EU Citizenship: Some Systemic Constitutional Implications

I. The EU boasts layered citizenships1 – the nationalities of the Member States are supplemented by an “additional”,2 “independent”3 EU-level citizenship granted to Member State nationals and impossible without the nationalities of the Member States.4 According to the Court of Justice, it is “destined to be the fundamental status of nationals of the Member States”.5 This prophecy from the shapers of the law is slowly being fulfilled, unsurprisingly, as the status has received a significant boost over recent decades,6 some disagreements in the literature about its occasional retreat notwithstanding.

2 Art. 20 TFEU.
3 Opinion of AG Poiares Maduro delivered on 30 September 2009, case C-135/08, Rottrmann, para. 23.
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ing. Ulli Jessurun d'Oliveira's age of the “pies in the sky”, if it was ever correctly diagnosed at all, is now definitely over, even if the question is open as to what precisely to count as the starting point of its demise. Candidates for the starting moment of EU citizenship abound. The point of citizenship's proverbial “birth” could overlap with Ruiz Zambrano, Rottmann, Grzelczyk, Martínez Sala, the Treaty of Maastricht, Micheletti, or could have even taken place earlier than that. Important rights effective throughout all EU territory accrue to this supranational citizenship, which stems directly from EU law, thus fulfilling the historic prophecy of Van Gend en Loos concerning the “constitutional heritage” of every European. However, this picture is nuanced by the fact that EU citizenship is sometimes, quite surprisingly, characterised as “not intended


11 Grzelczyk, cit.

12 Court of Justice, judgment of 12 May 1998, Martínez Sala v. Freistaat Bayern. See also Opinion of AG La Pergola delivered on 1 July 1997, case C-85/96, Martínez Sala v. Freistaat Bayern, para. 18.


14 Court of Justice, judgment of 7 July 1992, case C-369/90, Micheletti and Others v. Delegación del Gobierno en Cantabria, para. 10.


to enlarge the scope ratione materiae [of EU law]. A dictum of the Court which is most likely ultra vires, and certainly significantly out of tune with the case law in other areas. Having been dissected and criticised by the author with Sir Richard Plender elsewhere, it is most likely bad law by now.

I.1. Crucially, EU citizenship is one of those rare legal statuses which, although entirely dependent on the determination of the boundary of the material scope of the law which created it – being a derivative supranational legal status produced by a Union founded on the principle of conferral – is not yet unquestionably endowed with fundamental rights. While numerous rights are obviously there – and this Special Section scrutinises an array of those in detail too, from free movement and family reunification to social assistance, citizens’ initiative and fundamental rights in times of economic crisis, to freedom to move investments around the Union and voting rights – the dependence of any EU citizenship rights claims on the division of competences between the EU and the Member States unquestionably demonstrates the far-reaching limits of EU citizenship. This is because the division of competences between the EU and the Member States generally follows what one can term as a cross-border or internal market logic.

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17 Court of Justice, judgment of 5 June 1997, joined cases C-64/96 and C-65/96, Land Nordrhein-Westfalen v. Uecker and Jacquet v. Land Nordrhein-Westfalen, para. 23.
20 See, for a very detailed account, D. KOCHENOV (ed.), EU Citizenship and Federalism, cit.
21 This being said, it is impossible to claim that this derivative status does not impact, in the most direct way, the rules of conferral and withdrawal of the nationalities of the Member States, from which it is derived: D. KOCHENOV, Member State Nationalities and the Internal Market, in N. NIC SHUIBHNE, L.W. GORMLEY (eds), From Single Market to Economic Union: Essays in Memory of John A. Usher, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 241 et seq.
has been, although theoretically possible, truly feeble if not non-existent in practice. The result has been the weakening of the EU’s justice claims, and the punishment and undermining of the life-chances of those citizens who fail to qualify as “good enough” when scrutinised through the internal market lens. One of the core features of the EU as it stands consists, accordingly, in ignoring the pain of such unworthy citizens and failing to help those in need, explaining away their plight, as Charlotte O’Brien among others has splendidly demonstrated. As far as EU law is concerned, those who are not “good enough” for its scope do not exist, falling between the cracks in the dogmas of the internal market rationality.

