

Defining the Common European Way of Life

Exploring the Concept of Europeanness

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Abstract

The article focuses on the interpretation of the European Way of Life and the concept of Europeanness. Ursula von der Leyen determined the Promotion of the European Way of Life as a priority of the 2019-2024 Commission. The purpose behind this was to strengthen European democracy and place the citizens into the center of decision-making. The article examines the role of European identity, European citizenship and those historical-traditional conditions that make our way of life 'common'. The Common European Way of Life may be defined as a value system based on the established legal basis of EU citizenship that can be grasped in the pursuit of common principles and the exercise of rights guaranteed to all EU citizens, limited only under exceptional circumstances and ensuring socio-economic convergence. The article covers general conceptual issues but also focuses on the extraordinary impact of the COVID-19. Lastly, the relevant aspects of enlargement policy are also explored.

Keywords: European identity, Common European Way of Life, coronavirus, European citizenship, Hungary, enlargement policy, Europeanness.

1. Introductory Thoughts

Have we ever considered that we are living our lives relatively simultaneously in all parts of Europe? We start and end our days roughly at the same time, as there is only a three-hour time lag between the westernmost and easternmost points of Europe. Do we have anything else in common in our everyday lives? Is there a common European way of life? If so, what exactly does it mean? What does Europeanness mean? What does the term European identity mean? Is it the same as the European way of life?

Our study revolves around European identity and European values presented in the “Promoting our way of Life” portfolio in December 2019 by Ursula von der Leyen, current President of the European Commission.¹ Vice-President

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1 The Commission’s Programme for 2020 [COM(2020) 37 final], at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cwp-2020-publication_en.pdf.

Margaritis Schinas is responsible for the portfolio, together with other four key² policies.³ The article presents the concept and definition of the European way of life. It also reflects how the coronavirus affects our way of life, with particular regard to the Member States' restrictive measures.

The EU is unique among international organizations: it can be considered a *sui generis* entity rather than a classical international organization. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it appears to be a unit from the outside but is an extremely heterogeneous community from the inside. From the inside, we tend to amplify the differences among nations within the EU and tend to forget about similarities. If we were to ask a person from a third country, it is unlikely that he would mention sharp differences between individual European nations. Our unity is based in part on our common historical traditions, the unifying and decisive role of the Christian religion, and in part on the respect for democracy and other fundamental values. The article examines the concept of Europeanness and the European way of life from multiple aspects, considering the impact of enlargement policy and COVID-19. Nowadays, enlargement and neighborhood policies are significant EU policy sectors, especially from a Hungarian perspective. Consequently, the Authors analyze *how the newcomers fit into the European way of life, or how this concept may change due to the enlargement*, taking into account the role of religion and religious traditions in a common way of life. Do religion or religious traditions constitute compulsory elements of the European way of life? If so, to what extent?

It is evident that in case we accept that core historical, traditional, cultural, political, social, economic and other elements connect us in Europe, we can examine those links and develop a concept for that relationship. Once we have the concept, it is possible to interpret and examine how planned or extraordinary changes [such as the shocking (unexpected) COVID-19 and enlargement policy] affect that definition. In our view, integration could be evaluated from several angles. One way is to analyze the political and economic relationship of the Member States. Another is to see whether Member State citizens, the so-called Union citizens have something in common besides their states' membership status. The former analysis is mainly a general integration-history evaluation that depends on who interprets the process and from what perspective, but it focuses on state-level relations. The latter concentrates on the citizens of the Member States. This perspective is a *novum* that *goes beyond the interpretation of European citizenship but is nevertheless based on it*. The main difference between the two viewpoints is that the European way of life connects the "People of the European Union" without evaluating the interconnectedness of the Member States. We can differentiate between top-down (EU level), and bottom-up (citizens level) approaches. However, to understand the citizens' cultural and traditional

2 These are: migration, security, employment, education.

3 Margaritis Schinas – letter of credence, 2019, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/president_von_der_leyens_mission_letter_to_margaritis_schinas.pdf.

linkages, state-to-state relationships must be understood. Therefore, in a nutshell, the Authors provide some historical remarks in the following.

Generally, the states' political position on the level and form of the European integration has never been genuinely uniform. The differing views were closely tied to the form and extent of cooperation and the states involved. Proposals have also been made several times to move towards a federal⁴ Europe, but there has never been a political-social consensus for that concept. Regarding the degree of cooperation, there are numerous examples of differentiated integration in selected areas.⁵ It is no coincidence that the concepts related to two- or multi-speed Europe (which have been in place for over thirty years) have also entered the political-legal-social public consciousness. Just as there was no uniform vision of the degree of cooperation in European integration, we can name only *mandatory and additional conceptual elements* regarding Europeanness, European identity and the European Way of Life.

2. The Core of Europeanness – European Way of Life or European Identity?

Before precisely defining the European way of life, the Authors focus on the main historical events that influenced Europeanness. Understanding the roots of European identity and the concepts that shaped European integration is necessary to define the modern vision of a common way of life.

2.1. Historical Remarks

Identity means (self)identity, the full definability of ourselves. Does our European origin belong to the definition of ourselves? In the Authors' view, *common values can be attached to European identity*. Mutual respect for democratic values is one of the essential elements of the afore-mentioned virtues. Under European identity, the Authors mean the shared values of the citizens of the Member States, also referred to EU citizens since the Maastricht Treaty. These values are based on the common socio-cultural worth, historical traditions, and heritage of Europeans.

Nevertheless, the concept⁶ of EU citizenship has been on the agenda since the 1970s. The first practical steps were taken after the 1972 Paris Summit,

4 See e.g. White Paper on the Future of Europe Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025 COM(2017) 2025 final.

5 The Single European Act allowed a Member State to opt-out of cooperation and apply a "national provision" to the internal market. The Maastricht Treaty laid down three phases for the implementation of EMU. In addition, the Maastricht Treaty provided for permanent differentiation thanks to a protocol annexed to the Treaty, which enshrined the possibility of opt-outs for the UK and Denmark. Additional measures for multi-speed integration include: the euro area and the Schengen area. The existing Treaties also provide an opportunity for enhanced cooperation.

