



24 YEARS OF EU CITIZENSHIP: WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

18 May 2016 | 10am-5pm | Rue de la Loi 227, Brussels

#EUCitizenship24 #UImpactDebate



Conference Report

ECAS' Conference "24 Years of EU Citizenship: What We Stand to Lose" analysed the main achievements and challenges of EU citizenship close to 25 years after the concept was first enshrined in the EU Maastricht Treaty. National examples were presented on how the rights and values associated with EU citizenship are implemented in practice in the Member States, in particular in the light of the current political developments. Civil society representatives also discussed trends and civic engagement initiatives throughout the EU aiming at putting citizens at the centre of policy-making and enable them to tap the full potential of EU citizenship.

More than 70 participants took part in the Conference, which was held at the premises of the Delegation of the Government of Catalonia to the EU in Brussels. In addition, the event was live streamed and video recorded and over 100 people could watch it online in total.

Throughout the various presentations and interventions, one common message stood out: However crucial the role of EU institutions in advancing EU Citizenship may be, Member States share also their responsibility in making it happen. Indeed, several panellists and participants pointed to the recurrent misapplications of EU law in their national countries and some good practices were also presented. Another important message from the Conference was that more education and information is needed for citizens to be aware of their rights and better engage at EU level. Several speakers underlined that citizens should not need to claim their rights, but the conditions should be made available for them to exercise them.

The Conference was organised in the framework of the U-Impact project, funded under the Europe for Citizens Programme managed by DG Migration and Home Affairs.

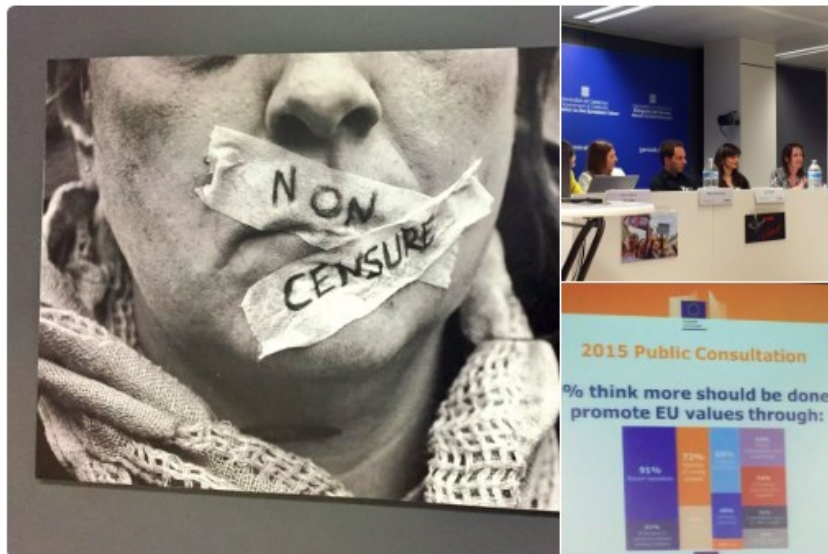
The Conference was opened by Mr [Amadeu Altafaj](#), Permanent Representative to the EU of the Government of Catalonia. In his welcoming note, he stressed the significance of EU citizenship and the importance to preserve it and urged the audience not to take it for granted.

"EU citizenship was and should remain a milestone in the construction process of the European Union. It is a valuable asset that we must absolutely safeguard and no-one should be allowed to undermine it." "In such difficult times for the European Union [...] it is essential to reaffirm our commitment to the protection and fulfilment of citizens' rights, but it is also a duty to be outspoken about it."



Amadeu Altafaj @aaltafaj · May 18

Don't take EU citizens rights for granted, defend them. Conf. "24 years of #EUCitizenship24: what we stand to lose".



← ↻ 6 ❤️ 1 ⋮

[Pavel Tychtl](#), Europe for Citizens Programme, DG Migration and Home Affairs, Keynote Speech

In his intervention, Pavel asked the audience to take a step back and look at the citizens' rights and their relation to modern European history. He presented a tragic family story taken from the Nazi times to show how important it is to remember where we come from and what the European Union was set up for. He ended his intervention by saying that the rights we have nowadays as Europeans are a manifestation of our collective solidarity, achievement and courage to face our past, and that we should never forget this.



