

Report for THE ECIT FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

6th Edition

Reclaiming European citizenship

Held on Tuesday 26, Wednesday 27 and Thursday 28 October 2021



They are supporting the ECIT Foundation 6th annual conference:



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION For Freedom.



Bundeszentrale für
politische Bildung



networking
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I. Introduction

Recently, European citizenship has sadly suffered many challenges: Brexit, climate change and of course most recently the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the game in terms of the exercise of citizenship. This whole context is raising extremely important questions about the foundations of European citizenship, which were explored during the ECIT Foundation annual conference on the 26th, 27th and 28th of October 2021. Thus, the conference has attempted to go deeper into the question of where European citizenship - as the first transnational citizenship of the modern era - stands after the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also looked at ideas that are pertinent to the future of European citizenship in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE).

Against this background, the main thread running through the event was evaluation and discussions about the [ECIT Foundation's Statute on European citizenship](#)¹. This initiative is a response to a resolution of the European Parliament in January 2019 calling for a statute of citizenship alongside the Pillar of Social Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights; but also, a strong suggestion from the cross-party group of MEPs on European citizenship with whom the ECIT Foundation has been working. After months of drafting a text in an attempt to come up with a response to the European Parliament call, the annual conference has also been the occasion to collect feedback on the Statute.

Overall, European citizenship has been tackled as a holistic concept. After the opening session that provided a state of European citizenship and set the tone for the following days, the conference examined in workshops rights, participation and belonging - the three components of citizenship at any level and which stand or fall together. The ECIT Foundation's Statute is based on these three components. The conference examined them one by one, and under each of these three sessions, there were two parallel workshops. Finally, in the closing session, representatives from all workshops came together to hear and discuss the results from their respective groups.

For your information, the full programme can be found [here](#). The event was also an opportunity to collect background reading materials on European Citizenship which can be found in the annex². The 2021 edition was organised in close cooperation with NECE (Networking European Citizenship Education) which held its annual event immediately afterwards on the 28th and 29th of October, and with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation Europe. It was also organised under the umbrella of "Citizens take over Europe".

The conference was held as a hybrid event which facilitated the collection of ideas and the building of consensus: with about 173 people registered to participate online, remote participation was made possible using Zoom and Howspace, whilst around 50 people were able to meet on spot in Brussels at the Press Club, StamEuropa and SECO. The conference brought together civil society activists, researchers, policymakers and EU affairs students to this hybrid discussion on European citizenship who kept a high standard of debate over two days of plenary sessions and six parallel workshops producing a wealth of material.

¹ The ECIT Foundation's Statute on European citizenship is now available on the online platform for the CoFoE to encourage a new round of discussions and changes. Later in the report, the ECIT Foundation's Statute on European citizenship is also referred to as "the ECIT Foundation's Statute" or "the Statute".

² A reading list is attached to this report containing all available background and other useful materials. See annex 1.

II. Summary of the workshops

1. Tuesday 26th

a. Opening session: State of European Citizenship and its prospects

The opening session set the stage for further discussion on European citizenship on the following day. It provided headlines and suggestions from successive panels of politicians, academics and practitioners about the current state of European citizenship, as well as reactions to the ECIT Foundation Statute.

i. Politics of European Citizenship

The first panel of the opening session was moderated by **Suzana Carp**, ECIT Foundation Board member, who introduced **the ECIT Foundation's Statute** to the panellists and the audience. This Statute takes up many ideas being put forward by civil society and its aims can be summarised under three C's³:

- Clarify European citizenship: by piecing together European Citizenship's aspects of rights, participation and belonging that already exist and are scattered across different structures, the ECIT Foundation seeks to go beyond the framework created by the Maastricht Treaty;
- Consolidate European citizenship: by spotting the missing gaps, the ECIT Foundation intends to identify where reforms are needed, in particular when it comes to health rights, environmental rights, social rights, children's rights and full political rights⁴;
- Create more rights: lastly, the Statute proposes more ambitious reforms on a continental scale for a more inclusive European citizenship.

The panel then featured the contributions of members of the cross-party group of MEPs on European Citizenship:

First, MEP **Victor Negrescu** emphasised that the momentum generated by the CoFoE should be used to put the issue of European citizenship education on the agenda. It is a very important occasion to raise the profile and visibility of European citizenship and try to come up with concrete proposals through the digital platform. According to him, the CoFoE moves slowly and lacks ambition in the format; however, European citizenship is frequently mentioned in the discussions, making the CoFoE an opportunity to reclaim this citizenship. Generally speaking, Victor Negrescu repeated his support to the ECIT Foundation's Statute and underlined the importance of building a strong alliance on this topic. In his opinion, "reclaiming" this citizenship is extremely relevant since it means giving it content, visibility and strength because it is not clearly defined in the European legislation.

Then MEP **Maite Pagazaurtundúa** expressed her support for the ECIT Foundation's Statute, stating that it has the potential to strengthen European citizenship, as well as pointing out the great potential of the digital platform as a tool to get more people talking about it. Some of the citizens' proposals

³ See annex 2: "The structured heart of EU citizenship".

