

# A 12- POINT PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECIT FOUNDATION ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

## INTRODUCTION

ECIT was established in June 2015 as a **public Foundation** under Belgian law. For the first three years, the organisation has been developed on a voluntary basis. It was not until 2019 that thanks to participation in a project for the European elections - [Caravans 2019 by European Alternatives](#) - that the foundation had the minimum budget necessary to begin recruiting staff. This is a good time to consider the programme for 2021 and beyond, especially since this turning point for ECIT coincides with a new European Parliament and a new European Commission with an ambitious [Recovery plan "NextGenerationEU"](#).

In the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic any programme has to be flexible and at this time any European activity raises more questions than answers:

- a) what type of activity is best suited to restrictions on budgets, travel and lack of face-to-face interaction? For example, ECIT activities are organised around an annual event, but maintaining a focus on event organisation, even on-line does not appear realistic;
- b) future directions for EU citizenship are far from clear. The Commission will publish its next tri-annual report on Union citizenship in November 2020. The [ECIT annual event](#) on 1-2 December will also influence priorities for next year. Whilst waiting for some time for these opportunities to discuss future work and develop other activities ECIT has concentrated throughout 2020 on the one issue of the political rights attached to EU citizenship and the launch of the ECI;
- c) more broadly, what will be the main context(s) for proposals to develop EU citizenship? Should it be the Conference on the future of Europe which is much delayed? Or, the implementation of the Recovery plan toward a more digital and sustainable Europe? Or, the normal legislative programme which appears in the [Commission programme for 2021](#) to be expanding?

Another factor which does influence the programme is ECIT's move to 53 Rue D'Arlon and SECO (Salon for European civic organisations) near the European Parliament, where we share a large open space with the [Good lobby](#), [EUMANS](#) and other organisations involved with citizenship and democracy. It is the right environment to place a think tank on European citizenship. With the launch of the ECI on political rights ECIT may have found an **effective low-cost business model**, combining a legal structure and think tank which hosts and passes on know-how to a task force of Erasmus students, who take the lead for a particular activity. At 104 Rue D'Arlon the fund for the European quarter is opening up a space for dialogue between citizens and the EU. ECIT should support these efforts to create a civic space and which echo its statutory objective to create a European citizen's house.

ECIT already has a **track record**:

- The approach adopted for a European citizenship which is holistic and based on rights, participation and belonging is making headway. ECIT has built up contents and translated its concept in guidelines and a set of demands to strengthen European citizenship. This approach,

to bring together the scattered elements of EU citizenship, is echoed by a call by the European Parliament before the last elections for a citizenship charter;

- The annual event on European citizenship, now in its fifth edition, is well established bringing together students and researchers, civil society activists and policy makers. This event has attracted partners and received the patronage of the European Parliament;
- The value of ECIT's role **has been recognised too by the European Commission**. ECIT has been sought out as a partner for research and European networking, both as a contents provider and through its ability to promote the results of its projects with the EU Institutions;
- Since the preparations and launch of the ECI "[Voters Without Borders](#)" the foundation has become much better known and well connected to a wider European circle lead especially by the young generation, which includes those who have grown up with the concept of EU citizenship.

This programme for the next four years has **four main objectives**:

- 1. Develop ECIT's role as the only think tank working exclusively on European citizenship** in all its aspects. The foundation should do this by monitoring EU citizenship and promoting its guidelines and demands towards the EU. By bringing together and expanding its constituency of civil society activists, academics and policy makers, a more effective lobby for European citizenship should emerge. One option could be to set up a friendship group on European citizenship in the European Parliament;
- 2. Make EU citizenship more popular** for which objectives are put forward here such as producing a book for the general public and developing a training kit for active European citizenship. This implies that the foundation should enlarge its audience beyond bringing together stakeholders and develop a marketing strategy going beyond the organisation to organisation approach to appealing directly to the public;
- 3. Develop partnerships to promote education for European citizenship**. In 2018 ECIT did a report for NECE (Networking for European Citizenship Education) examining European policies and programmes. The report has been updated recently and the work on citizenship education should continue. A declaration to be adopted by NECE at its annual conference in Berlin on 5-8 November should be promoted and followed up in 2020;
- 4. Promote a stronger and more inclusive citizenship** by pursuing objectives to add new European rights such as the right to vote in a country other than one's own not just in local and European elections, but also in regional and national elections as well as referenda.. Apart from full political rights for European citizens, the foundation should also promote new European social, environmental and health rights over the next five years.