1st panel: European Citizenship: Taking stock of the achievements and addressing the new challenges

“Once you take something for granted, you risk losing it the next day”

The first panel was moderated by Assya Kavrakova, ECAS’ Director, who took the opportunity to explain the reasons why ECAS had chosen the topic of EU Citizenship for this conference:

- EU Citizenship is embodied in ECAS’ mission and vision, which has been working with European citizenship for over 25 years
- European citizenship is the right framework to accommodate the various diverse debates that took place at national level under the U-Impact project
- In 2016 the European Commission will issue the third EU Citizenship report
- The multiple crises and populist movements that Europe is experiencing point makes us believe that now more than ever we should not take EU citizenship for granted

After this short introduction two video messages from Jo Leinen MEP and György Schöpflin MEP were played. They had been invited to speak at the conference but could not participate due to parliamentary commitments. After these videos the floor was given to the other panellists.

Jo Leinen, MEP

“We have to increase our efforts to show the benefits of being a European citizen and what the loss will be if Europe fails”

- We need a Europe for citizens and a Europe of citizens, where citizens take active part in decision-making
- Today most Europeans are aware they are recognised a series of rights as Europeans. Unfortunately, the concrete rights and privileges remain less known
- Europeans should learn more about the EU already at school, not only in an abstract way, but with practical examples. The European Parliament’s report on “Learning EU at school”, which calls for the development and promotion of a European dimension in education is all about this
- Citizenship is closely connected with active democratic participation. The campaigns for EU elections are an opportunity to foster transnational debates on European topics. The visibility of European party families should be increased by allowing candidates to run for truly transnational mandates. These proposals have been included in the proposed reform of the Electoral Law. It is up to the Member States to show that their calls to strengthen EU citizenship are more than a lip service

György Schöpflin, MEP

“Can you identify with Europe as a political body in your own country?”

- It is very difficult for the average European citizen to feel that voting for an MEP is going to have an impact on their everyday lives
- There is a disconnect between what Europeans vote for and how they feel about as most citizens relate rather to their national country than to Europe
- The European Citizens’ Initiative would be a good instrument to foster a contact between citizens and the European institutions, but it should be improved quickly in order not to generate more Euroscepticism.

Marie-Hélène Boulanger, DG Justice, European Commission

“There is potential to further increase citizens’ awareness about their rights and what to do if they are not respected”

Boulanger presented the findings of the Commission’s last public consultation on EU Citizenship, which was open between September and December 2015 and collected the views of over 2,000 respondents, together with the findings of the recent *Eurobarometer* on EU citizenship and electoral rights. These findings are going to feed into the Commission’s upcoming citizenship report due later this year. Some important findings of these studies are that:

- EU citizens are more familiar than ever with their status of European citizens and feel better informed about their rights as EU citizens, but there is still potential to further raise awareness among citizens about their rights and what they can do if these are not respected
- People are more informed about their right to free movement and to file a complaint to the EP, Commission and Ombudsman, but less informed about their electoral rights and their right to consular protection
- More than 1/3 of respondents faced difficulties in the exercise of their rights when moving to another country, mostly due to lengthy or unclear administrative procedures or because they could not find the relevant information or were not sufficiently informed about their rights as EU citizens
- A majority of respondents think that better informing about the relevance of EU policies for their daily lives and explaining the programme and objectives of the lead candidates could help improve participation in EU elections
- Main obstacles for democratic participation in the EU are red tape, insufficient information on how to vote and on how to register, lack of information about this right and lack of instruments for disabled people
- There is a clear interest in getting more cross-border coverage on political information
- School education, mobility of young people and cultural activities are mentioned as important means to foster EU common values
- Local and regional authorities should play a bigger role in promoting EU values

Rosita Agnew, Strategic Inquiries Unit, EU Ombudsman

“If people have a problem with the EU administration it is important for us that they know they can turn to the Ombudsman”

