



ROUND TABLE  
MAKING  
THE CASE FOR  
**EUROPEAN  
CIVIC EDUCATION**

IN THE FRAMEWORK OF EUCIS-LLL  
"LIFELONG LEARNING WEEK" - 2-6 DECEMBER 2013  
Hosted by MEP **RENATE WEBER**

European  
Parliament  
**Room PHS 5 B001**

4 December  
**2013**  
09am-12pm

EUCIS-LLL and the European Civic Forum organised a round table on "Making the case for European Civic Education" at the European Parliament on 4 December 2013 with the support of the ALDE group.

We believe that the current economic downturn poses a serious challenge to fundamental rights and democratic citizenship through rising unemployment, shrinking public spending and raising xenophobia and populism. Popular support for the European project has dramatically decreased over the last years, whereas European issues are increasingly piercing the public sphere and discourses all over Europe. This paradox of political disenchantment requires more work than ever on democratic values and standards which underpin the European building process. Should this be priority of the EU? Are teachers, educators and civil society organisations equipped to "teach European citizenship" and build active, informed and responsible citizenry in the context of rapidly changing social, political and economic environments? What is the role of non-formal education providers and EU organisations? Should we have a common module on EU citizenship in our schools? These are some of the issues that were raised during this event.

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*The economic, social and financial crisis fragilises Europe, its institutions and common values. More than ever we need to create a dialogue about Europe in our schools, associations and in public spaces. It is important to maintain and strengthen European civic education in the Member States and the decision of countries such as Portugal and Spain to suppress citizenship education from the curriculum is very questionable. We should also consider citizenship as more than a legal status and adopt an emancipatory and participative approach. It is about the common values of Europe such as tolerance, human rights and democracy that are linked to issues such as xenophobia, racism and gender equality. To be efficient and have a better impact we have to “take people out of the ordinary” to make Europe alive. We should also consider different ways to engage beyond voting as many research shows that there is a missing link between political participation and where people stand politically. Educational institutions and organised civil society play a key role in that respect.*



## Opening session

**Renate WEBER (ALDE, RO)**

### **Member of the European Parliament**

There is a very serious deterioration of the situation in Europe with the economic and financial crisis. The social crisis that came with it questions our values and the EU - institutions and citizens alike - was not prepared to it. We observe a rise of racist attitudes and popular movements around Europe with extremist parties such as the French FN making the headlines. In this context our contribution is very important especially towards the young people to prevent them from going into that direction. Tolerance should be the normal path for them. In spite of these attitudes, the EU almost succeeded to adopt a common asylum and migration policy with minimum standards for all Member States. We need more common sense and civic education can be an answer. What happens in Malta should alert us that “European citizenship is not for sale. It is about understanding the rights that comes with it”.

# Panel 1: state of play

## How do we teach and learn to be an active citizen in Europe?

**Daniela ULICNA**

**Senior Consultant, GHK**

**Key findings from the study “Learning Europe at School”**

GHK looked into national framework curricula of the 27 Member States from primary to upper secondary education. They also investigated on the field by visiting 15 schools, being introduced to teachers and students and engaging in workshops with experts.

- Today, every student getting out of school has heard something about the EU. There is a framework to teach about the EU, yet what is less clear is the civic dimension of this learning; students are expected to know the geography, the history, the “why, when and who” but little references are made on what is the impact of the EU on their life and how they can engage in the democratic process. These are complex matters but they are taught for national institutions. Many students are interested to learn more.
- When talking to teachers, the most efficient is to start from something the students are close to. One of the challenges faced by teachers is that they have to follow curricula requirements even if they have some freedom in the classroom and several said the EU was not a priority. Yet teachers are the key players, the ones that can multiply the impact.
- Existing expertise and material to discuss the EU should be made more accessible to teachers and schools: many teachers do not receive any particular initial education on the EU itself, even though there are a few examples of in-service training and continuing education along their career.

**Drs.Henk BOLK**

**History Teacher at Lorentz Casimir Lyceum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, Member of EUROCLIO**

**“Teaching active citizenship in practice”**

- What should be taught? The unification of Europe is the only thing in the curricula and teachers are free to teach any other important issue.
- How to go beyond the curriculum? Study trips are important to bring enthusiasm, to let the students see historical locations. Projects are also nice (i.e. investigations on new Member States) and external interventions are always welcome (i.e. “Back to school” initiatives where politicians or veterans visit the classroom).
- What about parents? It is important to bring them into the classroom, so that students can show them what they do and why, in order to bring Europe to the dinner table.



