

## Review Article on EU Citizenship

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### ABSTRACT

This review article critically assesses Elvire Fabry's exploration of European citizenship, particularly in the context of the European Constitution project and the complexities surrounding the establishment of a cohesive citizenship framework. Fabry interrogates whether the European Union can transcend the limitations of formal legal rights to foster a robust political identity among citizens amid significant political resistance and the varied national identities of member states. The article highlights key issues of democratic participation, such as low voter turnout in European elections and the challenges posed by a fragmented political culture. Fabry advocates for a reconceptualization of citizenship that underscores the necessity of active engagement and inclusivity through consistent multi-level application. By juxtaposing Fabry's insights with Lynn Dobson's perspective on citizenship as a mean to an end to strengthen supranational authority through participatory governance, this review elucidates the dual significance of legal entitlements and active civic participation as essential elements for enhancing the legitimacy and efficacy of supranational governance in the European Union. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the need for stronger political will and institutional and regulatory reforms to realize the potential of European citizenship as a dynamic and unifying force within the Union.

**Keywords:** European Citizenship, Political Engagement, Supranational Governance, Civic Participation, Democratic Legitimacy, Inclusivity, Marginalized Communities, Institutional Reform.

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*Wir sind ein Volk* - German Demonstrators

*Maintenant, nous sommes des Européens.* - Emmanuel Macron

### Introduction

The consolidation of Union citizenship within the European Union encounters multiple structural barriers that operate across legal, political, institutional, and social dimensions, limiting its capacity to function as a coherent and empowering status. At the legal and institutional level, EU citizenship is enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty and subsequent treaties, yet its application is heavily mediated by national legal systems. Member states retain primary authority over key areas such as voting rights, residence, and access to social benefits, resulting in a patchwork of

inconsistent practices. The principle of subsidiarity further restricts EU competence in areas of social welfare and public services, limiting the enforceability of citizenship rights across the Union. Reliance on judicial interpretation, as evidenced in landmark cases before the Court of Justice of the European Union, highlights the dependence of Union citizenship on legal adjudication rather than comprehensive legislative harmonization.

Political and sovereignty constraints further impede the consolidation of Union citizenship. National governments frequently view the expansion of EU citizenship as a challenge to their sovereignty, particularly in relation to migration, welfare, and political participation. The limited institutional mechanisms for direct influence at the Union level, including the relative weakness of the European

Parliament, underscore the absence of robust political integration comparable to that found in national citizenship frameworks.

Social and cultural factors also constitute significant barriers. Many citizens maintain a primary identification with national rather than European identity, which undermines the social legitimacy of EU citizenship. Awareness of rights and mechanisms is uneven across member states, producing informational asymmetries that restrict the full exercise of citizenship. Linguistic diversity and limitations on mobility further hinder meaningful engagement in civic and political life across borders.

Economic and regional disparities exacerbate these challenges. Unequal economic conditions between member states lead to asymmetries in access to mobility and social benefits, often constraining citizens from lower-income regions. Concerns in host states regarding social dumping and pressures on public services can also provoke resistance to the implementation of EU-level rights.

Practical obstacles, including fragmented digital infrastructures and administrative complexity, limit the realization of citizenship rights. The increasing intersection of Union citizenship with digital platforms, such as e-governance and cross-border healthcare, is hindered by the absence of standardized tools, while bureaucratic procedures, such as residence registration and recognition of qualifications, often impose *de facto* restrictions on mobility and participation.

Finally, symbolic and normative limitations affect the perception and experience of EU citizenship. It is frequently regarded as legalistic and abstract, rather than a lived reality, which diminishes its capacity to foster civic engagement and a sense of political belonging. Tensions between the universality of Union-level rights and the diversity of national practices may generate resistance or uneven enforcement, further weakening the consolidation of citizenship.

In sum, the structural barriers to the consolidation of Union citizenship are multidimensional, encompassing legal fragmentation, national sovereignty concerns, socioeconomic disparities, limited political integration, and practical obstacles to mobility and participation. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of institutional harmonization, enhanced political commitment, citizen-centered policies, and measures to increase public awareness and engagement.

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This has to be compared to that institutional actors in the European Union conceive Union citizenship as both a legal anchor and a political instrument, a status that secures rights while fostering cohesion. The European Court of Justice emphasizes enforceable freedoms—movement, political participation, and protection under EU law—while the European Commission envisions citizenship as a bridge to European identity and integration. Yet these aspirations unfold amid the realities of national sovereignty, political compromise, and structural constraints. Beyond institutions, business communities and civil society shape and respond to the evolution of citizenship: commerce advocates for mobility and regulatory harmonization to facilitate the single market, while civic organizations push for inclusive access, social equity, and digital rights. Here, authority and accountability intersect, ambition and prudence entwine, and law and lived experience collide; citizenship is neither static nor symbolic, but a dynamic arena where freedom, protection, and participation are constantly negotiated and renewed.

The latest Eurobarometer and annual reports show that 74% of EU citizens identify as Europeans, the highest level in over two decades, reflecting a strong sense of belonging. Trust in the EU has also increased, with 52% of respondents expressing confidence in EU institutions, supporting the case for binding regulatory frameworks. Citizens continue to associate the EU with peace, democracy, and human rights, highlighting the normative foundations of Union citizenship. Cultural and social participation remains important, with 87% emphasizing the value of cultural exchange across Member States. Despite this sentiment, cross-border mobility remains modest, indicating a gap between identification with the EU and practical exercise of rights. Citizens highlight migration, climate, and security as top policy concerns, suggesting that citizenship policies must integrate broader social and economic dimensions. The data support the introduction of instruments like a physical and digital EU ID, which could enhance access to services, mobility, and civic engagement. However, differences in national administration, digital infrastructure, and legal traditions may challenge uniform implementation. Issues such as data privacy, digital divides, and regional disparities need to be addressed to ensure inclusive and effective citizenship policies. Overall, the reports point to a favorable environment for harmonized and enforceable EU citizenship frameworks that translate legal rights into tangible benefits.

In this sense, this review essay is intended to make clear the evolving shape of Union citizenship. It traces the paths where law meets practice, where institutions meet citizens, where business and civil society meet the European project. It does not speak as a final authority, nor claim to settle disputes; it does not demand agreement, nor does it dismiss dissent. Rather, it joins an ongoing debate—more than a voice, less than a manifesto—inviting reflection, and showing how rights and responsibilities, freedom and authority, universality and subsidiarity, are constantly weighed and measured. It seeks to illuminate the complexities, to challenge complacency, to stir attention, and to contribute to the ongoing work of defining citizenship as part of the journey of the European adventure. In doing so, it seeks not merely to describe, but to engage, to unsettle assumptions, and to highlight the dynamic negotiation through which European citizenship is continually defined, contested, and renewed.

In what follows, we trace the elusive quest for coherence, guided first by the penetrating insights of Elvire Fabry and Lynn Dobson, and then juxtaposed with the broader expanse of comparative scholarship. Here, law and lived experience collide: the Charter of Fundamental Rights asserts its authority, yet its resonance varies across EU institutions and national courts. This allows to address the vantage point from where integration could take in the context of the harmonization of the member states nationality laws and the dual track application of the Charter in both EU-law and national legislation, something that would prepare the ground for a more integrated and classicising approach to Union citizenship as part of our als ob state-building project. We shift, unexpectedly, to the rural contours of Union citizenship, where tradition meets innovation, and then to the digital sphere, where rights flicker and flex, ever contingent on connectivity. Finally, we confront cultural citizenship—an ambition boundless, yet fragile—in the unprecedented enterprise of European unification, where unity and diversity engage in a perpetual, productive tension. At the nexus of imagery and institutional constraint, public authority shapes the cosmopolitan public, even as the cosmopolitan public tempers the exercise of authority—curbing the worst, safeguarding freedom. Authority without accountability risks excess; freedom without vigilance invites chaos. Here, structures and sensibilities entwine, each reflecting and refracting the other, a dance of power and restraint, imagination and law, ambition and prudence.

## The Elusive Quest for Coherence

Qui a peur de la citoyenneté européenne? La démocratie à l'heure de la Constitution by Elvire Fabry is a thoughtprovoking exploration of European citizenship

and its complexities. Fabry's work is set against the backdrop of the European Constitution project and the debates surrounding the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. She questions the EU's capacity to establish a truly European citizenship—one that goes beyond formal legal rights—while navigating political resistance and divergent national identities across member states. Through a multidisciplinary lens, Fabry examines the political, legal, and philosophical dimensions of European citizenship. She highlights obstacles to effective transnational democratic participation, including low voter turnout in European elections, a limited European political culture, and challenges stemming from the diversity of national identities. Fabry also explores the tensions between federalist aspirations and the realities of intergovernmentalism within the EU. Fabry concludes that European citizenship remains a work in progress. To realize citizenship as a truly meaningful instrument of democratic integration demands not only vision but steadfast political will, thoughtful institutional reform, and the sustained engagement of citizens themselves. She calls for an approach that is both inclusive and participatory—one capable of surmounting resistance, bridging divisions, and nurturing a shared European identity grounded in common responsibility, active involvement, and mutual respect.

This work is a key contribution to discussions on the future of European democracy and the conditions necessary for authentic transnational citizenship.

## Citizenship: Etymology, Intention, and Colonial Dimensions

The term “citizenship” originates from the Latin word *civitas*, meaning “city” or “state,” which referred not merely to a geographic location but to the collective body of citizens and the political community to which they belonged. In Old French, this became *citoyen*, later entering English as “citizen,” with the suffix “-ship” denoting the state, condition, or quality of being. Literally, citizenship denotes the condition of being a member of a civic community, encompassing legal status, political rights, and social responsibilities.

Historically, the concept of citizenship was intended to define both belonging and participation within a polity. It combined three key dimensions:

1. Membership in a political community, conferring recognition as part of the collective body of the state or city.
2. Legal and civic rights, allowing citizens to participate in governance, access protections, and exercise entitlements.

3. Political and moral obligations, such as contributing to the defense, taxation, or broader welfare of the community.

Thus, citizenship was always a dual concept, integrating rights and duties, and linking individuals to the functioning and legitimacy of the state.

In the modern era, particularly with the rise of nation-states in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, citizenship was expanded and codified in legal frameworks. However, in colonial contexts, citizenship often became a mechanism of exclusion. While European settlers in colonies could claim full rights, indigenous populations were frequently denied political participation and legal recognition. In this sense, citizenship in colonial settings reinforced hierarchical distinctions, legitimizing the authority of the colonial state while restricting full civic engagement to a select population.

Therefore, while citizenship was not invented for colonialism, its implementation was deeply influenced by colonial hierarchies and power relations. It served as both a tool of inclusion—defining members of the political community—and a tool of exclusion, marking who could exercise rights and participate in governance.

Modern debates, such as those surrounding EU citizenship, reflect these historical tensions: the challenge remains to create inclusive forms of membership that combine legal rights with political voice, formal status with lived participation, and institutional recognition with civic empowerment. How can citizenship be meaningful if it grants rights without representation, or membership without agency? It is not merely a question of who belongs, but how belonging is enacted, addressing past exclusions while extending civic agency to all members of a supranational polity.

### *Let's Examine it from the the Five Different Perspectives*

The origin of European citizenship is notably ambiguous, reflecting both historical contingencies and political compromise. Fabry highlights that the concept was formally established only with the Maastricht Treaty, largely at the insistence of Spain, whose national context linked the idea of ciudadanía to the historical presence of Indigenous populations in territories conquered during the Americas' colonization. This historical dimension underscores the distinctive nature of European citizenship: unlike traditional citizenship, which integrates political, civic, and social attributes within a territorial nation-state, European citizenship primarily functions to safeguard the rights of intra-community migrants, emphasizing mobility, residence, and legal protection rather than conventional political agency.

The principle of EU citizenship itself raises profound questions about the feasibility of political engagement at the supranational level. Fabry interrogates whether meaningful active citizenship can be cultivated across diverse Member States, especially in the context of major EU enlargements and constitutional reforms. While EU law formally grants rights and entitlements, the challenge lies in translating these provisions into tangible opportunities for citizens to influence policy and participate in governance beyond the national sphere.

Fabry further examines the limits of EU citizenship in promoting political integration. Despite the robust legal framework codified in the treaties, citizens frequently experience a sense of detachment from EU institutions and decision-making processes. This detachment reflects both structural barriers—such as complex administrative procedures, language differences, and uneven access to participatory mechanisms—and the enduring primacy of national political arenas, which often mediate or overshadow European-level engagement.