6 On EU citizenship, see e.g. Zsófia Asztalos, 'Az uniós polgárság és a diszkrimináció tilalma' PhD dissertation, Miskolc, 2009, at <http://midra.uni-miskolc.hu/document/5665>.

according to which a sense of European identity is needed to deepen integration.⁷ The European Summit developed the European Identity Declaration at the 1973 Copenhagen Summit. The importance of citizens' involvement was further strengthened at the 1974 Paris Summit. Since then, reference has increasingly been made to Community (EU) citizenship as a *status civitatis*.⁸ EU citizenship has rendered the citizens' supranational status a common denominator in terms of content by providing them the same economic and political rights on the legal basis of the citizenship. As a result of its careful, persistent and extensive interpretation of European law, the CJEU now has a wealth of case-law, covering the foundations of EU citizenship.

The Member States can only restrict the free movement rights of EU citizens on the grounds of public interest. The current public health emergency posed by the COVID-19 pandemic is a significant example of public interest that justifies restrictions on free movements. The creation of EU citizenship can be seen as one of the generators of a common sense of identity, which could later serve as grounds for defining, promoting, and protecting the European way of life. Several questions can be raised concerning the new vision of being European. Firstly, what is a common European identity? Is it a simple set of political values or purely the respect for our historical traditions and cultural heritage? The Authors explore the differences between common values and European identity, concentrating on the relevant Treaty provisions and interpretation.

2.2. Common Values as European Identity

In the following, the conceptual elements of European identity are summarized, differentiating among mandatory and optional elements. These elements appear as a part of treaty-law and also as a part of the general concept of Europeanness. The formation of 'individual identity' and 'self-identity' is a result of many factors: origin, family heritage, studies, the socio-economic environment. These all influence a person's definition of himself.

In the past decades, public opinion initially prioritized the citizens' *geographical connection to Europe as a mandatory conceptual element of European identity*. However, Europeanness alone cannot be interpreted as a kind of geographical criterion. The broad idea of Europeanness is also demonstrated by the interpretation of the term 'European state', a requirement for accession to the Council of Europe. In 1994, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted⁹ its recommendation on the interpretation of Europeanness. According to the still relevant interpretation, close cultural ties with Europe and adherence to fundamental values may justify accession to the international organization of

7 European Commission, Bulletin of the European Communities, No. 5. 1975, at <http://aei.pitt.edu/57736/1/BUL134.pdf>.

8 On the development of EU citizenship, see Patricia Mindus, *European Citizenship after Brexit, Freedom of Movement and Rights of Residence*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 8-15.

9 Resolution 1247 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation (1994).

new Member States, which would not meet requirement of being European on a purely geographical basis.¹⁰

The European location raises the question of whether *EU enlargement could be hampered by the geographical borders of the European continent*.¹¹ For example, even before Turkey became a candidate state to join to the EU, one of the most critical obstacles was that only 3% of its territory is located in Europe. The country was granted candidate status, *i.e.* the integration of EU law into Turkish national law is ongoing, at least, in principle.¹² Interestingly, Turkey was nevertheless admitted to the Council of Europe in 1950 as the thirteenth state.¹³ Based on the above, it can be concluded that the European location is not an obligatory condition of becoming a candidate state. However, they can serve as a starting point for defining Europeaness, which can be overridden by adherence to European values, cultural connections, and acceptance of European traditions.¹⁴

Although the Council of Europe's view will not directly influence the concept of Europeaness for the EU, it highlights the need for a flexible approach. In the Authors' view, instead of adding the European geographical location as a mandatory conceptual element of European identity, *the respect and commitment to European values set out in Article 2 TEU itself is much more expedient*. Article 2 TEU declares that

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail.”¹⁵

Does Article 2 TEU provide a legal basis for defining a common European way of life? Article 2 TEU was inserted by the Treaty of Lisbon and over the last decade an intense debate unfolded around the value system established by the provision. Not just the listed values were called into question, but also the EU's limited competences to pursue and enforce them. There is no doubt that Article 2 establishes basic requirements for Member States and for further candidate

10 The Council of Europe has listed Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia as countries eligible for cultural relations.

11 Candidates: Northern Macedonia (2004), Turkey (1987), Albania and Serbia (2009), Montenegro (2008). Hungarian Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi is responsible for the European Neighborhood and Enlargement Policy.

12 Tekin Caner, *Debating Turkey in Europe: Identities and Concepts*, De Gruyter, Oldenbourg, 2020, pp. 129-130.

13 A full list of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe at www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states.

14 About European values, *see* Oriane Calligaro *et al.*, 'Values in the EU Policies and Discourse. First Assessment', *Les Cahiers du Cevipol*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 5-52.

15 Article 2 TEU.

countries as well.¹⁶ As a result, “human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” are at the heart of Europeanness, regardless of the surrounding debate.

As an optional (additional) conceptual element of Europeanness, we can mark the protection of other European values. These include the European vision of security and safe living environment (e.g. a non-terrorist environment or joint action against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic), environmental protection, climate change mitigation, protection of social values, solidarity among states, the right to internet and information, data protection, and the joint protection of additional issues that complement all of these can also be part of our identity.¹⁷ In this context, the Authors would like to highlight the importance of the area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ) that is built to promote citizens’ rights. The shared management of values makes the above concepts an integral part of our way of life. Furthermore, as part of our way of life, they deserve protection. Is it necessary to look for a legal basis at all to determine the conceptual elements of lifestyle? If not, is it common cultural and social circumstances that determine the common way of life?

In order to answer these questions, we may have to go back to the interpretation of the EU’s eloquent motto. The *Unitas via Diversitas*, “united in diversity” has been the motto of the EU since 2000. On the one hand, it refers to diversity between the Member States and its citizens, and on the other hand, to common values in addition to these differences, therefore, it refers to the unity which accepts existing differences. It emphasizes *united nature of the peoples*, and *not unification*, that is, the alliance between different states with common values, respecting each others’ diversity.

The Authors address the question whether self-identity includes or could include a sense of belonging to a broader political or religious community? The Authors are of the view that the answer is a resounding yes. The EU consists of Christian Member States¹⁸ in general, however, all of these Member States respect the religious freedom and the free practice of religious rights.¹⁹ Therefore, *Christian religious traditions* could be named as additional elements of the concept of our way of life. *Additional, and not compulsory*. The reason behind is that the freedom of choice regarding religious views is laid down in several European and

16 See Cristina Fasone et al., ‘Revisiting Art. 2 TEU: A True Union of Values?’, *European Papers*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, 2020, pp. 255-277; András Jakab & Dimitry Kochenov (eds.), *The Enforcement of EU Law and Values: Ensuring Member State Compliance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017.

