REPORT ON ECIT ACTIVITIES
FOR THE MOBILECIT PROJECT
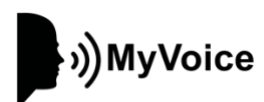
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1 INTRODUCTION AND ECIT'S ROLE IN THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE

The MobileCIT Project was a priority for the ECIT Foundation from late 2022 until the final Conference organised for the project on 3 July 2024. The Project matched the priorities of the Foundation, since it focussed on European rights to freedom of movement contained in the Treaty chapter related to EU Citizenship and non-discrimination (Articles 18-25 TFEU).

The Founder of ECIT, **Tony Venables**, brought to the project experience with organising conferences in Brussels involving civil society, researchers and policy-makers. He also contributed to the project on the basis of his previous experience with issues related to freedom of movement as director of ECAS (European Citizen Action Service), which ran Your Europe Advice (YEA).

The Foundation carried out the activities assigned to it under the proposal, but also made suggestions contributing to the overall design and execution of the project:

- on the choice of the 14 questions on the Open2Vote platform, it was suggested that the selection of topics could be checked against the evidence of questions received by the Commission and feedback reports from advice services. In the selection, ECIT emphasised those questions connecting freedom of movement and cross-border political rights;
- for the advocacy phase of the Project, ECIT suggested an approach consisting of first examining items already on the EU legislative agenda bearing a relationship to the 14 questions, and then targeting the policy-makers involved. It was also suggested that some questions, especially those related to European political rights, should be raised in the context of the campaign for the European elections in June 2024;
- for the communication campaign to attract votes on the 14 questions, ECIT played its part by highlighting the questions in its monthly newsletter reaching 950 stakeholders. The Foundation also promoted the questions on its website and through social media.

On a number of occasions, ECIT took the initiative to propose a meeting of the partners, and actively sought their approval and suggestions for the contents of the events organised.

2 ECIT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROJECT

At a very early stage, ECIT took advantage of its Annual Conference in 2022 to announce the start of the MobileCIT Project. A 10-point list of barriers to freedom of movement was distributed. The top three identified were: lack of proper political representation of 13.7 million mobile EU citizens (i.e., underuse of partial voting rights); lack of accessible, quick and effective measures to guarantee enforcement of European rights and access to justice; exploitation and lack of equal treatment in the workplace, on nationality or other grounds. The full results contributed to the research at the start of the Project.

For each of the four events on MobileCIT, we start with a short summary followed by an account of the discussion, and finally a section containing promotional material and links to the programme and supporting documents.

2.1 COMMUNICATION: General Promotional Activities

- **News story on website spotlighting the project with links to individual pages, each dedicated to one of the 14 questions** (also linked to from the website footer and spotlighted on the homepage at the time): https://ecit-foundation.eu/mobilecit-project-an-opportunity-for-european-mobile-citizens-to-participate-in-shaping-e-democracy/
- **Instagram post focusing on questions 1 to 8:** https://www.instagram.com/p/C0ecyDnMDLM/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Facebook post focusing on question 1 to 8:** https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=355784257101202&set=pcb.355797357099892
- **Instagram post focusing on questions 9 to 14:** https://www.instagram.com/p/C1_0WfSN2v5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Facebook post focusing on questions 9 to 14:** https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=377106554968972&set=pcb.377107788302182

Many other opportunities for additional promotion presented themselves around the events the ECIT Foundation organised in 2023-2024 within the framework of the MobileCIT Project. Links to these website updates, press releases, mailings, social media posts and reels can be found under each event below.

2.2 EVENT: MobileCIT Campaign Launch Conference

📅 19 September 2023   📍 Press Club, Brussels

2.2.1 Summary

This launch event featured a special session with the MobileCIT Project Coordinator and representatives of ETTW explaining the 14 questions to the audience and giving them directions on how to vote. In order to attract attention to the Project, ECIT had decided to focus on the most controversial of the questions — whether votes at 16 should be spread to all EU countries, especially since the European elections were imminent and, for the first time, voting at 16 was being introduced in Belgium.

The event took a considerable amount of organisation because it was targeting both Belgian and EU audiences. It was well advertised, for example by Visit Brussels and the Commune of Ixelles. The conference was a success in providing the audience with a picture of how the European elections are a multi-level challenge for local, regional, national and EU policy-makers — all of whom were represented on the panel of speakers. The main lesson was to involve young voters themselves in the debate which was achieved by dividing participants into three informal groups where a group of young Austrians explained their experience with voting at 16 to the young Belgian audience. One of the young Austrians was selected by the Commission to speak at their major event on democracy held on 1-2 December.

2.2.2 Account of the discussion

Interview with Joachim Wilke, Assistant to MEP Damian Boeselager
Speakers: Joachim Wilke, Assistant to MEP Damian Boeselager, **Suzana Carp**, ECIT Board Member and Voters Without Borders Spokesperson, **Tony Venables**, Founder of the ECIT Foundation, **Franziska Schweitzer**, young Austrian voter

The interview with Joachim Wilke, moderated by Suzana Carp, revolved around the significance of voting, which had long been an overlooked aspect of advocacy work.

→ **Key points from the interview included:**

- *Importance of Voting and Its Potential to Ignite Reforms:* Wilke emphasised that voting at 16 could be a persuasive tool to encourage parents to vote and potentially ignite other political reforms.
- *Expression of Freedom of Movement:* He highlighted the importance of the event's participants travelling to Brussels as an expression of freedom of movement, a fundamental EU right. Voting rights are not just about casting a ballot, but also standing as a candidate in European elections.

- *Discussion of the VWB Campaign:* The interview touched upon the Voters Without Borders (VWB) campaign, which aims to make the voices of 13 million people heard, although it faces challenges and limitations in achieving its goals.
- *Need for a Younger Political Landscape:* Politics should be more representative of the younger generation. Many crucial decisions are made by individuals who may not experience the long-term consequences of their choices, and youth voices must be taken into account.
- *Challenges in European Democracy:* Wilke expressed concerns about the state of European democracy. He advocated for making European democracy truly European, advocating for the candidate age to be 18 and voting age to be 16, making the system more inclusive.
- *Obstacles in Expanding European Voting Rights:* He explained that the European Parliament has the right of Initiative regarding voting changes, but national parliaments may not allow it, thereby limiting the prospects of European voting rights.
- *Potential for Symbolic Elections:* Wilke suggested that symbolic elections and surveys on interest in a transnational vote could be effective in gauging public support for these initiatives.
- *Role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):* He recommended that organisations like ECIT should include these topics in political party agendas, forcing them to commit to such reforms. He also pointed to the importance of young people's involvement in political parties.

Discussion on MobileCIT

Speakers **Gatis Pāvils** and **Karīna Karu** provided an overview of the MobileCIT Project, presenting the Open2Vote website and the results of their research which seeks to understand the needs and opinions of mobile EU citizens. They introduced participants to the questions and discussed the concept of lowering the voting age to 16. The Project collaborates with organisations like MyVoice, Open Knowledge Sweden, ECIT Foundation, and ETTW (Europeans Throughout The World), both based in Brussels, to empower mobile EU citizens and promote their rights.

Introduction to Plans for Votes at 16 and the European Elections

The second session delved into plans for votes at 16 and the European elections in Brussels. The discussion was centred on how to reach first-time voters and mobile EU citizens. Key points raised in this session included the significance of involving EU Institutions based in Brussels, a major employer of EU citizens. The unique position of Brussels allows the event to have broader relevance for the EU.

The panel on voting at 16 included various excellent speakers who discussed the importance of youth participation in democracy: **Guillaume Defossé**, federal MP, Ecolo-Groen: He highlighted Belgium's decision to lower the voting age to 16 for the European elections. This decision was a significant legislative achievement, and it was vital for young people to vote as the decisions made in these elections would directly impact their future. He pointed out however that following a ruling by the Constitutional Court, the law had to be revised. This revision would determine whether it should be compulsory for EU citizens to register to vote since the Court has ruled that this should not be the case for 16-year-olds.