Finally, Fabry highlights the paradoxical nature of European citizens' expectations. On one hand, there is a demonstrable demand for more participatory forms of democracy, a desire to engage with EU policies and influence supranational governance. On the other hand, skepticism persists regarding the legitimacy and responsiveness of EU institutions, leading to contradictory demands: citizens seek both increased involvement and greater assurance that their participation will have substantive impact. This tension encapsulates the broader challenge of transforming European citizenship from a primarily formal status into an instrument that fosters meaningful political integration, legitimacy, and active civic engagement across the Union.

In summary, *Qui a peur de la citoyenneté européenne?* prompts critical reflection on the evolving concept of European citizenship and its implications for democracy. Elvire Fabry's work invites readers to consider the delicate balance between legal rights and meaningful political engagement in Europe.

This has to be compared to earlier work by Lynn Dobson, who claims the EU citizenship is intrinsically linked to strengthening supranational authority and constitution-making processes. Lynn Dobson's work on EU citizenship, particularly in her book *Supranational Citizenship*, offers a distinctive perspective that bridges political theory, moral philosophy, and European integration. Her approach reimagines citizenship beyond the confines of the nation state, proposing a model that is adaptable to various political frameworks, including the European Union:



**Citizenship as an Institutional Role:** Dobson challenges traditional views of citizenship as a status of privilege and belonging. Instead, she defines it as an institutional role that enables individuals to exercise political agency, shaping the contexts of their lives and promoting the freedom and wellbeing of themselves and others. This perspective draws on the rights-based philosophy of Alan Gewirth, emphasizing the capacity for action and the fulfillment of duties to others within and outside the polity.

**Supranational Citizenship:** In the context of the European Union, Dobson explores how citizenship can function within a non-national political community. She examines the EU's democratic legitimacy, authority, political community, and identity through the lens of supranational citizenship, suggesting that such a framework can inspire rethinking of moral and political agency in other contexts and polities.

**Citizenship and Political Authority:** Dobson's work delves into the relationship between citizenship and political authority within the EU. She discusses how the institutional role of citizenship can contribute to the EU's democratic processes and legitimacy, proposing that an active and engaged citizenry is essential for the functioning of supranational institutions.

***Dobson's Conception of Citizenship Offers Several Avenues for Enhancing the EU's Supranational Authority:***

**Active Participation:** By redefining citizenship as an active role, individuals are encouraged to engage meaningfully in EU governance, thereby strengthening democratic legitimacy and the effectiveness of supranational institutions.

**Institutional Design:** Implementing structures that facilitate citizen involvement in decisionmaking processes can bridge the gap between EU institutions and the public, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability.

**Inclusive Frameworks:** Dobson's approach, while not explicitly focused on indigenous rights, provides a foundation for developing inclusive citizenship models that recognize and accommodate the rights and participation of indigenous peoples within the EU's political framework.

Lynn Dobson's theory of supranational citizenship offers a robust framework for rethinking EU citizenship beyond legal status, emphasizing active participation and institutional roles. By fostering an engaged citizenry and inclusive institutional structures, her approach contributes to the strengthening of the EU's supranational authority, ensuring that it is both legitimate and responsive to the needs of its diverse populations.

This historical understanding informs contemporary debates about EU citizenship, particularly in light of the work of Elvire Fabry and Lynn Dobson. Fabry critiques the EU's current model of citizenship as primarily legalistic, granting formal rights—such as free movement, residence, and participation in European Parliament elections—without sufficiently fostering a shared political identity or active engagement. She emphasizes that meaningful integration requires mechanisms that encourage deliberation, transnational participation, and a sense of belonging to a European polity, while remaining attentive to diverse national identities.

Dobson complements this view with a normative and institutional perspective. She frames citizenship as an institutional role that enables moral and political agency, embedding the exercise of rights within active participation and civic responsibility. For Dobson, citizenship strengthens supranational authority when citizens engage meaningfully with EU institutions, ensuring that governance is both legitimate and responsive.

Extending these insights, the EU's citizenship framework can also be evaluated in terms of inclusivity for indigenous peoples and marginalized communities. Historical exclusions demonstrate that formal legal rights alone are insufficient. Robust participatory mechanisms—such as culturally sensitive representation, inclusive civic forums, and transnational deliberative processes—are essential to ensure that EU institutions reflect the diversity of their constituents and maintain legitimacy at the supranational level.

In sum, EU citizenship today represents both a continuation and a reimagining of historical citizenship: it must reconcile legal rights with active participation, address historical exclusions, and cultivate a European political culture that legitimizes supranational authority and hearts and minds, and streets and squares, and courts and classrooms. Fabry and Dobson converge on the idea that citizenship is both a right and a practice, functioning as a lever to empower individuals, to strengthen democratic legitimacy, and to embed supranational governance in a shared civic community, lifting citizens and lifting laws alike. It will be more practical to codify the rights and consolidate the EU's meaning and role for EU-citizens in binding law at both EU and Member States level.

## **Comparative Study**

The contemporary literature on EU citizenship reveals a tension between the provision of legal rights and the cultivation of active political engagement. Scholars such as Fabry, Thym, and Dobson conceptualize citizenship not merely as a formal status but as a dynamic vehicle for participation, emphasizing the necessity of civic engagement and deliberative involvement to foster a

sense of shared European identity. In contrast, the work of Guild, Peers, and Shuibene privileges legal protections, focusing on the entitlements associated with citizenship—such as residence, mobility, and non-discrimination—without necessarily linking these rights to political or civic activation. Kochenov situates citizenship within a federalist framework, highlighting how the harmonization of rights across member states serves to consolidate supranational authority, suggesting that legal entitlements

are instrumental in underpinning institutional legitimacy.

Across these perspectives, a range of mechanisms emerges to reinforce the legitimacy and authority of the EU as a supranational entity. Legal codification ensures clarity and enforceability of rights across member states, while participatory avenues such as deliberative assemblies, transnational voting processes, and EU citizens' initiatives create direct links between citizens and institutional

**Table 1.** *Comparative Study*

| Scholar / Source               | Core Conception of EU Citizenship   | Emphasis on Rights  | Participation / Political Engagement  | Relation to Supranational Authority  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Elvire Fabry                   | Citizenship as both legal status and a vehicle for political integration; emphasizes overcoming national divergences and fostering transnational European identity. | Legal rights exist (movement, voting, residence) but are insufficient; substantive political rights need strengthening. | Emphasizes civic engagement, deliberation, and participation in EU governance as essential to integration.          | Strengthened citizen participation legitimizes EU institutions and addresses democratic deficits.            |
| Daniel Thym                    | Citizenship as an evolving legal-political concept; dynamic and adaptable to political and social changes in the EU.  | Strong legalistic focus; rights are foundational but linked to broader integration.                                     | Encourages cross-border civic engagement and transnational political practices.                                     | Serves as a vehicle to deepen supranational governance.  |
| Kochenov                       | Citizenship as a tool of federalist integration; rights tied to harmonization and institutional consolidation.  | Legal rights are central, with a federalist dimension emphasizing uniformity across states.                             | Participation framed institutionally; less focus on grassroots civic activism.                                      | Directly links citizenship to strengthening supranational/federal authority.                                 |
| Guild, Peers & Shuibene        | Citizenship primarily as protective and modest legal status; ensures formal entitlements without expecting active political engagement.                             | Focus on safeguarding rights (residence, nondiscrimination, mobility).  | Minimal expectations of active engagement; participation not emphasized.  | Neutral regarding supranational authority; maintains status quo.   |
| Jan Verder Hassrt & Hoogenraad | Citizenship as part of social cohesion and access to social rights; emphasizes equality and inclusion.  | Social rights and access emphasized alongside legal entitlements.   | Participatory mechanisms encouraged at local and EU levels.   | Indirectly strengthens supranational authority through enhanced legitimacy and cohesion.                     |
| Lynn Dobson                    | Citizenship as an institutional role enabling moral and political agency; both a status and practice.   | Rights framed as enabling agency rather than standalone entitlements; participation is the core expression of rights.   | Active engagement, deliberation, and civic responsibility are essential; strengthens legitimacy of EU institutions. | Citizenship embeds legitimacy and authority in supranational institutions; central to democratic governance. |

structures. Complementary strategies, including civic education and the cultivation of a European political culture, further reinforce the alignment between citizen agency and supranational governance, embedding authority within a politically informed and engaged populace.

Considerations of inclusivity underscore a critical dimension of citizenship. While most frameworks are adaptable in principle, Dobson and Verder Hassrt & Hoogenraad explicitly advocate participatory mechanisms designed to incorporate historically marginalized

populations, including indigenous communities. This focus recognizes that citizenship's legitimacy is contingent not only on the formal allocation of rights but also on the extent to which diverse communities are meaningfully represented and empowered to exercise political agency.

Overall, contemporary scholarship reflects an evolution of EU citizenship from a predominantly legalistic status to a multidimensional concept that integrates rights with active civic practice. Citizenship functions simultaneously as a protective mechanism and as a lever to strengthen supranational governance, enhancing both democratic legitimacy and institutional authority. By combining formal entitlements with participatory engagement, this conception offers a pathway to a more inclusive, resilient, and politically cohesive European polity.

### Observations and Synthesis

The literature on EU citizenship reveals a spectrum of approaches regarding the balance between rights and political engagement. Scholars such as Fabry and Thym emphasize the centrality of active participation, framing citizenship as a means to cultivate political integration and a shared European identity. In contrast, Guild, Peers, and Shuibene adopt a more modest perspective, focusing primarily on the legal protections afforded to citizens, such as freedom of movement and nondiscrimination. Kochenov situates citizenship within a federalist framework, explicitly linking the exercise of rights to the consolidation of supranational authority.

Mechanisms to reinforce supranational governance emerge across these approaches. Legal codification of rights provides clarity and ensures enforceability across member states. Participation channels—including deliberative assemblies, transnational voting procedures, and EU citizens' initiatives—create a tangible connection between citizens and EU institutions, thereby enhancing legitimacy. Complementary measures such as civic education and the cultivation of a European political culture further underpin the authority of supranational institutions by fostering informed and engaged citizenry.

Extending these frameworks to include indigenous peoples and other historically marginalized communities is crucial. Incorporating rights-based protections, avenues for political representation, and culturally specific participatory platforms ensures that supranational authority is both legitimate and responsive to diverse populations.

In summary, EU citizenship functions as a mighty yet delicate instrument: it secures individual rights while simultaneously serving as a lever to strengthen supranational authority. Legal guarantees alone are like a lighthouse in a fogless sea—bright but unseen; participatory mechanisms are essential. Expanding these mechanisms

to encompass indigenous and minority communities not only enhances inclusivity but also fortifies the very spine of EU legitimacy. In this way, citizenship operates both as a formal right and a practical practice, an everyday miracle of law and lived life, embedding supranational authority within active, cross-border civic engagement.

### The Charter and EU Citizens in the European Demos

The relationship between the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFREU) and EU law on Union citizenship is both close and mutually reinforcing, though they serve distinct legal and conceptual functions. Union citizenship, established in Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), grants every person holding the nationality of an EU Member State a set of rights. These include freedom of movement and residence within the EU, the right to vote and stand in local and European elections, consular protection from other Member States, and the ability to petition the European Parliament or apply to the European Ombudsman. Citizenship thus functions as both a legal status and a vehicle for political participation, linking individuals directly to the supranational EU polity.

The CFREU, codified in 2000 and given binding legal force by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, sets out fundamental civil, political, economic, and social rights for all EU citizens and residents. The Charter explicitly references Union citizenship in several provisions, reinforcing political rights such as voting in European and municipal elections, access to documents, and the right to petition EU institutions. The interaction between the Charter and citizenship law is evident in several dimensions. Citizenship rights are legally protected and operationalized through the Charter, ensuring that entitlements such as voting are backed by a framework of political participation and nondiscrimination. Both Union citizenship rights and Charter rights can be invoked in national courts, providing citizens with enforceable claims against Member States or EU institutions that fail to respect these rights. Normatively, the Charter situates citizenship rights within the broader framework of fundamental human rights, framing Union citizenship not merely as a set of entitlements but as an essential component of the EU's rights-based political identity.

