

Citizenship

At the Conservative Party conference recently the Prime Minister talked about the spirit of citizenship, *"That spirit that means you respect the bonds and obligations that make our society work. That means a commitment to the men and women who live around you, who work for you, who buy the goods and services you sell."*

Precisely. Except that Mrs. May completely misses her own point. I am (still) a Citizen of the European Union – at least until Mrs. May revokes that. Those bonds and commitment are there to family members, whether living in Newcastle, Lincolnshire or Bristol, in Paris or in Hämeenlinna, Finland. As the owner of my own small business, that commitment and respect is there for my clients and suppliers, irrespective of whether they are in Yorkshire or the Isle of Wight, in Lisbon or in Krakow. The obligations and commitment to "the men and women who live around me" is expressed in my work as a local councilor in Schwalbach, the town where I live, but also in my longstanding membership of professional institutions in the United Kingdom. But because I do not limit those bonds, commitments and respect to the United Kingdom, she claims I do not even know what citizenship is about.

Mrs. May's limited vision seeks to discredit any who sees citizenship in this wider European context. And citizenship should in any case be about more than Mrs. May's definition.

Citizenship is also about shared values. Much of our European value system is based on Judeo-Christian traditions, irrespective of actual religious belief. But many specifically European values go back to the Enlightenment, developed in the eighteenth century by people such as John Locke in England, David Hume and Adam Smith in Scotland, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France and Immanuel Kant in Germany. These values include a respect for the rights of the individual, equality of mankind, religious tolerance, freedom of speech and of the press, solidarity and the rule of law. These values were developed in Europe and are shared across Europe.

Citizenship is also about loyalties. Loyalty is visible in support for sports teams to which Theresa May's own pride in the British performance in the Olympic Games bears witness. I support our local Frankfurt football team, Eintracht. But at international level no one was more pleased at the success of the team from my native Wales in the European Championship in France than I.

And citizenship is also about 'home'. My profession causes me to travel outside Europe. I have lived in South Africa and India. I am regularly in the United States and China. But I know that when I am back in Europe, I am back home, whether my plane lands in Manchester or in London, in Paris, Amsterdam or Frankfurt.

Mrs. May is, like me, a Citizen of the European Union. But it is clear she does not "understand what the very word means", if she is prepared to give it up merely for the sake of a little peace and quiet in the Conservative party.

Christopher Higman