It is while burnishing the label on this citizenship which fosters its internal market logic, ignoring the vulnerable instead of defending citizenship bearers from market externalities, that the oxymoronic “market citizenship” was born. With respect to those proclaiming it – and they are no doubt correct in their meticulous engagement with the case law – “market citizenship” is without doubt a misnomer: it simply cannot be taken seriously unless deployed, as the majority of the literature has done, purely descriptively. The reason for this is that to do more requires an inevitable reversal of all the key principles informing the understanding of citizenship and the reasons for the articulation of the term in the first place, which occurs when the full enjoyment of this citizenship’s rights and status is made the prize for one’s employability and history of travel around the Union, instead emerging from any idea of equality before the law and protecting the vulnerable.

28 That a citizenship would punish those who do not qualify as “good citizens” in the eyes of the authority in charge is one of the core functions of the legal status. On this count the EU is not at all atypical, compared with any other public authority in the world, which selects “citizens” among the available bodies, whatever criteria are employed: D. KOCHENOV, Citizenship, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2019 (forthcoming).
32 See, for a very detailed treatment, D. KOCHENOV, On Tiles and Pillars: EU Citizenship as the Federal Denominator, in D. KOCHENOV (ed.), EU Citizenship and Federalism, cit., p. 3.
All the talk of democracy and rights\textsuperscript{33} within the unchangeable market citizenship paradigm\textsuperscript{34} could thus be nothing but a renewed entrenchment and glorification of the “wholly internal situation” and “reverse discrimination” thinking accompanied by the presumption that those who opt to remain outwith the scope of EU law\textsuperscript{35} – by staying at home for instance\textsuperscript{36} – deserve zero protection and respect within the legal context of the Union. This is an old and deeply troubling story ably characterised by Joseph Weiler as the loss by the Union of a mantle of ideals – and not much has changed in all the years since this characterisation appeared in print.\textsuperscript{37} By connecting human worth and dignity, any claim to rights, to employability and the mantras of a citizen's usefulness in the context of the Internal Market, “market citizenship” is the epitome of the ideological space where a human being is openly – not tacitly – commodified, and those evading commodification or perceived as not useful enough are not deemed worthy of the quasi-citizenship at stake.\textsuperscript{38} They are not “market citizens” and any other citizenship is apparently not on offer.

The result of this is troubling. When made dependent on the division of competences in the scope of the rights it protects, EU citizenship is turned into a neomedieval “citizenship of personal circumstances”: a judge first needs to see your full \textit{curriculum vitae} with all your jobs, travel history,\textsuperscript{40} the nationality of your current and former spouses,\textsuperscript{41} partners and children,\textsuperscript{42} and bank accounts,\textsuperscript{43} to see whether you – a


\textsuperscript{34} G. DAVIES, Social Legitimacy and Purposive Power: The End, the Means and the Consent of the People, in D. KOCHENOV, G. DE BÚRCA, A. WILLIAMS (eds), Europe’s Justice Deficit?, cit., p. 259 et seq.; A. SOMEK, Europe: Political, Not Cosmopolitan, in European Law Journal, 2014, p. 142 et seq.,