⁴ Concerning full political rights, the ECIT Foundation supports the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Voters Without Borders" demanding full political rights for mobile EU citizens. See the [website](#) for more information, and sign the [ECI](#) to show your support.

submitted on the platform should be taken up to be included in the Statute and used to reinforce European democratic identity. She stressed that the Statute requires greater support - including from within the Institutions. In this regard, she cautioned that balance in revising the Statute is essential and emphasized the importance of being “realistically ambitious”. Some proposals might be too ambitious for the EU Institutions to repeat on content. For what concerns enhancing citizens’ participation, Maite Pagazaurtundúa stressed the importance of establishing permanent citizens’ structures, which the first step could be to turn the CoFoE digital platform into a permanent platform.

MEP **Damian Boeselager** stated that the need for a clearly defined European citizenship stems from the current situation on the European continent: the EU must reassert meaningful European citizenship in times of crisis. Transferring competencies to the EU level is neither sufficient nor satisfactory, and European citizenship as well as the rights that come with it must be safeguarded against the recent threats. In this regard, Damian Boeselager expressed his support for the ECIT Foundation’s Statute, describing it as an essential initiative built on real-life issues and striving to relate to real-life people. In particular, he favoured an open character to the European citizenship rights⁵ and reiterated the importance of the work on voting rights and the reform of the European electoral law⁶.

Following these introductory speeches, the two last contributions were made by video messages.

Vice-president of the European Parliament **Fabio Massimo Castaldo** started by saying that the CoFoE is a great and fundamental opportunity to strengthen European citizenship for the first time within the European decision-making process to a bottom-up approach. He stressed the European Parliament commitment to engage young people within the democratic debate on the future of Europe. In light of all of this, it is pretty clear that the CoFoE has revealed its potential in bringing together people and ideas all over the continent. Nevertheless, this opportunity would not be wasted only if these outcomes were to be turned into binding conclusions of the CoFoE. Vice-president Fabio Massimo Castaldo also expressed his support to the ECIT Foundation’s Statute, agreeing with the need for extended rights and responsibilities entailed under European citizenship to the digital environment. He also supported the need to reform the exercise of European electoral rights.

Finally, MEP **Brando Benifei** emphasised the need for a follow-up to have the CoFoE delivering on citizens participation issues. In particular, he supported the idea of pushing for transnational lists and connecting European elections to the actual decision-makers that are put in the various positions at the European level. Hence the importance of efforts in formal and informal education on European rights so that the people can be involved in the participatory process, although it is not enough as being a citizen is not only about voting rather than being able to learn how to be part of society in a full way. This is the kind of effort the EU needs to invest in to be more inclusive and involve all its citizens in the building of EU democratic life. In this regard, MEP Brando Benifei repeated his support to the Statute as an example of good practice to better inform about European citizenship rights.

Overall, the idea of framing and consolidating European citizenship by bringing together its features of rights, participation and belonging and linking it to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Pillar of Social Rights gained significant support.

⁵ Article 9 of the ECIT Foundation’s Statute.

⁶ Article 13 of the ECIT Foundation’s Statute.

The second panel of the opening session provided a thought-provoking discussion on reconstructing the academic debate on European citizenship in the current political “moment” of the COVID-19 pandemic and the CoFoE. The panellists discussed how to realise the potential of a transnational citizenship, going beyond traditional normative theories of European citizenship, by reassessing Freedom of Movement, the political agency of citizens, and moving towards a more equal application of rights.

Jo Shaw, Professor at the University of Edinburgh, spoke about **the nature of European citizenship**, highlighting that while the values of freedom of movement and non-discrimination are the foundations of European citizenship, it is intended to go beyond them. European citizenship was established as an evolutionary concept which inevitably calls into question national democracies and frameworks as it represents a challenge to the Rule of law at the national level and questions the legitimacy of the EU institutions. However, despite support from the Treaties and the European Parliament, the negative perception surrounding the legal status of European citizenship and the sense of self as Europeans impairs its ability to stand up in front of national frameworks. The history of stop-start negotiation and ratification in national contexts (new constitutionalism and failed referenda in Ireland, Denmark; Brexit) has had an impact on European citizenship, revealing its unstable equilibrium while also opening new avenues for debate: European citizenship as the fountain of the polity - one can not proceed without the other.

Espen Daniel Hagen Olsen, Professor of Political Science at Oslo Metropolitan University, built his intervention on his recent book, *Challenging European Citizenship, Ideas and Realities in contrast*, which attempts to **reconstruct the academic debate on European citizenship**. European citizenship is a manifestation of European integration, deriving citizenship from an old treaty basis that put at the time mobile workers at the core of this first transnational citizenship. However, there is also a conception of European citizenship based on Human rights, putting forward the concept of equality as a key attribute of citizenship which inactive should provide all EU citizens with equal rights. This very theoretical and normative approach of European citizenship is confronted with the reality of citizenship as a social status: differentiated status of right based on social status not equal for all, ECJ rights are very thin and not evenly applied. From this issue, potential solutions are put forward in his book:

- To redevelop freedom of movement as a principle, not only as a legal right but as a political phenomenon, free mobility;
- To achieve more multi-level discussion of European citizenship that would include social, economic and common life (plea to see the whole picture);
- To have more equal application of European citizenship, economic and political active versus inactive, refugees versus economic migrants, the proliferation of inequality, contrary to normative promise in the 1990s.

