Public perception of European Union citizenship at the local level

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1. Introduction

European Union (EU) citizenship and the rights included in it are one of the major cornerstones of the European integration process. The creation of EU citizenship goes back to the Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force on 1 November 1993. Since then, every national citizen of a member state is also a citizen of the Union. The ultimate goal of this initiative was to encourage a sense of identification with and belonging to the European Union and thereby foster a common European identity. While certain rights, like the right of free movement and residence, are firmly anchored in European primary law and have undergone considerable developments in secondary legislation during the last decades, a significant gap remains between the content of the legal norms of EU citizenship and the civic realities of everyday life. This phenomenon is well known. Every three years since 1993, the European Commission reports on the progress towards effective EU citizenship. The Standard Eurobarometer, published twice a year, regularly examines people's perception of EU citizenship. In addition, two specific Eurobarometer surveys were carried out in view of the 2017 EU citizenship report. Academic literature has stressed the importance of knowledge for a positive perception of the EU (Gabel 1998; Hooghe/Marks 2005). It is expected that the more familiar people get with European institutions and politics and the better knowledge they have about EU policies, the stronger becomes their identification with the European Union. However, what is missing is a local perspective on this cognitive path between knowledge about and perception of EU citizenship. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which EU citizens' knowledge about their rights is accompanied by a positive perception of European Union citizenship. For this purpose, the chapter first explores the development of EU citizenship

and the relationship between citizenship and democracy on the European level. Then the chapter presents findings of a face-to-face survey of 425 local residents in Duisburg, Germany. Finally, the analysis of these findings will be used to formulate concrete policy recommendations about how to vitalise the link between local citizens and the EU.

2.   From »market citizenship« to »Union citizenship«

The concept of EU citizenship has been evolving highly dynamically over the past six decades of European integration. Since the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the 1950s, the rights of the »market citizen« (Ipsen/Nicolaysen 1964: 340) have been gradually extended by the subsequent treaties and secondary legislation. Already in 1957, the Treaty of Rome, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), explicitly mentioned the people in addition to the member states in its preamble. This was the very first sign that European integration not only directly affected the member states but also each individual citizen. As a result, market citizens, namely workers, businessmen and consumers, where the first beneficiaries of the internal market with the establishment of the four European freedoms (capital, goods, people and services). These four freedoms, formally contained in the treaties, were dynamically developed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and shaped the relationship of individual citizens with the community, based on the core norm of non-discrimination.

However, the 1980s witnessed a renewed interest in the issue of European identity and, as a result, the concept of citizenship started to develop as a boost to the political legitimacy of European integration (Isin/Wood 1999). In 1984, the European Parliament adopted a Draft Treaty establishing the European Union, whose Article 3 recommended the formal establishment of a »citizenship of the Union«. Only one year later, the Adonnino report proposed the development of »special rights of citizens« (Adonnio 1985: 7), in particular local electoral rights and voting rights in European Parliament elections in the according member state of residence. Nevertheless, the European Parliament's draft proposal was not accepted by the member states and the Adonnio report did not show a direct result.

A crucial catalyst in the development of EU citizenship was the often underestimated Single European Act (SEA) in 1986 (Warleigh 1998: 116). The SEA provided important innovations which prepared the ground for the ratifica-

tion of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. With entry into force of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) on 1 November 1993, the EU legally established the institution of Union citizenship stating that »every person holding the nationality of a Member State is a citizen of the Union« (Article 8(1) TEU). One of the Treaty's main objectives was »to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the creation of a citizenship of the Union« (Article B TEU). To reach this objective, the Maastricht Treaty added three additional rights to the existing free movement and residence rights of the classic market citizen: the right to vote and to stand as a candidate both in municipal and European Parliament elections„ the right of consular or diplomatic protection by member state authorities when travelling abroad and the right to petition the European Parliament or to apply to the Ombudsman. As a result, the Treaty of Maastricht legally established a political relation between the EU and its citizens which goes beyond the legal and economical relation of market citizenship.