17 With the withdrawal of the UK on 1 February 2020, we are now counting only 27 Member States, which, instead of the previous 516 million citizens, has approx. 450 million citizens. About Brexit legal issues, see e.g. Lilla Nóra Kiss, ‘Az Európai Unióból való kilépés jogi kérdései’, PhD dissertation, Miskolc, 2019, at <http://midra.uni-miskolc.hu/document/33257>.

18 See Jean-Louis Antoine-Grégoire et al., ‘Religious Practice and Observance in the EU Member States’, 2013. at [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474399/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2013\)474399_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474399/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2013)474399_EN.pdf).

19 Jonatas E. M. Machado, ‘Freedom of Religion: A View from Europe’, *Roger Williams University Law Review*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 2005, pp. 451-535.

universal legal documents, conventions and treaties.²⁰ Therefore, determining religion as an obligatory element of the European way of life would mean the automatic exclusion of those who are not Christians, but agree on all other European values and exercise the rights of European citizenship. These traditions are decisive, rooted deeply in European history. However, the conceptual elements of values, identity and way of life may differ depending on the person, because these concepts are determined by the citizens themselves and not the states. In general, European states are divided from the Church according to the principle of secularization, thus the execution of acts is not influenced by religious beliefs. The states ensure the frames, such the freedom to practice or refrain from practicing religious beliefs. This is very significant in our view, especially when we intend to take into account those candidate states' accession to the EU, which are not Christian (such as Turkey). The religious views as optional elements of the concept of European identity enable Muslim and other religious communities to become a part of the EU without feeling excluded on this ground. European culture (perhaps exactly because of Christian traditions and the respect for diversity) is generally open to accepting different views. Christian heritage and religion have strong roots in Europe. Therefore, Christian values have significant impact on our way of life and religious aspects could be interpreted only as optional conceptual elements of our way of life.

2.3. The Concept of a Common European Way of Life

The next question is whether, for an EU citizen, the broader community is the EU? *Instead of a common European identity, we propose the use 'common European way of life'*, which could be best captured in the exercise of political and economic rights arising from EU law, complemented by a sense of Europeanness, the conscious experience of belonging to the European community ('Family of nations'). The idea of belonging to a certain nation is never expected to be overridden by the idea of Europeanness. This was never an objective of European integration. Thus, for the time being, the feeling of Europeanness is fulfilled by living the common European way of life, of which the exercise of free movement rights is an integral part.

It is apparent that Europe today faces several challenges, both internal and external in nature, environmental and health-related, which require cooperation, obedience, and respect for the views of Union citizens. The promotion of a common European way of life could be interpreted as a bridge among citizens that connect them across Europe while respect their diversity. In the Authors' view, the European way of life is based on the EU's core values and can be grasped by exercising the rights derived from EU citizenship. The EU's core values include "freedom, democracy, and legal certainty, which are an integral part of the European way of life", as set out in the 2017 Comprehensive Report on

20 Id.

Citizenship of the Union.²¹ Thus, the key to promoting a European way of life may be found if EU citizens can exercise their rights deriving from their status without hindrance. The European Commission has recognized the potential of identifying the common values of its citizens embodied in the promotion of the European way of life. The current Commission's (2019-2024) program addresses European values in several dimensions. One of the core elements of the von der Leyen-led Commission's six-point program announced in 2019 is the initiative entitled "Promoting our European way of life". The aim is to strengthen values (such as the rule of law) on the European stage, through the development of equality, tolerance and social justice in a Union, where the security of citizens is ensured by a rethought immigration and asylum policy, and close cooperation with the neighboring countries.²² These values also appear in the primary law discussed earlier, highlighting the correlation between the virtues of European integration and guidelines calling for a common European way of life. At a relatively early stage of European integration, it was already apparent that through economic cooperation and later, through free movement, cooperation between European states could be deepened. This could then be accompanied by citizens' rights and protection on a Union (Community) level. The 1974 *Reyners* case also points to the 'economic and social merger' between European societies. As the Opinion of the Advocate General in *Reyners* declares, "with economic integration must obviously come to the development of legal relations", that is to say, economic integration necessarily entails the development of legal relations.²³ The Authors believe that the concept of the 'European way of life' is a consequence of the above-mentioned economic and legal development.

The concept of a common European way of life may be grasped as follows: *The common European way of life is a value system, legally based on EU citizenship, which can be defined as the pursuit of common principles and the exercise of rights guaranteed to all EU citizens, limited only in exceptional cases and ensuring socio-economic convergence.*²⁴

This concept is *necessarily determined by the historical heritage of the Member States* which shaped their national legal systems. This legal heritage is inevitably the value of the EU as the founding treaties refer to the Member States' constitutional traditions.²⁵ However, this common constitutional and historical heritage is very diverse, complex and heterogeneous. There are significant economic and social differences between the Western European states that founded and joined the EEC at the beginning and the Central and Eastern European states that joined later, in 2004, at the time of the big bang

21 Comprehensive Report on Citizenship of the Union, 2017, p. 12, at https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-is-new/news/news/20170124_eu_citizenship_report_2017_en.pdf.

22 Promoting our European way of life, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life_en.

23 Judgment of 21 June 1974, *Case C-2/74, Reyners*, ECLI:EU:C:1974:68.

24 Authors' definition.

25 Article 6(3) TEU: "[...] as they result from the constitutional traditions common to the Member States, shall constitute general principles of the Union's law."

enlargement. Due to their erstwhile participation in the Soviet bloc, these states have many things in common right down to their relatively simultaneous regime changes. There are several conflicting academic positions regarding the division between the West and the East. Still, without attempting to resolve these, it can be said that there are significant differences between states in terms of the civil sector, the foundations of society and their economy.²⁶ Although, in principle, these differences do not affect the rights deriving from EU citizenship, they may affect the possibility and framework of exercising them, in particular, due to the different financial means of EU citizens. At the same time, the potential political differences among the Member States may create obstacles to the development of a common European identity.