## **A 12-POINT PROGRAMME OF OBJECTIVES FOR 2021-2022**

ECIT is the only European think tank working permanently on European citizenship. It should gradually build up a reputation as a useful resource on civil society activism, research and policy initiatives on European citizenship. This means finding resources for regular monitoring of publications, events, legal development. The information is available but scattered. The basic structure of the website with its division into the three components of EU citizenship it is A-Z of resources, FAQ and section about ECIT initiatives is sound. Material gathered by the annual events is a useful resource on European citizenship. The website contains material for a start-up organisation but lacks visibility. More regular updating of the website and use of social media are required along with more colour and animation. A regular newsletter should draw attention to the website and initiatives such as the summer university.

### **I. GUIDELINES ON EUROPEAN CITIZENS' RIGHTS, INVOLVEMENT AND TRUST.**

The guidelines are an attempt to bring together the pieces of European citizenship from across the EU Treaties. Beyond describing what this transnational citizenship is, the guidelines also recommend how it can be developed. For the summer university in 2017 a new and shorter version of the guidelines was produced, but is the text sufficiently clear and readable? Other language versions should be produced. The guidelines are linked to the draft for the demands to the EU Institutions.

### **II. TRANSFORMING THE MANIFESTO FOR THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS TO DEMANDS TO THE NEW EU INSTITUTIONS-CREATING A FRIENDSHIP GROUP ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.**

The 10-point manifesto has been discussed with the Board, changed as a result of the 2019 summer university and in general well received. Before the elections it was sent to all the European political party groupings and political groups in the European Parliament. After the annual event on 1-2 December 2020 the manifesto should be revised and updated taking into account the EU Recovery plan and the Conference on the Future of Europe. ECIT will write to all MEPs in early 2021 with a questionnaire proposing that an all-party group on European citizenship should be set up.

### **III. ANNUAL EVENT.**

In 2021, the plan is to hold the annual event at the beginning of September 2021 to coincide with the end of signature collection for the ECI "Voters Without Borders". The core programme round rights, participation and belonging should be maintained whilst making this a more popular event especially for young people with a larger number of participants than the usual 70-100 participants. One idea for the summer university in 2020 would be to focus on European citizenship in a wider Europe.

### **IV. SETTING UP ECIT OUTSIDE BRUSSELS.**

The first initiative tried by ECIT to establish an existence beyond Brussels was to appeal for student debate circles on European citizenship at universities with a critical mass of students from different countries and a relevant study and research programme. A series of three debates were held in Maastricht university in 2015-2016 and preliminary work done on setting up ECI as a foundation in the Netherlands. This approach should be tried again provided local reliable support can be found. The "Voters Without Borders" ECI (see point X) has also shown the importance of building a **stronger presence in major cities.**

## V. BREXIT, EUROPEAN RIGHTS AND THE LOSS OF EU CITIZENSHIP.

This theme is a two-edged sword in the sense that Brexit is highly significant and has raised the issue of EU citizenship as a political challenge with 65 million people liable to lose this status, whilst at the same time becoming an over dominant theme of discussion. Loss of EU citizenship has been a theme at each annual event. ECIT has also organised two Chatham house style briefings with the Commission's chief negotiator for European citizens' rights. ECIT has also made a request to intervene in case in the European court of Justice (see point xii). A possible approach for ECIT would be to **look beyond the Article 50 negotiations and propose a new vision of European citizenship** which is more accessible for refugees and migrants and can extend beyond the borders of the EU, an objective which would require Treaty reform and which might be suggested in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

## VI. A BOOK FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP.

There does appear to be a gap in the market for a more easily accessible book for the general public about European citizenship. Preliminary work has been done and there is potential interest from publishers. Preparing the manuscript could go hand in hand with developing the contents of the ECIT website. In such a book there should be space for stories from individual European citizens and surrounding design and visual features. Although the manuscript should not be more than just over 100 pages and much of the material exists, this is a harder challenge than it might appear, citizenship meaning so many things to different people. It is certainly worth the attempt. The book would be linked to the guidelines. ECIT will launch a crowd-funding campaign for the book.