\textsuperscript{40} Court of Justice, judgment of 5 May 2011, case C-434/09, McCarthy; N. NIC SHUIBHNE, (Some of) the Kids Are All Right: Comment on McCarthy and Dereci, in Common Market Law Review, 2012, p. 349 et seq.,

citizen – “deserve” any EU citizenship rights. This story would not be complete without mentioning that, unlike in the earlier case law, dual nationality could be interpreted against you, as David de Groot’s ground-breaking research has shown.44 Neither disability nor pregnancy will help characterise you as a “good” EU citizen either.45 A truly minor crime will disqualify you from supranational rights, dignity and respect.46 Not even being deemed a worker is enough anymore:47 EU law will eagerly side with the Member States oppressing their ethnic and linguistic, and presumably other minorities, as long as frowning upon these groups is part of their “constitutional identity”, thus capable of creating a de facto wholly internal situation, depriving “market citizens” otherwise not unworthy per se of rights under EU law.48 The result is a self-proclaimed constitutional system without a free and self-determining constitutional subject endowed with rights:49 a neo-mediaeval construct where liberty and entitlements are strictly apportioned based on esoteric considerations rooted in personal histories, wealth, potential and actual employability, and travel and the willingness to do so: a triumph of contin-

42 Coman and Others, cit.; Court of Justice, judgment of 14 November 2017, case C-165/16, Lounes. Very much depends on whether one of the spouses is an EU citizen and whether this citizenship counts: also S. TITSHAW, Same-Sex Spouses Lost in Translation? How to Interpret ‘Spouse’ in the EU Family Migration Directives, in Boston University International Law Journal, 2016, p. 58.
gent and morally vacant acts necessary to be performed to enter the Union’s field of 
vision and thereby become endowed with personality in its law, which is the law which 
purports to have claimed you as its citizen, on top of your own national legal order.50 

The main outcome of such an approach to the individual is as atypical as it is trou-
bling: before a person’s CV and bank accounts have been investigated, the most funda-
mental, essential legal principles of Western constitutionalism will not apply. This especial-
ly concerns equality before the law, which does not kick in if you are too poor, like Miss 
Dano; too pregnant, like Jessy Saint Pris;51 or too Polish for the Lithuanian State, like 
Małgorzata Runiewicz. We are thus confronted by the lack of equality before the law as 
the main starting principle for dealing with EU citizens in a context where the EU produces 
and constantly re-enacts a neo-mediæval presumption of difference the goodness of 
which is presumed and does not per se require justification.52 Why this is the case has 
been explained to the citizens a thousand times: Niamh Nic Shuibhne might indeed be 
right that this is the Court willing “to accept the limitations coded into the current federal 
bargain”.53 Yet it is not the protection of a perfect Constitution from human rights con-
cerns – which the Court famously did, inter alia, in Opinion 2/1354 – but taking such con-
cerns seriously, which ensures that legal systems are both respected and effective. Hon-
ouring the bargain, when viewed in this light, could obviously be a big problem.55 

I.2. Armed with respect for the federal bargain which requires blind faith in and 
strict adherence to a context-sensitive neo-mediævalism, EU citizenship sends two sig-
als. Firstly, it significantly empowers the willing Member State nationals, “good 


50 D. KOCHENOV, On Tiles and Pillars, cit., p. 3 et seq. 
51 Court of Justice, judgment of 19 June 2014, case C-507/12, Saint Prix; S. CURRIE, Pregnancy-Related 
Employment Breaks, the Gender Dynamics of Free Movement Law and Curtailed Citizenship: Jessy Saint 
52 D. KOCHENOV, Neo-Mediaeval Permutations of Personhood in the European Union, in L. AZOULAI, S. 
BARBOU DES PLACES, E. PATAUT (eds), Constructing the Person in EU Law: Rights, Roles, Identities, cit., p. 133 
et seq. 
54 Court of Justice, opinion 2/13 of 18 December 2014, para. 170. P. EECKHOUT, Opinion 2/13 on EU 
Accession to the ECHR and Judicial Dialogue – Autonomy or Autarky?, in Fordham International Law Journal, 
2015, p. 955 et seq.; D. KOCHENOV, EU Law without the Rule of Law: Is the Veneration of Autonomy 
Worth It?, in Yearbook of European Law, 2015, p. 94 et seq. 
1703 et seq.
dozens of national legal statuses fused into one. Secondly, being silent on the scope of the law, EU citizenship is constantly presented to us as relatively weak, all the numerous successes reported notwithstanding. Crucially, it is respectful even when the issues to hand unquestionably fall within the scope of EU law: if a Member State wants to ignore EU law to grant fewer rights to women – it can. If a Member State wishes to continue abusing its own ethnic minorities by denying them a right to a name – it can. Both the rights of individuals and the sovereignty of the Member States thus stand protected – to a point. The flexibility of this arrangement seems to be key, however, which seems to be fundamental to the proverbial “federal bargain”. Moreover, if a Member State you are associated with leaves the EU, your supranational “new” citizenship is thereby extinguished: it is not that personal after all.