As Kostakopoulou (2013: 24) points out, the potential of EU citizenship to strengthen citizens' rights and enhance democratic practices at all levels of governance was not sufficiently appreciated by policy makers and academics at the time. Initially, even the ECJ adopted a cautious approach. This resistance changed in 1998 with the *Martínez Sala* case where the ECJ gave a big impetus to the concept of European citizenship. In that case, the refusal of the authorities to grant an economically inactive Spanish citizen who lived in Germany certain social benefits was dismissed by the ECJ. The next important step was the *Grzelczyk* case in 2001, where the ECJ was asked whether a French student could claim social assistance benefits in Belgium (Cornelissen 2009). These two decisions could be interpreted as the ECJ developing a general right to non-discrimination for EU citizens, independent of the performance of any economic activity.

The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 did not substantially modify the concept of Union citizenship introduced by Maastricht. Only some additional rights were included, such as the right to write directly to any of the institutions or bodies of the EU, the right to be replied to in any official language represented in the Treaty or the right of access to any of the documents of the European institutions and bodies. However, in Article 8(1) TEU it clarified that »citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship«. According to Barber (2002: 1), this provision is »an expression of both European ambition and Member State conservatism«. It was rooted in the so-called Edinburgh Agreement, which was made in the aftermath of

the negative Danish referendum of the Maastricht Treaty. In that agreement, the Council (1992: 53) underlined that provisions of the Treaty »do not in any way take the place of national citizenship. The question whether an individual possesses the nationality of a Member State will be settled solely by reference to the national law of the Member State concerned.« By making national citizenship a prerequisite for European citizenship, it is plausible to say that the EU did not create a system of double citizenship, but a system of dual citizenship (Saputelli 2018: 263). Double citizenship is characterised by the fact that a citizen can hold two (or more) citizenships which are independent and separated from each other and are not linked as in the European citizenship. For more discussion on the concept of dual citizenship, see Yildirim Sungur's and Schwarz' contribution to this volume (2020).

The next important boost to EU citizenship was the proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in 2000. Although it did not become legally binding until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the document underlined the EU's ambition »to adopt its own Bill of Rights« (de Búrca 2013: 172). The Charter contains inalienable rights, principles and values that all EU citizens are entitled to and all European actors must comply with when implementing European law. In this sense, the text has brought a new impetus to the EU's human rights framework (von Bogdandy: 2000). The Charter contains a preamble and 54 articles divided into VII chapters and some general rules. Chapter V lays down the rights attached to the status of EU citizenship. These rights include the right to vote and stand as a candidate at the elections to the European Parliament and at municipal elections, the right to good administration, the right to petition at the European Parliament, the freedom of movement and residence and the diplomatic and consular protection.

Scholars have praised the Charter for establishing »a direct link between the European institutions and citizenship« (Balaguer 2013: 233). In parallel, the Charter has attained considerable recognition through European jurisprudence (Sarmiento 2013). In 2011, the *Zambrano* case attracted wide attention (van Eijken/de Vries 2011; Hailbronner/Iglesias Sánchez 2011). This case dealt with the issue whether a residence permit should be given to two Colombian citizens who were parents of two Belgian children. The ECJ affirmed that such derivative rights exist for parents from third countries if EU member states have previously granted citizenship to their children. Moreover, in her opinion, the ECJ's Advocate General Eleanor Sharpston called for a reconsideration of the bonds between the EU citizen and the EU. This could only

be implemented through a more extensive protection of human rights and fundamental rights for EU citizens. The ECJ (2011) followed by deciding that Member States could no longer deprive Union citizens of the »genuine enjoyment of the substance of the rights conferred by virtue of their status as citizens of the Union«.

3.   European Union citizenship at the local level

Today, EU citizenship can best be described as a kind of federal citizenship (van den Brink 2019: 33). A federal citizen possesses »membership in two political communities within the same state« (Carens 2000: 164). She or he is a member of the federation as a whole as well as of one of the federation's constituent states. EU citizens, according to today's Article 20 TFEU, enjoy this kind of federal membership as well: »every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union«. As a result, EU citizenship, like other forms of federal citizenship, is characterised by a horizontal and a vertical dimension. The horizontal dimension allows the federal citizen to move and reside freely within the EU and not to be discriminated on grounds of national citizenship. The vertical dimension represents the core of EU citizenship as it represents a direct link between the Union and its citizens.

As outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume (Bayer et al. 2020: 7-22), there are generally three different aspects of citizenship: one focusing on the legal status granted by a political community, one relating a certain identity to a community and one highlighting social practice of democratic participation. Concerning status, van den Brink (2019: 33) resumes that »EU citizenship may indeed look rather meagre when considering solely its vertical dimension«. But how about practice and identity? The turnouts of the elections to the European Parliament indicate that the public does not see its EU citizenship as its most important status. This immediately leads to the even more puzzling question: Are Europeans really passive (non-democratic) citizens? One factor that may explain passivity in terms of participation is the extent to which individuals know their legal rights. Public knowledge of rights has been a subject of a number of empirical enquiries over the last decade (Denvir/Balmer/Pleasence 2013). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996: 1), for instance, state that »Democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed.«

The importance of political knowledge for the development of support for a European community was confirmed by Inglehart (1970). However, the author acknowledged cognitive mobilization and education as a necessary condition only but not as a sufficient one: »One must become aware of it before one can develop a sense of commitment« (Inglehart 1970: 47). This argument was empirically supported by Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2012) who measured the degree of cognitive mobilisation by evaluating the consumption of international news in newspapers. The authors' results were confirmed by Scharkow and Vogelsang (2009). Furthermore, there is evidence from research on EU support that possessing knowledge of European institutions affects support for EU authority in areas involving cross-border political issues (Clark/Hellwig 2012). Faas (2007) nuances these results. In a comparison study, he shows that a positive relationship of citizens towards the EU can only be expected in countries with strong European agendas and where Europe is conceptualised as an inclusive multi-ethnic concept. This view is confirmed by Thorpe (2008), whose work shows that social groups who stand little or nothing to gain from identifying with Europe are highly unlikely to do so.

Verhaegen, Hooghe and Dejaeghere (2015) also nuance the relationship between knowledge about Europe and identity. In a comparative analysis among adolescents in 21 EU member states, they show that knowledge about the EU has a significant but still limited effect on European identity.

The European Union argues similarly. In its programme *Europe for Citizens* (2007-2013), the EU argues that promoting knowledge about European citizenship rights will lead to the strengthening and safeguarding of the integration process (European Commission 2011: 4). 2013, the year that marked the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, was even designated as the »European Year of Citizens« by the European Commission. This initiative aimed at promoting the visibility and accessibility of EU citizenship. The European Year of Citizens also formed one of the main rationales for the research activities behind this chapter. »20 years of European citizenship. Progress and challenges« was a one-year project (September 2013 – September 2014) funded by the Stiftung Mercator. The project's main goal was to gather information on the knowledge of Duisburg inhabitants about their rights as citizens of the EU and to ask them about their opinions and ideas in regard to the future of the EU. Specifically, the project pursued a three-pronged strategy: (1) implementation of a comparative survey in selected districts of Duisburg, (2) analysis of the survey results and (3) presentation of the survey outcomes to the public through dialogue forums. All activities of

the project were part of the academic course »Practical application of research methods« at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen. The project was carried out in close cooperation with the Office of Elections, European Affairs and Information Logistics of the City of Duisburg.[1]

This chapter summarises the main findings of the project outlined above. Accordingly, the rest of this chapter is organised as follows: In section 4, an overview of the survey is given. Section 5 presents the survey results. Lastly, section 6 offers concluding remarks and practical recommendations about how to vitalise EU citizenship on a local level.

4.   Survey overview

The questionnaire of the survey contained 39 questions which were grouped into seven sections from A to G. Section A contained 2 filter questions to select only respondents who live in Duisburg and have EU citizenship. Section B entailed three questions to consider whether respondents are aware of their status as a citizen of the EU. Section C covered 9 questions related to the EU citizens' rights of participation in local and European elections. Sections D entailed 9 questions about the right of free movement within the EU. Section E (four questions) aimed to gather information on the respondents' perception of the EU. Section F (5 questions) asked for demographic details such as gender, age, income and professional status. Finally, section G contained seven questions for the interviewers on the credibility of the respondent and the quality of the obtained information. The questionnaire contained a mixture of closed and open questions. The formal survey was conducted by students based on the guidance of the lecturer. The interviews were conducted in October/December 2013 and April 2014. In the end, 425 questionnaires were usable. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and on the street in central locations of Duisburg and other parts of the city. The average interview duration was intended to be no longer than 20 minutes. Interviewers aimed to achieve a reasonably representative sample by age and gender. A comparison of the survey data with the demographics of the city of Duisburg is provided in Table 1 below.