## VII. A MODEL FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION.

At all the annual summer universities the issue of how to promote European citizenship education has been raised, an issue also covered by a number of large-scale research projects showing the inadequacy of existing efforts. Building on its responsibility for training of the Caravans teams in the run-up to the European elections, ECIT will be developing this project in the context of a potential research project and in cooperation with specialised organisations such as [NECE](#) (Network for European citizenship education). The aim will be to cover all the tools needed to be an active European citizen under the three components common to any democratic citizenship: **rights, participation and a wider sense of belonging.**

## VIII. EUROPEAN CITIZENS' CARD.

This is a proposal of ECIT which is worth exploring further but for which collaboration with specialised organisations would be necessary and research grants should be sought. The aim of such a card would be to **provide information and proof of a European citizens' status, rights and entitlements** moving around Europe and acting towards the EU. The proposal raises technical issues, data protection concerns and the feasibility of a multi-purpose card when there is a proliferation of different cards in addition to passports and identity cards. Such a card for which ECIT should produce a prototype could have a strong symbolic value and present advantages for citizens and the administration alike by cutting red tape. The Commission plans for a digital Europe have implications for EU citizenship. Digital citizenship is also coming on the research agenda.

## IX. EUROPEAN CITIZENS' HOUSE.

This is an old proposal which had strong support even leading to the creation of a budget line by the European Parliament in 2013. The idea has not gone away. It is a statutory objective of ECIT for which a crowd-funding campaign might be launched on the basis of a proposal which will be illustrated by

design features for a house citizens can call their own existing in Brussels but also elsewhere in the EU. The SECO premises are a start and might be linked in some way to citizen participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe. A proposal could be made to the Europe for Citizens or Erasmus programme to carry out a needs survey and a series of events across Member States. There is new interest in the future of public spaces as the pandemic leaves empty in city centres.

#### **X. ECI “VOTERS WITHOUT BORDERS”.**

European citizens are able to vote and stand as candidates in local and European elections if resident in another EU Member State, but why not in the national ones which really count, regional elections or referenda? Following the preparatory work and discussions at the ECIT annual events a task force of Erasmus students was put together, the [ECI](#) submitted in January 2020, accepted by the Commission in March and [launched](#) in September. **The Commission has put reform of the existing directives in its programme for 2021 which is a first major victory**, but signatures are slow to come. The ECI has been well promoted through European networks and the next step in 2021 will be to establish partners in major cities to shift emphasis to a more regional and national approach.

#### **XI. EU CITIZENSHIP AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.**

At the Board meeting on 2 October 2020 the proposal was made to investigate **the link between EU citizenship and fundamental rights**. The Maastricht Treaty introduced Union citizenship and the Lisbon Treaty placed it in the broader framework of the Charter of Fundamental rights. Negotiations are also beginning again for the EU to become a party to the European Convention on human rights. Within this framework **there may be scope to better protect EU citizenship as a status and enforce European rights and values**. It could also provide a context for developing a new ECI to add new social, environmental and health rights to EU citizenship.

#### **XII. OTHER TOPICS WHICH COULD BE TAKEN UP BY ECIT OR WHERE A CONTRIBUTION COULD BE MADE TO CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES OR RESEARCH BY OTHERS.**

ECIT is beginning to build connections and knowledge which can be developed further in cooperation with others. Here are examples:

- a) **Report on the current state of free movement.** Freedom of movement is both more practiced and popular whilst at the same time being more contested. Despite this there is a surprising lack of reports on the overall state of freedom of movement in the EU. It would be useful to fill this gap, especially since such reports interest the press and public opinion and provide evidence to influence policy making, particularly in order to enforce existing European rights more effectively. There is a case for looking beyond strictly legal instruments to guarantee and support the first of these rights-to live, work or study in another EU country.
- b) ECIT has requested to intervene with other organisations in an **appeal to the European Court of Justice against the loss of EU citizenship of UK citizens in the Withdrawal Agreement**. Whether or not the request is granted the case could be important for further activity on concepts of more inclusive European citizenship within the EU and in neighbouring countries.
- c) **Citizen participation in the EU.** Cooperation with The Good lobby and other organisations is a basis to develop further the comparative study done of different mechanisms-citizen deliberations, initiatives, petitions. ECIT can contribute to the debate about what is meant by a European public sphere since the SECO platform and a number of its proposals point in that direction.

## CONCLUSION

This is a first draft for discussion about what is desirable, what is feasible, what is not, what should be changed and what should be added. The programme should be revised after discussion in the Board and the ECIT conference on 1-2 December. Much depends on resources. ECIT has a table of funding opportunities which should be kept up-to-date and used constantly. The foundation is building its budget from different sources, crowdfunding, grants from foundations and applications to EU programmes. With the ECI on political rights it has also shown what is possible on a low budget and voluntary effort.

