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From “Citizens First” to “Citizenship Education in Europe – education in an European context”

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Origins and Background

The two seminars presented in this paper have their origins in an initiative launched by the European Commission and the European Parliament in 1996. The so called “Citizens First” initiative had an ambitious aim: to make people aware of their rights within the European Union and the Single Market. It sought two-way communication with citizens with a view to understanding the problems they have in exercising their rights, whether they be procedural problems, access to information, finding the right point of contact, or getting their rights recognised.

It was decided to create a 'Signpost Service' for EU citizens which could be contacted either via the “Citizens First” free-phone number or directly, via the Commission’s Internet site (<http://citizens.eu.int>) (European Commission, 1998a). A team of qualified experts, covering all the official languages of the European Union, undertook to reply to a request within three days. Its task was to help address a given problem in an impartial and objective way, and to suggest ways of finding a solution. As its name suggests, the service took a particular interest in directing interested parties to whoever was competent to deal with their problems at European level, and/or at national and local levels.

Themes of “Citizens First” Phase I and II

“Citizens First” was a theme-based initiative. Phase I covered a period of a year from November 1996, focusing on people’s rights on the following general themes:

1. Working in another country of the EU
2. Living in another country of the EU
3. Studying, training and doing research in another country of the EU

The evaluation showed the way the single market is perceived and, more generally the way the European Union is seen by the public at large. (European Commission, 1998b). Phase II of “Citizens First” began between November 1997 and February 1998 (different dates for different countries), covering the following themes:

4. Buying goods and services in the single European market
5. Travelling to another Member State of the EU
6. Equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in the EU.

Interestingly, the themes covered in Phase I have continued to arouse a good deal of interest despite the lack of direct media support, which indicates that they touch on what the general public believes to be the essential aspects of a citizenship in Europe. (European Commission, 1998a).

The next phase: “Dialogue with Citizens and Business”

At the European Council meeting in Cardiff, European Commission President Jacques Santer and President of the Council Tony Blair launched a permanent programme run by

the Commission called "Dialogue with Citizens and Business". Its aim is to encourage greater awareness of the opportunities offered by the Single Market and to provide an opportunity for people to feed back their experience and to make suggestions directly to the EU. The approach of the new programme had been taken from the "Citizens First" initiative. For its link with the public, the Dialogue used the communication tools of the 'Europe Direct' service which was also launched in Cardiff. 'Europe Direct' provides access to a wide range of information and advice about the EU, and about citizens' rights in the Single Market. The service can be accessed by internet and by free phone numbers from all Member States. The aim is to make it as easy as possible for people to find out what they need to know.

Feedback is used to identify and overcome problems, such as improving procedures, better training, simpler forms or, if necessary, legislative amendments. The establishment of a permanent Dialogue was a major commitment in the Commission's Single Market Action Plan (endorsed at the Amsterdam Council June 1997) (European Commission, 1998c).

Mainly requested themes of the programmes

The most frequent reasons people contacted the services were:

- requests for legal, practical or factual information;
- searches for a source of information or a competent authority;
- requests for individual legal assistance;
- the desire to have their opinion heard at an European level.

What did the people of Europe have to tell the Signpost Service? What were their main interests, their main concerns? Summarised here are the main themes:

Social security matters
 Right of residence
 Recognition of qualifications
 Job search
 Income tax
 Access to employment
 Buying goods
 Cars and drivers
 Education, training and research programmes

This seems to be a very realistic way of approaching the problems of the individual in Europe regarding EU-law and how the Union works, and of ascertaining which facets of the Union are of most concern to European citizens.

Outcomes and recommendations

In addition to those we have reported above, there are a number of other questions which are frequently asked but which are not directly related to the "Citizens First" themes.

It was obvious that even educated people do not have a clear picture of the division of power between the European Union and its member states. Some of the most significant problems which have often occurred and which are relevant to the concept of a People's Europe but outside the scope of the Community's powers are:

- human rights and the role of the Council of Europe;
- access to legal aid and slow-moving judicial procedures in the member states;
- access to law in another member state;
- associations' activities beyond national frontiers, and the lack of an appropriate legal framework for such associations;
- acquisition and loss of nationality, dual nationality;
- family disputes between spouses living in different member states;
- social rights and labour legislation. The existence of Community legislation is known, but people are generally not aware of its limitations (European Commission, 1998a).