Finally, **Ulrike Guérot**, Democracy Lab, took the floor to attempt to **unravel European citizenship** by presenting the debate that has surrounded it since 1992. A constitutional crisis was averted in 2003. Citizenship debates grew heated and divisive in 2009, marking the beginning of a shift in terminology, from integration to shaping democracy with citizens as agents. Ulrike Guérot underlined that nowadays, 18 years after the constitutional crisis, we are in a different momentum for the CoFoE, and it is critical to have an opinion. The CoFoE can be seen as an opportunity for emancipation.

The third panel discussed how policy reforms, participatory democracy, the media and shared experience might help to make European citizenship more intelligible and accessible.

Srd Kisevic, policy officer at DG JUST, delivered a detailed presentation and analysis on the **2020 Citizenship report**. He stated that the aim is to close certain gaps and increase legal clarity for citizens to enjoy their rights by taking a more practical approach. He also explained that next to this report, the European Commission published a broader document that sets up more policy vision that the European Commission intends to pursue over the next three years. This document goes beyond the rights mentioned in the European Treaties, attempting to bring together policies and programmes from various policy areas for European citizenship to better match the expectations of European citizens, and for citizens to perceive their status as European citizens in a broader sense than just legal provisions in the European Treaties. He concluded by stating that the implementation phase requires involvement not only from EU Member States officials but also from civil society representatives and academia.

Then, **Alberto Alemmano**, The Good Lobby, discussed **why European citizens should engage at the European level as European citizens**. He noted that European citizens can participate in European politics in two ways: through electoral rights (representative democracy) or direct participation (participatory democracy). When it comes to representative democracy, European citizens can participate by voting at the national level rather than at the European level, undermining the transnational potential of European democracy. The flip side of the coin is the situation of political rights for mobile EU citizens: most of them do not exercise their right to vote. In this regard, Alberto Alemanno gave his support to the “Voters Without Borders” initiative. When it comes to participatory democracy, the EU paradoxically offers many more channels than nation-states; however, most of these channels of participation are not only very little known across the general population, but they are also very little used and not made very user friendly. In his opinion, representative democracy and participatory democracy are “two ships passing in the night” because the EU Institutions (representative democracy) should be much more open and inclusive in terms of participation.

Claudia Delpero, editor of Europe Street, talked about the **link between European citizenship and media coverage**. First, from a top-political level, recent events have demonstrated the relevance of European citizenship, since there has been a desire and interest on the political level to communicate political views beyond national borders and to citizens from other EU Member States. From the point of view of the citizens, the questions of what citizens see in the media of this transnational citizenship that they have arisen. Based on surveys that Europe Street have conducted, it appears that, while there is widespread political interest in this transnational concept of citizenship, there is not yet a similar degree of enthusiasm among citizens. Claudia Delpero also spoke about her initiative Europe Street, which was created shortly after the Brexit referendum precisely to provide a transnational point of view of the news and to inform citizens about their rights.

Virginia Fiume, coordinator of EUMANS and of the EU SIGN DAY coalition, focused her introductory speech on suggestions for envisioning a more **European citizenship-based ecosystem of participation** that extend from very local municipalities to the European level. First, she introduced the audience to the EU SIGN DAY coalition, which is an initiative that brings together citizens’ committees of all ongoing European Citizens’ Initiatives (ECI), as well as a number of civil society organisations to call for the 9th of May (Europe Day) to be designated as ECI day. The problem with the ECI tool is that it

has structural flaws that prevent it from being used by European citizens. According to Virginia Fiume, one solution could be to create and further develop a digital participation ecosystem so that European citizenship can be technologically enabled. She believes that one of the cornerstones of European citizenship practice should be these digital improvements, in relation to political rights.

Finally, **Michael McLoughlin**, rapporteur for the EESC Year of Youth 2022, explored **new ways to improve the European citizenship experience** without relying solely on the Treaties. While acknowledging that the Treaty-based approach is one of the best ways to go because it provides clarity, he also pointed out that discussions about European citizenship lack passion and practical experience to appeal to the people, particularly the youth. Looking at Ireland, it becomes clear that strong mutual recognition, rather than regulation, can help two countries achieve a very high level of citizen integration. Mutual recognition is something that the EU Member States have among themselves, hence it may be worthwhile to explore new avenues for achieving European integration. Overall, more substance and passion must be invested in European integration in order to move it beyond the Brussels bubble.

b. Evening session: Post-Brexit European Citizenship

A workshop on Brexit was held on the evening of the first day of the conference to serve as an informal brainstorming breakout group on where European citizenship stands in the post-Brexit era. The ECIT Foundation Statute attempts to define a more inclusive citizenship beyond the EU, as being a citizen of Europe is wider than the EU.

