout Europe. The project threw a searchlight on a wide variety of themes and approaches to engaging people in Europe with European citizens' rights to freedom of movement and cross-border linkage of local struggles for more democracy as the leitmotif.

## Spring routes in May 2019:

1. The Central Eastern route: Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia: Civic spaces under pressure
2. The Western route: France, Spain, Portugal: Cities of Solidarity
3. The Visegrad route: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia: Culture and Theatre
4. The Baltic route: Sweden, Finland and Estonia: Sustainability and Climate Change

## Autumn route in October and November 2019:

5. The Mediterranean route: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia: Migration and borders

At each of the stops the Caravan teams engaged with the local people on the theme of European citizenship and free movement. Their activities and trainings included: workshops, spontaneous public happenings, discovery and connection of local projects, interviews, group discussions and participation in demonstrations and large-scale events. The aim of all these efforts was to foster political participation of EU mobile citizens and enhance capacity and knowledge of civil servants, activists and citizens on EU citizenship and related political rights.

In this REPORT, we are highlighting a range of good practices and recommendations, according to the three components common to any citizenship including European citizenship: rights, participation and belonging. The local or regional ini-



tiatives that the Transeuropa Caravans approached and explored in person, referred to as good practices, prove that inclusive Europe is possible when civil society, local authorities and the EU institutions join their forces together, overcome national populists' messages, and - most importantly - understand the value of European citizenship.

With this summary we are presenting the key takeaways from the project. Please refer to the full [REPORT](#) for a better understanding of Transeuropa Caravans' work towards freedom of movement, promotion of voting rights and active citizenship.

**1. European Elections 2019 - what next:** Planning and carrying out activities of Transeuropa Caravans on the routes was made easier by the run-up to the EP elections, which in 2019 benefitted from greater public awareness and interest. The Caravans were able to link with more large-scale and frequent events than would normally be the case on European topics and also to connect with local partners sharing a concern to take the opportunity of the elections to raise the profile of their issues. One conclusion of the Transeuropa Caravans is that civil society organisations, EU institutions and other public authorities do have a huge pool of talent on which to draw and which they should try to keep active - not just in the run-up to a European election but on a more regular basis.

**2. European networking:** The project produced good examples of local actions that can be scaled-up across Europe through networking. This can apply to almost any sphere of activity but it is particularly evident in the area of European rights to freedom of movement and migration. A trend observed on the tours was towards initiatives to break down barriers between migrants, European citizens and local people. Sometimes these initiatives are a reaction against anti-immigration rhetoric spread by the currently dominating political discourse, and sometimes they are introduced with the support of more enlightened local authorities. A conclusion from the Transeuropa Caravans is that mobile citizens in the EU would benefit from stronger transnational networks of organisations working with the same methods for the same groups of people across the continent.

**3. Black spots:** Although it is right to show that across Europe there are far more advanced practices than are generally believed to be, which are reasons for optimism, there is also a retreat to nationalism, a shrinking civil space and resistance to change which can take on extreme forms. These critical situations identified by the Caravans should be mentioned and here action is required, not just by civil society but also by public authorities including the EU institutions:

**Advice deserts.** There is a contrast between the capitals where some services exist for migrants and small or medium sized cities where there is nothing, not even where there are important inflows of foreign workers from across the border and enterprise zones to attract new investments. The Caravan teams met a number of workers who, having had to fight for their own rights, were prepared to defend the rights of others. With support, they may be encouraged to fill the gap with reference to availability of advice. There is a need for further research across Europe to identify the zones of significant migration movement without any corresponding institutional support.

**Support for civil society under pressure.** The impression from the Caravans routes is that there are initiatives across Europe which are springing up continuously to counteract anti-immigration or racist rhetoric. In areas of migration organisations are seen badly by governments as acting against the national interest. We believe that such groups need an extraordinary support in order to maintain their activities albeit the often nationalistic environments they operate in. We also uphold that a new EU programme on rights and values should be designed to provide structural support to such organisations.

#### **Transeuropa Caravans recommendations:**

Work towards a European network of associations defending European citizens' rights.

Carry out more place - based research into migration flows and needs for local support.

Take inspiration from local practices to introduce a European democratic culture.

Train and involve young people in Europe in the EU action plan for democracy.

Create a clearing house of citizen engagement techniques that can be used transnationally to spread the awareness of free movement in Europe.

Support media pluralism and independent media.

Counter nationalism and political divisiveness with a clear narrative about European values.

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