II. Although the literature on EU citizenship has been booming in recent years, the absolute majority of analyses have been confined to reactions to the ever-growing and byzantine case law and trying to make sense of the Court’s hints in various directions. This is no doubt the core of legal research and some of the contributions developing scholarship in this direction have been spectacularly illuminating. The majority of the contributions to this Special Section fit equally well within this established tradition. But what if we tease the “true” lawyers a little and entertain scrutiny of the very context of EU law, using its citizenship as a pretext, in the vein of Pedro Caro de Sousa, Agustín Jo-


61 See, e.g. a great example of the opposing interpretations of the same case law by two of the most eminent scholars of EU citizenship: N. NIC SHUIBHNE, *Recasting EU Citizenship as Federal Citizenship*, cit., and E. SPAVENTA, *Earned Citizenship*, cit.

Questioning the established story can be a useful way to see the well-known case law, as well as all the twists and turns of the European citizenship story, in quite a different light.

It can be argued that EU citizenship works against the established understandings of a) statehood, b) citizenship, c) democracy and d) equality, situating these in the context of cosmopolitan constitutionalism. The current dynamics illustrate the well-noted Joppkean global weakening of citizenship and the rise of a new way of organising political communities. European citizenship exemplifies key future global trends in citizenship and the development of constitutionalism, even if as already mentioned, with a necessary, surprising neo-mediaeval twist.

II.1. EU citizenship rights are of great importance, enlarging citizens’ horizons of opportunities by a factor of twenty-eight: work, residence, family reunification and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality where EU law is applicable – all have become claims to be turned against the government of any participating State, whether an EU member or not. Moreover, the direct effect of EU law, including its citizenship rights provisions, ensures that national law cannot prevail in the face of EU citizens’ supranational entitlements. States stand “humiliated”, obviously enjoying no power – legally at least – to close their territories and their nations to others, however friendly these are proclaimed to be. This touches the core of statehood, if not nationhood: no Member State can decide (some exceptions notwithstanding) who among the EU’s citizens may enter its territory, reside and work there. Going further, a similar regime applies to a huge number of foreigners too, be they EEA nationals, third country national family...
members of EU citizens or other privileged categories.72 Furthermore, States have lost
the ability to favour “their own” – the first key feature of any citizenship, distinguishing
between “us” and “them” – in a growing array of situations: the core outcome of the
prohibition of discrimination on the basis of nationality in within the scope of applica-
tion of EU law.73 EU citizens are now virtually always “us”, striking at the heart of nation-
al citizenships. Being unable to empower “their own” affects the nature of European
States. Rather than picking citizens through the framing of migration and naturalisation
legislation, in the EU the States are picked by citizens directly empowered by EU law.
The essential legal characteristics of European States and their nationalities are thereby
seriously altered. The new reality has not yet been fully internalised by the legal-political
systems of the Member States.