Ruvi Ziegler, Associate Professor in International Refugee Law at the University of Oxford, opened the post-Brexit citizenship discussion by clarifying the different ways in which a person is or has been related to European citizenship throughout their lives. **Four types of citizens** in connection to the EU were given for overall understanding. The first category is EU citizens within the EU who can be split into two categories - the stayers, as opposed to the mobile EU citizens who make use of their freedom of movement within the EU. The second category is former EU citizens: this applies to the British citizens who have lost their European citizenship with the UK withdrawing from the EU. The third category is third-country nationals living in the EU. Finally, the last category gathers EU citizens living in the neighbouring countries. Given the complexity and the diversity of the linkages that bind persons to the EU in one way or another, as well as the fuzzy distinction between European citizenship and EU citizenship, Ruvi Ziegler suggested a circular approach to who can be considered a European.

Following this explanation, **Nora Siklodi**, Senior Lecturer at the University of Portsmouth, commented on the **ECIT Foundation Statute** and its relevance to bringing together the concept of European citizenship⁷. In her opinion, it lacks emphasis on the sense of belonging, which undermines the engagement of civil society. Overall, more balance needs to be brought to the Statute. On **deepening the sense of belonging**, Nora Siklodi explained that there are two potential approaches. The first one is a civic approach founded on the values of freedom and equal opportunities, and that seeks to make European citizenship and residency more visible (EU identity card). The problem is that three of the four above-mentioned citizens' categories do not fall under this description, making a civic approach to the European sense of belonging quite excluding. The second approach is a cultural/ethnic approach which challenges the European citizens' sense of belonging because they do not feel

⁷ The Statute attempts to provide a comprehensive approach of European citizenship around the three concepts in the notion of any citizenship: rights, belonging and participation.

European unless it is a sense of geographical recognition. In this regard, free movement within the EU aids in the development of a sense of European belonging, but what helps, even more, is living outside the EU since once you are no longer in the EU you realise the benefits that you enjoyed while there.

Ruvi Ziegler took the floor again reminding the audience of the main argument made against the dismantling of **the distinction between citizen and non-citizen**, namely that the way states within the EU work cannot be completely collapsed. While it should not matter what kind of national you are to have certain rights, the truth is that the functioning of states does not allow for much flexibility when it comes to the many types of citizens and non-citizens.

Finally, **Jane Morrice**, specialist on the topic of Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit, explained how **the Good Friday Agreement affects the post-Brexit discussion about European citizenship**. The situation in Ireland and Northern Ireland concerning Brexit raises several issues, including what it means to be European, the role of CJEU and the border in the Irish Sea. Furthermore, according to her, people in the EU have no notion what their European citizenship is worth: they have no idea what they are entitled to. In this regard, making European citizenship more visible is much needed.

2. Wednesday 27th

a. *European Citizens' Rights and the Rule of law*

i. *Freedom of movement rights in relation to the EU Digital COVID Certificate*

This workshop explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on freedom of movement rights and whether it is possible to forecast possible future trends. The goal was to assess whether freedom of movement has been restored with the EU Digital COVID Certificate, or whether the EU still resembles an array of different systems and uncoordinated restrictions.

First, **Philippe Vlaeminck**, lawyer and specialist in EU law, discussed **how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted freedom of movement rights**. With the closure of borders during the COVID-19 pandemic, people's freedom was largely restricted, while restrictions were expected to be based on a valid justification and no discrimination. He stated that the EU Digital COVID Certificate is a crucial step towards reopening the borders and facilitating free movement rights; however, borders controls continued, and free movement within the Schengen area has not yet been fully restored. Hence the question is whether the constraints imposed by the EU Member States are necessary and proportionate since the EU has very limited authority in this area. Philippe Vlaeminck stated that a better-defined precautionary principle is needed so that the EU Member States do not overuse them in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic raises the question of whether the principle of free movement and the balances of power between the EU Member States and the EU need to be revised.

Then, **Catharina Sørensen**, Deputy Director at Think Tank EUROPA, gave an overview **of border controls processes** since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, there were more border closures than at any other time in the EU's history, and there is a lack of transparency in the border closure coordination. Also, border controls were not implemented for health reasons, but rather because of pre-crisis perceptions toward borders; many EU Member States understand that closing borders give people a sense of security. The issue is that there is no proof that border closure helped combat the

virus. She emphasized that although border closure remains a national competence, there has to be better coordination between the EU Member States.

Steen Illeborg, Europeans Throughout The World (ETTW), tackled the topic of **expats in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Indeed, the pandemic has affected policy-making and our social lives, it stigmatized expats who were dubbed “infectious people”. Associations defending expats are having many difficulties in protecting them and tackling discrimination, and cross-border workers and those who live far away from their home country continue to face numerous challenges. Before we reclaim freedom of movement, we must consider expat discrimination. Steen Illeborg also made many strong connections between his proposals and the ECIT Foundation’s Statute.

Iris Goldner Lang, Jean Monnet Professor of EU law at the University of Zagreb, discussed the issue of **border closure as a precautionary measure**. She reminded the audience that free movement was hampered by restrictions decided unilaterally by the EU Member States without coordination. The restrictions’ justifications focused on public health concerns when the Schengen regulations do not include such justifications⁸. The question, therefore, becomes whether the COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as an internal security and policy threat. Iris Goldner Lang suggested Schengen should be amended to avoid future uncertainties. According to EU law, travel restrictions are permissible, but they must be based on non-discrimination and proportionality; however, these principles were violated. According to her, because we did not know any alternatives to restrictions at the beginning of the pandemic, the precautionary principle has a transformative power on proportionality.