- The low awareness among citizens about what to do when their rights are not respected is of particular concern to the EU Ombudsman. To address this the EU Ombudsman launched a Twitter campaign on the Right to complain (#right2complain) to inform citizens about their right to complain if they encounter problems with the EU administration
- The Ombudsman has launched a strategic inquiry into the EU pilot procedure, which the Commission uses to tackle problems of poor implementation of EU law. The Ombudsman's inquiry focuses on timeliness, information to the public and information to individual complainants under the pilot procedure
- The Ombudsman has been at the forefront of efforts to improve transparency of EU institutions, in particular the citizen's fundamental right of public access to documents. More recently the Ombudsman's activities have focused rather on pro-active transparency (TTIP negotiations, trilogues, clinical trials, lobbying, etc.).
- The Ombudsman hopes to publish her position on trilogues and the responses to the public consultation before the Summer break
- The Ombudsman has launched an inquiry on the languages used in public consultations, as some of them are only available in English. This is an essential element to enable citizens become involved in the democratic life of the Union.



European Ombudsman  @EUombudsman · May 18

Ensuring that potential complainants know about their #right2complain is central to @euombudsman strategy #eurights #eucitizenship24



Isabell Hoffmann, Bertelsmann Stiftung

“There is much more room for manoeuvre for politicians to talk to people and bring them along than there is awareness of this opportunity”

- The Bertelsmann Stiftung is conducting surveys across Europe three times a year to gather general data on how EU citizens feel and position themselves with regard to the EU. These surveys include a first set of questions on the EU, a set of personal questions on the profile of the respondents and a third part on the hot political question of the moment
- Whenever they ask questions about the general feeling about the EU and European integration the responses are very positive, but when asked about the current state of the EU and its future the answers are very negative and majority of respondents do not see room for improvement in the next 10 years
- A majority of respondents cherish free movement and would like to preserve it



- A large majority of respondents believe there should be a common border protection in the EU, that there should be a fair distribution of asylum seekers in the EU and that Member States disrespecting these common solutions should face negative consequences
- These findings show that there is much room for manoeuvre for decision-makers to talk to citizens and bring them along than there is awareness about this opportunity. Politicians should not be silent about hot topics in fear of offending citizens, but rather discuss them openly.

Jon Worth, EU blogger

“Schengen works better if you fly than if you take trains or busses, as you are subject to border controls much more regularly”

- Freedom of movement matters to a vast majority of EU citizens and needs to be protected. 770,000 people in the EU are cross-border commuters every single day and 1.5 million Europeans who cross borders regularly
- With the European Movement International, Jon has set up a project –Schengen Watch- to collect citizens’ views about what is happening at the border and get that feeling better known at EU level
- The right not to be discriminated on the basis of nationality largely works well when it is about the right to move and reside in another EU country. But there are practical difficulties when nationality comes up against residence. He has been for instance unable to recharge his British mobile phone because he has a German address
- Complaints to the European Commission do not usually work and people prefer to mobilise online to find ways around the problem
- Very few mobile EU citizens engage in local party politics in the country where they reside, partly due to lack of information. Europeanisation of political parties does not have to happen only at EU level through transnational lists, it also has to happen at local level: we have to Europeanise political parties from below
- EU freedom of movement is a right, and as such it should not have to be pro-actively requested



Jon Worth @jonworth · May 18

This is how citizens solve EU-related problems. They don't go to SOLVIT!
[#EUCitizenship24](#)

Julian Komprobst @J_komprobst

@jonworth definitely. he asked what to do on facebook, #followerpower helped :P



2nd panel: European Rights and Values in practice: The national perspective

In the second panel of the conference civil society representatives discussed rights and values associated with EU citizenship and their practical implementation at national level.