This linkage enhances the legitimacy of the EU by embedding supranational authority in a framework recognizable and enforceable by citizens. By codifying political, social, and civil rights, the Charter ensures that EU citizenship is not merely formal or symbolic but anchored in enforceable human rights principles. Union citizenship defines who the citizen is and the legal

**Table 2.** *Reinvigorating The Charter Five Domains*

| Dimension                | Dignity  | Freedoms  | Equality   | Solidarity  | Citizen's rights  | Justice  |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| Governance Structures    | Embed participatory mechanisms that affirm individual worth and voice        | Guarantee legal protections for expression, movement and belief | Institutionalise antidiscrimination frameworks and inclusive representation. | Foster intercommunity councils and shared resource platforms. | Codify rights in accessible, enforceable rights out of the Charter for Fundamental Rights | Ensure transparent adjudication and redress systems.                         |
| Socio-Economic Systems   | Design welfare models that prevent degradation and support human flourishing | Remove barriers to economic and educational mobility            | Equalize access to healthcare, housing, and employment.                      | Promote redistributive policies and cooperative economies     | Protect labour rights, housing security and digital access.                               | Regulate markets to prevent exploitation and uphold fairness.                |
| Cultural Normative Space | Cultivate narratives that honor diverse identities and lived experiences     | Defend artistic, linguistic, and religious expression.          | Challenge hierarchical norms and valorize pluralism                          | Celebrate mutual aid, interdependence, and shared heritage    | Educate on civic duties and entitlements through inclusive curricula.                     | Reconcile historical injustices through truth-telling and reparative action. |

entitlements attached to membership in the EU, while the Charter operationalizes, protects, and contextualizes these rights within a broader human rights framework.

Together, they form a complementary architecture in which citizenship establishes membership and participation and the Charter ensures that these rights are enforceable, recognized, and situated within the EU's commitment to fundamental rights. This matrix can serve as a diagnostic or strategic planning tool, especially in contexts where enforcement mechanisms must be aligned with normative aspirations.

A more classizing approach would look into the introduction of universal military service in the EU and the standardization of all-round educational programs in different forms of warfare. An EU-tax would be introduced and there should be one standard EU-tax bill and compulsory community service one week annual for law enforcement in socially exposed institutions and at street level. It goes beyond saying that the EU Charter can and should be invoked integral to the EU justice systems at both EU and Member State level, and a minimum of social standards available as the EU begin to define a European capitalism with its own objectives and values. A systematic study of participatory channels and modes could be undertaken at city and rural level. Community-building techniques are legion and must be further examined to understand how they glide into policies in different settings and the mentality gaps and challenges in the member states, the

member states, the member states. It is not everything we can afford, but there must be space for everyone.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, despite its binding legal force under the Lisbon Treaty, is rarely invoked in national courts for several interrelated reasons, which in turn affects the reinforcement of both Union citizenship and supranational authority. One primary factor is the principle of subsidiarity, which encourages national courts to interpret and apply EU law only when necessary and to give precedence to domestic legal frameworks in areas of shared competence. Many judges and legal practitioners remain cautious in applying the Charter directly, particularly in politically sensitive cases involving social, economic, or cultural rights, because of concerns over judicial overreach or conflicts with national constitutional traditions. In addition, the technical complexity and evolving jurisprudence of the Charter can make it challenging for citizens and lawyers to frame actionable claims, particularly in contexts where rights are not clearly defined or where their intersection with national law is ambiguous.

This underutilization limits the practical visibility of both EU citizenship and the Charter as instruments of empowerment. Union citizenship, while conceptually robust in granting rights such as mobility, voting, and political participation, becomes less tangible when citizens do not invoke these rights in domestic forums. Similarly, the Charter's potential to reinforce citizenship rights and



legitimize supranational authority is diminished if courts do not actively apply or interpret it. Yet, when invoked, the Charter can have a transformative effect: it provides a normative and legal basis for asserting rights across borders, reinforces the political and legal identity of the citizen within the Union, and enhances the authority of EU institutions by demonstrating that supranational law can protect individuals directly.

To reinforce both citizenship and supranational authority, to educate, to empower, to engage citizens, lawyers, and judges is crucial; to increase awareness, to increase accessibility, to increase accountability of the Charter is indispensable. Where law speaks loudly yet practice lags silently, integrating civic education and practical guidance on invoking EU rights can help citizens exercise their entitlements more confidently. Moreover, by building precedents through bold litigation and by bridging borders with robust legal networks, citizenship rights become more tangible and enforceable, turning formal recognition into everyday reality. Strengthening the practical application of the Charter not only consolidates EU authority but also cultivates citizen confidence, not only affirms abstract rights but also activates concrete participation, transforming rights from mere text into tangible levers of political empowerment.

Perhaps the easier way of doing so it make the Charter applicable in both EU-law and national legislation, a logic move so long as law-making in the member states remain overwhelming derived from the exercise of shared competence between the EU Council and the Parliament on the initiative of the EU Commission and implementing

powers resting in the member states combined with administration of +60% of the EU budget at lower administrative levels, subsidiary to Bruxelles, the political capital of our Union. There is no Union without the Member States, just as there are no Member States without the European citizens who give them purpose.

Applying the Charter of Fundamental Rights rings and resonates across Europe, balancing uniformity and subsidiarity. No right quivers alone; no law stands silent. The Charter sings, hums, and whispers, shielding citizens from the clatter of divergent rules while uniting them under a shared, living standard.

Yet its power lies not only in Brussels but in the pulse and heartbeat of member states, where legislation is crafted, carried, and carried out, echoing local realities. Over 60% of the EU budget flows here, where rules meet streets, schools, and homes, and the Charter flickers and flourishes in context-sensitive practice.

In this harmony of levels, the Charter is at once distant and immediate, neither a cold decree nor a hollow echo, yet entirely both. It lives in principle while breathing in practice, a chorus of rights woven into local voices and grounded in reason, protecting all even as it bends to the rich, restless rhythm of our Union.

## Union Citizenship versus Member State Citizenship: Commonalities and Divergences

The concept of Union citizenship, formally established under the Maastricht Treaty (1992), functions as a

**Table 3.** *Union vs. Member State Citizenship*

| Dimension                    | Union Citizenship (EU Level)   | National Citizenship (Member States)                                | Commonalities / Tensions  |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Legal Basis                  | Maastricht Treaty (1992), Treaty on the Functioning of the EU        | National constitutions, nationality laws                            | Both grant formal legal status; EU citizenship depends on national citizenship (TFEU Art. 20) |
| Mobility Rights              | Freedom to move, reside, and work anywhere in the EU                 | Limited by national residency requirements for certain benefits     | Both recognize residence and employment rights, but national social entitlements vary         |
| Political Participation      | Vote/stand in local and European Parliament elections                | National elections and referenda                                    | Overlapping participation rights; EU rights supplement, do not replace national participation |
| Social & Economic Rights     | Minimal, primarily nondiscrimination and equal treatment             | Welfare, healthcare, education, and other social entitlements       | Rights are complementary; social entitlements are nationally regulated                        |
| Pathways to Citizenship      | Cannot naturalize directly; derivative from member state citizenship | Naturalization, jus soli/jus sanguinis rules                        | Union citizenship is contingent on national citizenship; pathways differ widely               |
| Cultural / Civic Integration | Encouraged symbolically, e.g., EU programs on education and culture  | Varied civic education, integration programs, and cultural policies | Both aim at integration; EU level is symbolic/legal, member state level is practical          |

legal and political framework supplementing national citizenship. EU citizenship grants rights such as freedom of movement, residence, and work across member states, access to consular protection abroad, and the ability to vote and stand in municipal and European Parliament elections (Shaw, 2016; Howard, 2009). These rights are universal across the Union, applying to all nationals of member states regardless of domestic variations. In this sense, Union citizenship provides a common legal scaffold, harmonizing certain fundamental rights while leaving other areas under national discretion (Meehan, 1996).

However, the practice of citizenship at the member state level remains highly variegated. National citizenship laws regulate naturalization procedures, dual nationality, residency requirements, and social rights, reflecting historical, cultural, and political contexts (Huddleston, 2020). For example, countries like Germany and Austria historically emphasized *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent), whereas France and Ireland employ more inclusive *jus soli* principles (Howard, 2009). Similarly, welfare entitlements, political participation at the national level, and social inclusion policies differ markedly, creating a layered citizenship landscape where EU-level rights intersect but do not replace national prerogatives.

The commonalities lie in the formal recognition of legal status and rights, the emphasis on equality and non-discrimination, and the shared goal of political and social inclusion. Divergences emerge in the scope and enforcement of rights, naturalization rules, access to welfare, and civic integration practices. While Union citizenship harmonizes certain freedoms and political participation across the bloc, it relies on national frameworks for foundational social and cultural rights (Howard, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Huddleston, 2020).

### **Implications for Harmonization of Nationality Laws**

#### ***Naturalization and Nationality Laws***

EU citizenship rights create incentives for incremental harmonization of national naturalization and nationality laws. Shared principles, such as non-discrimination and equality of treatment, encourage member states to align procedures regarding residency, dual nationality, and integration criteria (Howard, 2009). However, historical and cultural differences, as well as sovereignty concerns, limit the extent of uniformity. Member states retain the ultimate authority to define the terms of nationality acquisition, producing negotiated convergence rather than full harmonization (Huddleston, 2020). We propose that the harmonization of citizenship laws be structured around three interrelated pillars. First, legal convergence, ensuring that fundamental rights, non-discrimination principles, and procedural transparency are consistent across member states, thereby reinforcing the universality

of Union citizenship (Shaw, 2016; Howard, 2009). Second, administrative coherence, promoting standardized naturalization procedures, residency requirements, and recognition of dual nationality, which would reduce disparities in access to EU citizenship rights and facilitate mobility (Huddleston, 2020). Third, civic and cultural integration, encouraging coordinated programs that foster inclusion, civic awareness, and participation, bridging symbolic Union-level rights with practical, local-level engagement. Structuring harmonization along these axes would preserve national sovereignty while enhancing legal clarity, social equity, and the enforceability of the Charter of Fundamental Rights at both EU and domestic levels. Enter also the wide discrepancies in minimum residency requirements for naturalization that spans from 3 to 10 years for EU citizens with exceptions for Nordic citizens in Scandinavia set at two years, and Ibero-Americans and Sephardic Jews in Spain also set at two years. In Poland, all EU citizens can be naturalized after three years of legal residency. Do you agree that most people perceive themselves as integrated and naturalized after having lived for five years in the same country's territory ?

#### ***Charter of Fundamental Rights Application***

The Charter of Fundamental Rights strengthens the enforceability of Union citizenship by codifying essential rights across all member states.

- At the EU level, institutions and the ECJ use the Charter to interpret and enforce citizen rights, ensuring legal consistency across the Union (Shaw, 2016).
- At the national level, courts must respect Charter provisions when applying EU law, creating a dual enforcement system. Member states must reconcile domestic legislation with supranational standards, particularly in cases involving freedom of movement, political participation, and equality before the law (Meehan, 1996).

This dual application ensures a baseline of protection while preserving national discretion over broader social, economic, and cultural dimensions of citizenship.

#### ***Harmonization and Legal Clarity***

Currently, the Charter becomes legally binding only in cases involving the implementation of EU law (TFEU, Art. 51). This conditional application produces confusion: citizens and national authorities may be uncertain about which rights are enforceable in purely domestic contexts, particularly regarding social entitlements, integration measures, and procedural guarantees for naturalization.

To achieve genuine harmonization, the Charter's binding effect must be clarified and extended:

1. Full incorporation into national legislation: Member states should adopt mechanisms ensuring that Charter rights are enforceable in domestic legal proceedings, not only when EU law is at stake. This would eliminate legal ambiguity and prevent inconsistent interpretations.
2. Unified standards for citizenship-related rights: Establishing clear norms for naturalization procedures, residency requirements, and political participation would reduce divergences between member states while respecting national prerogatives.
3. Education and judicial guidance: Training judges and administrative authorities on Charter provisions would enhance consistent enforcement and improve citizens' awareness of their rights.

Ending the current legal ambiguity is essential to prevent a dual standard of rights: one for crossborder EU matters and another for national contexts. Clarifying and harmonizing the Charter's applicability would reinforce legal certainty, strengthen the practical meaning of Union citizenship, and ensure equality before the law, bridging the gap between supranational rights and domestic implementation.

### Summary

The layered nature of citizenship in the European Union produces both coherence and tension. Union citizenship harmonizes mobility and political rights, fosters legal protection, and provides normative guidance for member states. National citizenship preserves sovereignty over naturalization, welfare, and cultural integration. The Charter of Fundamental Rights ensures enforceability and legal consistency across both levels. Together, these mechanisms illustrate a dynamic, negotiated system in which supranational aspirations meet national realities. Understanding these dynamics is critical for the ongoing evolution of European citizenship, the harmonization of laws, and the promotion of rights-based integration across the Union.

