

**WELCOME TO  
THE ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE  
2020**



*Annual Conference  
European  
Partnership 2020*

NOVEMBER | 9:00AM | ONLINE

## WELCOME MESSAGE TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

Tony Venables, founder of ECIT

Welcome to this 5<sup>th</sup> annual ECIT conference. First I would like to thank our sponsors, who have given us not just financial support but also advice. It's encouraging that there are over 250 people registered, more than in previous years. One might have expected fewer: the pandemic has set aside freedom of movement, the first right of the European citizen. Brexit on 31 December with still no deal and the vetoes of the EU recovery plan and multi-annual budget which is supposed to start on 1 January 2021 are slaps in the face for EU citizenship. And yet you are all here for a reason. I think it's because this first transnational citizenship of the modern era has deeper historical roots, more legal substance and is more widely practiced than generally thought. There is also a paradox about 2020, that whilst caught up in the challenge of a pandemic and focussing on the here and now, we have also had more time to think about the long term and reconsider issues we normally take for granted, including EU citizenship.

Against this background I would like to guide you through the 6 sessions on the programme and highlight some ideas from our perspective as a foundation whose sole focus is European citizenship. Our 12-point programme will tell you more.

The first session "What is the current state and outlook for European citizenship?" will we hope echo an ECIT demand for a more comprehensive, less scattered approach to EU citizenship to make it more popular. We have produced a set of guidelines and in early 2019 the European Parliament in a report by Maite Pagazaurtundia who is with us today called for "initiatives towards the consolidation of citizen-specific rights and freedoms under an EU statute of citizenship" Such a statute should be linked to both the pillar of social rights and the charter of fundamental rights. But how to forge a consensus of a European citizenship of rights, participation and belonging? One initiative which could help would be an all-party group of MEPs from different committees. When Anna Comacchio presented the "voters without borders" citizens' initiative to a recent European Parliament hearing, there were no less than four committees involved. Trying to follow EU citizenship across Commission departments, academic disciplines and civil society structures is even more complex.

The second session "How to strengthen the enforcement of European rights, values and the rule of law?" must send out a clear message that there should be no question of getting round the recent EU agreement linking the rule of law to the budget, and that instead a way should be found round the vetoes, unless hopefully they are dropped. One of our Board members, Dora Kostakopoulou is raising some fundamental questions in this panel. How to link EU citizenship more firmly to fundamental rights? Could an EU citizen invoke a violation of fundamental rights without practicing rights to freedom of movement in a national court which would refer the question to the European Court of Justice? If the local court refuses to make such a reference could there be a procedure for

citizens to be able to appeal directly to the European court. Could there be a campaign for full legal rights as the counterpart to the one on full political rights for EU citizens?

The third session will focus on the question “How to make citizenship education central to the EU recovery plan?”. It’s called “Next Generation EU” by the way. The welfare of children should be central to EU citizenship. There should be rights for All to be informed, educated and participate in an Erasmus exchange programme to experience their European citizenship. The centre piece of this session is the NECE Declaration which affirms that “citizenship education is essential in a world of pandemic and ecological risk” to shape the transition to a new future. The declaration contains a shopping list of demands including the creation of a centre of excellence, to provide a focal point for the exchange of best practice. Could there be a link with the themes of the previous session? The EU could have a role in monitoring the performance of Member States in delivering citizenship education for its annual report on the rule of law.

The fourth session will consider “How to push back the boundaries of European citizenship within the EU and in neighbouring countries?” We will find out about an appeal to the European Court of Justice against the automatic loss of EU citizenship for 65 million UK citizens in which the ECIT foundation has requested to intervene. Whatever the legal situation a feeling of being a European citizen is stronger than ever in the UK and that, despite BREXIT, cannot be taken away. As the European Parliament has recommended a form of European citizenship not tied to being a national of an EU member State should be seriously examined from the perspective of a former Member State, applicant countries and other EU neighbours. Why accept a shrinking EU citizenship if we can imagine an expanding one on a continental scale? Is it really so difficult when EU programmes related to EU citizenship stretch in any case beyond its borders? You may also hear about a case coming up in the European Court from a UK national resident in France who can no longer vote there or back home.

The fifth session will consider “How can civil society and the European Parliament achieve full political rights for EU citizens on the move?” and will be led by the task force of Erasmus students ECIT has set up. Since we are recruiting to the task force can I encourage you? This is about campaigning for a European citizens’ initiative (ECI), the young generation taking over, advocacy towards EU policy makers, mobilising the press and public opinion. It involves team-work and multi-tasking on a steep learning curve to become an active European citizen leader. So far, the task force has achieved a commitment by the Commission to revise the directives on the right to vote and stand in European and local elections for 14 million mobile EU citizens but there is a long way to go to extend these rights to regional, national elections and referendums. The ECI needs more signatures. The struggle to link universal suffrage to a world of increased mobility deserves the support of the European Parliament, which can demand a uniform European electoral law.

The sixth session will ask “Should new social, environmental and health rights be added to EU citizenship?” The answer we hope will be a resounding “yes” from this event since EU citizenship should reach out beyond those on the move to the majority who stay at home. Furthermore, the question is overdue, since it is 27 years since Union citizenship was created by the Maastricht Treaty as a first step and evolutionary concept. But working on these new rights takes time and this will be

just a first brainstorming in the three parallel workshops on the last afternoon of our event, to point the way forward perhaps towards new task forces and ECIs to get new rights on the agenda.

In conclusion I would like to re-emphasise that this is the time for bold ideas. To make EU citizenship more relevant and resilient in the face of crisis we need more ambition. A number of reforms will be discussed and more ideas will come from you the participants. Together they should add up to a message to the EU not just to respond to citizens' demands for more Europe and see them as people whose way of life needs protecting, but also as active protagonists with rights and responsibilities. This will require more than just legislative reforms such as those outlined here; it will also require a change of administrative culture. We see this with ECIs. Changes in the law have made it easier to use this instrument, but it still remains foreign to the way the EU works.

We must stick together and we will examine how to keep the virtual platform going until our next annual event, probably in the second week of September 2021 when hopefully we can also meet in person. After this event, you will be asked to support our campaign "All I want for Christmas is a vote". There will be further opportunities for us to advocate for European citizenship: the Commission tri-annual report on Union citizenship, the action plan on democracy and the Conference on the Future of Europe.