Bryn Watkins, Office Commissioner for Europe: Representing an organisation that assists mobile citizens living in Brussels, Watkins discussed the challenges mobile EU citizens face in registering to vote in local elections. He emphasised the need to boost turnout among these groups and for clearer messages so that 16-year-old EU citizens living in Belgium realised that they had an equal right to vote with their Belgian counterparts in the European elections.

Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Acting Director European Commission: She emphasised the importance of youth participation in the European elections and the need to make voting accessible to young people, including those with disabilities.

Els Gossé, Deputy Mayor of Ixelles Responsible for EU Affairs shared insights from Ixelles, a municipality with a diverse population of non-Belgian residents. She emphasised the need for informative campaigns to explain who can vote and how the process works.

Franziska Schweitzer, young Austrian voter: Schweitzer pointed out that encouraging young people to vote was essential for bringing new ideas into the political landscape. She noted that when younger people vote, the political class is likely to become more youthful and representative.

Brainstorming Debate

A brainstorming debate followed, where participants divided in three informal groups and discussed the main concerns of young people and different communities of EU citizens, and explored ways to represent these concerns effectively in the European elections. The facilitators of each group were **Daria Pîrvu**, **Julian Waldbauer** and **Alvaro Oleart**.

Participants also discussed the potential ripple effects of lowering the voting age to 16, considering other proposals for extending the franchise and reforms to increase voter turnout.

During the three breakout groups, participants discussed ways to motivate first-time voters and explored strategies to increase youth engagement in the electoral process. Key topics included concerns specific to young voters and approaches to overcoming obstacles to voter registration.

Participants debated whether the mere two-year difference between 16 and 18 years of age could significantly impact an individual's political knowledge and awareness, and concluded that this was not the case. The notion that starting younger allows for greater political engagement as young citizens grow into adulthood emerged as a recurring theme. Additionally, concerns were raised about the disconnect between political parties, often dominated by older individuals, and the issues that matter most to the youth. It was argued that enabling voting at 16 could lead to more youth-focused policies and, crucially, a more balanced representation of both older and younger voters.

By involving young people at a younger age, it was believed that they could become active politicians earlier in life, fostering a generation of politicians who are deeply connected to youth issues. Moreover, the conference participants highlighted that lowering the voting age

to 16 carries the potential to generate heightened interest in politics among young people, as it compels them to embrace the responsibility of participating in the democratic process. This change was seen as a means to bring youth concerns to the forefront, stimulate more robust election debates, and encourage a deeper understanding of the values and consequences of the political system. Ultimately, the consensus was that educating students to be ready to vote at 16 not only fosters inclusivity but also serves as a significant step towards nurturing an engaged, informed, and empowered generation.

The debate over whether 16-year-olds should have the right to vote revealed differing perspectives. Those who opposed the idea often cited concerns about the susceptibility of younger individuals to external influences, their perceived lack of mental fortitude and maturity, as well as their limited responsibilities. Critics argued that voting at 16 might not be deemed as a necessary change. However, proponents of the idea pointed out that immaturity could be found across all age groups, and granting voting rights at 16 could serve as a catalyst for young people to become more mature and responsible. They stressed that opinions evolve throughout one's life and that a school-based education on politics could equip everyone with essential knowledge. Nevertheless, the potential difficulty in accessing objective sources of information remained a concern. The Romanian experience, shared by **Daria Pîrvu**, highlighted that the debate centred not on maturity, but on when the responsibility to vote is bestowed upon individuals.

Conclusion

The Conference on Challenges of Votes at 16 for EU Citizens Living in Belgium shed light on Belgium's pioneering decision to lower the voting age to 16 for European elections and its implications. The insights shared during this event have the potential to inspire further democratic reforms and youth participation in politics not only in Belgium but across the EU. The event underlined the importance of involving young people in decision-making processes and the need to make voting accessible, transparent, and inclusive to ensure the future of European democracy is truly representative and reflective of the diverse EU population. The conference successfully addressed the questions surrounding this initiative, including its potential to inspire other EU countries, engage first-time voters, and improve representation of young citizens' concerns.

The discussions and brainstorming sessions facilitated a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that votes at 16 presents. Participants collectively considered the impact of this decision on European democracy and explored strategies to enhance voter engagement and participation.

Austria's pioneering role in this democratic reform raises hope that more EU countries will follow suit, ushering in an era of greater political inclusion for young people. As the 2024 European elections approach, the lessons and insights shared during this conference may serve as a blueprint for countries aiming to extend the franchise to 16-year-olds and improve their democratic systems.

Certainly noteworthy were the numerous speeches by Austrian youths aimed at reassuring their peers about acquiring the right to vote at the age of 16. Against all expectations, even some of the youngsters were sceptical about the acquisition of this right, but probably only because they were afraid of the responsibility this right entails. The young Austrians were truly determined in stating that the possibility of voting at the age of 16 is followed by an extension of rights and greater consideration in the political world. Therefore, in Belgium they should welcome this proposal as an important innovation that could change the fate of political involvement for the younger generation as well, knowing that there is still a long way to go, but that we are on the right track.

The event concluded with a sense of optimism and determination, as participants recognised the potential of votes at 16 to shape the future of European democracy and inspire change across the continent.

2.2.3 Links to conference and promotional materials

Event programme, background document:
https://ecit-foundation.eu/challenges-of-votes-at-16/

Mailings
- **Invitation:**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/98385316083139939
- **Last chance to register:**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/99287081442870866

Social media
- **LinkedIn event page:**
  https://www.linkedin.com/events/votingat16inbelgium-anexampleto7101850833511698433/comments/
- **Event announcement:**
  https://www.instagram.com/p/CwffwhhoUCO/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Live tweet from event:**
  https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1704129697905520755
  Event follow-up:
  https://www.instagram.com/p/Cxib189IJEm/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

2.3 EVENT: Conference on the 30th Anniversary of EU Citizenship

📅 31 October 2023   📍 Press Club, Brussels

2.3.1 Summary

This event placed MobileCIT in the broader context of perspectives for EU Citizenship and freedom of movement in the run-up to the European elections and the next legislature. The most innovative feature was the contribution made by a senior official for the European Court of Justice showing that case-law was expanding from the traditional European rights to freedom of movement to new areas such as the acquisition and loss of EU Citizenship and a more digital European Citizenship. The analysis of case-law should be included in any follow-up to the MobileCIT Project. The Conference featured a very strong appeal by **Maite Pagazaurtundúa** via video, and a Declaration for the European elections. It should be pointed out that the Conference was backed up by ETTW efforts to bring together Latvian and Swedish EU citizens more specifically. The audience on 31 October was primarily made up of stakeholders and multipliers from civil society, the research community and EU policy-makers rather than individual mobile citizens.

2.3.2 Account of the discussion (selective)

Aim of the Conference

The conference aimed to address several critical questions:

- Considering the shifts in Europe since the optimistic Maastricht Treaty era and various crises, especially the Russian war on Ukraine, what transformative dynamics have occurred? Does the altered European landscape strengthen the need for a more inclusive and outward-focused European Citizenship?
- Can Union Citizenship be expanded by incorporating new rights — democratic, social, environmental, or health-related — to make it more relevant for those residing in their home countries, extending beyond the benefits for mobile citizens?
- What should be done to promote the ECIT project for a Statute on European Citizenship, which has received endorsement from the European Parliament and the Conference on the Future of Europe? Could this initiative serve as the framework for amalgamating existing rights and introducing new ones, shaping the course for the next 30 years?