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1   For more information, please visit the project's website at www.uni-due.de/unionsbuerger/

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

		Survey (n = 425) n	Percentage	Duisburg population Percentage
Gender	Female	178	41.5	49
	Male	251	58.5	51
Age	<18	23	5.4	16.6
	18-24	106	24.9	8.4
	25-64	238	56	54.2
	≥65	56	13.6	20.8

Source: Data obtained from the city of Duisburg (Stadt Duisburg 2018).

5.   Survey findings

The results of the survey are not representative. Thus, the collected information is best thought of as representing a picture of opinion and mood in the seven months from October 2013 and April 2014 in Duisburg. Nevertheless, the findings can contribute to an increased understanding of public perception of EU citizenship on the local level. The results that follow pertain to selected questions of the survey questionnaire and in this way represent a part of the survey and the statistical analysis that was carried out.

5.1.   Familiarity with the term »citizen of the European Union«

The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with the familiarity of the respondents with the term »citizen of the European Union«. Asked »Are you familiar with the term ›citizen of the European Union‹?«, the respondents were able to ascertain their knowledge in the range from »Yes, and I know what it means«, to »Yes, I have heard about it, but I am not sure what it means« and »No, I have never heard the term ›citizen of the European Union‹«. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (74.5 %) said they were familiar with the concept of EU citizenship. However, awareness of the term does not necessarily mean that it is also understood in terms of content. More than 42 % of the respondents said they had heard the term before, but could not say

exactly what it stands for. About a third of the respondents (31.9 %) was familiar with the concept of EU citizenship and knew its meaning. Nearly 26 % of the respondents were unacquainted with the concept of EU citizenship and had never heard of it.

Figure 1: Are you familiar with the term »citizen of the European Union«?
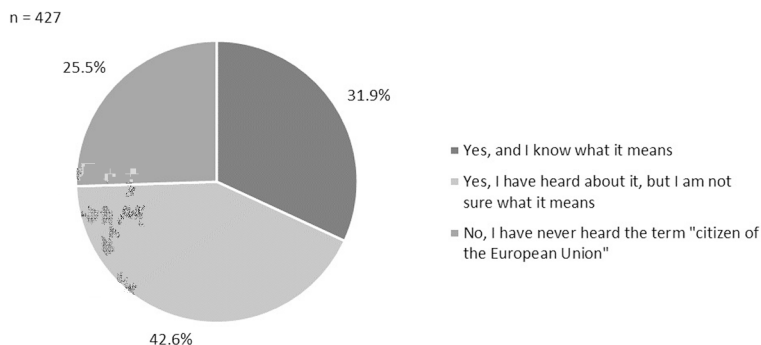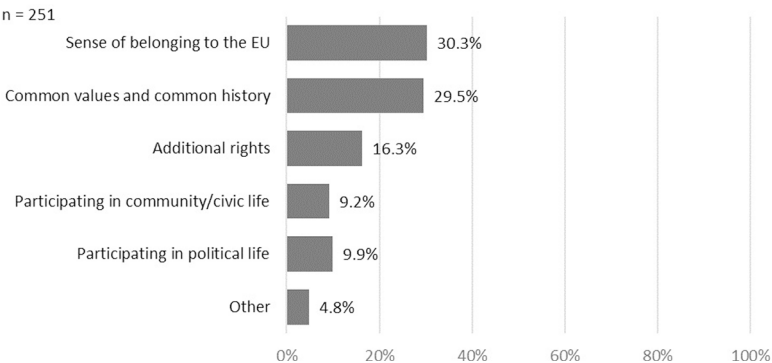

Source: Own compilation.

5.2. Perception of EU citizenship

The respondents' perception of EU citizenship was obtained by asking them »What does EU citizenship mean to you? What do you associate with it?« To code the answers to this open question, a coding system was used on the same lines as the one used by the European Commission (2012: 35). This system had six categories: »Sense of belonging to the EU«, »Common values and common history«, »Additional rights«, »Participating in community/civic life«, »Participating in political life« and »Other«. To more than 30 % of the respondents, EU citizenship meant a sense of belonging to the European Union. Slightly fewer respondents associated EU citizenship with common values and a common history (29.5 %). The item »Additional rights« came in at third place as a response to this question. This was followed by »Participating in political life« with 9.9 % and »Participating in community/civic life« with 9.2 % of the answers. It should be highlighted that only a minor proportion of the

respondents (4.8 %) had a negative perception on EU citizenship which was coded as »Other«.