On the basis of comments made by those who contacted these programmes two general recommendations were made:

- two areas are characterised by over-regulation, with procedures which are out of kilter with what we are seeking to protect: (a) the formalities to do with importing a car; (b) the right of residence of those who move to another country without any clear idea of what they intend to do next (students, trainees, artists, volunteers workers, people on exchange programmes etc.). In these areas, the member states favour administrative transparency and security over mobility - or at least, over legality - which does not seem to be an improvement. There is a clear need for deregulation, or at least simplification.
- for the general public, the concept of EU citizenship is closely linked to the idea of improving access to justice. This applies both to the situation within individual member states and to the ability to protect one's rights in another member state. As it develops, the internal market will create a growing need for information in this respect (European Commission, 1998a).

"Citizens of Europe – Being at home in Europe": An experienced concept for teacher training courses

The concept of a seminar/teacher training course (introduced at the annual CiCe-conference in Athens (Bauer, 2000)) on living and working in another EU member state has been implemented successfully several times in adult education and has been evaluated very positively by participants. I shall now suggest means by which this topic might be used as a module in teacher education for citizenship in Europe or in adult education courses.

Definition of the aims and means of the seminar/teaching course

Participants should gain basic knowledge about the possibilities of living and working in another EU member state and about the fundamental rights and opportunities that citizens share within the European Union. The seminar should be very practically oriented - teachers in particular are always seeking for ideas, concepts and methods which can be used in classroom situations.

The main method is the simulation of a situation where a family is planning a long stay in another EU member state. The learning process is initiated by confronting the participants with the everyday problems and decisions that will face family members in their new situation. Students should work out (e.g. in group work) strategies in order to cope with these problems, reflecting on the consequences for each family member.

Methods of teaching

In group work students use relevant literature and special EU publications, such as the six brochures titled "Citizens first" and the linked guidelines from the EU web server (<http://citizens.eu.int>). Ideally, the students should be able to come up with as many solutions and answers as possible to different questions regarding the various topics. The results of their findings are then presented to the plenum by each group. All the information gathered is then reflected upon and discussed in a dialogue between the trainers, the presenting group and the other students.

Topics

These four topics covered are:

- Right of residence and access to employment
- Labour law and social security
- Education, vocational training and research programmes
- Recognition of diplomas and degrees.

The programme of the one-day seminar

- Introduction to the general topic
- Presenting the simulation
- Brain-storming: what questions do arise?
- Organising working groups for the different topics. The groups find answers to the questions above. Students are provided with the relevant literature.
- Presentation by each group
- Reflection. Additional information given by the trainers
- "Self-test" in order to evaluate the newly gained knowledge (Bauer 2000, p.225-226).

Evaluation and next step

The experiences of these one-day seminars, given all over Austria and to those on different educational levels, and the feed-back of the participants led us to think about extending the size of the seminar and adapting it to the needs of a teacher training course. The use of simulation was very much appreciated by the participants of the courses. Rappenglück (1998) has found similar results using more complicated decisions and processes or elements concerning the enlargement of the Union.

During previous courses we found a lack of knowledge concerning the role of the different institutions and the historical development of the EU. Austria only joined the EU in 1995 and government information, initiatives, folders, information brochures and leaflets have not always been as successful as they should be. Our Institute therefore commissioned us to develop a concept for a teacher training course, and we decided to enlarge the concepts into a two-days seminar, "Citizenship education in Europe – Education in an European context", which would

- i. provide general information about the main historical and political facts on the way to a common Europe
- ii. present a simulation exercise about living and working in another EU-member state

- iii. demonstrate and explain the actual teaching/information materials (provided by the European Commission and the EU Parliament) and provide proper internet links on the topics for the teacher's use
- iv. explain opportunities provided by SOCRATES programmes for teachers (especially COMENIUS actions).