Panel on Rights

- **Chair: Tony Venables,** Founder of the ECIT Foundation
- **Speakers: Jeremy Bierbach**, Attorney at Franssen Advocaten; **David de Groot**, Policy Analyst, European Parliament
- **Rapporteur: Suzana Carp**, Deputy Executive Director at Cleantech for Europe & ECIT Board Member

The 30th anniversary calls for a reimagining of the unique transnational citizenship bestowed by the Maastricht Treaty. It urges a reflection on how this citizenship could become more relevant to all Europeans and capture the popular imagination.

Tony Venables acknowledges that European rights to freedom of movement have faced barriers for decades, taking on different forms and national variations. Proposals in the Statute aim to remove obstacles and improve enforcement. The focus is on addressing issues such as the requirement to have sufficient resources and medical insurance, a barrier to freedom of movement for lower-income groups. If there was a free movement solidarity fund as proposed in the Statute, then there would be no reason to expel EU citizens for lack of sufficient resources since their integration in the host country would be supported.

The broader challenge is reconciling these ideals with existing barriers and borders, whilst emphasising the need for stronger connections with migration policies for improved functionality.

Jeremy Bierbach, an immigration lawyer and researcher in European Constitutional Law, emphasises the significance of EU Citizenship as a source of equal treatment. The book, "The Passage of Europe," delves into EU Citizenship as a status guaranteed to nationals of EU Member States. **Bierbach** also highlights citizenship rights as inherently concerning minority rights, tracing their roots to a time preceding the formal establishment of EU Citizenship. He explores the underrepresentation of certain minorities, citing cross-border workers as an example facing limitations on certain rights. **Bierbach** finally criticises narrow views on citizenship and urges a fair interpretation under Article 20 TFEU, pointing out the importance of legislation and implementation.

David de Groot, a policy analyst at the European Parliament specialised in EU Citizenship, comments on the Draft Statute proposed by the ECIT Foundation. He stresses the need for Member States' citizenship acquisition procedures to align with the Charter and the European Court of Justice's case law. Thanks to his valuable expertise, **de Groot** advocates for a deep analysis of the proposed Statute on EU Citizenship, emphasising the inclusion of all rights from Article 20-24 TFEU. He also highlights the challenges of strengthening the non-discrimination laws if the Statute is to be a crucial step to solidify EU Citizenship.

In response to the proposals for changes to the Statute and further remarks from **Joanna Apap**, a colleague of **David de Groot** in the European Parliament, **Tony Venables** stressed that the text was work in progress. The ECIT Foundation lacked the resources and expertise to produce a more perfect product. He was convinced that the text in 27 articles already showed

that such a better product could be produced. Since the European Parliament had called for such a Statute several times, should not its research department be asked to produce one?

"Citizenship is the right to have rights" according to **Suzana Carp**. This means including the right not to arbitrarily lose citizenship and having recognition of family members in host Member States. She also stated that a "Citizenship is the right to know about your rights". For this reason, ECIT proposed an ECI on European citizenship education: to educate children and youngsters about all the chances and opportunities that they could have thanks to the EU. She shared her views on Union Citizenship being at a crossroads since the Maastricht Treaty and envisioned possibilities like a minimum European wage.

In summary, the discussion revolves around simplifying freedom of movement, the roots and challenges of EU Citizenship, the need for a comprehensive Statute, additional rights, and addressing disparities to enhance a sense of belonging within the EU. Finally, the audience emphasised the importance of EU measures to bridge national differences and enhance access to EU Citizenship.

Final Session: Priorities for Union Citizenship for the next 30 years
Co-Chairs: Tony Venables and Suzana Carp, ECIT Board Members
Speaker: Hildegard Schneider, Professor of European Law at Maastricht University

Hildegard Schneider stressed how much darker the climate was now than during the optimistic period following the fall of the Berlin wall when the Maastricht Treaty was being negotiated. She cited recent restrictions on European rights to freedom of movement during the pandemic as unthinkable 30 years ago. She had been particularly shocked by border closures between Netherlands and Belgium in her region. She suggested that there should be more efforts to listen and represent cross-border communities who experienced the core European rights to freedom of movement on a daily basis.

Tony Venables pointed out that associations of frontier workers used to be more active in coming together and bringing their concerns to the attention of the EU than they appeared to be now. The Interreg programme could be relevant.

Hildegard Schneider emphasised the need to reconsider citizen rights, increase involvement and foster a sense of belonging despite borders.

The discussion touched upon the challenges of border closures, the importance of trust in the integration process, and the need for a renewed focus on citizen rights.

Conclusion

ECIT's 8th Annual Conference on European Citizenship proved to be thought-provoking. The event not only highlighted the achievements and challenges of the last 30 years but also fostered a forward-looking dialogue on how European Citizenship can evolve to be more inclusive, relevant, and inspiring for all Europeans. The proposed Statute on European Citizenship emerged as a potential framework for shaping the next 30 years, aligning with the support it has received from the European Parliament and the Conference on the Future of Europe. The discussion had highlighted that ECIT should still make improvements to the Statute:

- Acquisition and loss of citizenship.
- A right to participate and its implementation.
- Rights to good governance and accountability.
- A wider definition of the proposal for a free movement solidarity fund.
- A rethinking and broader definition of citizenship as belonging.

The conference concluded with a sense of purpose and a commitment to collaboratively work towards a more inclusive and outward-looking European Citizenship.

Tony Venables noted that the Conference had certainly highlighted the need to examine the new case law of the European Court, whose role had appeared wrongly to have become less important. Not only were there a large number of cases, but they were also going beyond the traditional emphasis on rights to freedom of movement.

Echoing the sombre assessment of **Hildegard Schneider**, he drew attention to the final section of the Declaration where it was stressed that the Commission lacked even the most basic resources to begin to consider how to develop European Citizenship.

2.3.3 Links to conference and promotional materials

Event programme, report, Declaration and photos on our website
https://ecit-foundation.eu/annual-conference-2023/

Mailings
- **Invitation (dedicated mailing):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/102468563910002052
- **Last chance to register (dedicated mailing):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/99287081442870866

Instagram

- **Event announcement:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cyk7ucSM6KQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Registration open:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cyn1aQtMT8w/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Draft declaration:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cyq4IN-MNFV/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **30th anniversary of EU Citizenship:** https://www.instagram.com/p/CytWV-NMVVf/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Focus on 1st panel:** https://www.instagram.com/p/CyyDpD_s1uC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Focus on 2nd panel:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy0xAfCMvxm/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Focus on 3rd panel:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy3DMbbMluI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Final schedule:** https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy5uoLPsXs8/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  Registration reminder: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy_Qx-6sCRK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Last chance to register:** https://www.instagram.com/p/CzB6YLoM6oy/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Join live:** https://www.instagram.com/p/CzDuOUyMsGa/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Event follow-up:** https://www.instagram.com/p/CzbP_v2sIM0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

LinkedIn:

- **Event listing:** https://www.linkedin.com/events/ecit-s8thannualconference-30yea7120712338793488384/comments/

X

- **Event announcement:**
  https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1714954625533505953/photo/1
- **Registration open:**
  https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1715313468843143174/photo/1
- **Final schedule:**
  https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1717880053810250094/photo/1
- **Event follow-up:**
  https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1722601117387759792/photo/1

2.4 EVENT: Follow-up event on votes at 16, political rights more generally and the European elections

📅 24 January 2024   📍 Stam Europa, Brussels

2.4.1 Summary

This event was a follow-up to the first two taking into account the publication on 6 December 2023 of the Citizenship Package by the Commission, as well as the adoption of a new resolution by the European Parliament at its December session on the implementation of European citizenship rights. It was an opportunity to frame more precise demands to the next legislature, above all to implement proposals by the European Parliament, particularly on political rights, European citizenship education and the creation of a Statute on European Citizenship. For this event and future work on MobileCIT, the resolution on "Parliamentarism, European Citizenship and Democracy", adopted in September 2023, is a major source. It was appropriate that this event featured a dialogue with Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Rapporteur on both the European electoral act and European citizenship education.