There is a significant difference between the concept of a common European way of life and the idea of a federal Europe. Promoting the way of life include the respect for the diversity of the citizens and therefore it includes “all European ways of life” instead of determining a special list of conditions that makes “a” way of life “European”. Historically, in the beginning of European integration, the federal approach was supported by leading politicians creating “Europe”, but it soon failed due to deep historical, political and social cleavages. Ever since, the vision of a federal Europe remained a dream for some, but the majority opted out of it. In our view, the realization of a future European federation cannot be predicted today, as all efforts in this direction (suffice to think of the case of the Constitutional Treaty) have failed.²⁷

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the first steps of European integration after World War II were geared towards creating a federal Europe. In his famous Zurich speech on 19 September 1946, Churchill projected the creation of a regional alliance, the United States of Europe, modelled on the US.²⁸ Fifty years after the Schuman Declaration, it is still relevant to quote the words of one of the founding fathers of European unity: “European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace.”²⁹ Part of the truth is that initially, a concrete vision of integration based on political foundations emerged. Still, it was mainly the confrontation between Germany and France that made it impossible to complete this vision in addition to the fact that Member States were never fully agree on *raison d’être* of a political integration within a federal statehood. Following the founding of the Council of Europe in 1949, this led to the launch of cooperation on economic grounds.³⁰ Later, with the accession of the United Kingdom in 1973

26 Stefan Lehne, *Europe’s East-West Divide: Myth or Reality?*, 11 April 2019, at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/04/11/europe-s-east-west-divide-myth-or-reality-pub-78847>.

27 The ideal of the federation also resurface in a speech by Joschka Fischer, former German Foreign Minister, at Humbolt University (Berlin), ‘*From Confederacy to Federation – Thoughts on the Finality of European Integration*’, 12 May 2000, at <https://ec.europa.eu/dorie/fileDownload.do?docId=192161&cardId=192161>.

28 Winston Churchill, speech delivered at the University of Zurich, 19 September 1946, at <https://rm.coe.int/16806981f3>.

29 The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950, at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en.

30 Katalin Gombos, *Az Európai Unió jogának alapjai*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 2012, pp. 20-23.

to the EC, the confederative visions³¹ emerged, counteracting federative aspirations.

It is important to note that *the common European way of life does not aim to realize a European federation*. On the contrary, it provides a shield of shared values common to every Member State, through strengthening citizens' rights without a constitutional legal basis. All of the Member States pledged to accept and protect these rights when they joined the EU.

2.4. *The Interpretation of European Identity in the Case of Hungary*

Besides the characteristics that they share, each and every Member State has its history and belief about what it means to be European. In the following, the Authors shortly summarize some aspects of the Hungarian approach to Europeanness.

Since the 1990s, European identity has been at the forefront of the attention of the EU and also on the European Commission's agenda. Although, the issue of European identity already emerged in 1973 when the Heads of State and Government decided to find a better understanding of what European identity means.³² Several comprehensive surveys were conducted not just to find an acceptable meaning but also to measure the Member States' Europeanisation. European identity is a complex term and has several dimensions. In the communication of the European Commission, these dimensions are the following:

“Multiple social identities and biographical identity, transnational relationships, collective action, standardization and regulation, cultural production, intercultural translation, inclusion/exclusion, structural conditions and opportunity structures and the public sphere and state-regulated institutions.”³³

These characteristics are in line with the approach of the present article and the Authors' understanding of the European way of life. *For Hungary, the modern concept of Europeanisation started in the 1980s*, still within the frames of the erstwhile Soviet system, when the country sought to join in the European discussion. In the economic sphere, Hungary had been balancing between the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the EEC and entered into direct communication with the EEC in 1983.³⁴ Besides being a socialist country,

31 Margaret Thatcher, 'A Family of Nations', in Brent F. Nelsen & Alexander C-G. Stubb (eds.), *The European Union*, Palgrave, London, 1994, pp. 45-50.

32 Bulletin of the European Communities, No. 12, 1973, pp. 118-122.

33 The development of European identity/identities: unfinished business. A Policy Review, European Commission. 2012, p. 9, at https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_reviews/development-of-european-identity-identities_en.pdf.

34 See Pál Germuska, 'Balancing Between the COMECON and the EEC: Hungarian Elite Debates on European Integration During the Long 1970s', *Cold War History*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, 2019, pp. 401-420.

Hungary became a contracting party to the GATT in 1973.³⁵ To understand how the Eastern European Countries, thus Hungary, interpret the European way of life or European identity, we have to understand the historical background of these states. For more than 40 years (from World War II until the end of the 1980s) the Western and Eastern European blocks were socially separated from each other in every possible way. The regime changes and involvement in European integration meant a reasonable opportunity to “return to Europe”. However, both sides realized, the process of European reunification is much more challenging than it first appeared.³⁶ Finally, in 2004 Hungary became a Member State of the EU and soon benefited from this new position. After restrictions were lifted, an increasing number of Hungarian workers moved to, or provided services in the other Member States. According to the data held by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, around 5-600 thousand Hungarian nationals moved permanently to other Member States, and another 100 thousand regularly work abroad.³⁷ Other programs such as the Erasmus scholarship opened the way to study abroad, and EU financial support helped develop the country. For Hungarian nationals, the European way of life is embodied in the free movement and the benefits stemming from the cohesion and structural funds.

3. Concept of the Common Way of Life: Strengthening and Weakening Factors

In the following subchapters, the Authors provide a deeper analyses of particular policy areas that are essential factors influencing the European way of life. Firstly, the importance of direct democracy is highlighted. Then, the future enlargement of the EU and the possible accession of Balkan states are explored. Lastly, as the free movement of EU citizens is an immanent element of the common European way of life, the latter has been dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Authors briefly discuss the effects of the coronavirus on the European way of life.

3.1. *The Perspective of Direct Democracy*

“The times of European integration by implicit consent of citizens are over. Europe cannot be technocratic, bureaucratic or even diplomatic. Europe has to be ever more democratic. The role of the European Parliament is essential.”³⁸

35 Hungary and the WTO, at www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/hungary_e.htm.

36 Violette Rey, ‘Kelet-Európa után?’ (Translated into Hungarian: Barta Györgyi), *Földrajzi Értesítő*, Vol. 42, Issue 1-4, 1993, pp. 244-252.

37 See Judit Lakatos, ‘Külföldön dolgozó magyarok, Magyarországon dolgozó külföldiek’, *Statisztikai Szemle*, Vol. 93, Issue 2, 2015, pp. 93-112.