The differences between this programme and the one-day seminars are to be seen in (i), (iii) and (iv). The earlier concept, in an enlarged context, is embedded in (ii) and includes the "Citizens First Phase II" topics: buying goods and services in the single European market, travelling to another Member State of the EU and equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in the EU.

The core of the first seminar remains the main component of the two-days sessions, but we have reacted to the criticisms and positive feedback from former participants about the lack of an introduction to how the EU works and a historical overview beginning with the Treaties of Rome. Using the latest teaching aids and information material (which is obtainable in all EU-15 countries) and explaining the possibilities for its use in the classroom made the seminar more helpful for teachers. The use of ICT (CD-ROMs and the internet) and the presentation of examples of COMENIUS actions added to the European dimension of the seminar. The flexibility of the concept created 'modules' for the intensive two-day seminar.

Outlook and future aspects for teacher training or Higher Education courses

"Citizenship education must be primarily grounded in political literacy and an understanding of the values, skills and knowledge required for effective community involvement" (Koutselini, 2000). It is also important that teaching institutions should practice what they teach - otherwise most of the effort and attempts for giving a soul to Europe will be an exclusively theoretical or academic matter. "Students on an exchange should focus not merely on the experience, but also on possible discrepancies between theory and practice, between how citizenship for Europe has been defined and how it is actually experienced" (Koutselini 2000, p.105). The rapid progress towards an enlarged EU should be brought into the curricula or educational agendas of all European states as a matter of urgency: Higher Education institutions have to react in a fundamentally faster way than they used to do.

Chances to bring the Union closer to the citizen: the Laeken Declaration and the role of the participation of the public in the accession countries

According to the conclusions of the European Council, the Laeken Declaration and the prospects it opens "mark a decisive step for the citizen towards a simpler Union, one that is stronger in the pursuit of its essential objectives and more definitely present in the world ... the European Council has decided to convene a Convention" (Tomorrow Europe 2001, p.1). All the candidate countries will take part in the Convention. Parallel with the proceedings of the Convention, a Forum will make it possible to give structure to and broaden the public debate on the future of the Union that has already begun.

Various questions have been identified as requiring answers, given that "the European institutions must be brought closer to (its) citizens", and that Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in "the governance of globalisation" (Tomorrow Europe 2001, p.1). The text acknowledges that "the European Union is a success story". Whereas citizens

undoubtedly support the Union's broad aims, “they do not always see a connection between those goals and the Union's everyday action ... Many also feel that the Union should involve itself more with their particular concerns, instead of intervening, in every detail, in matters by their nature better left to member states' and regions' elected representatives. This is even perceived by some as a threat to their identity” (Blair, 2001). In short, citizens are calling for a clear, open, effective, democratically controlled Community approach, developing a Europe which points the way ahead for the world. An approach that provides concrete results in terms of more jobs, better quality of life, less crime, decent education and better health care. Citizens should be involved by means of a “Forum (...) opened for organisations representing civil society (the social partners, the business world, non-governmental organisations, academia, etc.)” (*Tomorrow Europe* 2001, p.4).

It will be interesting to see if the ideas of educational networks such as CiCe, which try to establish a genuine dialogue among professionals all over Europe and which deliver basic scientific data and good practice, will find their way to the decision-makers of the future Europe.

The role of the participation of the public in the accession countries

In the initial phase of the open debate on the future development of the EU the applicants have already become actively involved. A debate seems necessary, since there has not yet been broad public discussion on the future of the integration process in the accession countries. Both the accession countries and the current member states face the problem of how to raise public awareness and to initiate a wide-spread debate, while citizens in general increasingly abstain from any kind of political discourse. Citizens will actively participate in a debate only if they are convinced that their participation will make a difference from which they will benefit. For this reason, the EU must include the accession countries in the reform process (Bertelsmann Foundation and CAP, 2001).

The CiCe Phase 2 offers an excellent opportunity to start thinking about and acting in 'enlarged European dimensions'.

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