2.4.2 Account of the discussion (selective)

Summary and action points

This half-day event brought together some 60 participants — mostly on the spot but also online — with a high percentage of young people. The programme centred on three proposals, and how to develop them and use the European elections on 6-9 June 2024 as an opportunity to have them discussed and implemented in the next EU legislature:

- Creating a Statute on European Citizenship;
- Full political rights for European citizens;
- A European Citizenship for all: strategy for the ECI "I'm going European".

For the European elections, votes at 16 is the innovation in Belgium. How to reach out to young people and involve them in politics was a main theme throughout the event. The event highlighted many ways to become involved:

- Participants were encouraged to vote on **14 questions** related to their European rights to freedom of movement and EU Citizenship developed by the **MobileCIT Project**. One of the questions in particular related to whether votes at 16 should be spread from a minority of Member States to the whole of the EU.
- A Declaration was presented by the ECIT Foundation to mark the 30th anniversary of EU Citizenship — propose a European Citizenship Statute and other reforms to ensure that, after the elections, EU Institutions have the political will and resources to develop a stronger institutional commitment to the development of European Citizenship.

- The event began with a training session on how to organise a symbolic election, based on the experience of VRAR (Voting Rights for All Residents). Hopefully this will inspire young people to vote and also help carry out a Symbolic Vote in front of the European Parliament on 26 April 2024, which is International Voting Rights Day. This day celebrates the 110th anniversary of the first Symbolic Vote by French suffragette women. Similar events are planned in Berlin and Paris.

Speakers from the European Parliament, Commission and local Brussels authorities responsible for European affairs produced many other examples: **Together EU** was creating a community of civil society organisations and volunteers in the run-up to the elections, there was a special youth hub and events; **Europe Direct** offered a training session for schools; the **Commission** had produced a Handbook on EU Citizenship.

Whilst stressing that there many ways for citizens to become involved and heard, the event also highlighted the difficulties:

- Whilst the vast majority are aware that they are European citizens, fewer are clear as to their rights. For those who are aware, their rights are often taken for granted and EU Citizenship is seen as more abstract than real and palpable;
- The vast majority are unaware of the opportunities to become involved and are hard to reach because they have not received the necessary European civic education. It is here that the new European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), "I'm going European", could make a difference;
- Whilst reforms are necessary to extend the franchise and improve electoral practices, they are usually slow to implement and meet constitutional and political obstacles; none of the reforms proposed by the European Parliament will be adopted by the EU before the European Elections;
- ECIs illustrate this problem since the Commission has allowed more initiatives to go ahead and signalled that in theory they could lead to legislation, whilst also becoming more reluctant to follow them up, thus raising false expectations.

Key proposals by the European parliament to be followed up in the European elections

Domènec Ruiz Devesa MEP went through the May 2022 proposals by the European Parliament for a European electoral law. The report called for votes at 16 in all Member States, but it was also a compromise by stating where this is constitutionally possible. This was necessary in order to overcome opposition by some political groups. Where reforms can make voting easier, there is not always consensus. The European Parliament supports postal voting as a long-established practice and necessary for voting by people with disabilities and EU citizens particularly living in remote areas or outside the EU, but is more cautious when it comes to internet voting, fearing cyber-attacks.

The most important reform proposed is for EU citizens to have two votes, one as now for lists of candidates for election to the European Parliament from their own country and a second to choose a transnational list for election of 28 MEPs to a European constituency. Each European list would be headed by the candidate for Commission President.

Tony Venables said that this reform could be tested out on citizens during the Symbolic Vote on 26 April. Not enough was known about the public perception of the two votes. He asked how the momentum for such reforms proposed by the European Parliament could be kept up even though they had not been adopted by the Council.

Domènec Ruiz Devesa suggested that the results of the European elections should be judged by two criteria — was turnout better having reached just over 50% in 2019 for the first time recently? Were the elections more European? This meant appealing to Member States to introduce reforms on their own initiative ahead of EU agreement, for example, to inform hard to reach groups such as voters with disabilities and make registration much easier. The European Parliament had made proposals for highlighting European affiliations and lead candidates for Commission President which could be implemented by political parties.

He stressed that the European Parliament had called several times for a Statute on European Citizenship. This needed to be backed by European civic education which was also demanded by the European Parliament. The two demands should be put together. For this reason, he was glad to see that a new ECI "I'm going European" would be going ahead and suggested that it could be supported by a cross-party group of MEPs to encourage signatures.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel 1: Statute on European Citizenship

In her video message, **Maite Pagazaurtundúa** MEP stressed that in 30 years European Citizenship had added value to the EU. The political challenge was now to see it improved and further developed. Her report on the implementation of EU Citizenship had recently been adopted by a large majority. She stressed :

- The need for pedagogy among politicians themselves. For example, there were the transformations brought about by the digital world.
- The need to eliminate obstacles to the exercise of European rights which was also supported by the Commission in its Citizenship Package with clarifications on freedom of movement and a strengthening of the right to consular protection outside the EU.
- The need for a Statute to compile existing scattered rights using Article 25 TFEU. There was no need to wait for Treaty reform. The Commission Handbook was not ambitious enough and did not have the emotional and political appeal of a Statute.

With something of a democratic vacuum against populism and extremism, the new Commission after the election should go a step further and work for a stronger commitment by the EU Institutions.

Srd Kisevic presented the Package adopted by the Commission on 6 December 2023 with the Citizenship Report which is required every three years under the Treaties. He referred to a Eurobarometer opinion poll which is grounds for some optimism when it comes to awareness of being a European citizen, although there is less knowledge of what this status actually means in practice. The Citizenship Package contains measures to strengthen the application

of European rights and to clarify them in the light of judgements by the European courts. Real life cases brought by European citizens — for example to defend the rights of same-sex couples moving to another country — could make EU Citizenship much more tangible and inspired the Commission's work to clarify European rights. Similarly, the Commission was proposing in response to recent crises to strengthen the rights of European citizens abroad to protection. The Package also placed emphasis on the rights to vote of persons with disabilities. To communicate all this, the Commission had produced a Handbook on EU Citizenship which can be found HERE. This would shortly be available in all languages and could be used for formal and informal education.

Joanna Apap — speaking in a personal capacity — appealed to young people to participate and take ownership of European Citizenship as their responsibility. A Statute could help because it would make this unique transnational status more palpable and also inclusive. She agreed though with previous speakers that it was not enough on its own and had to be accompanied by European civic education on the scale practiced in Finland, for example, concepts such as social justice are explained from an early age and developed in an age-appropriate way.

Teaching of what it means to be a European citizen needs to be added to the teaching of history and geography for example. Her research department publishes studies of the cost of non-Europe. Such an approach can be applied to teaching European values so that their expression in Article 2 of the Treaty becomes more tangible. Above all a Statute, and citizenship education to go with it, have to address such questions as to who can be a European citizen, and how to reduce the gap between them and third-country nationals resident in Europe.

She ended by highlighting a number of ways the European Parliament encourages the involvement of young people.

Panel 2: Full political rights for EU citizens

Els Gossé, Deputy Mayor of Ixelles, said that her responsibility for European affairs was reflected in this very multicultural municipality. The innovation of votes at 16 in Belgium is really important and likely to be the main focus of the awareness-raising campaign of the municipality in the run-up to the European elections. All municipalities had responsibility for public sector schools. The administration had contacted the schools to discover that teachers were enthusiastic about votes at 16 but unaware that it was being introduced. Ixelles would be working with Europe Direct which had a ready-made workshop for schools. She stressed that the process would encounter obstacles and would take time. In the discussion, the question was raised of reaching other schools such as the European schools which were not the responsibility of the municipality.