Finally, **María Lidón Lara Ortiz**, Professor at the Jaume I University, **discussed the adequacy of Covid passes**, and she questioned whether restrictions on freedom of movement imposed by the national governments are in line with fundamental rights. According to Schengen regulations, border controls can be implemented for illegal immigration, but not for single states’ interests. National Covid passes have restored freedom of movement, but they do not ensure it, and they have not helped to achieve complete uniformization across the EU.

ii. How to enforce European rights and the Rule of law?

This workshop was an opportunity to analyse how the Rule of law and democratic practice have been affected by the emergency measures and whether the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a pretext in some countries to entrench authoritarian measures. A particular theme was developed as a result of the 2020 ECIT Foundation annual conference: how to encourage more bottom-up actions by citizens raising awareness of violations of the Rule of law and taking them into account.

First, **Kalypto Nicolaidis**, School of Transnational governance EUI (ULB), discussed **the Rule of law in the light of the current European crisis**, and how to protect it. According to her, the EU Institutions used to be the guardians of the Rule of law, but that role has vanished. In the light of the recent challenges, the EU has to face, the most important issue that should be put on the table on European citizenship is how we can find a more valuable tool to protect citizens interests and the Rule of law. The recent developments in Hungary and Poland have brought this issue to the forefront, but it is important to not overlook the importance of safeguarding the Rule of law, which is a cornerstone of human rights: everyone, including refugees, has an instinct for the Rule of law. There are several

⁸ Only justifications connected to public policy and threats to internal security.

stages of implementing the European law from above, but the question is how we can be more forceful on the topic. Kalypso Nicolaidis stated that the most effective approach to preserve the Rule of law is through empowering people from below. As a result, the Rule of law narrative is critical: it must become a story that we can tell. On the Lisbon Treaty, Kalypso Nicolaidis said that it concerns constitutional identity, which should not be ignored. The consequence is that one thing does not conflict with European law supremacy unilaterally. She also reminded the audience of the characteristics of the Rule of law, which includes clarity, thoroughness, equal treatment and impartiality.

Then **Natacha Kazatchkine**, Open Society Foundation European Policy Institute, discussed **the link between the Rule of law and European citizenship rights**, and the consequences of recent developments in both Hungary and Poland on European law. According to her, nowadays' the issue is active citizenship and how to bring the Rule of law forward as a dual entity enforced by citizens and the EU Institutions. Over the years, the primacy of EU legislation has been questioned but, as with human rights law, it evolved and that is how it works. Natacha Kazatchkine also warned about how the Rule of law can be misused and how much we must be careful of authoritarian regimes using it for their ends: it is not only how the EU can be a supporter of the Rule of law adherence, but also how the EU can be an officer in Rule of law compliance. Although EU law can be more about constitutional identity or national identity, the EU must pay close attention to what is happening in Hungary and Poland right now. In this regard, in the last few years, there has been a slew of infringement procedures: the EU now has new jurisprudence about freedom of association and academic freedoms.

Jeremy Bierbach, an attorney, talked about the obstacles that **personal rights abuses** put on the development of European citizenship and the protection of the Rule of law in the EU. He said that EU citizens are frequently subjected to personal rights violations by EU Member States and, in some cases, directly by EU authorities. As a consequence, the EU has grown and developed through these challenges.

Lasse Hansen, a participant, stated that the Rule of law is linked to issues of identity; people follow the law to safeguard the values and beliefs they seek to protect. The basic concept is to promote citizen education to increase adherence to the Rule of law. Once again during the exchanges, European citizenship education was brought up as a key issue for the future of Europe.

b. European Citizens Involvement and Democratic Participation in the EU

i. The campaign for voting rights across borders

This workshop heard about progress with the ECI "Voters Without Borders" and how, after a period of consultation, the European Commission intended to reform the directives on European citizens participation in municipal and European elections. In turn, issues about voting across borders were put in the broader context of how to make the European Parliament elections in 2024 more European.

First, **Thomas Peutz**, D66 Delft, spoke about his involvement in his political party and their efforts to **broaden foreigner voting rights**. Indeed, expanding voting rights for foreigners is a main point in the election program. According to Thomas Peutz, one of the key reasons for including foreigners in elections is because they are too often left out of the conversation, allowing politicians to easily blame

the EU for everything. When EU foreigners are granted voting rights, it becomes more difficult for politicians to engage in populist discourses that blame the “other”. He hopes that other EU Member States will follow and grant foreigners the opportunity to vote, hence enhancing European citizenship and incorporating foreigners into the national political discourse.

Mayada Wadnomiry, Freiburger Wahlkries 100%, explained her organisation’s work in conducting **symbolic elections** in many cities. These symbolic elections are held for those who do not have voting rights and are not represented in the German federal elections⁹. In this regard, only in 14 out of 27 EU Member States, non-EU nationals are allowed to vote in municipal elections. The symbolic elections are staged to seem like genuine official elections to give people an authentic experience. At the end of the mock elections, the results are displayed and Freiburger Wahlkries 100% tries to contact the parties that received the most votes to bring the matter to the parliaments.