**Lucille RIEUX**  
**Secretary General AEGEE**

**“YOUrope needs You” project**

- AEGEE aims at making students active citizens and therefore European civic education is at the core of the organisation’s life. It is relevant to the projects it runs but also to the organisation itself by encouraging participatory attitudes.
- AEGEE’s vision of European civic education is about: a better knowledge about the EU, reaching values and attitudes, feeling European and more confident and competent to get involved in the building of Europe.
- “Yourope needs you”, winner of the Charlemagne Youth Prize in 2009, is a 3-year project built on peer learning. It is about making young people talk to young people. AEGEE members go to high schools, hold a series of workshops, games and brainstorming sessions. The objective is to let students take the floor to share their personal stories in order to empower them. It is a bridge between formal and non-formal education.
- AEGEE also has another project entitled “Y vote 2014” encouraging young people to go to vote. It proposes guidelines and ideas to organise workshops and other types of activities. Currently several AEGEE members are leading activities with many volunteers involved and more than 4000 people reached.

**Joana DIAS**  
**Member, Academia Cidadã**

**Citizenship Academy project, Portugal**

- The aim of the Citizenship Academy is to boost active citizenship, empower people and organisations in the exercise of deepening democracy. The areas of intervention are education, communication and arts.
- There are seven poles in the academy: the school for citizenship, cultural action group, incubator of ideas, documentation centre, living laboratory for sustainability, laboratory for democracy and bridging point.
- The “Citizenship Caravan” project aims to promote interaction between local communities and the municipal, national and European levels. The caravan ran through 18 districts of Portugal and 4 main cities across Europe during one year, targeting mostly NEETs. Non-formal education methods were used: workshops on equality and citizenship, cultural activities and debates, simulations and interactive role plays...

- “Street Masters” project is aimed to empower citizens in situation of homelessness.
- “Occupy the space, make it public”: is a series of events held during one week to question if the public space is the space for democracy, also featuring non-formal education methods (screening documentaries, discussions, sensory simulations about the use of public spaces...). This project is run by 10-15 active people, 80 people are involved, and 400 people have been reached so far.



**Mirela MAZALU**  
**Public affairs, EUCA**

**Summer Schools on European political identity**

- The European University College Association (Euca) organises non-formal activities (voluntary work, community activities, workshops, study visits) in halls of residence to develop students’ soft skills to reach a comprehensive education.
- The Cambridge Summer School is a two week seminar series for university students from across Europe (usually 10-15 countries represented, also with neighbouring countries i.e. Ukraine) for the exploration of topics of interest in the future development of the European Union and its foreign policy, including analysis of the political challenges of the Union, the evolution of the European legal system, the future of the euro and the European economic governance. They are about social responsibility but also about gaining ownership of the European project.
- The feedback we have received from the first year is that students also want the input of people working in EU institutions. What they value is the ability to expose their opinions and possible stereotypes in informal talks for example during the meals shared with young people from different parts of the EU. Euca observed that students have enthusiasm and faith in the EU but scepticism about the European identity.

*«The European Year of Citizens was a missed opportunity as the Commission followed a narrow approach to citizenship based on the Treaty rights which made the UE campaign somehow irrelevant to the citizens.»*

# Discussion

*«More than talking about Europe, it is also about convincing young people to use their civic rights. Indeed even the most educated may not care about Europe, profiles and opinions are much mitigated. Besides, it is not because you speak to the converted that there is no impact: they take the debate home and multiply its effects with their fellows, organising conferences, etc. We also observe worrying answers also from governments, for example the decision of Portugal to suppress civic classes from formal education.»*

*«We need to step beyond the classical way of teaching and make educators develop social and civic competences so that they can transmit them. There are different levels of citizenship to take into account: local, national, European, global.»*

*«Being involved in an organisation can be one of the most active ways to learn about civic education and citizenship education.»*

*«There is a worrying climate in Europe today reminding of the situation in the thirties; it is thus important to speak about the negative attitudes towards the EU. In times of crisis Europe is often the scapegoat; this might be the best moment to talk neutrally about Europe in schools because pupils hear a lot about it.»*



# How do we build EU democracy through European civic education?

## Panel 2: ways forward

### Georg PIRKER

#### Secretary General of the Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (DARE)

- The programme Erasmus+ will give much more opportunities for transversal cooperation on European civic education. We should seize this opportunity.
- We need to reflect on what is European civic education: there is a difference between active political participation and engaging in society.

### Barbara MALAK-MINKIEWICZ

#### International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)

She presented the results of the study conducted by IEA on student achievement and related factors with national samples from 150 schools. It involved thousands of students, teachers, school heads and parents. The main target group was 8-grade students. The data collection started in the seventies and the last research was led in 2009 (24 countries participating). The next one will be in 2016 (only 15 have agreed to participate).