Hassan Bousetta spoke as an academic and politician. Brought up in Belgium he had not acquired citizenship until the age of 24 — so knew that if you don't exist politically, you don't exist! He stressed that the debate in Belgium about extending the franchise to EU citizens and

non-EU residents went back to the 1960's and the Mertens government of the 1980's. The slow pace of reform was due to the need to change the constitution. It was not sufficiently known that although Belgium is very pro-European, there was considerable reluctance to give voting rights to EU citizens — required by the 1993 Treaty of Maastricht — out of fear that it would affect the linguistic balance in Brussels and surrounding municipalities. Once reforms are introduced, legitimacy comes very quickly and voting by foreigners is accepted. The drawback is that reform is a step-by-step process applying to some foreigners and not others, or some elections and not others. This leads to increased fragmentation among a population with full, partial or no voting rights. This raises the question of the extent to which the political system really represents the population in areas where there is high fragmentation. It also in turn raises the need for other reforms to the way elections are organised, for example, to increase access to parliament for young people.

Frank van Bockstal, Deputy Mayor of Etterbeek, said that like Ixelles his municipality was very much at the heart of Europe. In the last European elections, 14% of resident EU citizens did vote which was better than the national average of 11%. Why are EU citizens not using their rights? A large number were on the move planning to stay less than one year — too short a time to think about their rights in the country of residence. Ways to register differed with different procedures and deadlines. More harmonisation would be desirable and more coordinated messaging could prove more motivating. Nevertheless, the municipality did make a considerable effort. Individual letters would be sent to all 16- and 17-year-olds. A network of 600 EU citizens and non-EU residents worked closely with the municipality. He stressed that different forms of participation are possible, in addition to elections.

Livio Loonbeek said that the role of the Liaison Office for Belgium was to make a link between the distant EU Institutions and the local level. At least given the complexities of Belgium, people could understand that the EU was also complicated! Few countries had introduced votes at 16 and yet the school climate strikes, and other campaigns showed that, contrary to received opinion, young people were interested in politics. He was therefore optimistic about turnout of first-time voters. Commenting on the issue of fragmentation, he believed that the real cause of the problem was political parties each calculating their own electoral advantages.

In the discussion, questions arose about procedures to register to vote and obstacles to standing as a candidate.

Tony Venables commented that the lack of answers or solutions to such questions reflected the absence of strong voter associations independent of political parties. He used to work, for example, with Test Achats which was a powerful organisation in Belgium and part of a strong European network. Despite their importance, there was no equivalent to consumer rights for political rights. This remained an underdeveloped area of civil society, even though it influenced everything else.

Conclusion

Tony Venables thanked the speakers and participants and in particular the three MEPs for their contributions. There was a strong sense of agreement between proposals to strengthen European Citizenship put forward by civil society organisations, citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe and the resolutions of the European Parliament which had been discussed. This was promising for a stronger commitment by the EU Institutions to European Citizenship after the next elections. However, resolutions remained non-binding, and the key challenge now was implementation with the necessary resources. When hearings were held with new Commissioners after the elections, MEPs should look for commitments to implement proposals of the previous Parliament, so that demands — for example for a Statute on European Citizenship — did not have to be repeated. The EU was opening up more to citizens' concerns but now the time had come to show that it could act on them.

2.4.3 Links to conference and promotional materials

Event programme
https://ecit-foundation.eu/european-citizenship-in-the-run-up-to-the-european-elections/

Press release
This press release focused on the Open2Vote.eu question of votes at 16 with link to event info and registration:
https://ecit-foundation.eu/should-votes-at-16-spread-throughout-the-eu/

Mailings
- **Event announcement and spotlight link to MobileCIT questions (november 2023 newsletter):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/106293021673261051
- **Event reminder and spotlight link to MobileCIT questions (december 2023 newsletter):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/107471493066130837
- **Event reminder (dedicated mailing):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/109702269075719939
- **Press release (votes at 16) with links to event registration and the 14 questions (dedicated mailing):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/111063312274294095
- **Event follow-up (January 2024 newsletter):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/112070328813880409

Social media
LinkedIn
- **Event page:**
  https://www.linkedin.com/events/europeancitizenshipintherun-upt7137469700350885888/comments/

Instagram/Facebook/X
- **Registration open:**

- o https://www.instagram.com/p/C0cANQQMfmi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - o https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=355171940495767&set=a.167309885948641
  - o https://x.com/ECITFound/status/1731705657810690540
- **Event reminder:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/p/C16lJlrtgrg/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - o https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=375967105082917&set=a.167309885948641
- **Second event reminder:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/p/C2P92nYMr_S/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Votes at 16 reel with link to event:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/reel/C2ZeH_eMIyS/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Last chance to register:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/p/C2cAqCOsrsd/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - o https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=383571597655801&set=pcb.383572710989023
- **Join online:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/p/C2ewk9TM-KT/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - o https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=384190044260623&set=a.167309885948641
- **Event follow-up:**
  - o https://www.instagram.com/p/C29k-LgMuqi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - o https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=391203033559324&set=a.167309885948641

2.5 EVENT: Final MobileCIT Conference

📅 3 July 2024   📍 European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels

2.5.1 Summary

This final event, like the Launch Conference, featured a special session where the results of the project were presented, as well as a detailed analysis of the results of the votes on the 14 questions and a summary note on the advocacy activity. ECIT published a background discussion document repeating demands from previous events and listing some main recommendations from the MobileCIT Project. The event was hosted by the EESC because of their detailed response to the 14 questions. **Andris Gobiņš**, the EESC Rapporteur on the defence of democracy package, gave the opening address and stayed throughout the Conference. ECIT intends to follow up the results of the Conference with the EESC.

On votes at 16, ECIT was encouraged by the interest shown on 19 September to organise a symbolic vote, starting on 26 April on the Esplanade of the European Parliament — the results of which were announced at the start of the Conference. This confirmed that, if asked, a majority — especially among the older generation and among young people themselves — is likely to be against such a reform. The same group may well though support other reforms to extend the franchise. Why the opposition? The main reason is a perceived lack of citizenship and political education to be ready to vote at 16.

Much of the discussion between the participants and EU policy-makers revolved round the implications of the European elections for the future of EU Citizenship and European rights to freedom of movement. There was a strong call for a new Commissioner to include these issues in his or her mandate to provide more political support and a focal point for the concerns of mobile EU citizens, which tended to be everyone's and no one's responsibility. A short declaration read out at the end of the event summarised the message to the new legislature. At the end of the Conference, it was stressed that now is the time to put forward concerns to newly elected MEPs one of whom, Raquel García Hermida-van der Walle, attended the closing session.

2.5.2 Account of the discussion

Introduction

On 3 July the ECIT Foundation hosted in Brussels, at the European Economic and Social Committee its 9th Annual Conference on European Citizenship.

This comes just after the results of the European elections held from 6–9 June 2024, which sent shock waves across Europe due to their nationalistic discourse and threats to progressive European policies. The elections fell well short of the EU Treaty objective, which aims for the European Parliament to be elected by European citizens rather than just by the

citizens of each Member State. These election results were a powerful signal indicating that a common European identity must be further developed to counteract the dangers of nationalism and the threats it poses to the rights already established by the Union's political framework. To achieve this, the further development of EU Citizenship could offer a valuable political strategy with multiple policy-making options that hold significant potential for further development within the EU policy making.

Within this political contest, the conference aimed primarily to reflect on the implications of the elections on the development of EU Citizenship, assessing what had been achieved thus far while also looking forward to what could be done in the next legislative period. The conference featured discussions and informal brainstorming sessions, building on the wake-up call highlighted in the Conference Background Document prepared by the ECIT Foundation.