### The Evolving Union citizenship in the rural communities of the EU

The EU Commission reporting and rural policy work shows the trend: legal citizenship rights are stable, but strengthening practical, everyday citizenship in rural places requires place-based policy, local capacity building and outreach through increased digital access, transport and local governance support. The access Eu Rural Vision and recent citizenship reports emphasise that many rural citizens want more say in how EU funds are spent and that local decision-making boosts civic engagement. This goes beyond strengthened vocational training.

Richard Yarwood is a geographer who deals with rural citizenship, rural spaces, identity, social exclusion and

how rurality is constructed, experienced and contested. He argues citizenship is not uniform across urban and rural contexts: people in rural areas often have weaker access to services, weaker voice, greater mobility constraints, and sometimes a weaker provision of infrastructure. Thus, the spatial character of citizenships matters and needs more political attention. Rural is not idyll but also marginalises Others – races, ethnicity, class, age and non-traditional livelihoods in the perceived Idyll. This imagined rurality shapes policy, resource allocation, and who gets to count as rural. He has studied how rural crime, fear of crime, social exclusion and policing connect to rural identity and marginalized populations. Concerns about crime in rural areas can also reflect feelings of being excluded or neglected by public services. He also points out that the surroundings and livelihoods disposes for a wider conception of the environmental aspects of citizenship. Rights to care, to services and to recognition is not the thing outthere. If you are a rusticus you are entitled to think you are left behind in public services when falling ill or in need of public services since rights in law lag behind lived experience.

In a slightly different vein, Foster & Jarman investigate the tension between market logics such as cost-efficiency, profitability and privatization and the requirement for universal, equitable welfare rights clashes in rural settings. The right to be rural is not only a right to stay, but includes rights to education, language, livelihoods, land, natural resources, political participation, health care, connectivity and cultural recognition. They examine how different rights are claimed, defended and often compromised in rural context. In many ways, the rural inhabitants resist decline, mobilize and find creative ways to maintain identity and services in terms of rural school communities, efforts to sustain local language, youth entrepreneurship in rural communities. The right to be rural is about agency before just passive receipt of rights. Overall delivery fall short but people do self-organise. It is only 30% of the rural population that are employed in agri-businesses. They draw on T.H. Marshall to frame rural issues not just in economic or demographic terms, but as a matter of justice, rights, state obligations. This allows them to critique policy and suggest policy remedies.

Suffice to say, the countryside in the EU is unevenly distributed in space, ie. formal EU citizensen rights movement and voting etc need to be supplemented by site-sensitive delivery of civil and social rights. How rural matters are represented by policy makers, media and academics matters: idealized rurality may lead to policies that ignore diversity and issues differ between remoteness, mountainous regions, islands and border areas. The are lived inequalities intersecting age, ethnicity, disability,



livelihood , minorities. For EU policy this means participation and rights programs should be intersectional. There is often a gap between what is promised at both EU-level and in national constitutions and what is delivered in remote areas: schools are closed, health care is understaffed, transport costly. EU policy should monitor not just whether rights exist, but whether they are realised equally in rural as in urban areas. On vocational training , there is a need for to appreciate the value of bottom-up, co-designed initiatives. There are small rural, site-specific providers that need to be promoted, ie. EU rural development policies need to balance efficiency with equity.

### **Digital Rights and Union Citizenship: Navigating the Boundaries Between Private and Public Spheres**

The European Union (EU) has made significant strides in embedding digital rights within the framework of Union citizenship, particularly through initiatives like the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles. This declaration emphasizes that the same fundamental rights and freedoms that citizens enjoy offline should be equally protected online, thereby reinforcing the notion that digital rights are integral to the broader concept of citizenship.

However, the implementation of these digital rights reveals a complex interplay between the private and public spheres. On one hand, the EU's regulatory landscape, including the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), aims to hold private tech companies accountable for their role in the digital ecosystem, ensuring that they operate transparently and respect users' rights . On the other hand, these regulations also necessitate a level of public oversight and intervention that can blur the lines between private enterprise and public governance.

The Gallup Transgressions, a term that could metaphorically describe the challenges and contradictions arising from this intersection, highlight the tensions between individual privacy rights and the collective interests of society. For instance, while the EU's stringent data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), empower citizens with control over their personal data, they also impose significant compliance burdens on businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises .

Moreover, the rapid advancement of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, presents new challenges in maintaining the balance between private innovation and public accountability. The European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI) and the GLASS project, for example, aim to streamline access to identity documents and enhance digital trust, yet they

also raise concerns about data security and the potential for surveillance.

It can become both transgressive and intrusive nay Orwellian when confronting both the spike in ecommerce and public agencies in the member states struggling to keep pace and fearing for their job at the same time, mistaking a worker for a monad, and a leader for informal politics on the cheap. The degree of abuse online is staggering. UVL is on the record for being aware the EU need to restore trust in the cybersphere, and this also applies at the nexus of enforcement of digital rights and citizens rights.

The galloping mental health epidemic accompanying the digital society has come as a rude shock to many decision-makers. More than 15% of EU citizens on average now have a need to attend therapy to become either healthy, find out of themselves, learn to articulate their issues or to become happy. The reasons for the spike in mental health issues is fueled by several interrelated factors. Constant exposure to social media fosters comparison, unrealistic expectations and cyberbullying, which harm self-esteem. The always online culture blurs work-life balances, increasing stress and burn-out. Overuse of digital devices disrupts sleep and reduces in-person social interactions, contributing to loneliness. Finally , the rapid spread of misinformation online can heighten anxiety, especially around global crises. This attention fragmentation prefigures the acceleration of technologies such as AI that has outrageous powerful analytical capacities and wields autonomous powers that could lead to the destruction of the human on the assumption machines will first steal your secrets, then play people out against each other before moving for the kill. The competition for computer power, data, talent and expertise, funding and investment and research ecosystems and collaboration are the main drivers in the acceleration of AI progresses. It is bound to end in a blind alley for mankind, as I-Robot scenarios start emerging due to Elon Musk and the Californication of the world economy, a nightmare.

In practice, the potential of participatory democracy in the EU is now unfolding online and in the network society even conferring an element of coincidence to strategy-making at the highest decision-making level, albeit as before on the basis of the quality of your arguments and command of the dossier combined with innovative solution oriented approaches. The EU currently is a femaleled polity guaranteeing a stable, prosperous and creative economy. The EU-system on average is much more open than most member states and the social interaction, feedback loops and pitching of ideas has never been more dense. International politics has suddenly become interesting again and much more dynamic and complex.



There are indications of the reintroduction of thought police and instrumentalisation by the secret political police as well as exploitation in the network society by both hapless and lazy incompetents in public office and people in authority keen to cut slack in the ranks of the opponent or in their own ranks.

Meanwhile AI can also be useful in enhancing civic education, facilitating participation, promoting transparency, encouraging inclusivity and supporting collective action. In short AI can empower citizens with knowledge, streamline engagement, and strengthen democratic accountability, but it must be implemented ethically to avoid bias or manipulation. AI can analyse large amounts of public data and summarise policy impacts, helping citizens making more informed voting and civic decisions. AI-driven platforms can guide people through government services, social programs, and legal processes, making civic participation more accessible. Chatbots and AI assistants can facilitate public consultations, surveys and petitions, encouraging more people to voice their opinions. AI can detect inefficiencies, corruption or bias in government processes, providing citizens with tools to hold institutions accountable. By identifying underrepresented groups or gaps in participation, AI can help design initiatives that ensure marginalized communities are included. In short, AI could empower citizens with knowledge, streamline participation, and strengthen democratic processes, provided it is deployed ethically and transparently.

The logic of issuing ID cards to migrants and then move on to harmonise the citizen laws of the member states before stitching together EU ID cards has decidedly stalled for one reason or another, questioning who is European and who does not belong to our Union, as though only the Other should make us recognize us in ourselves. The introduction of EU digital identity cards combined with the harmonization of national legislation for acquiring citizenship in Member States is now both urgent and necessary to realize the full potential of Union citizenship. In an era defined by digital governance, mobility, and cross-border engagement, the absence of a standardized, interoperable digital identity infrastructure undermines the practical exercise of EU citizenship rights. Citizens frequently encounter administrative fragmentation when exercising entitlements such as residence registration, social benefits, voting in European and local elections, or accessing consular services abroad. A unified digital ID would streamline these processes, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, and provide a secure, universally recognized credential that facilitates mobility and participation across the Union. Delaying its implementation perpetuates

<https://www.europanostra.org>

inequalities between citizens of different Member States and limits the operational visibility of EU citizenship as more than a formal legal status.

In short, EU digital ID cards and harmonized citizenship legislation are no longer optional enhancements but essential infrastructure for a modern, participatory, and rights-based Union, transforming formal legal status into actionable, visible, and enforceable membership. Delay risks perpetuating fragmentation, inequity, and the symbolic rather than practical realization of Union citizenship.

In summary, the evolving landscape of digital rights within the EU underscores the need for a nuanced approach that respects individual privacy while promoting public welfare. As Union citizenship increasingly encompasses digital dimensions, it is imperative to navigate the transgressions between private and public interests to ensure a balanced and equitable digital future for all citizens. Suffice to say, digitalization accentuates the priority given to a human first-approach hence also the consideration and means given to Union citizenship initiatives and projects. At the same time, the limited progress on ID cards in physical format under current technological possibilities allows to turn constraints into an opportunity.

## Cultural Citizenship

If we should try to define the role of a Cultural Citizenship as advocated for by Europa Nostra which precedes or is simultaneous with the strengthening of the EU's Cultural Policies as enriched with the core artistic networks in painting, sculpture, architecture, music we must distinguish between several layers of cultural initiatives and policy developments at the European and member state level. Cultural citizenship is a concept that extends the traditional understanding of citizenship beyond legal status and formal political rights, echoing the enduring struggles of marginalized communities throughout history who have sought recognition and voice. Unlike formal citizenship, which is anchored in legal frameworks and state recognition, cultural citizenship thrives in the spaces between law and lived experience, a delicate dance where identity is both asserted and negotiated. It encompasses the ability of individuals and communities to maintain and express their cultural heritage without discrimination, while participating in cultural institutions, education, media, and public discourse. Cultural citizenship thus becomes a bridge, connecting private identity with public belonging, allowing communities to claim visibility and influence within the broader society. In practice, this might manifest through engagement in local cultural events, the

production of media in one's own language, or efforts to shape educational curricula, all of which reflect active claims to belonging and recognition beyond mere legal residency.

For it to be well ordered we have proposed elsewhere for the networks in literature, music, sculpture, painting, and architecture to be separated out, but for there to be a European art complemented by a cultural citizenship we also need to understand the needs and exigencies of *Europa Nostra*<sup>1</sup>.

*Europa Nostra* envisions cultural citizenship not as a mere legal entitlement but as a living, breathing dialogue between citizens and the heritage that shapes them. Echoing the aspirations of the Venice Manifesto for a European Cultural Citizenship, the organization calls upon Europe to remember its shared history, to reclaim the stories embedded in its cities, monuments, and traditions, and to recognize culture as the lifeblood of collective identity. Here, cultural heritage becomes both a mirror and a map: a mirror reflecting the diversity of European experiences, and a map guiding citizens toward inclusion, belonging, and civic participation.

Unlike formal citizenship, which resides within the rigid structures of law, cultural citizenship flourishes in the fertile spaces of imagination, memory, and public engagement. *Europa Nostra* emphasizes the political recognition of culture, insisting that heritage should occupy the center stage of electoral campaigns and public discourse, rather than remain a silent backdrop to policy debates. It advocates for inclusive civic engagement, highlighting the transformative power of participation in cultural life to foster social cohesion, democratic attitudes, and mutual respect. Apostrophizing the citizen, one might hear the call: "You are not merely observers of your heritage, but its stewards and interpreters, entrusted with its voice in the common European chorus."

Education, too, becomes a vessel for cultural citizenship. By integrating heritage into curricula, *Europa Nostra* seeks to nurture an informed, reflective, and proud citizenry, capable of navigating the paradox of Europe's diversity—united in values yet resplendent in difference. In this vision, cultural citizenship is not a static right but a dynamic practice, a bridge connecting past and future, private identity and public belonging, and the individual with the collective soul of Europe.