Samia Badani, New Europeans

“The UK has been marked by a toxic debate over EU migration and the proliferation of ungrounded myths that EU migrants ‘take advantage’”




- They have partnered with “Volunteering Matters” under a European project to deliver a community voices project to look at the impact of EU migration on local communities and have run a series of seminars across the UK and gathered interesting findings
- There is a lack of understanding of EU citizens’ rights in accessing health services and a fear among EU citizens of being stigmatised as health tourists
- EU mobile citizens face discrimination in employment and in housing in the UK. Many EU citizens work in terrible conditions and face difficult housing situations
- EU citizenship needs to be more than this abstract notion that is now. There is a gap between these EU citizens and EU institutions and this disengagement is mainly due to a lack of understanding of the benefits attached to EU citizenship
- The UK has been marked by a toxic debate over EU migration and the proliferation of ungrounded myths that EU migrants ‘take advantage’ and we should think about the language we use
- There is a responsibility among Member States to embrace the rights attributed by EU citizenship. Instead, the very bodies responsible for protecting EU rights in the UK keep making a distinction between domestic law and European law
- The right to reside does not work in the UK. It is not enough to just work to qualify as a worker: additional conditions such as a minimal income per week are required. Job seekers need to prove they have genuine prospects of finding a job to have the right to residence, which goes against EU law
- It should be mandatory for Member States to conduct an impact assessment and consult citizens about the implementation of EU law and not just leave it up to the EU institutions


 New Europeans Retweeted



Nora Siklodi @NoraSiklodi · May 18

@SamiaBadani talks discrimination of EU mobiles, social #Eurights, clash btw national & EU law #EUCitizenship24 @ecas_europe @NewEuropeans

  2  

 Samia Badani and 1 other Retweeted



New Europeans @NewEuropeans · May 18

@SamiaBadani calling for impact assessments of how EU law is implemented in member states. #EUCitizenship24

  3  4 



Flora Graioni, IREX Europe

“European aid is increasingly diverted to tackle the migration crisis”

- The EU is still far from its commitment to international solidarity in terms of GDP % dedicated to development cooperation. Only 3 countries are well on track with regard to the 0.7% target
- A majority of Europeans consider development aid as a crucial tool and that tackling poverty in developing countries should be a top priority either in the EU or in their own country (*Special Eurobarometer 441*), but European aid is increasingly diverted to tackle the migration crisis
- This new direction for EU aid spending is taking much needed money away from projects supporting health, education, food security, democracy and human rights in developing countries
- It is the role of NGOs working in the development sector to raise awareness about development and to explain why it is important to sustain the support
- Development aid should not be used as a bargaining chip to obtain agreements or concessions on areas of strategic interest to the EU; it must not be linked to agreements on readmission, border control or stifling of mobility within African countries, and it should not be used to cover the costs of migrants in EU countries

Elsa Laino, Solidar

“The strengthening of EU labour citizenship is a cornerstone for the advancement of European integration”

- Their network of 60 NGOs supports solidarity and social justice in Europe and all over the world
- They have been involved in a project funded by Europe for Citizens programme called LABCIT (Labour Citizenship Project) whose aim was to test the link between EU citizenship and labour rights by looking at severe cases of labour rights violations towards EU mobile citizens in 6 European countries
- Key findings and recommendations of the project are:
 - o Posting of workers is only one of the many ways in which subcontracting occurs in the EU and is being used to exploit economic disparities in the EU, and there is a lack of transparency about such arrangements
 - o The EU should push Member States as much as possible towards direct employment contracts and use indirect employment contracts in a more regulated way
 - o In many Member States there is a huge overlapping between sectorial labour law regimes, which makes it difficult to identify the stakeholders and interlocutors, so there is room for improvement in terms of harmonization
 - o Civil society organisations have a strong role to play to fill in the gap of mistrust perceived by the EU mobile citizen who feel rather as foreigners when working in another EU country

Carles Cervera, Hàbitat3

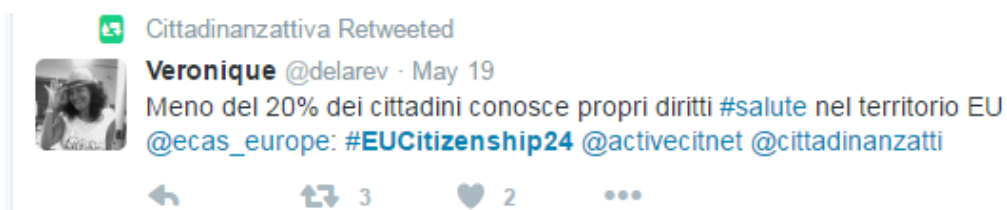
“A significant percentage of the people who get access to shelter manage to get out of their situation and have a normal life”