Sofia Profico, “**Voters Without Borders**” campaign, presented the same-called initiative. As it stands today, there are two main difficulties. The first one is the lack of awareness since only 2,4% of people are aware of ECI. It has become critical for “Voters Without Borders” to raise awareness on this topic because it creates political dissatisfaction and detachment from the EU. The second main difficulty is the standardisation of signing requirements: people are either hesitant to disclose personal information or the processes are too lengthy, so those who are less interested do not sign. The procedure for signing ECIs, therefore, needs to be made easier. In her opinion as a representative of the ECI “Voters Without Borders”, it is now critical to bring citizens closer to democratic processes.

Harry Panagopulos, DG JUST, talked about the initiatives he was preparing for the European Commission to **increase mobile EU citizens’ voting rights**. At the time the conference was held, they were at the stage of finalising the proposals; they are now available¹⁰. From a personal stance, Harry Panagopulos is focusing on how to increase participation and transfer knowledge to EU Member States that desire to improve in his area.

Finally, **Domènec Ruiz Devesa**, MEP Rapporteur for AFCO on European electoral law, outlined how **to make the 2024 European elections more European**. Legally – he explained – cross-border voting and nationality issues are complicated. Strengthening transnational democracy, three main gaps need to be filled. The first one is the lack of a transnational political life at the EU level as there are 27 parallel national elections based on national governments. The second one is the lack of identifiable European Parliament parties. The third one is the inability of the *Spitzenkandidat* as it functions today to promote true transnational European democracy. According to MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa, to fill these three gaps, a declaration of an EU parliamentary constituency is needed, therefore it would be clearer for citizens that they are voting for EU political parties. Also, the process of electing the European Commission president should be made more transparent.

⁹ In Germany, 14% of the residents have no right to vote: with 53 million people holding a German passport, a total of 5,3 million people is unable to vote.

¹⁰ The proposal on voting rights in municipal elections is available [here](#), the one on voting rights in European elections is available [here](#).

ii. *Will the CoFoE make citizens participation a permanent pillar of EU decision making?*

In a mid-term review of the CoFoE, this workshop will aim to assess lessons learned about engaging with citizens with examples of both good and bad practices from across Europe. For many supporters of ECIs, assemblies, participatory budgeting and other forums to bring citizens together across borders, the question is: can the CoFoE lay the basis to go beyond projects and experiments, and bring about more systemic permanent change. Could citizen participation become a pillar of the EU decision-making process?

Ophélie Masson, Citizens take over Europe, presented the **citizens' assemblies in the context of the CoFoE**. She started by reminding the audience that the CoFoE aims to reach out to everyone. The main topics are democracy, health and climate change. The process is based on transnational assemblies to reach everyone and arrive everywhere in order to address the issue that often plagues citizen participation, which is relying solely on “privileged” citizens participants. Furthermore, Ophélie Masson emphasized that the representation of the population must be based on genuine numbers: if the representatives are composed of 60% from men, it is clear that the initiatives cannot be inclusive; in fact, the population is not represented in its entirety. Citizens' participation is crucial and it must be enjoyable for all. Participation of local organisations is critical, as is the role of institutions in forming a network among them – Ophélie Masson said. Volunteering has its limitations; thus, organisations must hire specialists.

Daniela Vancic, Democracy International, shared her perspective on **citizens' participation in the context of the CoFoE**. The CoFoE is multi-levelled in organisation, and the participation is more active. The plenary, on the other hand, is different because citizens find it difficult to present their thoughts in front of a large group of people. However, the initiatives of participants are very positive and fruitful. As a member of the ECI Forum and an adviser to ECI organisers, Daniela Vancic stated that the CoFoE differs from ECI in that it is unable to reach every citizen through online platforms; yet, even if the organizations have this potential, many citizens require a voice.

Noémie Galland-Beaune, Missions Publiques, discussed **the challenges to citizens' participation**. The participation of hundreds of people from many different cultures and languages can be challenging at times, but there are criteria for selection based on inclusiveness. Of course, the method may be improved, but there are a number of ways to do so, including using a platform to track the development of the project. In terms of budget and resource allocation, the deliberative process is flawed and opaque, thus politicians have no idea how to allocate them because they do not know what citizens require. For all these reasons, the CoFoE is very important for improving citizens' participation in the European political and public debate.

Theodora Famprikezi, Programme Assistant at the European Policy Centre, gave a **presentation on the CoFoE**. The CoFoE does not intend to teach lessons, but it does want to encourage participation and initiative. The CoFoE is unique in that it is transnational. However, we need legal and cultural institutionalisation to keep change going. This institutionalisation can take three forms: a permanent structure, the organisation of deliberative processes and regulations that allow citizens to demand one.

c. A European Citizenship of Trust and Belonging

i. Should there be a right to European citizenship education for our children's future?

This panel explored the question of whether an ECI on a child guarantee for European citizenship education could be launched. The aim of the workshop was to examine the demands formulated for such an initiative and its feasibility.

Suzana Carp, Board member of the ECIT Foundation, introduced the workshop on European **citizenship education** by emphasising the importance of the latter to the audience, as many additional human rights are made possible by education. The question during the workshop was what having a right to education means, and especially whether and how digital rights and literacy should be included in citizens' right to be educated. The pandemic brought children's rights to the forefront. There is, however, a delay in responding to education, unlike the area of economics and vaccines.

