



Plate forme européenne de la société civile pour l'éducation tout au long de la vie European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning

Contact:

EUCIS-LLL
Gina Ebner, President
Audrey Frith, Coordinator
40 rue d'Arlon
B-1000 Bruxelles
+32 2 234 37 63
gina.ebner@eaea.org
afrih@laligue.org

Members:

AECEE: European Students' Forum
EAEA: European Association for Education of Adults
EAICY: European Association of Institutions of Non-Formal Education for Children and Young People
ECSWE: European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education
EFFE: European Forum for Freedom in Education
EfVET: European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training
EPA: European Parents Association
ETDF: European Training and Development Federation
EUCEN: European University Continuing Education Network
EUROCLIO: European Association of History Educators
EURO-WEA: European Workers Education Association
EVT/AEFP: European Vocational Training Association
FECCA: European Federation For Catholic Adult Education
FEEC: European Federation for Education and Culture
FICEMEA: International Federation of Training Centres for the Promotion of New Education
IAEC/AIVE: International Association of Educating Cities
ISCA: International Sport and Culture Association
SOLIDAR: European Platform on Social Affairs, International Solidarity and Lifelong Learning

To: José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission and Viviane Reding, Vice president for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Brussels, March 24th 2010
Ref.: 10-120-01-GE

SUBJECT: ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS MORE THAN COMMUNICATION!

Dear President José Manuel Barroso and Vice president Viviane Reding,

The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 19 European networks in education and training. Together, these networks represent thousands of teachers, animators, school heads, HR professionals, trainers, in training centres, schools, associations or universities. Mr Barroso highlights that “**reinforcing EU citizenship and participation**” is one of the five key challenges ahead for Europe. We highly appreciate this focus and agree that a great effort should be made in order to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. We also welcome the nomination of the first Commissioner for “Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship” in the name of Viviane Reding. We are nevertheless concerned by the way the European Commission tackles issues related to civil dialogue and active citizenship.

Together with 16 organisations, EUCIS-LLL highlighted the need for a more structured dialogue at European level. This initiative was officially presented in presence of Vice president Viviane Reding on 22 March in Brussels. We would like to thank her for her strong commitment to put citizens at the core of the EU2020 strategy. She also outlined concrete actions such as “EU Citizens Rights” that we will actively support. We nevertheless feel that if the European Commission is concerned by the promotion of individual's rights and of citizens' voice (civic rights, citizen's panels, citizens' initiative, etc.) it does not consider sufficiently the “representative associations” as mentioned in article 11 of the Treaty.

Millions of associations have been created in order to promote the interests of citizens notably at European level. Most of our members, for example, have been created in the 1950s for that purpose. In accordance with Article 11, the EU institutions have a joint responsibility to ensure that **organised civil society and their “representative associations”** are actively involved in the formulation of European policies. Rules must be established. This implies a large debate. We thus ask the European Commission to launch a Green Paper on article 11 as a whole and to re-launch the process leading to the adoption of a statute of the European association. The voice of millions of European citizens, freely and voluntarily joining together in associations and NGOs, would thus be given proper recognition. Active citizenship is also encouraging the emergence of a genuine European civil society.

Our members are also worried about the decision to move the “**Citizenship Unit**” under the “**DG Communication**”. Promoting active citizenship should not be limited to “communicating Europe” nor to civic rights. Active citizenship is only possible if citizens have the basic skills to understand the political system they are part of. This means, for instance, learning about the EU in schools, fighting against illiteracy, ensuring a larger participation in lifelong learning, encouraging innovative partnerships or enabling the whole educative community (teachers, animators, parents, students...) to participate in mobility schemes. **Active citizenship is complex and transversal and should be closely linked to educative, social and youth issues.**

The **Active citizenship programme** is currently trying to deal with this very important issue but the **allocated budget is very low and should be increased in the next generation of programmes.**

We also need a strong Lifelong Learning programme that has “active citizenship” as one of its priorities for all its sectors and for all age groups. Indeed, the experiences of our networks clearly show how important it is to make people meet in education and training (students but also teachers, parents, animators, social workers...). It is the best tool for creating a sense of belonging to a common project, Europe. We hope that the Member States will be able to agree on a budget that really corresponds to the needs of its citizens.

The results of the **last European elections, with a European turnout of 43.1%, teach us a lesson.** Most citizens do not feel their vote will change the way the EU functions and sometimes do not even know what is going on in Brussels. It is not by “communicating Europe” that citizens will feel part of the political project. It is by providing proper information, by offering proper modules in schools and continuing training to teachers, by involving civil society representatives actively in the process of decision-making and by proposing policies that correspond to citizens’ needs. With processes of participatory democracy, with listening and respecting citizens’ voice, representative democracy will be strengthened. Consultation processes for example should be improved so that we know what the European Commission takes into account and that we can also consult with our members in order to bring the European process closer to them. For the EU2020 strategy - as with other consultations - we would have hoped for more time to react and to include more of our own stakeholders, i.e. European citizens, in this process.

“Communicating Europe” is not enough! We need a constructive dialogue between the EU and its citizens!

Given the complexity of challenges related to “Justice, Liberty, Security” and “European Judicial Cooperation” it would be most regrettable to see that matters relating to citizenship and relations with civil society are given minor attention on the Commissioner’s agenda.

We would therefore recommend:

- Citizenship should be tackled in a global perspective by the European Commission, the “Citizenship unit” should be shifted back to DG EAC or at least function in close relation to it;

- Active citizenship lies in our capacity to give access to lifelong learning to all citizens and to strengthen our European social model;
- Common modules on Europe should be developed in lifelong learning and teachers and trainers should be better trained throughout their career;
- Stronger European civil dialogue is needed to bridge the gap between citizens and the EU; the statute for a European association should notably be adopted as a positive symbol of active citizenship;
- European organisations and networks should be recognized for their active role in promoting European citizenship;
- A green paper on the other sections of article 11 should be published in order to launch a global discussion on European civil dialogue.

I remain at your disposal for further information.

Yours sincerely,

Gina Ebner,
President of EUCIS-LLL