This event also marks the conclusion of the EU-financed 'Inclusive Europe for Mobile EU Citizens' (MobileCIT) Project, organised by Europeans Throughout the World, MyVoice, Open Knowledge Sweden, and the ECIT Foundation. The Project aimed to enhance political rights and the participation of all EU citizens in everyday EU political life.

Finally, the conference was an occasion to examine a new version of our European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), now called "Teach Me Europe" — which calls for European citizenship education and Erasmus for all in order to raise awareness of the Statute and make European Citizenship a citizenship for everyone and not only for the most privileged.

The event was attended by 50 participants, mainly scholars, democracy and political rights activists and policymakers, and succeeded in bringing together different points of view on EU Citizenship, its function and its potential for further development.

Based on the background discussion document, the event focused on discussing the following points and proposals on EU Citizenship:

- **Assign Responsibility to a Senior Commission Member:**
  According to the ECIT Foundation, EU Citizenship should be overseen by a senior member of the Commission in a coordinating role. This ensures that EU Citizenship is integrated into all EU policies and is not overlooked. Supported by a dedicated team and necessary resources, this Commissioner should address complaints, appeals, or initiatives and follow up on policy making. The Commissioner should aim to create a more inclusive and outward-looking European Citizenship, supported by a Cross-Party Group of MEPs.
- **Clarify Citizenship in a Statute:**
  A clearer definition of EU Citizenship was demanded by the Conference on the Future of Europe and has been proposed repeatedly by the European Parliament. The Commission has produced a guide to a limited set of rights, but consolidating all rights across different policy areas will help citizens understand the meaning of EU Citizenship better, identify enforcement areas, and address gaps. EU Citizenship should be relevant to both those who travel and those who stay at home.

- **Full Political and Democratic Citizenship:**
  Political rights are central to citizenship. The Maastricht Treaty granted EU citizens the right to vote and stand in municipal and European elections where they reside. However, these rights are underutilised and should be extended to regional and national elections. Efforts are needed to combat disenfranchisement linked to freedom of movement, and national authorities should work to bridge the gap between EU citizens and other residents. Extending voting rights should include lowering the voting age to 16, accompanied by enhanced citizenship education.

- **Citizenship for All, Not Just the Few:**
  Introduce a right to European citizenship education, supplementing national citizenship education both in and out of school. This education should be practical, allowing everyone—not just the privileged few—to experience what Europe has to offer. These benefits should be integrated into a European citizens' card linked to one's ID, making the application of one's status and rights within Europe more accessible and automatic. A European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) called "Teach Me Europe" should be supported, building on repeated demands by the European Parliament and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

- **Citizenship Owned by Citizens Themselves:**
  ECIT also suggests making European citizens co-owners of their status, making it less of a top-down EU creation and more of a fundamental status that citizens have the responsibility to develop further. Selecting citizens at random to represent the population in European Citizens' Assemblies has proven effective in the Conference on the Future of Europe. National models and examples like the transnational Democratic Odyssey demonstrate this participatory democracy instrument's power, which should be used to support and implement the above agenda.

Official Release of the Symbolic Vote Report

At 10:30 AM, the ECIT Foundation officially presented the Symbolic Vote Report, which detailed the results of a symbolic vote held on April 26, 2024. This initiative aimed to demonstrate to EU policymakers the strong support among citizens for electoral reforms and the expansion of political rights within the EU. The symbolic vote focused on three critical questions regarding voting rights: lowering the voting age to 16, allowing EU citizens to vote in all elections in their country of residence, and extending political rights to third-country nationals residing in the EU. There were 523 votes in total with the following results :

- 45.3% yes and 54.7% no to lowering the voting age to 16;
- 82% yes and 18% no to full political rights for EU citizens;
- 72% yes and 18% no to voting rights for third-country nationals.

During the panel discussion, **Tony Venables** highlighted the positive outcomes and challenges faced during the organization of the symbolic vote. **Venables** noted that the last European Parliament had given hope through its initiatives on EU Citizenship, but emphasised the logistical difficulties in organizing the vote on the Esplanade of the European Parliament due to constraints from Belgian and EU authorities. Despite these challenges, the symbolic vote was deemed a huge success, attracting significant participation and yielding surprising

results. Notably, the proposal to lower the voting age to 16 was the least popular, while there was overwhelming support for extending the franchise to EU mobile citizens and third-country nationals.

Venables also drew parallels between the symbolic vote and the MobileCIT Project, which showed similar trends in voter preferences. The report concludes that there is a pressing need for citizen input in policies related to electoral and democracy reforms. The feedback from the vote on lowering the voting age revealed that citizens have well-founded proposals and motivations, underscoring the necessity for more participatory and in-depth discussions to advance these reforms.

Question Time with Policy-Makers
Panel: Chaired by **Suzana Carp**, ECIT Board Member
Speakers:
Andris Gobiņš, Member of the EESC, Rapporteur on the defence of democracy package
Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Head of Citizenship Unit, DG Justice
Dora Kostakopoulou, Professor of European Union Law, KU Leuven

Suzana Carp began the discussion by highlighting the nationalistic focus of recent EU elections. Despite being a democratically elected body of the EU, the elections have been dominated by national politics and issues. She expressed concern that EU Institutions are neglecting the concept of common EU Citizenship, which is crucial for the EU integration process. **Carp** emphasized that political rights attached to EU Citizenship and their development are inherently linked to the health of EU democracy and, by extension, to the EU elections.

Andris Gobiņš underlined the significance of rights, participation, and belonging for EU citizens. He advocated for more involvement of EU citizens and civil dialogue in policy-making, emphasizing the need for strategic approaches to strengthen European democracy. He noted that there is a broad consensus within the EESC to support initiatives aimed at enhancing EU democracy, and the committee is particularly interested in the outcomes and proposals emerging from the conference. However, **Gobiņš** criticized disenfranchisement of EU citizens, EDAP and the DoD Directive. EESC plans to write a joint paper with civil society on a European Citizen Strategy by fall. **Gobiņš** indicated the importance of citizenship should also be reflected in the EP.

Dora Kostakopoulou added to the discussion by emphasising the need to formalise the relationship between EU Citizenship and fundamental rights within the EU treaties. She proposed linking rights such as family reunification and human dignity to EU Citizenship and advocated for the inclusion of digital rights under the umbrella of EU Citizenship. **Kostakopoulou** stressed that while expanding EU Citizenship, it is important not to overshadow the role of national citizenships.

Marie-Hélène Boulanger from the European Commission provided a nuanced perspective, asserting that EU Citizenship has not been neglected. She emphasised that EU Citizenship was already a priority in the outgoing Commission, and highlighted significant

accomplishments, particularly in light of various crises. Boulanger cited the Commission's efforts in supporting free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implementation of the EU Digital COVID Certificate (DCC), and the development of the Citizenship Package. She detailed the work done to bolster consular rights through proposals for new directives, enhance free movement rights with updated guidance, and improve electoral participation through various initiatives such as directives, the ECNE, guides for people with disabilities, and recommendations for inclusive and resilient elections.

Boulanger stressed that while some of these initiatives may not be explicitly labelled under EU Citizenship, they effectively address crucial issues like political participation, disinformation, social inclusion, and consumer protection. She highlighted the importance of creating spaces for citizen dialogue and participation, which are fundamental for a functioning democracy. Looking ahead, **Boulanger** indicated that citizenship would remain high on the political agenda, as evidenced by the EUCO conclusions on democracy and citizens' engagement. She called for building on these positive experiences, leveraging new technologies, and promoting a strong narrative on the advantages of EU Citizenship to further enhance and implement policies effectively.