38 José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission, *State of the Union 2012 Address*, Plenary session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 12 September 2012, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_12_596.

In this section, the Authors would like to answer how a sense of community can be achieved if there is only a small window of opportunity to have a say in influencing EU decisions. The answer obviously would be to strengthen the instruments of direct democracy in the EU. In this respect, two more issues can be raised: why and how?

3.1.1. *The Tools of Direct Democracy*

Generally, the tools of direct democracy were significantly reduced over the last century, as parliaments squeezed out popular decision-making. According to contemporary political views, direct democracy can lead to instability, so the still existing instruments of direct democracy, such as referendums are considered complementary or corrective mechanisms. The question arises whether it is even necessary to introduce the tools of direct democracy in the EU. In order to answer this question, the decision-making process conducted 'above the heads' of European citizens must be addressed. Many European citizens have the feeling that a supranational organization delivers decisions that significantly impact the Member States and citizens' lives without them having any influence on the measures taken. As a result, the instruments of direct democracy in the EU are necessary tools of democratic participation aiming to correct shortcomings of the decision-making process. Policy areas can be identified where these instruments may be beneficial, especially if European citizens widely support them. According to literature, both direct and indirect democracy instruments have a place within the EU framework due to its specific institutional system and unique functioning.³⁹

According to surveys, there is growing support for direct democracy in the European sphere, to remedy the lack of trust in decision-making and to reduce the democratic deficit.⁴⁰ The creation of EU citizenship alone is the result of "efforts to reduce the democratic deficit". Rights arising from citizenship are also reinforced by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The intention was to codify the rights already enjoyed by citizens of the Union.⁴¹ As a legal status, the Union citizenship is a meaningful, central element of EU law, clarified by the extensive case-law of the CJEU.⁴²

Democracy issues are not unknown as the so-called '*democratic deficit*' was often raised in connection with the EU and other historical forms of European integration. In 1972, Richard Corbett, a young British politician, used the term democratic deficit for the first time in history to describe the European

39 Ágnes Tuka, *Az Európai Uniónk színe és fonákja*, Publikon, Pécs, 2009, p. 63.

40 Richard Youngs, '*Getting Europe's Direct Democracy Right*', Centre for European Policy Studies, 14 November 2018, at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/11/15/getting-europe-s-direct-democracy-right-pub-77750>.

41 Articles 39-46 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

42 Imola Schiffner, '*Az Unió polgársághoz kapcsolódó jogosultságok mint alapjogok az Európai Unióban*', in Tamás Antal & Tekla Papp (eds.), *Az alapjogvédelem nemzeti, nemzetközi és jogösszehasonlító aspektusai*, Pólay Elemér Alapítvány, Szeged, 2013, pp. 41-55.

Parliament's weak legislative powers.⁴³ Social scientist David Marquand coined the now widely used term to describe the weak democratic legitimacy of the EC's institutions in 1979.⁴⁴ *The democratic deficit is a negative, critical term, but its reception was not uniform in literature.* According to the majority position, this phenomenon can be interpreted in two ways: primarily, the democratic nature of the EU's institutional structure is called into question. Secondly, from a socio-psychological point of view, the EU is inherently incapable of reflecting the values of traditional democracy for lack of the necessary structural social preconditions.⁴⁵ Democratic deficit has a rich literature; in this context, the Authors do not intend to provide a detailed analysis. In the nineties, Jürgen Habermas argued in connection with transnational democracy "that democratic deficit could only be overcome replacing the technocratic approach by a deeper democratization of European institutions".⁴⁶ The TEU also declares that the EU "shall be founded on representative democracy" and "citizens are directly represented" in the European Parliament.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it provides the legal basis for the European citizens' initiative.⁴⁸

The tools of direct democracy were integrated into the EU's institutional and decision-making system in a long process and only to a limited extent. However, this is not surprising given the European integration's goals, development and history. In recent decades, the possibility of citizen participation and its impact on decision-making has significantly improved, *via* the European Parliament's increased legislative role, the reform of the electoral system and other solutions.⁴⁹ Nowadays, *five forms of direct participation exist in which EU citizens are allowed to express their views or in some way influence EU decision-making.*⁵⁰ (i) The Maastricht Treaty introduced the right to petition. It provides an opportunity for any citizen of the Union to address the European Parliament on matters falling within the EU's competence.⁵¹ (ii) To investigate complaints against EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, the European Ombudsman's Office was set up in 1995 and is open to citizens and residents of EU Member States, or to businesses and organizations based in the EU.⁵² (iii) Thirdly, the

43 Richard Corbett, 'The First Use of the Term "Democratic Deficit"', 10 October 1977, at <http://federalunion.org.uk/the-first-use-of-the-term-democratic-deficit/>.

44 David Marquand, *Parliament for Europe*, J. Cape, London, 1979, p. 147.

45 Kübra Dilek Azman, 'The Problem of "Democratic Deficit" in the European Union', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, Issue 5, 2011, pp. 242-250.

46 Jorge Adriano Lubenow, 'The Paradox of Technocratic Democracy and the Democratic Deficit of European Institutions by Jürgen Habermas', *Aufklärung*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2015, pp. 103122.

47 Article 11 TEU.

48 Article 10 TEU.

49 Anna Unger, 'Demokrácia a képviselőten túl: a közvetlen demokrácia intézményrendszere és szerepe az Európai Unió demokratizációjában a demokrácia részvételi elmélete alapján', PhD Dissertation, ELTE Budapest, 2018.

50 Steven Blockmas & Sophia Russack (eds.), *Direct Democracy in the EU, The Myth of a Citizen's Union*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London, 2018, pp. 9-13.

51 Legal basis: Articles 20, 24, and 227 TFEU and Article 44 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

52 Article 228 TFEU. See legal basis at www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/legal-basis/treaties/en.

European Commission organizes a wide range of consultations on new priorities of existing policies and adopted legislation.⁵³ (iv) Fourthly, aiming at examining the benefits of the EU, the Commission shall conduct regular civil dialogue with the Union's citizens on their experiences of the EU. The advantage of the dialogue is that it is possible to have a personal discussion with policymakers at the announced events.⁵⁴ (v) Finally, the Citizens' Initiative was introduced, and its recent reform aims to enhance the applicability of this instrument.