Figure 2: What does EU citizenship mean to you? What do you associate with it?

n = 251

Sense of belonging to the EU	30.3%
Common values and common history	29.5%
Additional rights	16.3%
Participating in community/civic life	9.2%
Participating in political life	9.9%
Other	4.8%

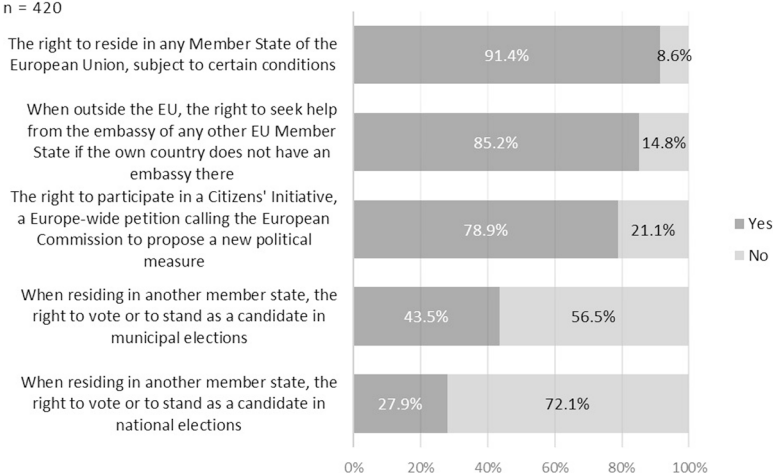0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Source: Own compilation.

5.3.   Awareness of EU citizens' rights

The next part of the questionnaire was designed to test the respondents' awareness of some of the most important rights they hold as EU citizens. To this end, the students carrying out the survey explained to the respondents that since 1993 all citizens of the EU member states are »citizens of the European Union«. Five statements describing EU rights were then read out and the respondents were asked which of these rights an EU citizen has. When asked about the possibility of residing in another EU country, the vast majority of all respondents indicated that they knew they were entitled to this right. The right of free movement was familiar to 91.4 % of the respondents. Around eight in ten respondents also knew that an EU citizen, when abroad, has the right to seek help from an embassy of any other EU member state if the own country does not have an embassy in the according country. In total, 85.2 % of the respondents were aware of this right to seek help from other EU embassies. The right to participate in an EU Citizens' Initiative was also known to most of the respondents. With over 70 % of the respondents, a clear majority knew about this right. The opportunity to participate in local elections when EU citizens reside in another EU member state is an important opportunity

to participate in the political decision-making process and influence local politics. However, less than half of the respondents (43.5 %) were informed that they have the right to vote or even stand as a candidate in local elections in another EU country while they residing there. The last question in regard to the rights of EU citizens was the only question that constituted a right which is not given to EU citizens. There is no right to participate in national general elections as an EU citizen if you live in the concerned country. The majority of respondents were aware that participation in national elections is not an EU citizen's right. 72.1 % of respondents in Duisburg knew that they are not entitled to this right.

Figure 3: In your opinion, which rights does a citizen of the Union have?

n = 420

	Yes	No
The right to reside in any Member State of the European Union, subject to certain conditions	91.4%	8.6%
When outside the EU, the right to seek help from the embassy of any other EU Member State if the own country does not have an embassy there	85.2%	14.8%
The right to participate in a Citizens' Initiative, a Europe-wide petition calling the European Commission to propose a new political measure	78.9%	21.1%
When residing in another member state, the right to vote or to stand as a candidate in municipal elections	43.5%	56.5%
When residing in another member state, the right to vote or to stand as a candidate in national elections	27.9%	72.1%

Source: Own compilation.