- In 2009, a European module was included in the survey. Three levels were investigated: knowledge and understanding, beliefs, values and attitudes as well as behaviours.
- In many countries, civic education is cross curricula. The positive outcome is that knowledge about Europe is quite broad, even though it is not very deep.
- Kids who believe that things in their own country are going well tend to think the same about the EU institutions and are positive about Europe. But there is a percentage of pupils that

have a negative behaviour towards the EU and those kids deserve a special attention. IEA did deeper studies to better identify them.

- In the next ten years, the role of teachers in civic education will really change, they will not be teaching but assisting learning. IEA observed in 1999 a growing interest of young people in learning about politics and other aspects of citizenship from Internet.
- A majority of schools and teachers limit European citizenship to voting. From IEA experience, we could wish to have a common module on European civic education but even if this happens, Member States would still have to show good political will in implementing it.



### Jean-Charles de CORDES

#### Programme coordinator, Directorate of External Relations, Liaison Office of the Council of Europe to the EU

- Even though today several key legal texts have been produced, we lack a shared understanding and what needs to be done in the field of European civic education.
- The most recent and comprehensive text developed is the Council of Europe Recommendation which has led to the adoption of the Charter for democratic citizenship and human rights education in 2010.
- In 2012, a report has been written on

the implementation of the European Cultural Convention. It showed that the implementation of the Charter was going well (the next review is planned in 2017).

- The “Human rights and democracy in action” is a pilot project launched in 2013 by the Council of Europe and the Commission to contribute to develop sustainably human rights education, focusing on articles 9, 6 and 13 of the Charter (teachers, curricula, skills).
- The Council of Europe has developed a unique network in the field, based on coordinators from the states parties to the European cultural convention, which meet once a year and contribute to the Council’s work.
- In 2013 we had the second meeting of the international contact group on citizenship and human rights education bringing together all actors active in the field. The aim is to ensure close cooperation among regional and international initiatives.
- In the framework of the European Year of Citizens 2013, the Council launched a wide campaign “Democracy and human rights start with us”. The Council and the European institutions implemented a large number of projects in several fields, including with Turkish authorities and schools. The Council has also developed a large number of materials (guides for teachers, posters...).
- Austria took over the chairmanship of the Council of ministers and has put human rights education among its priorities with particular emphasis on preventing racism and xenophobia.

## **Edurne GRAU**

### **Fundacion Cives (Spain)**

- The Spanish government removed human rights education from formal education at the end of November in a reform bill. Gender violence, poverty, homophobia, how to become an active citizen...will not be taught anymore.
- The Foundation denounced the pressures received from the Catholic Church, the right wing and other movements that consider civic education was indoctrinating learners and that the state had no legitimacy to teach values at school while moral education should be decided by the parents. At the same time religion has come back into formal education curricula as an optional class.
- A Memorandum has been sent to the Council of Europe supported by more than a hundred organisations that saw the threat. As a result, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe started an investigation in Spain and concluded that the government had not been able to prove the charges for indoctrination. In its last report of October, it asked the Spanish government to reconsider its decision and maintain citizenship education in schools. The Council of States which is the higher national advisory body in Spain supported the idea. The Foundation also went to the Spanish Parliament to expose the issue.
- The adoption of the reform was made possible by the vote of the government party and has been elaborated without any social dialogue with the educational community. But in 2015 the government should lose majority in the Chamber so the law may never be applied.
- It is interesting to see that neither strong social pressure nor complaints from different international institutions have stopped the government. How do we prevent it to happen in other countries?



## **Renato GIRELLI**

### **European Commission, DG Education and Culture**

- In 2012, on the request of the European Parliament, the Commission had to react to a request to orientate schools to more EU-related issues. The lack of knowledge on the Union was quite impressive and elections turnouts were decreasing. The Commission set up an initiative run by GHK to prepare a state of the art, which shows very diverse situations in the Member States. The mention of the EU at school is often based on local decisions and depends very much of the organisation of the school itself.
- The Commission launched a new initiative and supported 150 projects in 3 years, based on the expertise of university teachers from the Jean Monnet Community. But the programme is quite limited as well as the Parliament's mandate because Member States are open but not very willing to include new common modules in the curricula; the most difficult is to motivate teachers and find a way to implement this kind of activities in an efficient way.
- Within Erasmus+ the Commission will try to sustain the work of the Jean Monnet community by eTwinning and Comenius actions, and also through the new Europe for Citizens programme.





