

## BREAKING NEWS: DUTCH PARLIAMENT VOTES TO RING-FENCE CITIZENS' RIGHTS

Today, Dutch parliament has vote in favour of a motion that could be crucial to avoid a catastrophic loss of rights for five million EU citizens if the UK leaves the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement. The motion was drawn up by Dutch MPs Pieter Omtzigt and Kees Verhoeven and calls on the Dutch government to lobby the European Council to salvage and implement the section on citizens' rights from the Withdrawal Agreement regardless of Brexit outcomes. Those rights, agreed over a year ago in the Withdrawal Agreement, are the only way to comprehensively protect the 3,6 million EU citizens in the UK and British citizens in the EU.

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'. Citizens' rights organisation the3million argues that this is not enough: dealing with the complications of healthcare, pensions and social security will require a complex web of bilateral arrangements. In addition, this approach 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.

Dutch MEP Sophie in 't Veld says, "It is high time to clarify the situation for the five million citizens who, for two years now, have been waiting with fear and trembling to see what their fate will be. Many of them were born as EU citizens, with full EU citizenship rights. Now they are being deprived of their civil rights in one fell swoop. This is unacceptable in a democratic constitutional state."

Monique Hawkins, Dutch spokeswoman for the3million, says: "We are delighted that the Dutch government is putting people before politics. It is time to let the five million Brexit hostages go free at last, and finally give us all the certainty we need."

### What does ring-fencing mean?

Ring-fencing means to rescue those parts of the Withdrawal Agreement that deal with citizens' rights and their lifelong protection. These were painstakingly negotiated, and according to Hawkins it is "utter madness to risk throwing them in the bin. They **cannot** be negotiated **after** Article 50, as the EU will then not have the same competency."

The first step has already been made: on 27<sup>th</sup> February, in an extremely rare show of unity in the UK Parliament, British MPs **unanimously** expressed their support for this. Today, the Dutch parliament has done the same. the3million hopes that Dutch support for upholding citizens' rights will be the catalyst for the European Council to declare its support in turn.