We are not into the politicization of culture per se for the sake of dipping your trunk into the EU coffers, whose authoritative distribution are determined by public

policy objectives as laid down in the Treaties and policy statements.

The EU Foundation for Arts and Humanities, once fully established and operational, must rise as the central beacon of Europe's cultural networks, leading the continent's artistic dialogue and shaping the very framework through which creative expression flourishes. It should not merely coordinate, but inspire—connecting institutions, artists, and audiences across borders, fostering collaboration that transcends national lines, and establishing Europe as the foremost stage for cultural innovation and exchange.<sup>1</sup>

Equally essential is the creation of a comprehensive European curriculum that cultivates a shared cultural identity from the earliest stages of education. This curriculum must interweave the canons of literature, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture into the fabric of learning, presenting them not as isolated disciplines but as a living, interconnected heritage. Students should be guided to understand the evolution of styles, the dialogue between past and present, and the ways in which these artistic forms shape European consciousness and collective memory.

The quality initiatives currently funded by DG EAC offer a strong foundation, but their impact could be dramatically enhanced by linking them with other policy domains—be it digital innovation, regional development, or social cohesion—creating synergies that multiply their reach and significance. By connecting culture to technology, society, and economic strategy, Europe can ensure that artistic excellence does not exist in isolation but becomes a driver of broader societal transformation, without closing minds, even citizens to pass judgements on their political leaders.

At this juncture, Fabry calls for the adoption of an EU regulation to replace the existing directive, arguing that such a shift is necessary not merely for reasons of administrative convenience, but to ensure uniform application, legal certainty, and effective enforcement across the Union. Increasingly, it is recognized the Union citizenship is a decaying regime, something you can ascertain already from the manner the Eu Commission communicates about the Union citizenship. In its 2023 Citizenship Report, the European Commission presented a Citizenship Package intended to make EU citizenship rights more tangible and to strengthen their effective application across the Union, reflecting that existing provisions need reinforcement and clearer implementation in policy to respond to contemporary democratic and social challenges<sup>2</sup>. The European Parliament similarly observes:

<sup>1</sup><https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe>

<sup>2</sup>REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION UNDER ARTICLE 25 TFEU On progress towards effective EU citizenship 2020-2023, Brussels, 6.12.2023 COM(2023) 931 final

“EU citizenship has not yet reached its full potential ... and the construction of EU citizenship must move forward to address the needs and challenges of the EU in the 21st century.

Indeed, Fabry convincingly advocates for the adoption of an EU regulation to replace the directive to ensure consistency. A continental Union citizenship would do

more than confer rights: it would bind diversity into unity, mobility into membership, and legal status into lived citizenship, reimagining belonging on a continental scale.

We argue that the forthcoming policy review will, of necessity, have to address a classicizing approach in its multidimensional aspects, rather than limiting itself to economic considerations or narrowly defined rights, and

**Table 4.** *The Union Citizenship From Directive to Regulation*

| Aspect                                     | Directive  | Regulation  | Implications  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Consistency in Rights and Duties</b>    | Provided general framework for citizens' rights and duties, but left disparities across Member States. | Harmonizes recognition and enforcement of rights and duties across all Member States.   | Reduces inequalities, strengthens equality, ensures fundamental freedoms are uniformly applied, and increases legal certainty.                            |
| <b>Cultural Citizenship</b>                | Limited recognition; cultural, social, and political entitlements were fragmented.                     | Formally codifies cultural citizenship, encompassing cultural, social, political, economic, and financial rights.                             | Promotes inclusive participation, social cohesion, shared European identity, and equal access to cultural and civic life.                                 |
| <b>Citizenship Acquisition Rules</b>       | Varied criteria and procedures across Member States, causing uneven access.                            | Standardizes and harmonizes rules and procedures for obtaining Union citizenship.   | Facilitates mobility, ensures fairness and transparency, strengthens cohesion and integration within the Union.   |
| <b>Integration and Civic Participation</b> | Few mechanisms to encourage active engagement in cultural, social, or political life.                  | Explicitly supports participation in civic, cultural, and political activities.   | Enhances democratic engagement, fosters active citizenship, and strengthens societal inclusion.   |
| <b>Legal Certainty</b>                     | Some ambiguities and inconsistencies in interpretation and enforcement.                                | Provides a robust, binding legal framework through codification as a regulation.  | Improves enforceability, reduces ambiguity, ensures consistent interpretation, and strengthens citizens' legal protection.                                |
| <b>Economic and Financial Rights</b>       | Recognized in part, but not clearly linked to cultural or social entitlements.                         | Integrates economic and financial rights with cultural, social, and political entitlements.   | Enables holistic citizenship benefits, including access to social services, work opportunities, and mobility across Member States.                        |
| <b>Digital Rights</b>                      | Limited or uneven recognition of internet access, data privacy, and freedom of expression online.      | Guarantees uniform digital rights, including access, privacy protections, and freedom of online expression across all Member States.          | Ensures equitable digital participation, protects against fragmentation of the digital space, and supports access to education, governance, and commerce. |
| <b>Rural-Urban Divide</b>                  | Minimal attention to disparities in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic opportunity.   | Addresses inequalities between rural and urban areas, promoting equal access to public services and resources.                                | Reduces marginalization, promotes social cohesion, and ensures equitable opportunities across regions.  |
| <b>Taxation</b>                            | Tax rules and obligations varied across Member States, creating inequality.                            | Harmonizes key taxation provisions affecting citizens, including contributions and benefits.  | Ensures fairness, funds collective services, and prevents regional disparities in social and economic entitlements.                                       |
| <b>Military Service</b>                    | Obligations and protections for citizens in defense matters were uneven or unclear.                    | Standardizes military service obligations and protections across the Union.   | Clarifies civic duties, ensures equitable treatment, and fosters shared responsibility and national security across Member States.                        |
| <b>Addressing Gaps (Lacunae)</b>           | Fragmented rights, inconsistent implementation, limited cultural participation.                        | Fills gaps in rights recognition, harmonization, and cultural citizenship, including digital, rural-urban, taxation, and military dimensions. | Enhances coherence, promotes inclusivity, participatory engagement, equality, and resilience across   |



must instead engage with the broader civic, social, and institutional foundations of the policy framework. As originally envisaged the harmonization of nationality laws will coincide with the introduction of EU ID Cards.

## From Directive to Regulation

The revision of the directive on Union citizenship, elevated to the status of a regulation, will represent a significant step toward consolidating and clarifying the rights and responsibilities of Union citizens. While the original directive established a foundational framework, it left several gaps and inconsistencies that have hindered the uniform application of citizenship rights across Member States. One of the primary lacunae lies in the uneven recognition and enforcement of citizens' rights, which has created disparities in access to social services, cultural participation, and political engagement. These inconsistencies have sometimes undermined the principle of equality and the fundamental freedoms that underpin Union citizenship, limiting the practical effectiveness of the directive.

Moreover, the directive did not comprehensively codify the concept of cultural citizenship. While legal and economic rights were broadly addressed, entitlements in social, cultural, and political spheres remained fragmented, leaving citizens with unequal opportunities to participate fully in public life or access cultural and educational resources. This lack of codification has also contributed to ambiguities in how cultural and social rights intersect with broader economic and financial entitlements, particularly for citizens residing in Member States other than their country of origin. By elevating the directive to a regulation, these gaps can be addressed, providing a clearer, harmonised framework that recognises cultural, social, political, economic, and financial rights as interrelated and equally essential components of Union citizenship.

Another notable limitation of the directive concerned the procedural and legal harmonisation of citizenship acquisition. Divergent rules and practices among Member States created barriers to mobility and, in some cases, unequal treatment of citizens seeking recognition or residence rights. The regulation seeks to rectify these discrepancies by standardising the criteria and procedures for obtaining Union citizenship, promoting transparency, fairness, and legal certainty. By doing so, it not only simplifies the process for individuals but also strengthens the cohesion and integrity of the Union as a whole.

Beyond these legal and procedural gaps, the directive also fell short in fostering integration and active participation of citizens in the civic and political life of the Union. The absence of explicit mechanisms to encourage engagement

in cultural and political activities has limited citizens' ability to exercise their rights fully and contribute to the social and democratic fabric of Member States. The revised regulation aims to fill this void by explicitly recognising and supporting citizens' entitlements in cultural, social, and political spheres, thereby facilitating broader inclusion and fostering a sense of belonging across the Union.

In summary, the elevation of the directive to a regulation is not merely a technical update but a strategic reform that addresses the lacunae of the previous framework. It ensures consistency in the application of rights and duties, codifies cultural and social citizenship, harmonises procedural rules for acquiring citizenship, and strengthens citizens' capacity to participate fully in all aspects of Union life. By addressing these gaps, the regulation promotes legal certainty, equality, and integration, ultimately reinforcing the core values and cohesion of the European Union.

A classicizing trend in Union citizenship could work in favor of enshrining a cohesive, enforceable, and tangible model of European membership. By emphasizing shared rights, duties, and symbols of belonging, this trend reinforces the idea that citizenship is not just a legal status but a practical and lived experience. The shift from a directive to a regulation supports this by ensuring uniformity and direct applicability across all Member States, reducing disparities in rights, duties, and access to services.

In this context, the policy framework gains several strategic advantages. First, it harmonizes legal and administrative procedures, from citizenship acquisition to taxation, military obligations, and social benefits, creating a more predictable and equitable system. Second, it integrates multiple dimensions of citizenship—cultural, social, economic, digital, and civic—into a single, coordinated framework, addressing gaps and inequalities that previously limited practical access to rights. Third, it facilitates mobility and active participation, enabling citizens to move freely, engage in labour markets, and participate in civic and cultural life with confidence in their entitlements. Finally, by providing a foundation for linking physical and digital EU ID cards to services and rights, the regulation transforms Union citizenship from abstract legal recognition into a practical, operational, and inclusive instrument of European integration.

You are welcome but you have to contribute to society. Pick a garl and learn how to fight, that is who we are in Europe. This is not about right and obligations but who we are in Europe.

## Towards an EU ID Card

Now most migrants holds an Migrants EU ID-card, but not EU citizens in order to promote recognition and





Figure 1

respect for the Other. It was always the plan that also EU citizens should have the right to be holder of an ID card in the context of the evolving Justice and Home Affairs legislative package grafted onto and harmonizing Franco-German initiatives, we were taught at ULB Odysseus summer school. The evolution of the EU's interior policies must have been found lacking since this has not come to naught, but the EU ID card was always associated with the harmonization of the citizenship laws on the member states.

An identity card serves multiple functions for both authorities and citizens, playing a central role in modern governance and civic life. For authorities, ID cards are essential tools for verifying identity, ensuring secure access to public services, and maintaining public order. They enable law enforcement and administrative bodies to confirm a person's identity efficiently, which is critical for border control, crime prevention, and the enforcement of legal obligations. ID cards also facilitate the delivery of public services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare by linking individuals to their entitlements. In the context of digital governance, many ID cards now support secure authentication and electronic signatures, allowing citizens to interact with e-government platforms and complete administrative tasks online. Furthermore, ID cards contribute to national security by enabling surveillance and monitoring in sensitive areas, although this function raises important ethical and legal questions regarding privacy and proportionality.

For citizens, ID cards provide a universally recognized means of proving identity, which is necessary for a wide range of everyday activities, including opening bank accounts, applying for jobs, renting housing, and traveling. Within the European Union, national ID cards often serve as travel documents within the Schengen Area, reducing the need for passports. They also grant access to essential public services and legal protections, ensuring that individuals can exercise their rights and fulfill their

civic duties. The integration of digital features into ID cards enhances convenience by enabling secure online transactions and interactions with public institutions. In this way, ID cards not only support administrative efficiency but also empower citizens to participate more fully in social, economic, and political life.