Tony Venables stressed the need for better education on EU Citizenship and political rights, and noted that many citizens are unaware of their rights and the potential improvements that could be made. **Venables** also highlighted the conference's importance in addressing both theoretical concepts and practical implementation issues, advocating for a Statute on citizenship and a stronger commitment from EU Institutions. **Venables** also reiterated ECIT's proposal for a major shift towards increased citizen involvement, suggesting the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly with priorities on a Citizenship Statute, full political rights, and citizenship education. He also recommended appointing a senior Commission member dedicated to EU Citizenship. **Julian Culp** emphasised instead the importance of correct implementation and harmonisation of policies to guarantee the rights of EU citizens. He pointed out the need for better enforcement of existing rights and harmonisation of social security systems to facilitate mobility within the EU, in some way criticising an excessive focus on the theoretical aspect of EU Citizenship.

Dora Kostakopoulou and **Elīna Pinto** discussed how the current crisis presents an opportunity for EU Citizenship reforms, noting that crises have historically driven EU integration forward and stressing the importance of both implementing existing policies and promoting the broader concept of EU Citizenship. **Elīna Pinto** added also that there is a crisis of trust in the EU, as citizens do not see enough improvements in their daily lives. She agreed with **Julian Culp** that practical improvements are necessary for citizens to trust the EU and advocated for political groups to unite in support of reforms focusing on the rights of mobile citizens.

The panel concluded with a call from **Andris Gobiņš** for better narratives on EU Citizenship and potential reforms. **Gobiņš** suggested the formation of an intergroup on citizenship in the European Parliament, while **Tony Venables** added in the end that citizenship should benefit all, not just mobile citizens. They emphasised the importance of ensuring that even those who do not intend to move from their country are included in the discourse on EU Citizenship.

<u>Main Conclusions</u>

- Enhanced citizen involvement in EU policy-making is crucial.
- Strengthening the link between EU Citizenship and fundamental rights within EU treaties is essential.
- Improving education on citizenship rights is necessary to foster a more informed and engaged electorate.
- Effective implementation and harmonisation of policies are needed to ensure that EU Citizenship works in practice.
- EU Institutions must maintain a strong commitment to advancing citizenship rights, especially during times of crisis.
- The concept of EU Citizenship should be inclusive and benefit all residents, including third-country nationals.

Discussion on mobile citizens' rights
Panel: Chaired by **Gatis Pāvils**, MobileCIT Coordinator
Speakers:
Cecilia Borglin, Secretary General, Swedes Worldwide.
Elīna Pinto, Senior advisor, Europeans Throughout The World (ETTW)
Dejan Valentinčič, Europeans Throughout The World (ETTW)

Gatis Pāvils opened the discussion by presenting the MobileCIT Project, outlining its objectives, and showcasing its achievements. He highlighted the project's creation of a website featuring 14 questions, which allowed EU citizens to express their opinions on various political issues and potential policy reforms. This initiative aimed to explore general sentiment on topics concerning the rights of EU mobile citizens. **Pāvils** presented data and results from the project and the online vote, which are better detailed in a report prepared by ETTW. He pointed out that the question about lowering the voting age to 16 was the only one that did not receive majority support.

Elīna Pinto discussed ETTW's role in promoting best practice exchanges among mobile EU citizens and emphasised the unique challenges they face. She noted that while mobile citizens benefit greatly from EU rights, they are also the main victims when these rights are not properly implemented. **Pinto** stressed that digital solutions are often the first response from policymakers to address these issues, but the problems mobile citizens face are complex and multifaceted and require more than quick fixes. She highlighted the difficulties mobile citizens encounter in having their interests represented and coordinating politically, partly due to the multilingual nature of the group.

Cecilia Borglin underscored the necessity of addressing mobile citizen rights at the EU level and introduced the advocacy actions taken by Swedes Worldwide, particularly towards government representatives in Sweden. She emphasised that many of the issues mobile citizens face can only be effectively resolved through EU-wide solutions.

Dejan Valentinčič compared the challenges of national minorities to those of mobile citizens, noting the need for EU-level intervention. He pointed out that countries receiving the most EU

funds are often the ones with the highest emigration rates to net contributor countries. This creates an economic burden on these countries as they invest heavily in education for future expatriates. **Valentinčič** also emphasised the obstacles to mobility created by non-harmonised policies, particularly in education.

Daria Pîrvu, another participant in the MobileCIT Project, highlighted the specific challenges faced by Romanian mobile citizens, such as losing their identity cards upon migration. She stressed the utility of the MobileCIT Project in supporting the Romanian diaspora and other mobile citizens across Europe.

The discussion concluded with many attendants and speakers expressing gratitude to ETTW for their efforts and service to mobile citizens in the EU. **Elīna Pinto** highlighted the importance of the MobileCIT Project, noting the emergence of a new generation of mobile citizens with a European identity and roots in multiple countries and regions within the union.

Main conclusions

- The MobileCIT Project effectively highlighted the opinions and challenges of mobile EU citizens through its Open2Vote platform.
- Digital reforms are often seen as immediate solutions, but the complexities of mobile citizens' rights require more comprehensive and nuanced approaches.
- Addressing mobile citizens' rights at the EU level is essential for effective resolution of their issues.
- There is a significant need for better representation and political coordination among mobile citizens.
- The importance of ongoing support and advocacy for mobile citizens was emphasised, particularly as a new generation with a European identity emerges.

Discussion on mobile citizens political participation and belonging to the EU
Panel: Chaired by **Tony Venables**, Founder of ECIT Foundation
Speakers:
Julian Culp, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Fellow of the Center for Critical Democracy Studies, The American University of Paris
Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Chair in International Affairs, School of Transnational Governance at EUI
Pablo Luongkhan-Garcia, Associate in Antitrust and Competition Law in Latham & Watkins
Francesco Zatelli, Public Impact Lawyer at Pro Publico
Gosia Wochowska, PhD, Project Manager of Networks of Towns, and Evaluator (CERV, Horizon Europe)
Nora Siklodi, Lecturer in Politics and EU Studies at University of Portsmouth
Alejandro Peinado García, Former APA for Domènec Ruiz Devesa

Tony Venables opened the panel by outlining the ECIT Foundation's objectives regarding the participation of EU citizens. He emphasised the importance of continuing the proposals made by the previous European Parliament, especially those from the AFCO committee, in the new legislative term. **Venables** highlighted the need for ongoing support for electoral reform and initiatives addressing disenfranchisement, as well as the continuation of efforts in EU citizens'

education. He underscored the consensus on these reforms by presenting the positive outcomes of the symbolic vote organised by ECIT on electoral reforms and the fight against disenfranchisement of mobile citizens. Despite the lack of consensus on lowering the voting age to 16, **Venables** stressed the demand for public debate on this issue and the need to increase citizens' participation in policymaking processes.

Alejandro Peinado García highlighted the key points that should be defended in the next term. He emphasised the importance of civil organisations pushing to influence the working agenda of the next Commission, as the Parliament has leverage and there is already a working majority. **Peinado García** called for an electoral reform of the European Parliament elections and suggested that more competences should be delegated to the EU from the national level to strengthen and potentially reform EU Citizenship in the treaties.

Kalypso Nicolaïdis criticised the Commission for not continuing enough the work started during the Conference on the Future of Europe regarding citizens' participation. She argued that more citizens' participation would increase the EU's visibility and perceived political legitimacy. **Nicolaïdis** noted that many parliamentarians might feel delegitimised by initiatives that seek to complement the Parliament and its elected representatives. She also pointed out that the Council's reluctance towards electoral reform is partly due to uncertainties about its impact on national parliaments. **Nicolaïdis** stressed the importance of understanding the perspectives of settlers and non-mobile citizens on EU Citizenship.