3.1.2. *The Citizen's Initiative: Reformed but Not Rethought?*

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was established in the context of the "failed" Constitutional Treaty, with the urgent support of civil society. Although the Constitutional Treaty did not enter into force, the European Citizens' Initiative has found its way into the Treaty of Lisbon as the latest EU instrument for direct democracy. Since 2012, EU citizens have been entitled to the ECI, which is an excellent opportunity for citizens to make themselves heard on issues of common interest that are important for society and influence rules applicable to them in the future.⁵⁵ The aim was laudable, but it could not be achieved because of the overly complex rules governing the initiative, and so, it did not fulfil expectations. The European Commission intended to reform the initiative to make it 'more user-friendly'.⁵⁶ The process started in 2015. The new proposal was submitted in 2017, accepted in 2019⁵⁷ and entered into force on 1 January 2020. Several problems were identified in connection to the 'old' legislation: the meagre chance of proposing admissible initiatives, as around a third of the registered applications was rejected. Then, it was challenging to obtain statements of support, for example, due to the different reporting requirements applicable in the Member States and the relatively limited impact and debate garnered by European citizens' initiatives.⁵⁸

The general success rate of European citizens' initiative is around 4 per cent, *i.e.* these are the initiatives that were answered by the European Commission. It is important to note that the European Commission is not required to submit a legislative proposal within the initiative's scope. Without going into a detailed analysis of the new and old legislation, we can state that the reform of the European citizens' initiative changed several elements of the procedure, yet its

53 Consultations, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_en.

54 Public Debates on EU Policies, at https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/get-involved/citizens-dialogues_en.

55 The original legal basis was Regulation No 211/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative.

56 State of the Union 2017 — Democracy Package: Reform of Citizens' Initiative and Political Party funding, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_3187.

57 Regulation 2019/788/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative.

58 Report on the application of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative COM(2018) 157 final, p. 2.

core characteristics remained the same.⁵⁹ Naturally, the initiative is applied in cases where the citizens are interested. In the last ten years, the ECI aimed mainly at common concerns of environmental or animal protection and the rights and legal status of minorities.⁶⁰

In the past months, another successful initiative entitled “*Minority Safepack*”⁶¹ was answered. It “called upon the EU to improve the protection of persons belonging to national and linguistic minorities” and also to “strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity”. The organizers collected 1,320,000 statements of support, and they have reached the threshold in 11 Member States.⁶² Notwithstanding the considerable support garnered by the ECI, the European Commission still found that existing rules are sufficient for the Member States to support projects that promote the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and their culture; thus, no additional legal act was considered necessary. As usual, the Commission found that the already existing legal norms ensure the required level of protection and legal basis.⁶³ The Commission’s decision is debatable, but it has been so far in the case of any other initiatives as well. As a result, the citizen’s initiative is a reformed, but not rethought tool of direct democracy in the EU. *The biggest concern is the Commission’s discretion to decide the necessity of proposing new legislation.* In order to strengthen the tools of direct democracy in the EU, the citizens need more power to influence the adoption of EU law, in particular, when the initiative is also supported by the European Parliament.

3.2. *The Newcomers of the Balkans – Interconnections Between European Identity and Enlargement Policy*

In this subchapter, the Authors will summarize how European identity and the European way of life can be influenced by enlargement policy. The main question is whether the accepted shared values can influence the future enlargement of the EU or whether the accession of new countries will change and dilute Europeaness. To answer the questions raised, the Authors concentrate on the Balkan enlargement.

Enlargement was always significant in the history of European integration and development, since it determined both the territorial extent and the economic power of cooperation. From a market perspective, one may simply summarize the process as a new Member States constituting a new market and

59 A detailed analysis may be found in Katalin Gombos & Orsolya Johanna Sziebig, ‘A polgári kezdeményezés mint a közvetlen demokrácia eszköze az Európai Unióban – Jegyzetek az új szabályozás margójára’, *Jogtudományi Közlöny*, Vol. 75, Issue 12, 2020, pp. 556-565.

60 See Katalin Gombos & Orsolya Johanna Sziebig, ‘Az európai uniós környezetvédelmi szabályozás legújabb irányai’, in Péter Smuk (ed.), *Társadalmi fenntarthatóság*, NKE, Budapest, 2021, pp. 2010-2022.

61 See Balázs Tárnok, ‘European Citizens’ Initiatives for the Protection and Promotion of Rights and Interests of National Minorities – Latest Developments’, *Hungarian Yearbook of International Law and European Law*, Vol. 8, 2020, pp. 299-313.

62 Original homepage of the Citizens’ Initiative at www.minority-safepack.eu/.

63 Communication from the Commission on the European Citizens’ Initiative Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe, 14 January 2021 C(2021) 171 final, pp. 18-21.

providing additional labor force.⁶⁴ From a cultural-sociological perspective, enlargement is more complex. The different regions of Europe share similarities (e.g. the Scandinavian and the Baltic states, Central Europe, Southern Europe, etc.) regarding their cultural-social circumstances, but they often share economic and geographic characteristics, too. In order to examine enlargement-related issues from the perspective of Europeanness, the states' cultural and sociological conditions must be considered. As a preliminary observation, the Balkans in general and the Western-Balkan region differ greatly from other European states, perhaps in all of the aspects mentioned above.

Every accession implies the fear of losing national characteristics, and the future possibility of the disintegration of the EU. The Western-Balkan enlargement is a very sensitive issue: understanding historical events, and consequences may provide an objective scope. *From a Hungarian point of view, the integration of the Western-Balkan is a clear national interest, but why?* (i) First of all, Hungary is located at the edge of the current map of the EU. Therefore, it constitutes an external border of the EU from the South and North-East, and a border-control state from the Schengen-zone's perspective. As a result, several obligations arise from this position, such as maintaining border control and security as well as cooperating with Frontex. These requirements impose a heavy burden on the public administration executing customs and border control, parallel to police services deployed for related tasks. Border-related issues (such as the permissions to enter the country, the evaluation of asylum seekers' claims) are heavily contested and usually require a complex approach. Moreover, besides the public administrative tasks involved, the financial dimension of maintaining borders, the human resource of providing these services comes at a significant cost for the state. In addition, the treatment of migration issues has been in the focus of political attention since 2015. At the time of COVID-19, the generally sensitive issue of migration gained more awareness. A new dimension of migration occurred due to the healthcare situation of migrants on the one hand and the "free movement of diseases" on the other.⁶⁵ (ii) Secondly, Hungary lost over two-thirds of its territory and more than half of its population after World War I due to the Treaty of Trianon that formally ended World War I between most of the Allies of World War I and the Kingdom of Hungary. More than a hundred years passed since this tragic event, but its effects and impacts are still tangible. As a result, there are territories beyond the Hungarian borders in every direction inhabited mainly by Hungarians, which are a part of the neighboring states. As a result, the accession of these neighboring states could bridge a century-old gap separating Hungarians from their kin-state. Overcoming this separation was achieved when Romania joined the EU. The same applies not only to Balkan countries but the future accession of Ukraine (Transcarpathia) as well. If Serbia becomes a Member State, more than 200 thousand Hungarians can