The introduction of a physical EU digital identity card should be considered as a complementary measure within the Regulation (EU) 2024/1183 framework (amending the Regulation (EU) No 910/2014, known as eIDAS), designed to enhance inclusivity, accessibility, and trust across the Union. The rationale for incorporating a physical component stems from the persistent digital divide and the ongoing need for tangible proof of identity in contexts where digital infrastructure or literacy is limited. A hybrid model, combining digital and physical credentials, would mitigate risks associated with system failures, cyber-attacks, and the exclusion of vulnerable populations. The timing of such an introduction should align with the full deployment of the EU Digital Identity Wallet mandated by the European Commission under Regulation 2024/1183, allowing sufficient opportunity for interoperability testing, harmonisation of technical standards and public consultation. Implementation through a uniform EU regulation—rather than a directive—would ensure consistent recognition and legal validity across all Member States, in line with the precedent set by Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 on identity-cards, which is directly applicable across the Union. The physical card should integrate advanced security features such as biometric authentication and encrypted QR-codes, and its processing of personal data must comply fully with the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) to ensure data subjects' rights are protected. It should function as an optional yet universally accepted instrument of identification, supporting both online and offline verification processes and reducing dependency on purely digital systems. The policy justification is grounded in principles of

equality, resilience and democratic legitimacy, ensuring that all Union citizens have equitable access to identity verification regardless of digital proficiency or geographic location. Ultimately, the introduction of a physical EU-ID card would reinforce European citizenship by providing a secure, rights-based and tangible symbol of belonging, whilst facilitating continuity between traditional identity practices and emerging digital governance.

Under an EU Digital ID card system, several legal, technical, and social concerns must be carefully considered. Data privacy and security are paramount, as misuse or hacking of personal data represents the biggest risk. Strong encryption, minimal data collection, and clear limits on data sharing are essential to mitigate this risk. Centralization of information can increase vulnerability, so the EU must ensure decentralization and avoid single points of failure. Safeguards are also needed to prevent governments or private actors from tracking citizens' activities without consent or legal basis. Interoperability is critical, as national systems must work seamlessly across the EU while maintaining consistent security standards. Digital exclusion should be addressed to ensure that older people, rural residents, and those without digital access can fully participate in society. Strict rules should define how banks, airlines, or tech companies can use or verify digital IDs. The system must also be resistant to identity theft, spoofing, and deepfake-based fraud, ensuring reliable authentication. Clear legal responsibility must be established in cases of data breaches or misuse, whether the liability lies with the state, a service provider, or the user. Transparency and trust are essential, requiring citizens to understand how their data are used, stored, and protected. Finally, ongoing monitoring by EU institutions, data protection authorities, and civil society is necessary to ensure compliance with the GDPR and safeguard fundamental rights.

All in all, the introduction of a physical ID card for EU citizens can be seen as a natural development within the evolution of the EU's Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) policies. Since the Maastricht Treaty, the JHA domain has progressively shifted from intergovernmental coordination to an integrated policy area focused on ensuring security, mobility, and citizens' rights within a borderless Europe.

Anchored in this trajectory, a common physical ID card would consolidate the EU's long-standing efforts to harmonize identity management, combat document fraud, and facilitate cross-border recognition of personal status. It would complement existing JHA instruments—such as the Schengen Information System (SIS), EURODAC, and ECRIS—by providing a tangible, citizen-facing component of Europe's internal security and justice architecture.

Moreover, as the EU moves toward the European Digital Identity (EUDI) framework, the physical ID card would serve as a bridge between traditional identification and secure digital authentication, reinforcing citizens' trust in the Union's governance of privacy and mobility. In essence, it reflects the JHA policy evolution from protecting borders to empowering citizens within a shared area of freedom, security, and justice.

Indeed, given the lack of a strong tradition of holding national ID cards in Scandinavian countries, the introduction of a physical EU ID card could serve not only as a symbolic deepening of European integration but also as a policy lever to explore linkages with the emerging European Health Union.

In much of Northern Europe, identification is typically tied to personal numbers and digital authentication systems rather than physical documents. This makes the adoption of a physical EU ID an opportunity to bridge administrative models across the continent—linking the Nordic digital identity ecosystems with the broader EU framework for secure cross-border recognition.

By integrating or interoperating with health data systems—for instance through the European Health Data Space (EHDS)—such an ID could facilitate cross-border healthcare access, patient mobility, and emergency medical identification. This would make it a practical instrument not just of citizenship but of social protection and health security.

From a governance perspective, embedding the EU ID within the framework of both the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and Health Union policies would underscore the EU's shift toward integrated citizenship services—where security, mobility, and well-being are seen as interconnected dimensions of the same European project.

This has to be compared to that 13% of Europeans have a non-European parent, 10% are migrants of the EU's population and a mere 4 % of EU citizens are resident in another EU member states. This must be seen in relation to the evolving realities of Union citizenship. Around 13% of Europeans have at least one non-European parent, 10% of the EU's population are migrants, and only 4% of EU citizens reside in another member state. These figures reveal that, despite the legal and institutional progress of European integration, the practical exercise of Union citizenship remains limited. Imagine the conflicts in the families with parents and children having different statuses under the law.

In other words, mobility and transnational belonging—core promises of EU citizenship—are still experienced by a relatively small segment of the population. The

data highlight both the potential and the constraints of the EU's citizenship framework: while Europe has become increasingly diverse, cross-border residence and participation remain modest.

Against this backdrop, instruments such as a common physical EU ID card could help operationalize the rights associated with Union citizenship, making freedom of movement, access to services, and civic recognition more accessible and visible across member states.

The introduction of an EU-ID card in physical and digital format would therefore also be an opportunity to promote mobility inside the EU. The introduction of a physical and digital EU ID card would therefore represent a strategic opportunity to actively promote mobility within the Union. As a first step, it could streamline administrative procedures for citizens living or working in a Member State other than their own, making access to healthcare, social services, banking, and voting more seamless. Beyond its practical functions, such an ID would symbolically reinforce the tangible benefits of Union citizenship, helping citizens experience freedom of movement not just as a legal right, but as an everyday convenience. By linking identification, digital authentication, and cross-border service access, the initiative could lay the groundwork for a more integrated, mobile, and connected European citizenry.

To increase labour market flexibility, more than a standardized EU ID card will be needed. Labour market mobility matters because it allows workers to move freely to where their skills are most in demand, helping to address regional labour shortages, reduce unemployment, and boost overall productivity across the Union. Achieving this requires mutual recognition of professional qualifications, so skills and certifications are portable across Member States, and harmonized social security coordination, ensuring that pensions, healthcare, and unemployment benefits follow workers as they relocate. In addition, targeted mobility incentives—such as relocation support, tax alignment, and EU-wide job-matching platforms—can facilitate movement, while digital tools linking the EU ID to employment verification and skills databases make mobility practical and efficient. Finally, language and integration programs help workers adapt to new labour markets without losing ties to their home country. Together, these measures transform the legal right to move into a tangible, effective capacity for cross-border employment, complementing the EU ID card as a key facilitator.

A cross-border labour market in the EU matters because it allows workers to move where their skills are most needed, addressing regional labour shortages, boosting productivity, and supporting economic integration. It also strengthens citizens' rights, making freedom of movement

a practical reality rather than a legal abstraction, and helps economies adapt to demographic and structural changes. A targeted roadmap to increase mobility and labour market flexibility in the EU from 4% of the population to 8% could build on the rationale that a cross-border labour market allows workers to move where their skills are needed, addresses regional shortages, and strengthens citizens' rights. It would begin with mapping regions with labour shortages and surpluses to target mobility initiatives efficiently, while harmonising professional recognition across Member States to remove administrative barriers. Coordinating social security and benefits would ensure workers can move without losing entitlements, and integrating a physical/digital EU ID with employment verification, skill credentials, and social benefits would simplify cross-border movement. Relocation assistance, job-matching platforms, language courses, and integration support would further facilitate mobility, while continuous monitoring and evaluation would allow policies to adapt as needs evolve. Such a roadmap would transform freedom of movement from a legal right into a practical tool for economic and social resilience across the EU.

Data on retirees are limited, but it is estimated that tens of millions of EU citizens live in another Member State for work, residence, or retirement. For instance, around 6 million pensions are paid to individuals residing abroad within the EU/EFTA region. Although retirement mobility is less systematically documented than labour mobility, it represents a significant and growing dimension of cross-border movement. This underscores the relevance of policy instruments such as a physical and digital EU ID, which could streamline access to social security, healthcare, and other cross-border services, ensuring that citizens can fully exercise their rights regardless of where they choose to live within the Union.

To sum-up, the rationale for introducing an EU ID card in both digital and physical formats is to make Union citizenship more tangible and functional. It would simplify identification across Member States, facilitate access to public services, healthcare, and social benefits, and strengthen citizens' freedom of movement. By linking physical and digital credentials, the card would enhance security, interoperability, and trust in cross-border interactions, while supporting labour mobility, administrative efficiency, and integration into both traditional and digital EU systems. Ultimately, it would transform legal rights into everyday practical benefits, reinforcing the EU's vision of a connected, mobile, and empowered citizenry. It will also enhance a sentiment of us and them, a underpin a European identity, something should not be ignored. When you arrive in a new EU member state it should feel natural to feel welcome



provided you contribute to the community, so that the political community of political communities may grow together. Accidentally, the genetic pool of the Europeans in western and central Europe suggest we are a people of peoples but this potential remain largely untapped in a meaningful political, economic and cultural manner, yet free movement in the EU is a core marker of not only of Europe's rejuvenation. In this context an EU ID Card becomes a tangible symbol not only of the eastern and south eastern half come back home but also of civic pride conferring a sense of belonging.

### **Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Accountability and Participatory Governance**

Recent debates on the democratic implications of artificial intelligence (AI) underscore the need for institutional frameworks that ensure both accountability and citizen participation in governance. Zarkadakis (2023) makes the point that the emergence of intelligent machines requires a reimagining of democratic institutions, emphasizing the need for citizen participation, inclusive digital economies, and secure digital identities to ensure that technological progress benefits society broadly rather than concentrating power and wealth. He largely fails to concretize his ideas.

Drawing on the work of Bruce Schneier and Nathan E. Sanders, we could examine how AI could be leveraged by European Union (EU) institutions to strengthen the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the European demos. Schneier emphasizes that trust in AI cannot be achieved through technological regulation alone; rather, accountability must extend to the human actors responsible for deploying and managing these systems. Sanders, by contrast, highlights the potential of AI to empower communities and facilitate broader citizen engagement in policymaking. Integrating these perspectives, this paper proposes a comprehensive approach for EU institutions, combining structural reforms, technological innovation, and participatory mechanisms.

A central tenet of Schneier's argument is that public trust in AI depends on the accountability of those who govern it. Consequently, EU institutions should ensure that every AI system deployed within their purview, or through EU-funded programs at the Member State level, is accompanied by a clearly identifiable human governance lead. This lead would be responsible for the ethical and legal oversight of the system, ensuring compliance with EU standards and facilitating external audit. Moreover, in alignment with Schneier's call for non-corporate alternatives, the EU could invest in open-source, publicly governed AI models. Such models would serve as publicly accountable

benchmarks and provide a transparent alternative to commercial systems whose incentives may conflict with the public interest. These public models would also enable independent audits, allowing both institutions and civil society actors to evaluate system performance, detect bias, and ensure compliance with EU legal norms, including the forthcoming Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA).

Transparency, traceability, and auditability are essential dimensions of accountability. AI systems deployed by EU institutions should be accompanied by detailed public reporting, including information about data sources, decision-making logic, and system performance metrics. Establishing a centralized "EU AI Transparency Portal" would allow public access to these records, enabling researchers, civil society, and individual citizens to scrutinize AI deployments. For high-stakes applications—such as welfare allocation, migration decisions, or law enforcement—AI systems must retain detailed audit logs, which can be accessed by oversight bodies and, where appropriate, by citizens themselves. Beyond technical transparency, participatory oversight mechanisms should be established. Citizens should have the right to challenge AI decisions, provide feedback on proposed deployments, and participate in consultations about system design and policy implications. The creation of an independent European AI Ombudsperson could further institutionalize these rights, providing a formal avenue for public complaint and redress.

The practical facilitation of existing Union citizenship rights through digital tools, including AI and a physical-digital EU ID, represents both a technological and policy innovation. By integrating intelligent systems, rights such as freedom of movement, access to healthcare, portability of social security benefits, and participation in elections or civic initiatives can be streamlined, standardized, and made universally accessible across Member States. For example, AI-driven translation and automated credential recognition can ensure that citizens receive official communications in their own language and that professional qualifications are validated without bureaucratic delay, directly enhancing mobility and employability. Digital platforms can also link citizens to consular services, dispute resolution mechanisms, and cultural or civic participation opportunities, extending the practical reach of legal entitlements.