- The right to social housing and assistance is recognised in article 34 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- In Catalonia less than 2% of the housing is for social rent, whereas in the EU it accounts for 15% on average
- Due to the economic crisis there is an increasing demand for social housing, which has traditionally been secured by the public and charitable sectors
- Non-profit private foundation Hàbitat3 was set up over a year ago to address this raising demand
- They are implementing new ways of collaboration between different stakeholders (financial entities which own unoccupied houses, private owners and local and regional public administrations) to secure housing for people in need
- The novelty of their model is that they offer social and technical supervision and monitoring to make sure that the occupiers pay the rent and they also evaluate the impact of this social investment

Mariano Votta, Active Citizenship Network

“Less than 20% of citizens feel informed about their cross-border healthcare rights”

- Citizens' health is a core European policy, but the implementation is largely left to Member States
- Each year on the occasion of the European Patients' Rights Day the Commission publishes a list of 10 benefits that the EU brings to citizens in order to raise awareness
- In order to further raise awareness among citizens about their healthcare rights and involve them in their implementation, ACN and other civic and patients' organisations have established the European Charter of Patients' Rights, have launched an annual event "European Patients' Rights Day" and have promoted an interest group inside the European Parliament on this topic
- But awareness of healthcare rights remains still low, which hampers their exercise by citizens
- Through the U-Impact project ACN has shared successful national experiences and put forward recommendations on the issues of cross-border healthcare and it has launched a call for action to raise awareness of patients' rights across Europe through a communication campaign entitled "Patients' Rights Have no Borders"
- Cross-border health treatment is the missing piece of the puzzle to make Europe a true common house for everybody



Petko Georgiev, ProInfo Foundation

“Is there something we can do as citizens to explain to citizens in another country that we are not a threat to them [...], so that a national politician is not faced with anonymous pressure?”

In his intervention Petko talked about the situation of the so-called “citizens in limbo”, that is citizens trying to exercise their EU rights in another EU country and are facing discrepancies with the local legislation. He mentioned several practical examples, such as accessing social security made conditional upon having a work contract in a given country or signing a contract for a mobile phone made conditional upon having a residence permit in that particular country. He suggested to get citizens to recognise their rights at home as the rights of everybody else who is living or moving to their country as a way to make up for these implementation gaps.

3rd panel: Civic Engagement and Social Entrepreneurship: Can they contribute to tap the potential of EU citizenship?

The third panel of the Conference looked into different examples of civic engagement and social entrepreneurship initiatives across Europe and how they can contribute to foster EU citizenship. The panel brought together speakers from very varied organisations active at both national and EU level.

Aida Barquero, Fundación Ciudadanía

“We cannot demand a participatory citizenship unless EU institutions provide citizens with the right tools”

Aida presented *Dilee Fácil Lectura* (Easy Reading), a project aiming to create a more inclusive society and opportunities for everyone through reading by offering materials which meet the needs of people with disabilities and/or at risk of social exclusion.

- Access to reading is a social need and a right recognised by various national and international legal texts
- Only 5% of books in developed countries are produced in accessible countries
- Currently 7 Member States are blocking the ratification of the Marrakech Treaty which aims to promote accessible format books



JEF Europe @JEF_Europe · May 18

'We can't demand participatory citizenship if EU institutions do not provide #EUCitizens with the right tools' @AiBarquero
#EUCitizenship24