5.4. Knowing what to do when rights are not respected

Being asked »How well-informed do you feel about what you can do if your rights as an EU citizen are not respected?«, respondents could rate their subjectively perceived level of information on a scale from »very well informed« to »fairly well informed«, »not very well informed« or »not informed at all«. Only 6.4 % of the respondents said that they felt very well informed. After all, just

under a fifth of those surveyed sample (19.9 %) stated that they feel fairly well-informed, so that the sum for the positive values was only about one quarter of the sample (26.3 %). Conversely, this means that nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.7 %) had no or no good level of information. Almost half of the respondents (49.2 %) said they were not very well informed, while almost a quarter (24.1 %) did not feel informed at all.

Figure 4: How well do you feel informed about what you can do when your rights as an EU citizen are not respected?
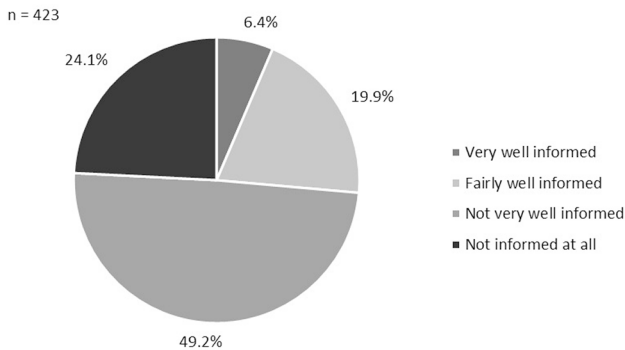
Source: Own compilation.

6.   Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results of a survey on the public perception of European Union citizenship on a local level. For this purpose, firstly, the development of EU citizenship and the relationship between citizenship and democracy was explored in a European context. Then an overview on the survey questions and a summary of selected results were given. In a nutshell, the vast majority of respondents said they were familiar with the term ›citizen of the European Union‹ (74.5 %). Respondents were most familiar with their right of free movement: 91.4 % were aware that an EU citizen has the right to reside in any member state of the EU. 85.2 % knew that, when outside the EU, a European citizen has the right to ask for help at embassies of

other EU Member States if her or his country does not have an embassy there. More than three-quarters of the respondents (78.9 %) were also aware of
the right to participate in a Citizens' Initiative. The least known right was the
right to vote or to stand as a candidate in municipal elections: Just over half
of the respondents (56.5 %) correctly identified this right. In addition, a sizeable number of respondents (27.9 %) incorrectly thought that a non-national
citizen of the EU living in their country has the right to vote or stand as a candidate in national elections. Just over one quarter of the respondents (26.3 %)
said they feel informed (either »very well informed« or »fairly well informed«)
about what they can do when their rights as an EU citizen are not respected.
Finally, to more than 30 % of the respondents, EU citizenship meant a sense
of belonging to the EU. Almost the same number of respondents associated
EU citizenship with common values and a common history (29.5 %).

Although the results of the survey are not representative, they nonetheless
demonstrate that Duisburg citizens are very well aware of their status as EU
citizens and have developed a sense of belonging to the EU. Interestingly, the
differences between the socio-demographic categories on the sense of European citizenship are limited. However, the concrete knowledge on certain
rights varies considerably between the generations. Younger respondents and
students in particular know their rights better than the older or less educated
respondents. In addition, respondents who place themselves at the top of the
social scale are better informed than those who place themselves at the bottom of the social scale. It is therefore encouraging that a huge majority of respondents, regardless of their socio-demographic background, wants to know
more about their EU citizenship rights and about what to do if their rights are
not respected. As outlined above, the survey was conducted in the years 2013
and 2014. Since then, some important developments have taken place. More than 9 million Europeans have already spoken up through the European
Citizens' Initiative. As of 2020, new rules on the European Citizens' Initiative will apply. These rules should make the European Citizens' Initiative more
accessible, less burdensome and easier to use for organisers and supporters
and therewith »facilitate the participation of as many citizens as possible in
the democratic decision-making process of the Union« (Publications Office
2019: 55). In addition, throughout the EU, people have engaged themselves
in pro-European grassroots movements like »Pulse of Europe« or »Stand Up
for Europe«. Last but not least, two European elections have taken place. The
turnout for the European elections in 2019 was the highest since 1979. A total
of 50.6 % of EU citizens voted in the elections this year. In the previous Eu

ropean elections five years ago, the turnout was only 42.6 % (Schwarz/Stark 2019).