64 See Szilvia Váradi, *Az Európai Unió bővítésének jogi aspektusai*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 2014.

65 See Angeliki Dimitriadi, "The Future of European Migration and Asylum Policy Post Covid-19", *FEPS Covid Response Papers*, 2020, pp. 1-12.

enjoy free movement from Vojvodina to Hungary.⁶⁶ Moreover, the accession of neighboring states could strengthen relationships among Hungary and Serbia and Hungary and Ukraine in general. In the current European Commission, the enlargement and neighborhood policy portfolio belongs to the Hungarian Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, who is well aware of these states' historical and geographical specificities. The accession of these candidate states would change the *status civitatis* of their citizens automatically into European citizens. (iii) Thirdly, but not lastly, enlargement could support the regional development of Eastern Europe by promoting economic relations among these states. Cooperation in border control and public administrative issues could result in burden-sharing. Those states are eligible to apply for candidate statues that fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, laid down during the European Council Summit of Copenhagen in 1993.⁶⁷ On the one hand, these include political conditions (such as the respect for European values enshrined in Article 2 TEU) and, on the other hand, a specific level of economic development. From the point of view of the European way of life, we may say that the conditions of the EU's capacity to assimilate and absorb new states is also significant. The European Council declared in 2006 that "the rhythm of the enlargement should be aware of the capacity of the Union to integrate new members".⁶⁸ What does this mean? The capacity of the EU is unclear but may refer to the tension among nations that the Authors highlighted in this article. The political conditions for accession include a mutual willingness to live together and cooperate. The financial circumstances of the EU are also of relevance and a decisive component is the EU's institutional capacity. The EU has a complex and unique institution system.⁶⁹ Financial aspects include the economic readiness of the EU (and not just the candidates) to allow candidate states to join. Newcomers cost more for the EU than they are able to contribute to the common budget. Some states on the Western-Balkan do not have a stable economy due to the Yugoslavian wars.⁷⁰ (iv) Finally, the EU's capacity has a social aspect, closely related to our main topic, the European way of life. To be clear, we have to ask whether Western-Balkan citizens are ready to fit into the common European way of life? Not just from a simple economic point of view, but from a social identity aspect. Western-Balkan states' social parameters are radically different from those of the EU Member States and are not uniform across the former Yugoslavian states either. The tension of former conflicts is still tangible between the ex-Yugoslav states. This root of possible future conflicts

66 Tibor Ördögh, *Vajdaság gazdasági és társadalmi jellemzői*, Vajdasági Magyar Doktoranduszok és Kutatók Szervezete, Szabadka, 2017, p. 54.

67 Article 49 TEU. About the accession criteria (Copenhagen), see the Glossary at EUR-LEX: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen.html?locale=en.

68 Conseil Européen – Bruxelles 15-16 June 2006. Conclusions de la Présidence, 54.

69 About the complexity of the EU's institution system, see Edward C. Page, 'Bureaucracy and the European Union', *Oxford Scholarship Online*, October 2011 at <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198280798.001.0001/acprof-9780198280798-chapter-1>.

70 Jean-Jacques Mével, 'Les Vingt-Huit s'alarment de l'instabilité dans les Balkans', *Le Figaro International*, 10 March 2017, at www.lefigaro.fr/international/2017/03/10/01003-20170310ARTFIG00254-les-vingt-huit-s-alarment-de-l-instabilite-dans-les-balkans.php.

may hinder their accession, in particular, since Croatia will always have the right to veto their accession. Five states are already candidates: Albania, Montenegro, North-Macedonia, Serbia from the Balkan region and Turkey.⁷¹

The above-mentioned criteria and circumstances determine the enlargement of the EU. *The newcomers are going to impact the existing status quo among the Member States.* The question arises whether the accession presupposes the acceptance of the concept of the European way of life. The concept is elaborated on the grounds of our common values and citizenship status. The answer in the Authors' view is yes. Since accession does not require any resignation from former values of the state or the EU, the concept implicitly strengthens the EU from a democratic perspective. The question is whether the Western-Balkans fit into the EU's framework or not. At this point, *multiple social, cultural and financial issues are still unknown*, so this question cannot be answered yet. The ex-Yugoslav states are extremely heterogenetic nationally, socially and politically.⁷²

3.3. How Does COVID-19 Affect the Realization of the European Way of Life?

Generally, the concept and practical implementation of the European way of life are continuously affected by all those events (accessions and withdrawals) and circumstances (economic and / healthcare crises, pandemic) that reach the EU. To put the question into a broader context, promoting the European way of life shows the Commission's commitment towards integration, towards relying on European citizens and building European democracy. European citizenship grants rights directly to citizens *via* the Treaties that provides a pragmatic framework for the institutions. The new concepts – such as in the case of European citizenship – are often filled with content by the practice and later interpreted by the CJEU. Officially, the nation-states have nationals, who are the European citizens, but European citizenship only complements and does not change national citizenship. European citizenship entitles the citizens to live their way of life *via* their political and economic rights. Therefore, by interpreting the elements of citizenship we can discern the substance of our common way of life. European citizenship bridges the gap to the supranational polity without forcing the Member States into a federation.⁷³ Meanwhile, over last more than one year, the pandemic has showed that some elements of Union citizens' rights may be restricted or temporarily repealed by national legislation.

A consequence of the coronavirus is that *the Member States restricted citizens' mobility rights to prevent the spread of the infection.* The public health emergency temporarily hollows out the concept of the European way of life by restricting the free movement of people. Other freedoms of the single market remained

71 Candidate Countries and Potential Candidates at <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/candidates.htm>.

