

NEW ACADEMIC YEAR AND NEW TERM OF EU INSTITUTIONS START WITH MORE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

By P. MARKOVIC, ECIT FOUNDATION

The fourth edition of the ECIT (European Citizens' Rights, Involvement and Trust) Foundation's Summer University on European Citizenship, co-organized for the first time in cooperation with the Institut d'études Européennes (IEE) of the Université libre de Bruxelles on 2-3 September 2019, brought together policy-makers, civil society activists and members of the academia to discuss and set the priorities for the development of European citizenship in the new term of European institutions. High-ranking officials of the Commission, MEPs, professors and even a judge from the Court of Justice of the EU were unified in demanding 'More European Citizenship'!



Summer University Opening panel

The summer behind us was an ideal chance to take stock of the rare confluence of watershed changes in the life of the European Union. The European elections in May brought with them a new turn in the institutions of the Union but also showed that the citizenry had bestowed a level of legitimacy upon the European Parliament unprecedented in the past 25 years with a turnout over 50%.

Earlier this year, the European Parliament asked for all developments in the legislation regarding European citizenship since its introduction in 1992 and scattered throughout the Treaties to be consolidated and unified so that they would become a firm basis for the active and politically salient citizenship of Europeans. After the elections, the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, called for the establishment of the two-year citizens' conference on the future of Europe by 2020 with a mandate to come forward with proposals for reform in the democratic DNA of the Union.

To take stock of this tide of encouraging developments, the ECIT Foundation organised this year's edition of the Summer University on 'More European Citizenship'. Our aim? To debate the new agenda for advances in European citizens' rights, participation and the sense of belonging to the EU, and to draw up a set of demands to the EU institutions.

When it comes to rights as the core dimension of citizenship, participants of the Summer University debated how to tackle the longstanding and new barriers to the freedom of movement, how to strengthen the rule of law in the EU and how to incorporate new rights, such as that to clean environment, in the catalogue of those all EU citizens are entitled to. A keynote speech by Lucia Serena Rossi, a judge of the European Court of Justice, focused on the Court's case law on non-discrimination.

*«Citizenship of the EU and Principle of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality: the effects of Article 18 TFUE in the case law of the EU Court of Justice»
Keynote by Lucia Serena Rossi (European Court of Justice)*



Citizens' participation was approached by some of its most active civil society champions, who looked at how the past experimentation with new channels of citizens' influence over the decision-making of the EU can be turned into a permanent feature of EU politics by transforming participation into one of its central pillars. The need for a new and truly democratic White Paper on EU governance and a widespread system of citizen agoras was emphasised.

Finally, we discussed how we all, but especially the young, can all feel more at home in this Union of ours. Experts in the field of citizenship education, civic and environmental activists came together to see what needs to be done so that programmes like Erasmus+ and social movements such as school strikes for climate can engender a deeper allegiance to Europe at a time when most of our problems

cross borders and demand solutions beyond the narrow confines of nation-and-member states. Among the highlights in this dimension, I would like to point out the keynote speech of MEP Julie Ward, the Vice-President of the CULT Committee in the European Parliament and the prototype training on 'Making European Citizens' co-developed by ECIT, European Alternatives and the Good Lobby.

The ECIT Foundation is very satisfied with the results of the event and also grateful that the GEM-STONES community and the IEE have chosen to join forces and help set the stage for all these exciting future steps. We invite the readers to continue to follow us and invite them to visit ECIT's new office at the Salon for European Civic Organisations (SECO) at Rue d'Arlon 53 in Brussels so we can all plan how to further entrench EU citizenship together!

ECIT Foundation's immediate plans for the year ahead:

Make citizenship more popular. A book will be produced for the general public with inputs from experts and editors to cover as many languages as possible and reach the unreached. Nowadays a record 72 % of our population see themselves as European citizens, but is there really a clear idea of what this means? Creating a resource on European citizenship, regularly updated, should follow this publication.

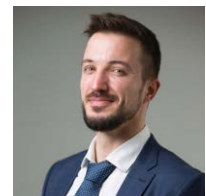
Deepen knowledge of European citizenship. This will be done via a training programme on European rights, how to defend claims more effectively or promote initiatives backed by 1 million signatures in order to build a citizenship of networks across the continent. This training module can also be developed for citizenship education in and outside school.

Demand full political rights for EU citizens on the move. A European citizens' initiative will be launched for universal suffrage. This will aim to extend electoral rights in European elections and local elections in one's country of residence to regional, national elections and referenda.

Help build a European public sphere. Building on transnational activism that boosted turnout in this year's European elections among young people, ECIT will work on reforms to make it easier to vote in the next European elections and to create transnational political parties and lists of candidates. This work will be carried out in cooperation with the new wave of other organisations fighting for citizenship and democracy at SECO.

*If you wish to participate, make a donation or have any suggestions for our work, do not hesitate to write to info@ecit-foundation.eu

Petar Markovic is Executive Director of ECIT Foundation. Petar completed his PhD thesis on '*EU Democratic Deficit and Transnational Civic Culture*' within the framework of a GEM PhD School Erasmus Mundus European Joint Doctorate between the Université libre de Bruxelles (BE) and LUISS Guido Carli di Roma (IT).



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pmof@gem-stones.eu

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