



Report



LIFELONG LEARNING INTEREST GROUP

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING AND STRENGTHENING CITIZENS RIGHTS

WELCOME WORDS

by Krystyna Łybacka MEP
by Svetoslav Hristov MEP

PRESENTATION

Presentation of the EU public consultation on the «Recommendation on promoting social inclusion and shared values through formal and non-formal learning, Marta Markowska, DG EAC

EXCHANGING IDEAS

- EAEA
- LLLP
- ECAS
- EUNET
- DARE
- AEGEE



Initiated by EAEA and Lifelong Learning Platform together with a number of MEPs, the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning is the new European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. The interest group works as a “watchdog” to what the European Union is doing.

The focus of 2015–2016 is “Inclusive education for inclusive societies”. The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

WELCOME WORDS

MEP Krystyna Lybacka welcomed the audience and thanked participants for their attention to this very important issue. Brikena Xhomaqi, Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform, took the floor to explain that the LLLP's core business is to promote democratic and civic participation through education and to support the role of education in transmitting social and civic values. This workshop comes at the right moment given the relevance of the debate for the current political agenda.

MEP Svetoslav Hristov Malinov followed by explaining that **it is common for younger generations to take for granted the rights they have as European citizens** without really having a full understanding of them. He pointed out that we are all aware of certain rights but do not necessarily realise where they come from. Younger generations use these rights naturally. Mr Malinov proposed that we refrain from teaching or giving mere information on how these rights actually work, because this is not very interesting for young people, but rather **teachers should encourage students to learn about the achievement of these rights**, about what rights and freedom they have as European citizens. He considered this to be the breakthrough that could allow our society to rethink citizenship and citizens' rights.



**MEP SVETOSLAV
HRISTOV MALINOV**

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION OF THE COMMISSION

Ms Marta Markowska, Policy Officer in the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, introduced the audience to what the European Commission is doing in terms of promoting citizenship and common values. Here a strong focus was put on the big challenges for education that the EU is facing. In June 2016, the European Commission adopted a Communication calling for the mobilisation of the education sector to promote inclusion and fundamental values. This should be achieved by **ensuring young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences**; enhancing critical thinking and media literacy; fostering the education of disadvantaged pupils; and promoting intercultural dialogue through learning. In this respect, a greater emphasis should be given to the development of skills and competences.

Ms Markowska continued by highlighting that **the promotion of a democratic and inclusive school culture is a crucial step to ensure the full fruition of rights, by all citizens**. Teachers need to be supported in this. We all need to empower them to manage diversity, equip them with practical tools and support them in their efforts to teach troubled pupils, she explained. Teacher support does not stop at funding but encompasses, among other things, innovative tools, adequate infrastructures and a healthy work environment.

Ms Markowska also highlighted some key findings from the **public consultation on the "Recommendation on promoting social inclusion and shared values through formal and**



MEP LIADH NÍ RIADA, MEP KRYSZYNA ŁYBACKA, AND LLL-P DIRECTOR BRIKENA XHOMAQI

non-formal learning". A staggering 95% of people recognise the role of education in helping young people to understand the importance of and adhere shared values; 62% think education already plays a strong role in helping young people in this respect. To this extent, early childhood and school education were interpreted in the questionnaire responses as more effective in transmitting shared values than VET, adult learning, and higher education.

In terms of what works in fostering understanding of citizens' rights, the consultation findings suggest that **in teaching and learning it is best to have curricula that focus on values, on different cultures, religious beliefs and citizenship education.** Moreover, in schools, it is useful to provide experience of democracy and create opportunities for civic engagement. EU funding, support for cooperation between schools and universities to promote innovation and modernisation, student learning mobility

FIRST PANEL DISCUSSION

and short-term exchanges for pupils in schools were seen as the most effective tools at the EU level. Following Ms Markowska's intervention, Ms Assya Kavrakova from ECAS took the floor to outline the activity of her organisation with regards to citizenship education. She considered it important to build understanding on how to improve national involvement. She mentioned the issue of media and information in the digital society and the need to address propaganda and fake news.

