

## Proposal for enhancing the Cross-Party Group of MEPs on European Citizenship

### 1. Background:

The ECIT Foundation is a Brussels-based 'think-and-do tank', working exclusively on topics pertaining to European citizenship. It produces research and policy analysis, advocacy towards the European institutions and organizes a major annual event to bring together civil society organisations, academics and policy makers. ECIT hosts a youth task force, starting with the flagship 'Voters Without Borders'. This was a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), demanding the extension of voting rights for mobile EU citizens in regional and national elections, and referendums.

ECIT has three priorities:

-advocate for a statute on European citizenship, an idea pioneered by the foundation and which now has the support of the European Parliament and the Conference on the Future of Europe;

-follow-up the ECI by campaigning for full political rights for EU citizens, whilst joining forces with other voting rights activists to define a roadmap for universal suffrage in Europe

-launch a new ECI on European citizenship education demanding a guarantee for every child to the democratic freedom of Europe

Over the past two years, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have participated regularly in ECIT and 'Voters Without Borders' events. The participation of these MEPs has encouraged the ECIT Foundation - together with Europeans Throughout The World (ETTW) and New Europeans - to explore setting up a dedicated group of MEPs. In spring 2021, a memorandum with a questionnaire was sent to all MEPs, to which **fourteen MEPs** from different groups, committees and nationalities replied expressing interest in forming a group.

### 2. Cross-Party Group of MEPs on European Citizenship:

The group is currently comprised of the following MEPs (party group, Member State):

- **Brando Benifei** (S&D, Italy)
- **Damian Boeselager** (Greens/EFA, Germany)
- **Fabio Massimo Castaldo** (Non-attached, Italy)
- **Maria da Graça Carvalho** (EPP, Portugal)
- **Domènec Ruiz Devesa** (S&D, Spain)
- **Daniel Freund** (Greens/EFA, Germany)
- **Sylvie Guillaume** (S&D, France)
- **Maria Manuel Leitão Marques** (S&D, Portugal)
- **Karen Melchior** (Renew Europe, Denmark)
- **Victor Negrescu** (S&D, Romania)
- **Maite Pagazaurtundúa** (Renew Europe, Spain)
- **Mikuláš Peksa** (Greens/EFA, Czechia)
- **Helmut Scholz** (GUE-NGL, Germany)
- **Yana Toom** (Renew Europe, Estonia)
- **István Ujhelyi** (S&D, Hungary)

### 3. Objectives:

The group has been formed around the following objectives, as defined by the MEPs:

- **To bring together MEPs from different committees** to promote European citizenship across all EU policies in the European Parliament, as well as other EU institutions;
- **To share different political conceptions of European citizenship**, in to encourage dialogue and greater consensus on its meaning (alongside more technical activities);
- **To provide a forum for debate** on European Citizenship among elected representatives, and encourage dialogue with experts, academics and researchers outside of the European Parliament. Civil society organisations and foundations working on different aspects of European citizenship can also bring issues to the group.

### 4. Activities so far:

In 2021, the MEPs from this group came together on three occasions:

- A **preparatory meeting** was held on 19 April 2021, based on the responses to the survey which was attended by five MEPs; four others were represented by their assistants. The idea of a Statute on European Citizenship was strongly supported, with the ECIT team beginning work on a draft soon afterwards. Other ideas were put forward;
- A **launch meeting** was held on 18 June 2021 in Strasbourg on the eve of the first plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It was attended by six MEPs, the Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, ETTW, Citizens Take Over Europe and senior members of the secretariat of the Conference. On the basis of the discussion, the draft Statute was revised and published on the online platform for the Conference;
- At the **opening session** of the **ECIT Foundation's Annual Conference** on 26 October 2021, five MEPs made statements in support of the work done on the Statute on European Citizenship, but encouraged further revisions. This cross-party support nevertheless demonstrated that this project can gain traction in the European Parliament.

Outside of the group's meetings, individual members have started taking action upon their own initiative. For example, Yana Toom successfully included a commitment to a Statute in the PETI Committee's opinion on the Commission's 2020 Citizenship Report, adopted by the Parliament in the March Plenary. Another member of the group, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, took initiative from ECIT and drafted her own version of the Statute, which borrows several elements from the ECIT draft. The Renew Europe group has subsequently adopted the Statute in a recent position paper.

