

## **MEETING OF THE CROSS-PARTY GROUP OF MEPs ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP – “European Citizenship Education: Forging our way ahead with high-priority”**

### Present at the meeting:

MEP Victor Negrescu (S&D)

Madalina Codreanu (Assistant of MEP Negrescu)

Tommaso Bratto (Assistant of MEP Brando Benifei – S&D)

Alejandro Peinado Garcia (Assistant of MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa – S&D)

Tony Venables (ECIT Founder)

Suzana Carp (ECIT Board Member)

Alvaro Oleart (ECIT Board Member)

Martina Rubino (ECIT Activity Coordinator)

Otilia Colceriu (Communications Assistant at Youth Outreach Unit of the EP)

Andrei Frank (Lifelong learning platform)

Andrea Lapegna (Lifelong learning platform)

Sofia Viviani (Eumans)

Jana Weber (Human Rights & EU Funding - FNF Europe)

MEP Victor Negrescu opened the meeting by welcoming all participants, thanking them for their presence and the input they would give to the conversation. He began his speech by emphasising the need for a new narrative for Europe and to provide citizens with more tangible benefits; European citizenship is not and should not be seen as just a concept but should contain tangible and concrete efforts. This, however, takes time and effort; for example, MEP Negrescu pointed out that we needed 50 years to recognise birth and marriage certificates across Europe; now it takes 60 to get an online driving licence. In order to achieve the goal of making this concept tangible, one of the first key elements is to make people aware of what it means to be European: this can be done first and foremost through citizenship education. The problem, however, seems to be the timeline. There are elements and possibilities to achieve citizenship education before 2024; to do so, however, it must be made attractive to citizens and politicians.

Tony Venables (ECIT Founder), after thanking MEP Negrescu for his hospitality and the participants for their presence, stressed that the meeting's main purpose should be brainstorming on what is seen as gap between the rhetoric and implementation when it comes to citizenship education. Referring to the [note](#) distributed to participants, he suggested that were different, not necessarily mutually exclusive, options:

- build on what exists whilst giving more salience to European citizenship education by creating a pilot project, a European agency or centre of excellence-ideas which had so far not been accepted by the Commission, but which remained valid;
- seek to amend existing EU legislation and add a citizenship education dimension to existing policies to defend democracy and work towards a green and digital Europe-an approach proposed by the citizen-led Conference on the Future of Europe which made several references to this theme;
- seek to build citizenship education on Erasmus and other mobility programmes which could be a starting point-the drawback being however that it would not reach the majority of people who stay at home;
- attempt a new approach using Union citizenship and Article 25 TFEU as a legal basis- this was the approach being advocated in the ECIT proposal for an ECI “Making European citizens”; the ECI would be submitted for registration next Europe day but without a guarantee of being accepted. It also takes up the other options;
- consider Treaty revision at least for European citizenship education- this approach would at least allow the EU to address the issue more directly rather than seek ways round the legal constraints

The aim of ECIT is to launch the ECI, along with others being brought together, in the run-up to the 2024 European elections.

Martina Rubino (ECIT Activity Coordinator) then presented the [ECI proposal for European Citizenship Education](#) that ECIT is working on. Despite a lot of preparatory work, it is not easy to present a proposal that the Commission can accept as it is within its legal competence. In this case, the proposal is a framework legislation on the basis of Article 25 TFEU, which should be supported by the inclusion of a clause on European citizenship education in existing legislation in the areas mentioned by CoFoE, as well as recommending non-legislative measures. In the proposal we ask the Commission to:

- propose a European law for all Member States guaranteeing the education of every child in the European citizenship values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;
- support this guarantee for children in EU legislation on European rights and the transition to a green and digital economy;
- provide for a European Citizenship Statute, teacher training and monitoring of practices;
- support the demands of CoFoE – in particular, the Proposal n.37: “Citizens information, participation and youth” included in the [Final Report](#). In this proposal, among other requests, citizens specifically demanded a minimum level of education about the EU and in particular its democratic processes, including the history of European integration and European citizenship.

Tommaso Bratto, now an assistant to MEP Brando Benifei (S&D), was also part of the *Voters Without Borders* team, thus knowing the issue of ECIs well. According to him, the main problem with this medium is how to reach one million signatures. One has to cope with the lack of resources, the lack of a stable, international and organised network. There is also the need to find a way to promote and finance ECIs because without funding it is difficult to have a concrete, functioning and successful strategy.