11



2



Ariola Agolli, Partners Albania

- Partners Albania works to create a more enabling environment for civil society organisations and they also support groups of citizens in their innovative ideas
- They work through different approaches:
 - o They receive funding support for start-ups or active local citizens, especially in communities with marginalised groups
 - o They do exchanges and cooperation among various stakeholders at national and international level for the exchange of experiences
 - o They facilitate the civic dialogue with the Albanian state actors in order to help them align with EU legislation in the field of social entrepreneurship through conferences and debates
- They have been organising an annual “Green ideas competition” that aims to serve as an incubator for small scale green and social economic development ideas utilising local resources and traditional models. Examples of the best ideas are:
 - o *Pana Albania* (a furnishing social enterprise working with recycled materials and engaging immigrants, pensioners and orphans)
 - o *Albania recycling community*, where Roma community is organised to collect objects to be recycled with bicycles
 - o *Gjirokastra foundation*, which aims to develop the traditions in Albania for handicrafts and other products produced by unemployed women and girls in poor living conditions

Carlotta Besozzi, Civil Society Europe

“Funding restrictions and lack of adequate consultation processes are perceived as top issues of concern by CSOs”

Carlotta presented the preliminary findings of an survey carried out together with CIVICUS Alliance to map the operating conditions for CSOs and key trends and challenges on civic space in Europe. They received a total of 180 full responses from civil society organisations across the EU. The full report should become available in June:

- Respondents are very divided with regard to the conditions for civil society and citizens’ action, especially between Western and Eastern countries
- Cross-border cooperation is very positively assessed by civil society organisations
- Funding restrictions and lack of adequate consultation processes are perceived by CSOs as top issues of concern
- Access to government information and reporting of corruption are also perceived as areas of concern
- A large majority of respondents sees an increase in nationalism and discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities and an increased polarisation between different sectors of the society



- A wide majority believes that governments' support to civil society to uphold human rights and democracy is unsatisfactory and want the EU to do more to guarantee civic space in their country

Ioan Bucuras, Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

"It is a paradox that EU countries that are currently not in Schengen but want to be in are against the current wave of refugees"

- JEF Europe launched European-wide street and social media campaign under the motto *"Don't Touch My Schengen!"* to call on EU leaders to protect free movement
- The campaign was structured in 3 pillars:
 - o An online campaign enabled through *Thunderclap* which reached over 1.5 million users
 - o A letter signed by JEF and other 18 other pan-European youth NGOs, and endorsed by the different political parties, which was addressed to Juncker, Tusk and Schulz to draw their awareness on the negative consequences of violations to the Schengen Agreement
 - o Street actions on the ground undertaken by JEF's local members
- People identify with their fellow citizens and not necessarily with complex Treaties. In order for the complex mechanisms in which Europe operates to be understood and used by citizens activism and civil society organisations have a big role to play

Claire Dhéret, European Policy Centre, FutureLab Europe

Claire presented the *FutureLab Europe* Programme led by the EPC and the findings of its recent publication *"Bring Back the Citizens! How to revive democratic participation for a citizens-led Europe"*. This publication is a collection of suggestions put forward by the young people on how to revive citizens' interest in participatory democracy and how to re-invent Europe's political system, which is facing growing distrust.

- There is a growing disconnect between citizens and their representatives all across Europe
- This young generation is the first generation who does not believe in social progress anymore
- Civic engagement is not disappearing in Europe, but the form it takes has changed: it is no longer civic engagement through trade unions or traditional organisations, it is mostly through online public debates and grass-root movements. The EU has to adjust to these changes
- Civic engagement mostly happens at local or national level, but it does not cross borders so often
- Key recommendations of the *FutureLab Europe* Programme are:
 - o Create a truly European political culture
 - o Make progress on social policies and re-distribution at EU level
 - o Increase the transparency of decision-making process in the EU using the potential of technology

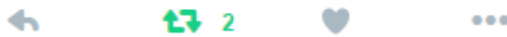


- Support the emergence of pan-European movements by supporting cross-border initiatives
- Promote civic education on EU citizenship and the way the EU works



JEF Europe @JEF_Europe · May 18

'Civic engagement of young people has changed: in streets instead of in labor unions. #Youth is still active' @cdheret #EUCitizenship24



Closing remarks by Assya Kavrakova

"We can never succeed in making EU Citizenship work and tap its potential if we do not look at it as an ecosystem with different interdependent levels [...] Even if the EU does everything perfect it will not be enough if Member States do not do their job [...] Some important steps have to be taken at local level. A mobile citizen has to be welcomed when he moves to another EU country."