In 2022, ECIT came to the conclusion that in order to continue with the work of the group more professional support was needed. Cooperation was established with the Friedrich Naumann foundation, which organised contacts with other members of the European network of political foundations with a view to putting resources together for the group to have a secretariat and a senior coordinator at its disposal in 2023. In the meantime, two meetings are taking place in 2022 within the limits of the existing resources: the first on 5 October in Strasbourg focussing on political rights and the second on 29 November during the ECIT annual conference.

### 5. Proposal and Prospects:

So far, the cooperation between ECIT and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation to push forward the activities of the group and, consequently, the concept of European citizenship has been promising. The initiation of this group alongside the relevant citizenship ECI, in parallel with increased public and parliamentary interest in citizenship topics in the follow-up to the Conference of the Future of

Europe, has provided a perfect window of opportunity to not only secure further support from MEPs but also foster dialogue between elected officials, civil society and academia.

One illustration of this is the Statute on European Citizenship, which has been developed under the patronage of the group. When the ECIT Foundation was established six years ago, it was alone in promoting the idea, but its proposal for a Statute has since been supported by MEPs in successive resolutions, by citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and has recently been earmarked as an item for Treaty reform by the European Parliament. The cross-party group can continue to lead the work towards the realisation of an adopted Statute on European Citizenship as a key priority in its activities going forward.

Nevertheless, to fully implement the aims of the group, the ECIT Foundation requires more support for the preparation of meetings, work on publications and for managing communication with MEPs and civil society partners. More resources would also foster the professionalisation of the young ECIT team and enable them to commit full-time to the activities under this project. An experienced external consultant working part-time on a low retainer fee would support their day-to-day activities and act as a coordinator between ECIT, the group's members and other civic stakeholders or funders. Without more support, the cross-party group's decentralised structure means it is difficult to coordinate the agenda and timing of meetings from within the European Parliament and risk losing commitment to this project by the group's current members.

The support of several political foundations would not only strengthen ECIT's capacity to undertake the proposed activity programme, but would also better reflect the cross-party nature of the group and would offer a more resilient funding model. With a more diverse support system, matched with interest and enthusiasm from MEPs both inside and outside of the cross-party group, the ECIT team foresees the opportunity to institutionalise the dialogue in an official intergroup, after the 2024 European Elections.

## 6. Proposed programme of activities for group in 2023

The aim is to have a senior consultant in place by the end of 2022 who can frame a work programme for the group in cooperation with MEPs. The outline below is therefore an illustration of the type of activity to be undertaken rather than any kind of blueprint. What is already clear is that the basis for the organisation of the group should be quarterly meetings held in either Strasbourg or Brussels.

The following activities are proposed over a twelve-month period:

- Work to improve **the Statute on European Citizenship** and to better define the concept of European citizenship in a new version of the Statute, as well as producing and promoting an abridged, 'user-friendly' booklet;
- **A detailed report or roadmap** on reforming and extending existing rights, as well as mapping advocacy opportunities for advancing discussions on EU citizenship, with contributions from experts and academics;
- **Quarterly meetings of the group:**
  - **April 2023:** to discuss implications of the results of the CoFoE for European citizenship, civic education and the latest Statute on European Citizenship draft;
  - **June 2023:** to discuss the path to full political rights for mobile EU citizens;
  - **September 2023:** to discuss an initiative by the European Parliament for a European diaspora policy to protect the rights of EU citizens outside of the EU;
  - **December 2023:** to discuss the Commission's 2023 citizenship report and the run-up to the European elections

- **A draft policy document** will be prepared on each specific theme for these meetings;
- **Encouragement of more proposals from the MEPs** on the group's activities, to add to those already put forward during the preliminary discussion and launch event last year;
- **Creation of a dedicated mailing list** with the main actors involved in the activities of the group, to start sharing written ideas and contributions, as well as a contact database;
- **Creation of a dedicated website and social media channels** on the activities of the group, to provide info and resources to the public, as well enabling the sharing of ideas.

## 7. Budget:

The ECIT Foundation is proposing a **budget of €24,000** to fund one year of activities; the majority would be for direct costs, with around one-sixth allocated for preparatory work.

This proposal can be broken down further as follows:

- **4 Series of events** (inc. venue hire, travel, accomodation, materials, equipment): **€9,500**;
- **Publications** (the Statute on European Citizenship and roadmap): **€3,500**;
- **Communications and Outreach Costs** (inc. website, social media promotion): **€1,750**;
- **Preparatory & Background Tasks** (inc. inter-group correspondence, monitoring): **€3,250**;
- **Subcontracting** (a part-time external consultant to supervise outreach): **€6,000**