Pablo Luongkhan-Garcia and **Francesco Zatelli** introduced their organisations and activities. **Luongkhan-Garcia** discussed potential legal actions to address disenfranchisement of mobile EU citizens, highlighting the severe impact on citizens from Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, and Malta who lose their voting rights in national elections when residing abroad. He emphasised that this issue extends to European Parliament elections for those living in non-EU countries. **Luongkhan-Garcia** discussed the limitations in exercising democratic rights, such as the inability to vote by postal or e-vote in certain Member States, and the disparities in voting rights across different countries. He called for harmonised electoral laws within the EU to ensure full participation of mobile citizens in democratic processes, reinforcing principles of representative democracy and equality. He also spoke about the need for pro bono legal work to challenge disenfranchisement in European elections and discussed the role of advocacy and strategic litigation in defending citizenship rights.

The panel concluded with **Tony Venables** highlighting the paradoxical nature of voting rights, where changes seem impossible until sudden shifts occur. He mentioned the need for a European help desk on voting rights to address the complexities of the electoral system and ensure that citizens can easily understand their voting rights.

Main conclusions:

- Enhanced citizen involvement in EU policymaking is crucial.
- Improving education on citizenship rights is necessary to foster a more informed and engaged electorate.

- The concept of EU Citizenship should be improved taking account also of non-mobile EU citizens
- There are multiple legal avenues to advocate against disenfranchisement within the EU, and there is the need for both strategic litigation and advocacy efforts.
- Pushing for an EU electoral reform, despite its complexity and challenges, remains essential. This process should actively involve citizens to ensure broad support and legitimacy.
- **Tony Venables** proposed the establishment of a European help desk for voters to assist with the complexities of the electoral system and ensure that citizens can easily understand and exercise their voting rights.

Final debate with recommendations to the new EU legislature Speakers

Raquel Garcia Hermida-van der Walle, MEP
Tony Venables, Founder of ECIT Foundation
Niccolò Milanese, European Alternatives
Suzana Carp, ECIT Board Member

Raquel Garcia Hermida-van der Walle, recently elected as an MEP, shared her perspective on voting rights within the EU. She emphasised the importance of citizen awareness regarding their voting rights and registration possibilities, drawing from her experience in the Netherlands. **Garcia Hermida-van der Walle** expressed her disappointment with the Council and Commission's inaction following the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe, labelling it as scandalous. She committed to advocating for better recognition of EU Citizenship within national legislatures and showed interest in the ECIT-proposed cross-party group on EU Citizenship. Additionally, **Garcia Hermida-van der Walle** voiced concerns about the freedom of movement within the EU, particularly in the Netherlands, and tempered her expectations regarding treaty reforms, acknowledging their long-term nature and the current unfavourable political climate.

Julian Culp, speaking as both a scholar and an EU citizen, expressed his worries about the rise of Euroscepticism across Europe. He highlighted the potential backlash and the need for proactive measures to enhance the legitimacy and perception of the EU. **Culp** argued that the EU's ability to effectively protect fundamental rights is crucial for its legitimacy.

Niccolò Milanese addressed the issue of democratic disorder and malaise within the EU, echoing Culp's concerns about the EU's perceived loss of legitimacy from a democratic standpoint. He stressed that the EU's strength and legitimacy should primarily come from its internal actions, particularly its capacity to protect citizens' rights and represent them effectively. **Milanese** also discussed the topic of EU enlargement, suggesting that while geopolitical reasons might drive integration, it must align with EU values and demonstrate the EU's ability to act democratically and promote fair politics in new Member States.

Tony Venables reflected on previous discussions with Madame Boulanger and the behind-the-scenes actions of the Commission. He argued for the need to have senior commissioners

take responsibility and politically defend free movement and European Citizenship. **Venables** emphasised that a more proactive political stance is necessary to uphold these principles.

Garcia Hermida-van der Walle further stressed the importance of focusing on mobile citizens who are not economically privileged, such as cross-border workers and seasonal workers. She underscored the need to work towards inclusive citizenship that addresses the needs of those who are not yet mobile due to lack of information and economic constraints.

Suzana Carp concluded the panel with an optimistic outlook on reforms related to political rights and freedom of movement, despite the challenging political environment. **Carp** informed **Garcia Hermida-van der Walle** about ECIT's new European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) proposal, "Teach Me Europe," which aims to link EU Citizenship with the right to citizenship education within the Union and update Article 25 of the TFEU.

Main conclusions

- Enhanced awareness and protection of voting rights and freedom of movement in the EU.
- There is the need to work on the legitimacy of the EU and its perception by its citizens, reforms on EU Citizenship should follow this strategy
- EU enlargement should align with EU values and demonstrate democratic capacity.
- Senior commissioners should take a more active political role in defending free movement and European Citizenship.
- Inclusive citizenship should cater to both mobile and non-mobile citizens, focusing on education and economic constraints.

2.5.3 Links to conference and promotional materials

Event programme, background discussion group and reading list
https://ecit-foundation.eu/annual-conference/

Mailings
- **Event invitation (May 2024 newsletter):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/122762569944401190
- **Event reminder (dedicated email):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/123927906719106302
- **Event reminder and Zoom link details (June 2024 newsletter):**
  https://preview.mailerlite.io/preview/382394/emails/125106319326709306

Social media
- **Registration open:**
  - https://www.instagram.com/p/C7o1eS0IY6V/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ecit-foundation-european-citizens%E2%80%99-rights-involvement-and-trust-_registration-now-open-you-

are-most-warmly-activity-7206650186977153024-
Z2MC?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- **Event announcement video:**
  - https://www.instagram.com/p/C8M1pIqs4P7/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Proposals reel:**
  - https://www.instagram.com/reel/C8W6qM7MljP/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
  - https://www.facebook.com/reel/1941269389642236
- **Spotlight reel on key issues:**
  - https://www.instagram.com/reel/C8b034PMsxI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==
- **Last chance to register:**
  - https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=478249014854725&set=a.167309885948641
  - https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ecit-foundation-european-citizens%E2%80%99-rights-involvement-and-trust-_program-and-registration-httpslnkdin-activity-7213572874731728898-3uuZ?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- **Event follow-up:**
  - https://www.instagram.com/p/C9KHNDysPrG/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

3 CONCLUSION

The MobileCIT Project was innovative with its aim of aggregating the concerns of mobile EU citizens and bringing them to the attention of EU policy makers with a view to getting them addressed and finding answers. The Project had to deal with a number of challenges:

- Firstly, the research and the discussions during the events described here show that the concerns of the 13.9 million EU citizens living and working in another Member State are shifting. For example, questions surrounding dual citizenship and the acquisition of EU Citizenship may not be numerous but are becoming more salient, reflected for example in cases before the European Court of Justice. There is certainly a need for more research into these concerns and the barriers to the exercise of rights to freedom of movement.
- Secondly, there is no single well-identified channel for raising these issues with EU policy-makers, for example questions about the right to reside in another Member State are dealt with by one department, whereas recognition of academic qualifications (which got the most votes out of the 14 questions) is dealt with by another department. The concerns of mobile citizens relate also to several different committees in the European Parliament — hence the efforts of ECIT to bring MEPs together in a Cross-Party Group on EU Citizenship.
- Thirdly, both the research and the discussions at the events described here show that the issue of representation of mobile EU citizens has become almost the key issue in its own right, reflecting increasing doubt that if concerns are raised a person responsible will be found to deal with them. Possibly, the new committee to consult civil society being set up by DG Justice in the Commission might be part of the answer to this question.
- Finally, the Project revealed that the question of votes at 16 is controversial. The only question of the 14 to get a negative response was whether the voting age should be lowered throughout the EU. This was borne out by the discussions at two of the four ECIT events in September 2023 and January 2024 which focussed on this theme and involved audiences of young people. The Symbolic Vote ECIT organised in front of the European Parliament on 26 April also showed that a majority consider that the level of political education is not adequate to vote at 16.

Hopefully this report will be useful to others building on the MobileCIT Project.