First, **Selma Kropp**, researcher on the rights of the child, spoke about her research, which focuses on **EU citizens' education about EU values**. She said that children account for 18% of EU citizens, and 30% of the world population. Children's rights are established in the EU under article e(3) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU Child Guarantee 2021 aims to help marginalised children by ensuring their education and care. It focuses on the principle of participation. Not only is there protection but there is also engagement.

Then **Susanne Zels**, Values Unite, introduced the same-called initiative. The goal of **the initiative "Values Unite"** is to improve and increase EU coordination and competence in the area of EU education. Promoting the concept of participation among youngsters is critical, especially through creating an educational strategy all over the EU. Because education is a competency of the EU Member States, the EU may only play a role in informal education, and it can assist the EU Member States in organising formal education. Susanne Zels also recommends the introduction of an indicator to determine which groups require more education – this indicator is currently missing. She also believes that collaborating with the Council to improve citizens' education is fundamental. In this regard, a European platform for citizenship education should be established.

Christoph Müller-Hofstede, ECIT Foundation Board member, stressed **the importance of EU-wide efforts on citizenship education**. He quoted Angela Merkel: "We still need to do much work on social integration", "It needs to be addressed by citizens, not only by governments". According to Christoph Müller-Hofstede, the EU should try to combine participation and education in order to bring communities together by starting a discussion.

The debates addressed the problems that such an initiative may face when it came to the possibility of launching an ECI on a European right to European citizenship education. The key obstacles are that an ECI about education would require professionals and fundings, as well as the fact that ECIs have failed by far in the education area. However, such an undertaking is essential for the future of Europe. The importance of integrated education cannot be overstated, because so far there is no such thing as an EU-wide integrated education system. The best way to ensure that the EU has a secure future is to educate our youngsters. Talking about a stronger EU role in education is ambitious; however, this is the only way to avoid democratic backsliding.

ii. *The wider aspects of European citizenship of shared cultural values, belonging and identity*

This last workshop, like the opening session, concentrated on the lessons from European research and programme such as Erasmus and Horizon, and what can be expected from new programmes under the multi-annual framework such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) and the EU Recovery Plan generally. Can European citizenship become the status with which people identify to come together across different languages, cultures, histories and beliefs? What reforms such as those recommended in the ECIT Foundation Statute are necessary for this to become citizenship for all?

Louisa Slavkova, Sofia Platform Foundation, talked about **the sense of identity and belonging to the EU from a non-Brussels perspective** but from the newest EU Member States' point of view. This presentation provided an opportunity to focus on the perspectives of EU Member States other than the major ones, which raised fresh difficulties in terms of developing a European identity and European citizenship. Many symbols and emblems of the EU may be founded in the new EU Member States, as it represents a significant novelty as well as considerable economic support. Membership, however, is not felt in all of these new EU Member States. Frequently, two systems coexist, a democratic union and a different regime. On European identity, Louisa Slavkova said that there is an emotion present, and we must progress in the proper direction in order to develop this European identity. In this regard, rather than an EU-level reform, major progress in communication among people is required.

Gilles Pelayo, DG EACEA, discussed the approach of **“the Europe for Citizens”**. According to him, this “Europe for Citizens” relies on four main pillars: a legal approach to citizenship that is prolific, a strong local implementation, a strong history component as it constitutes an important shared value, and programmes like Erasmus that are essential to strengthen the European identity and dimension. Gilles Pelayo, commenting on the Brexit, added that it has shown surprisingly and unexpectedly the problem of identity and misunderstanding; the main reason for that being that the majority of the European people lack important education and information.

Finally, **Stefan Zotti**, DG EAC, commented on how **to build a feeling of European identity and belonging among the European citizens**. European citizenship was originally pushed as a common value and identity in the first decade of the 21st century, mostly in response to the terrorist attacks, the economic crises and other events. The European perspective on citizenship is educative and complements national citizenship. In Stefan Zotti's opinion, programmes like Erasmus should not only empower teachers and students in this subject but also connect different schools in order to inspire and improve others. The main purpose is to instil a feeling of identity and belonging among young people, who will eventually become voters. As a result, educating young people can become more engaged citizens, which the EU requires nowadays. Stefan Zotti also observes a major difference between one's relation to one's national citizenship and one's relationship to one's European citizenship: while European citizens do not talk about institutions and laws when describing their own country, they do so with the EU. For these reasons, young people must deepen their sense of belonging and make the EU as their own. Finally, Stefan Zotti also observed that it is vital to distinguish between enthusiasm for the EU and European citizenship. Information and education, not propaganda, is required for the spread of the sense of European identity. We must provide people

with strong and accurate information, and we can start from an emotional dimension to improve the EU policies, but we must not confuse that with fanaticism.

d. Thursday 28th: Closing session and concluding remarks

The closing session served as an opportunity for participants to come together to hear and discuss the results of their respective workshops. Following this, final remarks were made by Tony Venables, ECIT Foundation founder, Niccolo Milanese, ECIT Foundation Board member, and Suzana Carp, ECIT Foundation Board member.