To conclude, EU citizenship as a legal, practical and habitual form of membership plays a distinct role in the European Union. However, in times with populist and Eurosceptic forces on the rise, there is an urgent need to foster the citizens' trust in the European integration project and remove all remaining obstacles standing in the way of the citizens' enjoyment of their rights (ECAS 2017). Brexit is an exemplary showcase that the construction of democratic citizenship on a European level is not only still in flux but that changes are reversible (Schwarz 2017). The EU citizenship report 2017 lists numerous practical proposals to improve the value of EU citizenship (European Commission 2017). Some of these proposals have been implemented yet while others have not. It is therefore key that the new Commission under Ursula von der Leyen takes further steps to deepen the democratic life in the EU. These steps should revolve around the following key issues:

1. In many cases, member states are the best channel to inform citizens about their rights as citizens of the EU. Accordingly, member states should be further encouraged and financially supported to adopt a more proactive approach in raising awareness about the EU and its activities. Europe Direct Information Centres (EDIC) represent one of the main channels of information for EU citizens. The latest funding period was launched on 1 January 2018 and will run for three years (Nokes 2018). Unfortunately, the last Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker has decided to shut down a considerable number of EDICs. In Germany, the network has been cut down from 54 to 41 EDICs. North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populated federal state in Germany, was particularly effected: Only five of eleven EDICs were allowed to continue their work (Aachen, Duisburg, Essen, Gütersloh and Steinfurt), while only one new centre was opened in Düsseldorf (Europa-Union Deutschland 2018). This approach is short-sighted at best and should be reversed as soon as possible.

2. The elections to the European Parliament are the most visible expression of democratic EU citizenship. However, the European Parliament still suffers from problems of democratic representativeness due to the diversity of national electoral rules (Costa 2016: 53). European elections remain second-order elections (Träger/Anders 2020). Accordingly, the European dimension of EU elections should be strengthened. The introduction of transnational lists has repeatedly been proposed as one way to make Euro-

pean elections even more European and more democratic (Anastassopoulos 1998; Duff/Pukelsheim/Oelbermann 2009; Duff 2011, 2012). The latest attempt to allow transnational lists at European elections was made by the European Parliament rapporteurs Danuta Maria Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira (2018). The proposal mentioned keeping 46 of the 79 seats vacated by the United Kingdom for a transnational list. The additional seats would have been redistributed to under-represented member states in the Parliament. In February 2018, the European Parliament unfortunately rejected the idea of a transnational list for the 2019 European elections, though MEPs agreed to change the composition of the Parliament in light of Brexit (Schwarz 2020). This decision is regrettable and should be re-examined.

3. The 2014 European elections could be characterised as the first ever »Europeanised elections«, because with the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, a truly European political space and a Europe-wide public debate emerged (Koller 2017: 169). Unfortunately, in July 2019, none of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, including the EPP's Manfred Weber and the S&D's Frans Timmermans, was elected as the next President of the European Commission. Instead, the German defence minister was the choice of the European Council and the European Parliament. This is a huge setback in the constitutional development of the European Union and a massive disappointment of thousands of European voters. Although some have argued that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process is »even more dead than the parrot in the Monty Python sketch« (Legutko 2019), it is worth to work on a democratic reform of the election process. Therefore, it is a good sign that the political guidelines for the next European Commission acknowledge the need »to rebuild trust and confidence« and Ursula von der Leyen has proposed herself as a broker for the discussions between the European Parliament and the European Council (von der Leyen 2019: 20).

Last but not least, there is one underlying condition for any EU citizen to truly assert her or his democratic right: the primacy of the rule of law. The current EU lacks adequate mechanisms to monitor and deal effectively with violations of the rule of law in its member states. Recent democratic backsliding in Hungary, Poland and Romania has underlined this. As a matter of fact, the EU faces a »Copenhagen dilemma« (Reding 2013) and its long inaction poses a serious and alarming threat to the credibility of the European integration project as a whole. The central assumption of this chapter is that a truly demo-

cratic EU citizenship cannot emerge without serious attention to democracy and the rule of law across all EU member states. Therefore, it is an urgent matter that the next European Commission and Parliament credibly protect and enforce the rule of law and democracy as a backbone of the EU.

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