Alejandro Peinado Garcia (Assistant to MEP Domènec Ruiz Devesa - S&D) first of all reminded the AFCO and CULT committees of the deadline of Friday 24 March for pilot projects and preparatory actions; by the day after our meeting (23 March) their team would finalise a proposal to register it. This proposal will focus on citizenship education and making the initiative a reality. In addition, the AFCO committee is working on an initiative on how to organise an election observation mission in the EU. This would make it possible to monitor possible violations of electoral law by organising observation missions by the European Commission in member states. Furthermore, he spoke about the role of the Spanish presidency on European electoral law. There will be important negotiations in AFCO on the report on treaty amendments. For this reason, a careful and targeted communication campaign is needed to reach MEPs and ask them which article to amend in the treaties.

A pilot project that was presented in AFCO by MEP Ruiz Devesa was also briefly explained: "Building Europe with Local Entity", which will be implemented by the Commission and about 400 partners are expected. It is an initiative that seeks to identify local municipalities as those responsible for communicating about European programmes in their constituencies, with the hope of making it a stable programme.

Finally, it was stated that one of MEP Ruiz Devesa's objectives is to reach an agreement on European citizenship education during the Spanish Presidency.

Sofia Viviani (Eumans) emphasised that the European Citizens' Initiatives, Article 25 TFEU and the proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe should be used as three elements in synergy to achieve treaty change; therefore, ECIs should not be seen as an objective but as a means of action to achieve a specific goal.

Suzana Carp (ECIT Board Member) pointed out that last January, in the European Parliament, a ceremony and debate was held at the beginning of the plenary session, which led to the adoption of a [resolution for the 30th anniversary of the EU single market](#) with 537 votes in favour, 35 against and 66 abstentions; it outlines the urgent challenges facing the single market today and recommendations for the future. The proposal is to ask the institutions to do the same with European citizenship, which will also reach its 30th anniversary in 2023. This would bring attention and clarity to a fundamental issue that is often left behind.

Andrei Frank (Lifelong Learning Platform) emphasised that in 2023 there will be a [mid-term review on education](#), which will focus on competences and elements within the area of education that the COM is working on and reported on. If during the mid-term review process the EP could highlight the need to focus education also on citizenship – for example, saying what education for European citizenship can look like, what it is, how it could be implemented. Furthermore, a suggestion regarding the ECI proposal that ECIT is working on was to speak more broadly: European citizenship education should therefore not only focus on children, but also on lifelong learning. It is clear that education is not a European competence; however, in the panel on education in CoFoE, many citizens' contributions called for change in several areas, including education.

MEP Negrescu then finished by responding to the various inputs received. First of all, he underlined how Commission President von der Leyen could be asked to present a communication on 30 years of European citizenship - as was done for the anniversary of the single market. Furthermore, he emphasised the focus on the mid-term review and how to approach this area; again, one could ask the president of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) to focus part of their work on this.

Regarding the ECI proposal developed by ECIT, MEP Negrescu had many ideas and suggestions. First of all, he wanted to emphasise how there are already many people working on this topic - European school network, all the networks put in place; therefore, one should list the already existing and active networks that can inform about European citizenship and also connect for ECI to expand an already pre-existing and functioning network. Then there would be no need to create a new network, but simply connect existing ones and use them to bring people together who can work.

He also recognised the difficulty in reaching 1 million signatures. However, he emphasised that the goal should be to raise public awareness and make the topic interesting for policy makers. If you build and put forward positive arguments, it is more difficult to get signatures, but because they are positive arguments, they are interesting to a larger portion of politicians, who will consider them. He suggested the possibility of renaming the ECI; this is because in the Brussels bubble we know what European education is, but outside of it this is not so clear. It should therefore be reworded so that people understand what it is. Some proposed ideas: 'learning about the EU' 'right to be informed' 'right to quality education'. This would be more appealing and make it easier to collect signatures because we talk about the right to quality education. It is therefore a question of 'selling' this issue: discussing how to word it to make it attractive to the majority of people and more difficult to reject is one possibility that could be considered. Finally, as also pointed out earlier, referring to the right of everyone, not just children, could be a successful way of involving more people.

Finally, Suzana Carp (ECIT Board Member) outlined the next steps of the ECIT Foundation, especially concerning the Cross-Party Group of MEPs on European Citizenship. Three more thematic meetings are in the agenda and will be hosted by MEPs members of the group. At the moment, the strategic plan is to have:

- a second meeting around Europe Day (9 May) at the European University Institute in Florence;
- a third meeting in early July, coinciding with the start of the Spanish Council Presidency, on the topic of political rights and the new EU electoral law;
- fourth and final meeting in 2023 in correspondence with the ECIT Annual Conference scheduled for 31 October 2023 - anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty.