

## PROPOSAL TO RELAUNCH THE CROSS-PARTY GROUP OF MEPS ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The case for bringing together a Cross-Party Group of MEPs on European Citizenship is strong because this is a theme cutting across the work of different parliamentary committees, and which can become easily taken for granted as everyone's and no-one's responsibility. In the previous legislature, this Group was started in 2021 and held 11 meetings, which are listed in the annex at the end of this document. A report on the activities of the Group can be found [here](#). On the basis of an initial proposal and survey, the following 15 MEPs were members of the Group in the last legislature:

FULL NAME	POLITICAL GROUP	COUNTRY
<b>Brando BENIFEI</b>	S&D	Italy
<b>Damian BOESELAGER</b>	Greens/EFA	Germany
<b>Fabio Massimo CASTALDO</b>	Non-attached	Italy
<b>Maria DA GRAÇA CARVALHO</b>	EPP	Portugal
<b>Domènec RUIZ DEVESA</b>	S&D	Spain
<b>Pascal DURAND</b>	Renew Europe	France
<b>Daniel FREUND</b>	Greens/EFA	Germany
<b>Maria Manuel LEITÃO MARQUES</b>	S&D	Portugal
<b>Karen MELCHIOR</b>	Renew Europe	Denmark
<b>Victor NEGRESCU</b>	S&D	Romania
<b>Maite PAGAZAURTUNDÚA</b>	Renew Europe	Spain
<b>Mikuláš PEKSA</b>	Greens/EFA	Czechia
<b>Helmut SCHOLZ</b>	GUE-NGL	Germany
<b>Yana TOOM</b>	Renew Europe	Estonia
<b>István UJHELYI</b>	S&D	Hungary

The involvement of the Group took different forms including the hosting of a meeting in the Parliament by an MEP or participation of a panel of MEPs in a conference organised by the ECIT Foundation. The approach has been to have a group which meets publicly and informally in a dialogue with civil society. The basic idea has so far been to meet on a quarterly basis, and that, where possible, each meeting should be hosted and chaired by an MEP from a different political group supporting EU Citizenship. The aim too has been to focus each meeting on a particular theme related to a citizenship of rights, participation and belonging, so as to be able to better target the audience.

## 2. THE CASE FOR REINSTATING THE GROUP IN THE NEW LEGISLATURE

The ECIT Foundation believes that the Cross-Party Group must be relaunched in the new legislature. In the last legislature, the European Parliament was more active on EU Citizenship than any of its predecessors. The fact that the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) met in parallel was particularly productive. On the topic of European Citizenship, an informal alliance between MEPs and citizens in the Conference meant that proposals emerged which reinforced each other, and which were also the main agenda items of the Cross-Party Group:

- the case for bringing together the scattered features of EU Citizenship in a Statute alongside the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Pillar of Social Rights, so that this unique status is better known and evolves further;
- the case for reforms to make citizen participation a more permanent feature of the EU policy-making process and strengthen the political rights of EU citizens, especially in elections to the European Parliament which should become more genuinely European and less nationalistic;
- the need to back such reforms for the many not just for the few by adding a European dimension to national citizenship education and making this unique transnational citizenship more genuinely a citizenship for all.

The demand for [a Statute](#) has been supported by the Committees on Constitutional Affairs, Civil Liberties and Petitions. It was also recommended by the CoFoE. Both the CoFoE and the European Parliament have underlined the need for European citizenship education. Many of the reform proposals discussed in the Cross-Party Group are brought together in [the AFCO report on “Parliamentarism, European citizenship and democracy”](#) approved by the Parliament on 1 September 2023. The Cross-Party Group should be reinstated if only because there will be an evident need in the new legislature to keep up the pressure to implement reforms proposed by the preceding one. The need to support MEPs who wish to pursue such a reform agenda will be greater: there will be fewer of them in the new Parliament and so more of their time and resources may well have to be taken up defending existing EU achievements rather than supporting new ventures. Continuity will be an issue since some MEPs most active in the Group in the last legislature decided not to stand again for election. There is also an obvious need to persuade the other Institutions and the Commission in particular to take on board the reforms proposed by the last legislature and

implement them. In the last legislature, a growing gap between the ambitious proposals of the Parliament and the Commission's technical language and insistence on the *status quo* became apparent and is a worrying sign.

### 3. THE PRELIMINARY STEPS TOWARDS SETTING UP THE GROUP AGAIN

When the Group was first set up, the new legislature had already been running for two years so it was relatively clear which MEPs could be interested. This meant especially building on cooperation with Maite Pagazaurtundúa who had already pioneered the proposal for a Statute on European Citizenship before the last legislature and who was the Rapporteur for [a new report for AFCO on "the implementation of the Treaty provisions on EU citizenship"](#) which supported the proposal again at the end of her term as an MEP.

EU Citizenship is often a theme which inspires strong personal commitment, so the fact that not all such MEPs are in the new Parliament presents a challenge to find their successors. This is why ECIT believes that a period of preliminary research in the Parliament will be necessary, followed by a proposal and questionnaire to MEPs from groups supporting EU Citizenship to establish the membership of the Group and its activities before its relaunch at the beginning of 2025. There are three main tasks:

- i) **Fundraising.** In a more difficult context following the European elections, the Group may well keep its informal approach, but will have to be better organised. In the last legislature, the ECIT Foundation benefited from the generous support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) which covered the costs of the secretariat including a senior consultant to organise meetings of the Group, whilst rightly pointing out that the responsibility to support what is after all a Cross-Party Group should be shared with other political foundations and donors.
- ii) **Membership.** There is no point in just sending a questionnaire, out of the blue, to MEPs to ask them to join such a Cross-Party Group. A proposal has to be put forward preferably by a core group of former and new members already showing an interest. Such a start to the membership should emerge from personal contacts with links to the secretariats of the relevant political groups and committees, as well as MEPs and their assistants. From the preliminary interviews, the schedule and topics of meetings in 2025 and the name of the MEP willing to host each meeting should become clear.
- iii) **Immediate action.** Whilst planning for next year, it will be essential not to miss any opportunities with the support of newly elected MEPs to get the issue of EU Citizenship on the agenda for the next legislature. This means analysis of the composition of the new Commission and its likely programme to establish a list of priorities to which a European Citizenship dimension should be attached, whilst also assessing the chances for pursuing the agenda set by the previous Parliament. A background briefing on European Citizenship should be prepared for MEPs including proposals, which they could raise in hearings with new Commissioners. This should certainly include the demand that there be a Commissioner responsible, more resources and a commitment to producing a proposal for a Statute on European Citizenship.

Once the process of setting up the new legislature is complete a report and questionnaire should be sent to MEPs inviting them to join the Group and put forward their views about its organisation and priorities. In turn the answers should establish the membership and basic description of the Group, as well as its programme for next year which is outlined in the next section.

#### 4. PRESUMED PROGRAMME FOR 2025.

The programme which follows could both change radically because it is based only on experience in the last Parliament and it does not take into account that newly elected MEPs may decide to do things differently. It is based on the assumption that the approach to the role of the Group and how it is organised should probably not be completely different in the new Parliament. In response to the survey carried out in 2021, experience with the organisation of meetings suggests that a frequency of 4 meetings per year is about right, and that an open, informal and non-hierarchical approach should be maintained. Whenever questions about the role of the Group were raised, MEPs made clear their interest in an open dialogue with civil society organisations and did not necessarily see any advantages in trying to make the Group more formal, which would simply require more resources and organisation without necessarily producing better results. On the basis of experience so far, there is room for improvement:

- **More input and regular monitoring of EU Citizenship** related to other policies. It would be useful to have at each meeting a roadmap for activities related to European Citizenship coming up in different parliamentary committees or in the other Institutions, so that MEPs can take the opportunity to put forward suggestions or amendments. This would make the work of the Group not just conceptual, but also more practical showing the way to take EU Citizenship into account across the board in EU policies. The idea here is that, whilst each meeting would focus on a particular theme, other subjects would not be excluded.

The research and policy departments in the European Parliament have been contacted and will provide informal in-kind support to identify ways to embed the Group more in the work of the European Parliament.

- **More involvement of other Institutions**, especially the Commission and Council Presidency. The discourse on European Citizenship varies significantly among the Institutions in official meetings, and to an extent that it is becoming unproductive. It is possible that the Cross-Party Group could become at least a forum where more open dialogue could take place. Speakers from outside the EU Institutions could also be invited: city mayors, well-known academics, writers or leaders of European networks with the evidence on EU Citizenship.

In the last Parliament of the 15 members, the maximum number attending a meeting was 6. If the meetings offer more opportunities for practical follow-up and interesting outside speakers, more MEPs including those not yet members of the Group might well show up.

As a working hypothesis, here is the outline for the programme suggested in 2025:

**i) How to improve the enforcement of European rights and uphold a European Citizenship of values?**

A criticism of the last Commission by many MEPs was that, in the face of external crises, it developed more of a geo-political role and did not pay enough attention to its role as guardian of the Treaties. Polls suggest that EU citizens are unaware of ways to defend their European rights if they are violated. The start of a new legislature should be an opportunity to look into the performance of EU information, advice and assistance services and propose ways they could improve, as well as how to strengthen legal assistance and access to justice. Such a meeting would involve MEPs from the Petitions and other Committees, the Commission and the European Ombudsman. Input about recent case law related to EU Citizenship in the European Court of Justice could be particularly valuable. There is no doubt, as shown by the nationalistic climate surrounding the European elections, that the need to protect European citizens when they move across European borders against all forms of discrimination will become more challenging. (*March in Brussels*)

**ii) How to make the case for implementing the proposal for a Statute on European Citizenship?**

This meeting would build on the first meeting of the Group under the past legislature. With the participation of representatives of the Commission and Council Presidency, the aim should be to raise again the aim of a Statute on European Citizenship, and consider the options for implementation. With the 2023 tri-annual [Citizenship Report](#), the Commission published a [Guide to EU Citizenship](#) limited to the European rights set out in articles 18-24 TFEU. These are the freedom of movement and associated political rights, which are the responsibility of DG Justice. This is a step in the right direction but far from the aim of bringing together the European rights scattered across different Commission DG's. Maybe the solution is to find a middle path between such narrow and broad approaches? Realising the goal of such a Statute is though primarily not so much a question of content, as of political will and resources. (*July in Strasbourg*)

**iii) How to pursue the goal of full political rights for EU citizens and make elections to the European Parliament more European?**

The period in the run-up to the current legislature was characterised by more emphasis on external threats to democracy than electoral reform to increase participation or extend the franchise. The exception was a start to the spread of votes at 16 – a topic raised by ECIT in [a Symbolic Vote](#) started on 26 April 2024, International Voting Rights Day. This is a reform encouraged by the previous Parliament which should be pursued, linked to European citizenship education. A year on from the European elections, the Commission is likely to publish a report on the results with a particular emphasis on turnout by mobile EU citizens, which

does not appear to have increased. This should encourage reforms to the directives on the right to vote and stand in municipal and European elections in one's country of residence, which were not adopted in the last legislature. Certainly, the objective of eliminating disenfranchisement linked to freedom of movement should be pursued. The conduct of the 2024 elections to the European Parliament was particularly nationalistic – surely an encouragement to the reform proposed by the Institution to introduce transnational lists and a second vote for lead candidates? It would be very useful to review the package on electoral reforms. *(September in Strasbourg)*

**iv) How to bring about European citizenship education for all ?**

The last legislature was characterised by a considerable amount of exploratory work to make progress. This issue was singled out for special treatment by the European Parliament in its resolutions, whereas the Commission sees it as an ongoing activity within the European Education Area. ECIT had success with the registration of a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "[I'm going European](#)" which showed that a European law could be introduced without revising the EU treaties. This though did not prove to be the breakthrough expected. Finding that the ECI was not properly understood and failed to attract funding, it was withdrawn and remodelled as a new proposal "Teach me Europe". To give a clear focus to the objective of adding a European dimension to citizenship education, an ECI is the right instrument, but it needs more preparation on fundraising, communication and coalition building. Once the new proposal is registered and the launch of signature collection decided, it should certainly benefit from support by the Cross-Party Group. The meeting could be linked to the Lifelong Learning Week or to [the ECIT Annual Conference](#) on the eve of the anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty. *(November in Brussels)*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The preparatory period until the end of this year is a determining factor in shaping the programme for the relaunch of the Cross-Party Group of MEPs. A report by the end of 2024, with the results of a survey of MEPs, will be the basis for establishing the membership of the Group, its priorities and working methods. In the meantime, some assumptions have to be made for the series of meetings in 2025, so that funding can be allocated at least in principle in good time until the revised programme is established.

## ANNEX TO THE PROPOSAL TO RELAUNCH THE CROSS-PARTY GROUP ON EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

### LIST OF 11 MEETINGS HELD

- **Kick-Off Meeting** – based on results of a questionnaire to MEPs about aims and working methods of the group (*online, 19 April 2021*). [Meeting report](#)
- **Launch Event of the Group and Proposal for a Statute on European Citizenship** – meeting attended by 6 MEPs on the eve of the first CoFoE Plenary (*Lieu d'Europe, Strasbourg, 18 June 2021*). [Event report](#)
- **ECIT Annual Conference on European Citizenship 2021** – presentations by a panel of 4 MEPs (*Press Club, Brussels, 26 October 2021*). [Event report](#)
- **Opening Event to the Strasbourg Summit** (*Villa Schutzenberger, Strasbourg, 5 May 2022*). [Event report](#)
- **Meeting hosted by Domènec Ruiz Devesa MEP with voting rights organisations** (*European Parliament, Strasbourg, 5 October 2022*). [Meeting report](#)
- **ECIT Annual Conference on European Citizenship 2022** (*Press Club, Brussels, 29 November 2022*). [Event report](#)
- **Meeting hosted by Victor Negrescu MEP with NGOs** – on lifelong learning for a new ECI on European citizenship education (*European Parliament, Brussels, 22 March 2023*). [Meeting report](#)
- **Meeting hosted by Maite Pagazaurtundúa MEP with an audience of European associations** – on the RENEW and ECIT versions of a Statute (*European Parliament, Brussels, 4 July 2023*). [Meeting report](#)
- **Conference on the Challenges of Votes at 16 in the European Elections** (*Press Club, Brussels, 19 September 2023*). [Event report](#)
- **ECIT Annual Conference on European Citizenship 2023** – marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty (*Press Club, Brussels, 31 October 2023*). [Event report](#)
- **Conference on European Citizenship in the Run-Up to the European Elections** (*Stam Europa, Brussels, 24 January 2024*). [Event report](#)