This approach is justified not only by efficiency but also by broader EU interests, including the promotion of cohesion, equality, and the operationalization of Union citizenship as a lived experience rather than a purely legal status. It allows the EU to close gaps between formal rights and their exercise, fostering trust and engagement while supporting cross-border mobility and integration. To safeguard



against risks, such as privacy violations, unequal access, or algorithmic bias, the deployment of AI and digital systems must be accompanied by robust safeguards: clear legal frameworks for data protection, transparent algorithms, interoperability standards, and mechanisms for accountability and redress. Such safeguards ensure that technological facilitation enhances rights inclusively and ethically, reinforcing both the instrumental and normative objectives of Union citizenship.

From a participatory governance perspective, Sanders advocates for AI systems developed “by the people, for

the people,” emphasizing the potential for communities to co-create policy solutions. EU institutions could operationalize this vision by supporting participatory AI design laboratories, in which citizens, NGOs, researchers, and public officials collaboratively define the objectives, limitations, and ethical parameters of AI applications. Complementing these initiatives, open-data policies would allow citizens and civic actors to develop independent AI models, fostering a decentralized and pluralistic ecosystem of public technology. AI-mediated deliberative platforms could further enhance civic engagement by summarizing



**Figure 2.** *Ancient greek theatre, Theater architecture, Ancient greek architecture*

citizen inputs, identifying trade-offs, and highlighting policy implications in accessible formats. In a multilingual and geographically diverse union, AI tools such as machine translation, summarization, and explanatory chatbots could reduce barriers to participation, ensuring inclusivity for underrepresented linguistic and social groups.

To ensure that these reforms are sustainable and effective, capacity-building and education are crucial. Citizens must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand AI systems, interpret their outputs, and exercise their rights to participate in governance. EU-funded digital literacy programs, public dashboards summarizing AI deployments, and open-source citizen audit kits would help bridge the gap between technological complexity and democratic oversight, enhancing both agency and trust.

To implement this vision, a phased roadmap for EU institutions can be proposed. In the short term (1–2 years), the EU should establish governance structures, identify accountability leads for existing AI systems, and launch transparency portals for public reporting. Parallel efforts should include pilot programs for citizen engagement in AI design and the creation of multilingual tools to facilitate participation. In the medium term (3–5 years), the EU could develop public-option AI models, expand participatory AI labs across Member States, and institutionalize the AI Ombudsperson. Training programs and citizen audit

toolkits should be widely deployed during this phase. In the long term (5–10 years), EU institutions should evaluate the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms, refine legal and ethical frameworks, and scale AI-mediated deliberative platforms to support decision-making in complex policy domains such as climate adaptation, digital regulation, and social welfare. Continuous monitoring, reporting, and independent evaluation would ensure that AI deployment remains accountable, transparent, and inclusive.

While the potential of AI to enhance democratic governance is substantial, both Schneier and Sanders caution against the risks of superficial transparency, technocratic drift, and algorithmic bias. Achieving genuinely participatory and accountable AI governance will require sustained political commitment, institutional innovation, and vigilance against capture by commercial or technocratic interests. Nonetheless, by embedding Schneier’s emphasis on human accountability and Sanders’ vision of participatory AI, EU institutions have an unprecedented opportunity to model a new form of democratic governance in which AI acts as a tool of empowerment rather than an opaque instrument of control.

## **Towards an European Public Sphere**

The European Broadcasting Union must be reimagined—not merely as a coordinating body, but as a fully-fledged EU agency, endowed with the capacity, the mandate, and

the vision to operate seamlessly across Europe, uniting voices, bridging cultures, and projecting our shared values to the world. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is currently an alliance of public service media organizations across Europe and beyond. Its core functions include facilitating content exchange among members, coordinating news coverage, organizing international events such as the Eurovision Song Contest, and providing technical expertise, training, and standardization for broadcasting practices. The EBU also advocates for the interests of public service media, promotes media freedom, and supports innovation in audiovisual technology.

If the EBU were reimagined as a fully-fledged EU agency, its role would shift from a voluntary network to a formal EU institutional body with legal authority and operational mandates across member states. As an agency, it would gain the capacity to implement EU-wide audiovisual policies, ensure regulatory compliance, and coordinate national media regulators through formal mechanisms. Its activities would expand to include the development of harmonized standards for content, licensing, and digital media platforms, as well as the systematic monitoring of cross-border broadcasting and media plurality. The agency would also acquire formal oversight and funding mechanisms through the EU budget, enabling long-term strategic initiatives rather than relying primarily on membership contributions. Moreover, the restructured agency would enhance the EU's soft power by promoting European values, culture, and public service media standards on a pan-European and global scale. In essence, the transformation would shift the EBU from a cooperative network into an authoritative, policy-driven institution, capable of shaping the audiovisual landscape of Europe in line with EU objectives.

The European Broadcasting Union, if reimagined as an EU agency, would work closely with ERGA, the network of national media regulators, to ensure coherent implementation of EU audiovisual policies. It would coordinate with ERGA to harmonize standards, monitor compliance, and address cross-border broadcasting challenges. ERGA would provide expert advice and share best practices from national regulators to inform agency initiatives. Together, they would facilitate training, capacity building, and knowledge exchange across member states. This partnership would strengthen regulatory consistency, enhance oversight, and promote a unified European media framework.

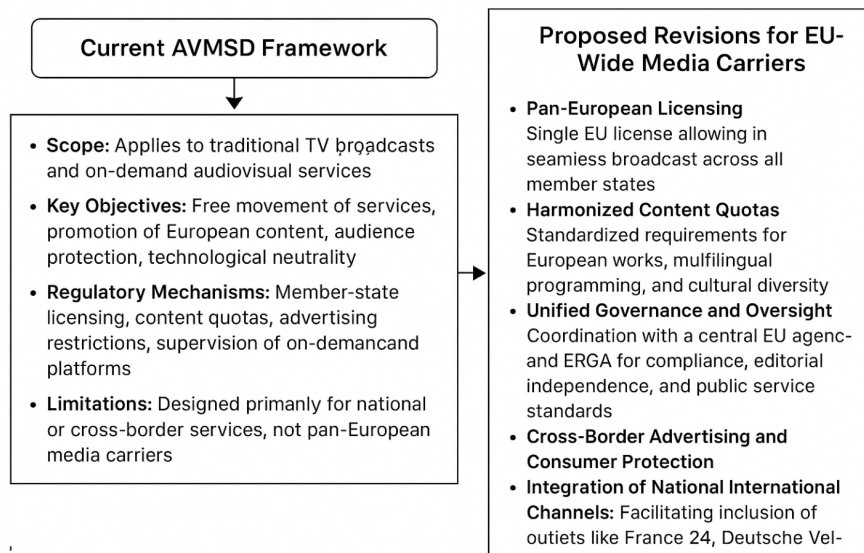
Imagine five EU-wide media carriers, reaching every citizen directly, delivering not only news but also educational programming and cultural content designed to illuminate, inform, and inspire. These platforms would do more than

transmit information—they would reinforce knowledge, nurture a shared European identity, and make the continent's rich cultural heritage tangible and immediate. This would create a truly pan-European information space, bridging borders, connecting communities, and fostering civic cohesion. By offering content that is diverse, multilingual, and accessible, these media carriers would cultivate a profound sense of belonging, making European culture both visible and visceral. In doing so, they would transform the media landscape into a shared public sphere, where citizens experience Europe collectively, and where knowledge, culture, and identity converge in a dynamic, participatory space. If five pan-European media carriers were established under an EU agency, existing international channels such as France 24, Deutsche Welle, ARTE, and TVE Internacional would likely be incorporated into this network should they be invited to and desire so. This integration would require alignment of editorial policies, programming schedules, and target audiences to ensure consistency with EU-wide objectives while maintaining local expertise and cultural nuance.

Currently, these channels are primarily state-funded but operate under independent editorial boards to safeguard public service values. Integration into an EU-level framework would necessitate a reevaluation of ownership structures for instance max 49% public ownership of shares. While retaining national contributions and cultural perspectives, oversight would shift toward the EU agency, ensuring coordination across member states and compliance with common standards. This could involve a hybrid governance model in which national stakeholders participate in advisory roles while strategic and operational decisions are centralized. Maintaining editorial independence would remain a priority, with mechanisms to protect against political interference while fostering pan-European cohesion. Guidelines would need to balance the channels' national identity with the overarching goal of reinforcing a shared European information space.

The EU agency could optimize resources by coordinating production, distribution, and technology infrastructure across all channels. This could reduce duplication, improve cost-efficiency, and expand the reach of content across multiple languages and platforms. Integrating these channels into an EU-wide framework would amplify Europe's voice globally, enhancing the projection of EU values, culture, and public service media standards. The channels would act not only as national broadcasters but as instruments of collective European soft power, showcasing a coherent yet diverse European identity internationally. The transformation would require revisiting licensing, funding, and compliance frameworks, harmonizing them with EU directives while respecting national media laws.





Coordination with ERGA and other regulatory bodies would ensure adherence to standards regarding media plurality, content quality, and cross-border broadcasting so that EU-citizens at all times can access the five EU-wide broadcasters.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is the EU's core legal framework governing audiovisual media, encompassing both traditional television broadcasts and on-demand services. Its objectives include ensuring the free movement of services across the EU, promoting cultural diversity by requiring a significant proportion of European content, protecting audiences—especially minors—from harmful content, and maintaining technological neutrality so that regulations apply equally to all delivery platforms. The directive was last updated in 2018 to address the rise of videosharing platforms and the digitalization of audiovisual services.

### *Frontierless Television Reimagined*

To accommodate five EU-wide media carriers, the AVMSD could be revised to introduce provisions for pan-European licensing, allowing these channels to broadcast seamlessly across all member states under a single regulatory framework. Rules on content quotas, advertising limits, and consumer protection could be harmonized for EU-wide operations while respecting linguistic and cultural diversity. Additionally, the directive could establish standards for governance, editorial independence, and cross-border cooperation, ensuring that EU-wide media carriers operate transparently, uphold public service values, and contribute to European soft power. Such revisions would provide a legal foundation for the integration of national international broadcasters, support multilingual programming, and facilitate the creation of a shared European information space dovetailing with public policy as discerned by the member states in the Council and the European Parliament who decides by qualified majority.

A comprehensive EU Film Strategy should serve as a cornerstone of this vision, encompassing every stage from production and distribution to international promotion, ensuring that European cinema resonates across the globe. This strategy must cultivate emerging filmmakers, champion diverse voices, and safeguard the rich tapestry of European narratives—stories of innovation and struggle, of triumph and tradition, of culture and creativity. By supporting cinematic excellence and encouraging cross-border collaborations, the EU can amplify these stories, making them accessible to audiences far and wide. Cinema, after all, is the medium through which Europe narrates its identity, conveys its values, and celebrates its cultural heritage. Through strategic investment, thoughtful policy, and coordinated promotion, these stories can not only reach the world but also claim the prominence on the global stage that they richly deserve. In doing so, European film becomes more than art; it becomes an instrument of soft power, a vehicle for dialogue, and a beacon of cultural influence. This would encompass an EU-funded film studio in the Cannes area and likely also funding for a Museum of Langauges in F24 New HQ in Paris.

Building an EU streaming service requires careful consideration of location, legal frameworks, technology, and content strategy. A UK–Italy base leverages strong English-language reach, Southern European markets, and established production networks, while a Scandinavian base offers technological innovation, public media expertise, and high English proficiency for international expansion. Compliance with the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive, GDPR, and national licensing is essential, regardless of location. Technologically, cloud-based infrastructure, CDNs, and multilingual content management ensure seamless pan-European delivery. Content should reflect European identity, combining region-specific productions with pan-European appeal,

while collaborations with national broadcasters and EU funding programs enhance reach and quality. A hybrid business model, combining subscription tiers with advertising-supported content, can maximize accessibility and sustainability. Governance should involve alignment with an EU audiovisual agency, oversight by ERGA, and independent editorial boards to safeguard public value. Phased expansion across member states, integrating regional hubs and EU-wide media carriers, will reinforce both cultural influence and European soft power.

Finally, the MEDIA program must be scaled up significantly, tripling current investments to provide the resources necessary for sustained innovation, high-quality programming, and independent journalism. Equally critical is the need for comprehensive education and professional development for journalists across all media sectors, ensuring that they are equipped to navigate complex political, technological, and cultural landscapes. Initiatives such as the expansion of the CSJSorbonne online courses can play a pivotal role in training journalists in investigative reporting, digital media literacy, and ethical standards. At the same time, the persistent threats to media freedom in parts of Europe underscore the urgency of these measures, as robust education and support systems are essential to safeguarding journalistic independence. With robust funding, strategic training, and a firm commitment to media freedom, Europe can not only preserve but amplify its cultural richness, ensuring that its artistic and media ecosystems remain resilient, dynamic, and influential on the global stage.