The ECIT Foundation would like to thank again all participants. The feedbacks received are very positive and, in contrast to what one might expect from a hybrid event, the range of input from panellists and participants, as well as the breadth of ideas presented, was stunning. The conference demonstrated that once a debate on European citizenship can go beyond the obvious general messages, it becomes a challenging mix of analysis about Europe, the EU and the complexities and paradoxes of any citizenship regime. Everyone involved in some way in the conference contributed to framing the debate and making this event such a success.

The ECIT Foundation team would like to remind participants and panellists, as well as readers, that contributions are still very welcomed. We invite you to stay engaged through:

Signing the ECI “Voters Without Borders”

SIGN HERE

Endorsing the ECIT Foundation Statute on European citizenship on the CoFoE platform

CoFoE

Your participation will be central in maintaining momentum and remaining connected in the follow-up of the conference.

III. Annexes

Annex 1: Reading list

Internal sources:

- Proposal for a Statute on European Citizenship, ECIT Foundation. Available on the platform of the Conference on the Future of Future. Also available in French. <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/OtherIdeas/f/8/proposals/88573>.
- ECIT Foundation Fifth Annual Conference report, December 2020. Available on ECIT Foundation website: <https://ecit-foundation.eu/annual-conference-2020#5ef747fb-7fc3-4c3d-be85-e4c825cc79b1>.
- Proposal for a European Citizens’ Initiative, A European right to citizenship education for our children’s future, A guarantee for every child born in the EU to receive an education in European citizenship and values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, ECIT Foundation.

- Towards a more inclusive European Citizenship reaching beyond the EU.
- Voters Without Borders' statement, Support the ECI Voters Without Borders to improve EU democracy and citizenship.

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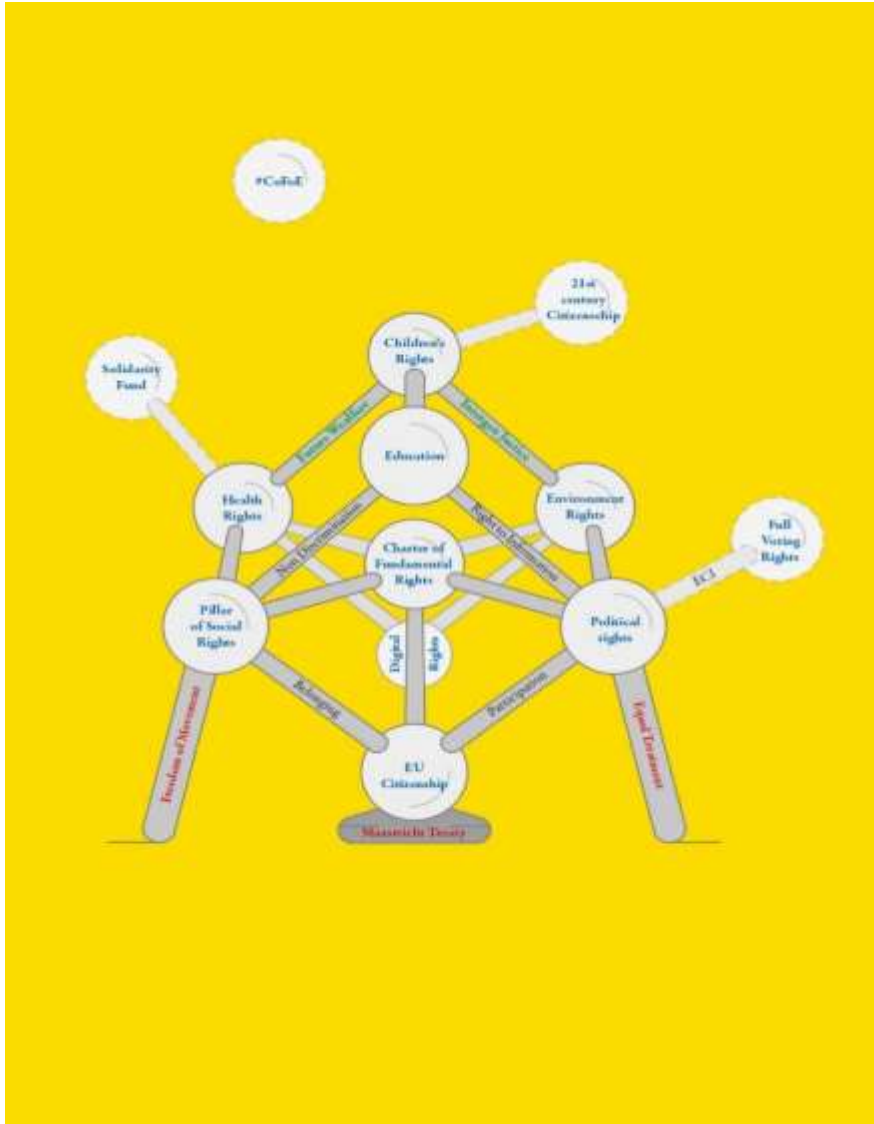
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- Resolution of the 87th conference of ministers and senators for Europe from the German states from 8th/9th September 2021 in Chemnitz.

Annex 2: The structured heart of EU citizenship

Designed by: Suzana Carp and Arh. Gabriela Barbulescu.



Annex 3: Pictures from the ECIT Foundation 6th annual conference