# Discussion

«The work on behaviours and attitudes is important; we need to develop a comprehensive approach to the concept.»

«A lot has been said about citizenship disengagement and radical movements today and we blame citizens themselves, we blame European institutions for not doing enough propaganda but the challenge should be put the other way round: how to regain the support of those citizens? Perhaps we lost their support because they do not feel their voice is heard anymore. Often, the lack of engagement is not because of a lack of information but rather a lack of trust. How to provide an institutional framework to make sure citizens have a say?»

«Participation in the voting process is not democratic participation: how to build bridges between traditional politics and new forms of politics?»

«The global disenchantment is partly due to the fact that we have probably reached the peak of the economic crisis and people need a more social Europe. We also deal also with an institutional crisis. The Commission will go on with its initiatives, backed by the Parliament, but progress may be slow as education remains a competence of the Member states.»

## Closing remarks

**Joke VAN DER LEEUW-ROORD**

**General Secretary of EUCIS-LLL**

- We see how important national political responsibility is. Sometimes European civic education is included in curricula, sometimes not, it has also been recently removed due to political reasons. There is an enormous capacity of the Council of Europe to influence national governments and NGOs should look at this institution to push for more civic education.
- There is also a big responsibility for schools, for people teaching civic education: everywhere we hear the role of teachers is changing but that also means to give them the means of change. There is a massive request to do capacity building in a peer learning environment where educators are confident.
- This event also shows the very importance of our plea in our Manifesto for a Lifelong Learning Intergroup in the Parliament. The Commission's work is very good in the field but we have to widen cooperation.
- The event also shows how active civil society organisations are. I suggest EU decision makers to listen to them, they have direct contacts with the people, they are the best friends of society and often the best friends of Europe.

# Key recommendations

## **For schools**

- Broaden the scope of civic education: there is a framework to teach about the EU in the school system however the civic dimension is weak. Teaching Europe is often limited to its geography, history and institutions and does not tackle the impact of the EU on the citizens and how to engage with the EU. To be efficient it should link to the everyday life of the learners and be an active experience.
  - Go beyond the curriculum: go out of the classroom, do projects and investigations to have more active learning, invite witnesses of historical events, from the institutions, etc. to make learning more attractive.
  - Empower and motivate teachers who need to work with other partners. Information and pedagogical material should be made more available to them and teachers should receive a training about the EU in initial and continuing training.
  - Talk to the parents and involve them in the learning.
  - Develop networks and partnerships: to create awareness, for professional development and to work with other partners.
- Erasmus+ should encourage these partnerships between institutions.
  - Create a debate in public spaces and target disadvantaged groups (homeless, unemployed, NEETs) and neighbourhoods: developing people's capacity for dialogue especially through the use of arts and simulation in local communities.
  - Address Euroscepticism: average of 10% if our schools (IEA).
  - Many activities are going on in Europe by civil society organisations. In order to have a sustainable impact, teachers should be empowered to reproduce these participatory methods. The gap should be bridged between formal and non-formal education.

## **National and European institutions**

## **Non-formal education and youth providers**

- Acknowledge the role of non-formal education and youth providers whose aim is to help students to feel confident and enabled to have their say for example by voting. They work on values and attitudes.
  - Support other ways of developing active citizenship: NGOs can be a laboratory of democracy (members vote for their representatives, etc.). Encourage and recognise the importance of volunteering.
  - Bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education:
    - Invite NGOs using non-formal education methods (making games, debates, brainstorming sessions, arts) in formal education to create a debate about Europe. Use very practical and interactive methods that touches young people. Use of multipliers within volunteer organisations but also of intermediary bodies such as halls of residence for students.
    - Develop the use of non-formal learning methods by teachers in the classrooms.
- We should look at how to regain the support of the citizens and at why they are disengaged. It is not only a matter of civic education or knowledge about Europe that explains why people are feeling further away from the European project. For instance there is the problem of trust in political parties that schools cannot solve. We should look at other ways to engage citizens especially in local communities where schools can play a key role.
  - It is crucial to safeguard and provide a favourable environment to a dynamic and healthy civil society at EU, national and local level.
  - Governments should give priority to civic and human rights education. Ministries of education should include civic education in curriculum that encompasses European active citizenship. It should be based on a comprehensive and holistic approach: it is about knowledge but also about values and attitudes.
  - We need a sustainable approach towards European citizenship: go beyond a project-based approach that lacks continuity. Educators need proper training and pedagogical resources. Many resources already exist about Europe (i.e. Council of Europe) and should be better disseminated.