Cultural citizenship is not an abstract idea; it is something we see and experience every day. It is found in participation in the arts, in literature, music, theatre, and cinema. It is shown when people preserve their traditions while also engaging in cultural networks that cross borders. These are the ways in which citizens live their rights, contribute to their communities, and take part in the shared life of society. As they say in Greece: so long as the culture exists, so does the nation. In other words, culture is the foundation of belonging, the proof that a community lives and persists.

At the European level, this cultural citizenship connects directly with Union citizenship. Citizens remain rooted in their own local and national communities, but they also share in European institutions, programs, and values. This dual identity is important: it allows people to feel both local and European, to belong to their homeland while recognizing a larger, shared interest. Programs in education, cultural exchanges, and digital platforms all help make this dual identity tangible, turning legal rights into real experiences.

Media and culture play a central role in this process. They communicate knowledge, offer shared points of reference, and help citizens understand the perspectives and experiences of others. Through European broadcasting, film, and cultural initiatives, people encounter other ways of life and other traditions. This experience teaches them to see beyond narrow local concerns, to appreciate the broader community of Europe, and to recognize their shared stake in its future.

In this way, the EU does more than legislate or fund programs. It creates the conditions in which citizens can participate in building a European identity. By linking culture and media to Union citizenship, Europe can foster a sense of belonging that is active, practical, and meaningful. It is through everyday engagement—in schools, museums, theatres, cinemas, and through media—that citizens learn what it means to belong to Europe, and that a cosmopolitan European identity is conditioned to emerge and the worse prevented in the public realm underpinning participatory governance and transparency towards a democratizing and more plural European Union by empowering

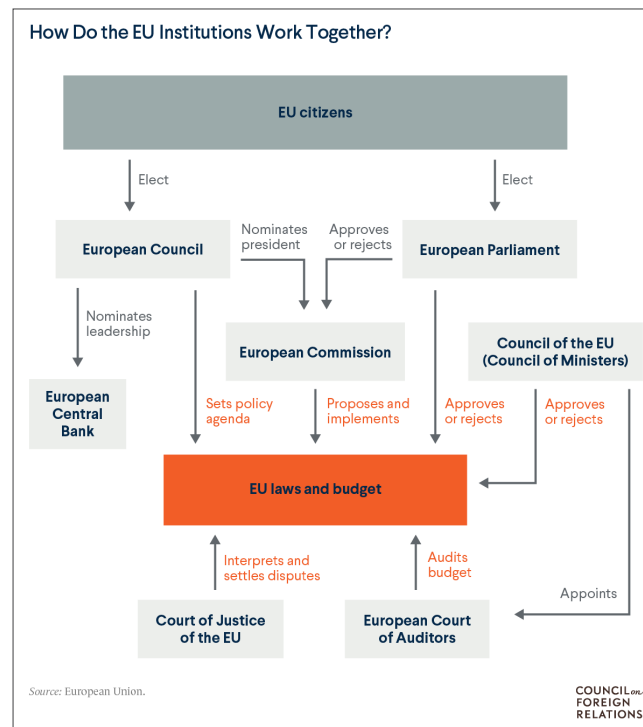
Cultural citizenship is not quiet. It is alive. It beats. It hums in classrooms, it whispers in galleries, it dances in streets, it shimmers in squares. It sings in literature, it drums in music, it leaps in theatre, it flickers in cinema. When citizens participate, when they create, perform, debate, or simply bear witness, they do more than belong—they build, they bind, they broadcast the values, the visions, the vibrant stories that define Europe.

In the European Union, this living culture flows into soft power. Europe becomes attractive, admired not by force, not by fiat, but by fascination, by curiosity, by collective admiration. Citizens cross borders, swap ideas, share art, and spark movements—from Erasmus classrooms to festival stages, from digital streams to broadcast waves. Ideas ripple, visions resonate, influence spreads with a hum, a murmur, a melody that travels far without a single command.

Strong cultural policy beats like a drum, signals commitment, and shouts values. Media amplifies: films flicker, screens shimmer, voices buzz, broadcasts beckon. Stories flow, narratives float, ideas ignite. Europe is seen, Europe is felt, Europe is heard, resonating in hearts, tickling imaginations, shaping perceptions across the globe.

Cultural citizenship also strengthens from within. Communities that participate, that celebrate, that pulse with pride, become stable, resilient, confident. That internal rhythm echoes outward. The EU, united, culturally alive, hums its presence, not with force, but with fascination. By nurturing cultural citizenship, by fortifying EU





cultural policies—through education, media, arts funding, transnational programs—the Union projects a soft power that sings, that pulses, that moves, that matters. A Europe that is heard, a Europe that is seen, a Europe that beats in every heart, every mind, every street, every stage.

## Organisational Implications

At this point it is relevant to examine an administrative reorganization of the European Parliament's organization. We propose the EPRS is strengthened by a directorate on DEMOSCOPE, in essence moving the Unit for surveys & polling from the General Secretary and cooperating closely with Eurostat. We propose that the EPRS be strengthened through the creation of a dedicated Directorate for DEMOSCOPE, effectively relocating the Unit for Surveys and Polling from the General Secretariat and ensuring close operational coordination with Eurostat. This restructuring would consolidate expertise, streamline data-driven analysis, and enhance the Parliament's capacity to monitor public opinion and societal trends with greater precision and responsiveness. In turn, the offices of the General Secretary or the President could be strengthened through the establishment of a dedicated unit responsible for policy coordination, strategic initiatives and projects, external relations, performance monitoring, and citizen satisfaction surveys. The Conference of Presidents should also be reinforced by enhancing its analytical and advisory support, ensuring that decision-making is informed by timely data, cross-institutional coordination, and comprehensive evaluation of parliamentary priorities.

To strengthen party democracy and membership in the EU and its member states, reforms should focus on increasing citizen participation, transparency, and cross-border political engagement.

At the EU level, transnational political engagement can be promoted by enhancing the visibility and platforms of European political parties and encouraging transnational lists for European Parliament elections. Democratic innovation could include expanding digital participation tools like online consultations and e-voting, as well as supporting citizens' assemblies and deliberative forums on EU-wide issues. Transparency and accountability can be improved by enforcing stricter rules on campaign financing and lobbying, and by increasing transparency in party operations and decision-making processes.

At the member state level, grassroots empowerment is key. Political parties should develop local chapters and engage members in shaping policy agendas. Providing training and resources for party members can help them participate meaningfully in internal debates and candidate selection. Inclusive participation can be encouraged by lowering barriers for young people, minorities, and underrepresented groups, and by promoting gender parity and diversity in party leadership and candidate lists. Civic education and media literacy programs are essential to build political awareness and counter disinformation.

To bridge EU and national democratic spaces, coordinated campaigns and platforms can align national party platforms with EU-level priorities and facilitate joint campaigns and debates between national and European candidates. Democracy action plans like the European Democracy Action Plan and the Defence of Democracy Package should be implemented and expanded to protect democratic integrity and empower citizens.

At the EU level, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are currently allowed to hold side jobs, provided

they declare them publicly. However, this system has been criticized for leaving conflicts of interest largely unaddressed. To improve regulation, the EU could implement a more robust ethics framework that includes mandatory disclosure of income sources, clearer definitions of incompatible roles, and independent oversight bodies to monitor compliance. Following scandals like the 2023 Qatar corruption case, the European Parliament has taken steps to reform integrity rules, but experts argue that enforcement remains weak (Springer).

National parliaments can also strengthen ethics by adopting comprehensive codes of conduct. These should outline acceptable behavior, restrict paid external roles that conflict with public duties, and require regular audits of financial interests. Transparency International recommends that such codes be backed by sanctions for violations and accessible public registers of interests.

In both contexts, ethics regulation should be proactive rather than reactive. This means not only responding to scandals but building a culture of integrity through training, public accountability, and institutional safeguards.

## Conclusions

The discourse on European citizenship, as articulated by Elvire Fabry, represents a critical intersection between legal rights and active political engagement. The complexities inherent in fostering a unified European identity are illuminated through Fabry's exploration of political resistance, low voter participation, and the diverse national identities across Europe. These challenges highlight the urgent need for the European Union (EU) to cultivate a more inclusive and participatory framework that can accommodate its broad diversity.

Viewing citizenship not merely as a legal status but as a dynamic practice underscores the importance of empowering all EU citizens, particularly those from marginalized communities. This empowerment relies on the development of robust civic education initiatives and participatory mechanisms that enable meaningful engagement in EU governance. Citizens must not only understand their rights, but also feel equipped and motivated to exercise them actively.

Fabry's insights, when considered alongside Lynn Dobson's work, offer a potential pathway forward. This approach blends legal entitlements with civic responsibility and encourages active participation. The goal is to enhance the EU's legitimacy, responsiveness, and cohesion as a supranational entity. For European citizenship to truly serve as a vehicle for democratic integration and a shared European identity, it is essential to prioritize political will, institutional reforms, and a cultural shift toward

inclusivity. Only by fostering these changes can the EU hope to transform citizenship into a cohesive and unifying force.

Citizenship, as both a normative and institutional role, empowers individuals to exercise moral and political agency within the EU. It is lived not only in legal terms but also through active participation—whether in the European Parliament, national courts, or local town halls across Europe. While rights are essential, they are more than just protections—they are tools that enable participation, encourage civic responsibility, and foster public deliberation. Without active engagement, rights remain abstract; it is through participation that they gain meaning.

Active engagement is not merely about voting or attending meetings, but about shaping outcomes through deliberate action. When citizens engage with the EU's political processes, they transform abstract rights into lived experiences, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of EU institutions. This engagement is what gives citizenship its meaning and force.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, with all its weight, must not remain a mere symbol but be wielded through active participation. The democratic legitimacy of the EU rests on this engagement, and without it, governance becomes hollow, with authority but no allegiance. This participatory approach should not exclude marginalized communities but should expand to include them, following frameworks like Dobson's that can adapt to ensure broader representation, particularly for indigenous or historically excluded groups.

While not specifically focused on indigenous rights, Dobson's framework is relevant to these communities, as it builds on a model of participatory democracy reminiscent of ancient Athens. This model can be applied within the EU to ensure that historically marginalized groups are included in decision-making processes.

Yet, as Fabry notes, access to European citizenship is a concept that is both empowering and diluted by national laws. The legal mechanisms in place do not fully transform citizenship into a political tool, as EU citizenship remains restricted by national frameworks and lacks full enforceability. To address this, it is crucial to strengthen EU citizenship by enacting reforms at the constitutional and legislative levels, ensuring that the law becomes a tool for active, not passive, participation.

In the Brussels-Capital Region, urban diplomacy thrives through strategic collaboration between the Belgian federal government and EU institutions. This alignment is not simply administrative but represents a form of soft

power, where spatial governance, symbolic representation, and policy coherence converge to enhance Brussels as a global urban player. The focus has been less on increasing Brussels' rank on the Regional Competitiveness Index or forming a European Urban Power Index, and more on its cultural attractiveness and its role as a hub for EU governance.

The urban fabric of Brussels, particularly the European Quarter, should reflect this shared narrative between Belgium and the EU. Joint investments in public space, mobility, and architectural symbolism can create a physical embodiment of European values while respecting Belgian identity. Projects like co-designed public squares or cultural corridors that integrate EU transparency with Belgian heritage can signal unity through design.

To avoid fragmented narratives, Brussels must craft a harmonized urban brand that highlights both its Belgian roots and its identity as a European capital. This dual identity should be celebrated, not diminished, and be represented in diplomatic events, cultural programming, and international summits.

One possible solution to institutionalizing this coordination is the creation of a Brussels Urban Diplomacy Council. This body, composed of federal, regional, and EU representatives, could oversee strategic partnerships with other global cities, align urban sustainability efforts, and manage shared cultural diplomacy initiatives. Such a body would help ensure that Brussels' role as both a Belgian and European capital is clearly defined and strategically leveraged for global influence.

To have *droit de cite* under the new regulation on Union Citizenship ideally references what expresses what makes us Europeans across the ages and the era we live in today. The implication is consistency, harmonization of citizenship rules, EU ID cards, taking into consideration the urban-rural divide by empowering rusticus, protecting against predatory behavior in the digital society and Orwellian mentality, and give the power back to the people, while strengthening civic society, our economies and martial traditions.

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