There is no unified European policy, yet there needs to be more cross-border cooperation. Building the skills of young people, as well as adults, when it comes to media literacy is important. In addition, she insisted on the importance of formal education in promoting rights, democracy and responsible citizenship. Decision makers have to embrace and believe more in democracy and involve citizens more - the European Union is lagging behind in this kind of innovation, she stressed.



The next speaker was Ms Gina Ebner from EAEA which has a long tradition in civic education, she explained. She put a strong emphasis on the importance of values, shaping the community and learning with and from each other for each other. **It is not only about what we do in education but also how we do it.** We need to know how policy works, she stressed. Continuing, Ms Ebner spoke about a methodology implemented in Romania two years ago which focused on getting people involved in their community - in villages and small towns, people got together to discuss local issues (e.g. tourism information, renovation of houses in the city centre, installing new traffic lights, etc.) and agreed on what they really wanted to change and how to implement the changes - a sort of city council made up of citizens. This was a very successful sign of democratic development.

Following this, MEP María Teresa Giménez Barbat spoke about the **need to promote European dialogue, civil participation and European citizenship.** She highlighted that 80% of European citizens are aware of their status and rights as European citizens, yet implementation of these rights remains

«It is not only about what we do in education but also how we do it»

GINA EBNER
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF EAEA

SECOND PANEL DISCUSSION

low. **It is important to empower citizens to be aware of their rights and how to use them,** she said.

Thomas Heckeberg from EUNET explained that **information campaigns are not always the most useful way to promote active citizenship.** If the campaign comes from Brussels, it will not really be trusted by the citizens. Another problem is that during an information campaign you cannot ask questions, because it is not a dialogue. The solution, in his view, was that there should be citizens' dialogue - maybe also inviting high-ranking Members of the European Parliament to town meetings. But he acknowledged that this could be expensive and may not target the right



audience. He stressed that we ultimately need citizens to understand who makes their rights and how.

Mr Heckeberg went on to explain that **citizenship is not enough – it is taken for granted, it comes naturally – we need active citizens that create a sense of union and belonging**. This serves to bring concerns and hopes to the European level. He thought the best way to promote an active citizenship was by pursuing civic education and getting a better understanding of discussions on how we want to live. Civic education should be extended to people from all ages and via any form – informal, non-formal, formal). He pointed out that the European Union has a beautiful programme for this, namely the Europe for Citizens Programme, but the funds are limited. He asked for at least 1 euro per citizen to be spent on this type of initiative.

Taking the floor next Elinne Mertens from AEGEE explained that their association focuses on non formal education, learning by doing and the role of volunteers. She insisted that civic education is important and one of AEGEE's aims is to increase the civic competences of its members. One initiative developed by them is called «More than Education – Shaping Active and Responsible Citizens», which uses ECI as a trigger for discussion and creative innovation, as well as awareness-raising. Raising awareness among AEGEE members is a key area of focus for them, she explained.

MEP Liadh Ní Riada remarked that we identify with each other through culture and that we share communalities – common values and common rights. She recognised the value of sports, for example, as an inclusive medium which brings people together.



MEP KRYSZYNA LYBACKA

CLOSING REMARKS

MEP Krystyna Lybacka gave the concluding words, firstly by welcoming the proposal by Mr Heckeberg of spending 1 euro per citizen. Concerning rights, she stressed that it is important to how to use them, while respecting others. Teachers should also be at the centre of the process – without them much less could be done.. We need to make sure that they are empowered, that they have all the necessary tools at their disposal to teach present and future generations about the fundamental EU values. This is how, in her eyes, we can ensure that education is a driving force for the promotion of citizens rights. **Ms Lybacka likewise emphasised the role of sports, as they teach respect for rules and are a great form of inclusion.** She underlined that **sportsmen and sportswomen can be wonderful role models and can act as “ambassadors” of citizenship.** She closed the debate by calling for the promotion of active citizenship through education, culture and sport.



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Visit our website
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>



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