II.2. The implications for the nature of democracy are equally significant. In terms of
procedure, EU citizens participate in EU-level and municipal-level elections in their State
of residence,74 as well as being able to register citizens’ initiatives, provided what these
proposals are within the scope of EU law.75 Even without covering national elections, the
EU and its citizenship is a vehicle of democratic inclusion. Simultaneously, however, EU
citizenship can shield its bearers from the application of legitimate democratic out-
comes to them, once a connection with EU law is found. Having its final say, the Court of
Justice then tests the reasonableness and proportionality of any national measure. This
potentially covers any national rule objected to by an EU citizen, including rules on na-
tionality itself.76 Democracy’s function is thus changed significantly, placing absolute
emphasis on contestation.77 This produces new users of democracy: cosmopolitans

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72 D. KOCHENOV, M. VAN DEN BRINK, Pretending There Is No Union: Non-Derivative Quasi-Citizenship
Rights of Third-Country Nationals in the EU, in D. THYM, M. ZOETEWIJ-TURHAN (eds), Rights of Third-Country
Nationals under EU Association Agreements: Degrees of Free Movement and Citizenship, Leiden, Boston:
Brill Nijhoff, 2015, p. 66.
73 G. DAVIES, Nationality Discrimination in the European Internal Market, The Hague: Kluwer Law In-
ternational, 2003; K. LENAERTS, Union Citizenship and the Principle of Non-Discrimination on the Grounds
of Nationality, in N. FENGER, B. VESTERDORF, K. HAGEL-SØRENSEN (eds), Festskrift til Claus Gulmann: Liber Ami-
74 Cf. F. FABBRINI, The Political Side of EU Citizenship in the Context of EU Federalism, in D. KOCHENOV
(ed.), EU Citizenship and Federalism, cit., p. 271 et seq.
75 A. IANNI, The European Citizens’ Initiative in Light of the European Debt Crisis: A Gateway Between
76 ROTTMANN, cit.; D. KOCHENOV, Case C-135/08, Janko Rottmann v. Freistaat Bayern, cit.
77 M. KUMM, The Idea of Socratic Contestation and the Right to Justification: The Point of Rights-Based
fighting “unreasonable” regulation. While the trend is not new, the EU context reinforces it. Having used EU law to choose a State, EU citizens both participate in democratic decision-making and enjoy protection from its legitimate outcomes. This is valid at all levels of the law, including legislation, constitutional-level rules and the duties of State-level citizenship. That said, citizens cannot do much supranationally, given that the design of the Union prevents the essential principles of the internal market from being subjected to democratic contestation, or any other form for that matter. In a curious ideological twist, the internal market as it stands is presented to the Europeans as rational, technocratic and apolitical, foreclosing any democratic dialogue about Europe’s future development.

II.3. Akin to sorting “us” from “them”, equality among the holders of the status is a core feature of citizenship. Its practical realisation depends on how clearly the scopes of EU and national law are delineated: both promise equality. Since, as we have seen, EU citizenship cannot bring citizens automatically within the material scope of EU law, additional factors are determinant. The law is malleable: the nationality of your former wife, being born across a border or the vague likelihood of changing States in the future can suffice to bring EU-level equality into play, covering a flexible group of EU citizens; though not all. While EU and national citizenships extend equally to the same people, the application of EU equality – not dependent only on status – is an either/or question which disables national equality claims, as the question is not answered by analysing the objective situation of the person concerned. The Court’s attempts to frame EU law’s scope through the severity of the actual or potential violation of the essence of EU-level rights met strong resistance, ruining clarity. When France promises equality to all Frenchmen it cannot possibly deliver, since two French neighbours living largely similar lives can be subject to two different legal systems for reasons bearing no relation to their lives or legal status. The promises of national and EU-level equality are fictitious: indeed, it is the differentiation in the face of the law, rather than equality be-

80 E.g. G. Davies, Social Legitimacy and Purposive Power: The End, the Means and the Consent of the People, in D. Kochenov, G. de Búrca, A. Williams (eds), Europe’s Justice Deficit?, cit., p. 259 et seq.
82 Scheppe, cit.
83 Zhu and Chen, cit.
84 Court of Justice, judgment of 2 October 2003, case C-148/02, Garcia Avello.
85 Ruiz Zambrano, cit.
fore the law, which emerges as the main supranational – and thus national-level – legal principle, as far as EU citizenship is concerned.