72 Dusko Sekulic *et al.*, Who Were the Yugoslavs? Failed Sources of a Common Identity in the Former Yugoslavia, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, 1994, pp. 83-97.

73 See Lilla Nóra Kiss & Orsolya Johanna Sziebig, 'European Way of Life: Making an Omelette Without Breaking the Eggs?', *Constitutional Discourse blog*, at www.constitutionaldiscourse.com/post/lilla-n%C3%B3ra-kiss-orsolya-johanna-sziebig-european-way-of-life.

untouched or still function, such as the free movement of goods. Understandably, some restrictions were introduced due to the health emergency. Seemingly, restrictions hollowed out the mobility freedoms temporarily. In the long run, the restrictions introduced may affect the citizens' rights in general. No one can foresee when citizens are going to travel again. This may only be answered years after the pandemic. At this stage, only predictions can be made. The Authors agreed on some broad ideas as predictions.

First, the concept of the European way of life could be a linkage between the citizens, and by strengthening it, the EU institutions could be brought closer to the citizens. The possible future reform of the ECI within the frames of the Future of the European Union Conference series started on 9 May 2021, can serve as a tool of direct influence while providing answers for questions that matter to the citizens. The series of events under the umbrella of the Conference will contribute to understanding the future trends and directions of EU development. All stakeholders (the EU *via* its institutions and bodies, the Member States, the citizens, NGO-s and civil society organizations, *etc.*) agreed on the proportionate involvement of EU citizens in discussing the future.⁷⁴ Thus, citizens are core elements of the discussion on the future of the EU by which the *institutions* established a *quasi* bottom-up process. Obviously, the pandemic affected the citizens' life which needs to be treated later, during and after the Conference-series. The citizens may have a similar experience on the pandemic that could contribute to new policies.

No doubt, *the coronavirus deeply affected the elements of European identity, primarily through the restrictions on free movement in the Schengen Area* and other travel bans. Some programs, such as Erasmus, continued mainly in an online form, thus, the general goals of such initiatives could be reached fully. However, these statements can be formulated not just about the European area, but globally. Hence, COVID-19 greatly influenced everyday life in other countries, other continents as well. The pandemic made us realize the vulnerability of life, nations and the world. Shall we go back to where we were before the coronavirus? – that is the question that the world has to grapple with, even Hungary and the EU. “All countries need to review their strategies now” as Michael J. Ryan, WHO Informal Advisory Group member said.

The coronavirus pandemic showed that *the EU can still function and help Member States, even during such challenging times*. Financially, the EU will distribute EUR 37 billion cohesion money among the Member States. The aim is “to strengthen healthcare systems, as well as support small and medium-sized enterprises, short-term working schemes, and community-based services.”⁷⁵ The new Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and Solidarity Fund aims to recover losses incurred due to the coronavirus pandemic and help the Member

74 See at https://europa.eu/european-union/conference-future-europe_en.

75 Press release 30 March 2020, COVID-19 – Council adopts measures for immediate release of funds, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/30/covid-19-council-adopts-measures-for-immediate-release-of-funds/>.

States “strengthen healthcare systems, support SMEs, short-term employment schemes, and community-based services”.⁷⁶

Concerns about Hungarian steps taken in response to COVID-19 highlighted that core values, such as democracy and human rights are guiding principles of the EU, even under exceptional circumstances. We will find the answer later to the question, how the coronavirus will influence the European way of life or the future cooperation of Member States. Undoubtedly, the EU and the Member States as well have to reschedule the planned programs and ó strengthen the partnership and mutual acceptance between Member States (regardless of political oppositions) in order to face the crisis.

4. Concluding Remarks

Several factors influence the development of self-identity: family heritage, education, socio-economic environment will primarily affect how a person defines himself. The question is whether this self-definition may include a commitment to a broader community, in our case, the EU? The answer is a definite yes in the framework of the European way of life, our interpretation of European identity. With the words of Ursula von der Leyen: “I want Europeans to build the future of our Union. They should play a leading and active part in setting our priorities and our level of ambition.”⁷⁷ Being a European citizen cannot and will not replace state citizenship, the most crucial legal connection between countries and their nationals. Nevertheless, it can serve as a source of common identity, based on the shared values of the EU and the Member States, providing significant rights and legal protection for European citizens.

The coronavirus pandemic was a challenge for the international community and the EU as well. All the nations are still in shock, and every day holds new tasks to solve and problems to discuss. The global health emergency is not over, and it is already clear that the world cannot go back to business as usual. The Authors raised some general comments on how the EU has been influenced by COVID-19. Hopefully, these challenging times will show the real strength and future viability of European cooperation, especially with the support of its citizens.

The concept of the European way of life is a special tool that allows the approximation of citizens without any Treaty-change. European way of life shows that there are solutions for bringing the people closer to each other and to the EU. The existing legal basis may be found in European citizenship. Citizenship includes those political and economic rights that are ensured by the EU directly to the citizens. However, some political rights are not considered to be effective, such as the ECI. In order to provide the real opportunities to European citizens, it

76 Legislative measures, at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-5-2020-INIT/en/pdf> and <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-6-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

77 Ursula von der Leyen, *A Union that Strives for More. My Agenda for Europe*, Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024, p. 19, at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf.

is not enough to promote their way of life, but their role in democratic decision-making must also be reinforced within the existing framework. The above-mentioned ECI is an existing legal tool to make the Union citizens' voice heard, but its success rate is relatively low. Thus, we may conclude that European way of life as a common denominator for EU citizens may only be effective if existing mechanisms are rethought, reformed and filled with content.

Europeanness is not just about being born in a European country. It is a fabric of shared values that we all believe in, such as democracy, the protection of fundamental rights and the rule of law. Common values facilitate the exercise of political rights arising from European citizenship, such as the ECI. The future has many attractive paths – from a strengthened confederation to multispeed Europe – for European integration that focuses on the citizens (*e.g.* enlarging Schengen-zone) and respects the diversity as our common heritage. Shall we invite more states to share our values, or remain a centered and robust cooperation of countries that are European in the geographical sense? In the Authors' view, the concept of a common European way of life reflects Europe more a value-based entity, than a simple regional cooperation of European states: a Europe for all, all for one Europe.