

French

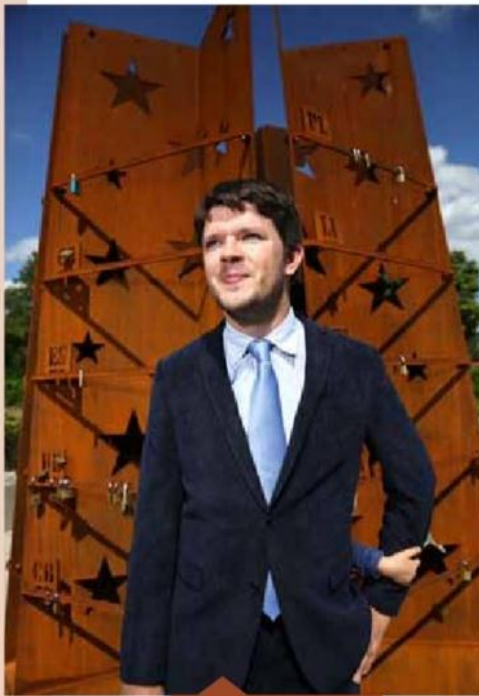
"COMMON VALUES"

Four year resident Nicolas Delaby gives his insight into living and working in the Grand Duchy, in the 22nd instalment of Delano's "Think Local" interview series.

Interview by *Aaron Granwald* Photography by *Steve Eastwood*

After growing up in Dunkirk, in northern France, Nicolas Delaby lived in Minsk, Belarus—where he met his wife—then Lille and Brussels. The father of two young children moved to Luxembourg in 2009, where he is a project manager for food safety lab Eurofins and an organiser of the "Let Me Vote" campaign for equal voting rights among expat EU citizens.

www.letmevote.eu



NICOLAS DELABY
Photographed in Schengen

AG: Why did you leave Belgium?

ND: I must say it was not the choice of our life to come to Luxembourg. [It was] for my job.

AG: What surprised you most when you got here?

ND: I'm [still] surprised that it's so calm, and that's the first picture you get. Usually people who don't know Luxembourg think, 'oh, it's a place where there's no life'. It took us some time, we dug into it, and we got in touch with so many people. It's easy to get linked to people here.

AG: How did you become involved in the 'Let Me Vote' campaign?

ND: At the time, I was a bit homesick and was listening to [radio station] France Inter. Philippe Cayla, who is the boss of Euronews, was explaining there is a new democratic mechanism introduced by Europe, called the ECI [European Citizens Initiative]. He wanted an ECI to create the right to vote for foreigners in Europe. I just sent him an email, and we started to work together on creating this initiative.

I was very interested in the idea that it's a new way of doing politics. You can propose an idea, collect signatures, and trigger a process at the European level. The topic itself was very interesting. Because I believe now that we are free to move, free to work where we want, and we should be free to vote where we are.

AG: What specifically is your petition demanding?

ND: That when European people, members of the 28 states of Europe, decide to live in another European country, they are considered then as a 'national resident'. So, a French in Luxembourg or a Luxembourger in France should be equal citizens.

We are now in a common union where we share common values based on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

We have many, many common values between the 28. I still see a difference between being an American and being a European, but between us, we are more like cousins. That's why, if I decide to live in Luxembourg, I should have the same rights.

AG: That includes the immediate right to vote in national elections?

ND: Everything.

AG: What happens in January, when your one year signature collection process ends?

ND: If we reach one million signatures then the European Commission will have to look into the proposal and trigger a debate within the European institutions. They don't have to follow, but they at least have to discuss.

AG: Are there a lot of people opposed?

ND: There are quite a few.

AG: What's their argument?

ND: [Some say] if you want to vote in France, you have to be French. Some other people are afraid that a small part of the population would then take the lead. Like in Luxembourg, that foreigners would decide. Because if you look at who works and pays taxes today in Luxembourg, it's us basically. And maybe they're afraid of that.

AG: But linguistically speaking, maybe foreigners can't follow the political debate?

ND: If you see in Luxembourg that there is a big Italian or Portuguese community, then the political parties translate their programme. [And] if you're able to work in a foreign country, normally you should be able to understand the political programme. //