II.4. As a result of the blurred and contested essence of EU citizenship, the nature of the state, democracy and national citizenship in the EU are profoundly transformed. By its very existence, the EU and its citizenship promote one particular type of constitutionalism⁸⁶ to which the Member States are bound to adhere, which implies an emphasis on proportionality and justification,⁸⁷ and a toning down of representative democracy and equality claims. Due to the penetrating nature of EU law, the relationship between the levels of the law in this model is far more complex than in the majority of “straightforward” federations:⁸⁸ the EU is much more malleable and haphazard.⁸⁹ Two key features of national citizenship do not hold true here: in a Union where EU law enjoys supremacy and direct effect and the scope of this law is necessarily blurred, citizenship firstly does not bring about equal treatment. Secondly, national citizenship does not provide better treatment than other EU citizens within the scope of application of EU law. EU law thus brings about a very significant alteration to the very legal essence of the Member States’ nationalities. Crucially, the humiliation of the state and undermining of the key features of citizenship is not accompanied by a solid doctrinal or practical alternative: we are not shown a new way. Instead, we are constantly treated to the dogmatic mantra of the perceived benefits of the “apolitical” internal market. As a result, morally and ethically vacant reasons rooted in the internal market – such as the programmed-in belief that those who chose to move about in space are entitled to more constitutional protections and are more “valuable” as EU citizens – can set aside fundamental human rights concerns and key principles of the national constitutional law of the Member States. Setting aside the norms of a particular legal order is not a problem per se, of course. It becomes a problem, however, when the reasons underpinning this are not sufficiently clear – if not arcane – and are entirely removed from the realm of democratic testing.

III. The legal context of the EU, amplifying and reinforcing the global trends in citizenship, equality and democracy, also brings with it grave challenges, and as a path-dependent process faces virtually no serious challenge. Critical analyses of it are equally

limited and surprisingly new.90 Hungary and Poland, with their crises of the rule of law,91 or the United Kingdom, with its anti-immigration populism,92 oppose the EU for entirely different reasons. However, the ongoing process of reinvention both of citizenship and the state in the EU has only just begun. Exposing it with clarity and scrutinising its implications for the development of the constitutional systems around the world is a starting point for coping with a reality which is here to stay. The sterile and cartoonish official story retold in EU textbooks simply does not hold, and States which fail to take note are in danger of getting a rude awakening in the near future, be it through absurd populist victories or by finding themselves attempting to implement Brexit-like claims. An alternative narrative of EU citizenship, to contribute to a sound dynamic understanding of the evolution of statehood and citizenship in Europe and beyond is sorely needed at the moment. EU citizenship, focused on fundamental rights, equality and a critical rethinking of the core grounds behind the division of competences between the EU and the Member States, could provide such a much-needed narrative and a starting point, offering a sounder and less awkwardly “depoliticised” paradigm of European integration than the pure internal market. One can coexist with the other, but the realisation that the essential starting points of the internal market and of EU citizenship are incompatible should necessarily be the starting point of such a journey.93

This is the context that the contributions to this Special Section should be considered within. All the Articles which follow are rooted in the conference dedicated to the publication of EU Citizenship and Federalism, which dissected the role EU citizenship rights could play as potential triggers of jurisdiction, to save this supranational personal legal status from the internal market contamination currently opposing, as we have seen, citizenship’s necessary rationale and purpose. The conference was held at the Court of Justice and the University of Luxembourg in November 2017, and was made possible with the generous help from the Amicale des référendaires, William Valasidis of the Court of Justice and Eleftheria Neframi of the University of Luxembourg. The core

question this Special Section engages with is simple: how far is EU citizenship deserving of its name and what kind of rights could Europeans legitimately see as unquestionably associated with it – as opposed to with a proxy of the internal market, that is. Let us cast another glance at EU citizenship's lived reality and systemic implications and join these nine wonderful authors – both upcoming and already famous – in attempting to move the debate forward.

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