



Committee of the Regions

EDUC-IV-015

**73rd Plenary Session
6-7 February 2008**

**OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions
on
PROMOTING THE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH EDUCATION**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- finds that the EU's citizens are, broadly speaking, unfamiliar with the basic principles on which the European Union is built, and its prospects for development.
- This unfamiliarity is particularly detrimental among young people, who will live out their social and economic lives within the European Union. For the future of the EU, it is important that young people adopt a democratic, civic approach to the Union.
- considers that, in this context, the Committee of the Regions has a part to play, owing to the responsibilities that regional and local authorities in some countries have towards young people's education and to their proximity to young people, in order to encourage them to begin to show civic involvement.
- considers that, while it is essential for all young Europeans to receive an education that suits their professional needs and personal development throughout their lives, it is equally important for them to receive the knowledge that will enable them to feel like EU citizens.
- does not propose that the EU should take the place of education authorities in Member States, but would encourage the Union to assess practices and propose objectives and measures for these to be achieved.
- highlights the importance of the non-formal education initiatives that exist and should be developed in tandem with formal education on Europe, as these initiatives generally lead to an initial, voluntary assumption of responsibility – the precursor to active citizenship.

Rapporteur

Claude du Granrut, Regional councillor for Picardy (FR/EPP)

Reference document

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I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

1. finds that the EU's citizens are, broadly speaking, unfamiliar with the basic principles on which the European Union is built, and its prospects for development;
2. considers that this unfamiliarity is particularly detrimental among young people, who will have to build their social and economic lives within the European Union and that, in parallel, it is important for the future of the EU that young people be able to display an active, civic approach to the Union;
3. considers that European citizenship, as established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and refined by the Treaty of Amsterdam (Article 8.1) in 1997, provides all EU citizens with certain important rights and privileges, some of which directly affect young people in the EU: the right to travel, live, work or study in any EU Member State, and the right to vote. European citizenship does not replace national citizenship – it enhances it;
4. considers that, while it is essential for all young Europeans to receive an education that suits their professional needs and personal development throughout their lives, it is equally important for them to receive, throughout their time at school, the knowledge that will enable them to feel like EU citizens;
5. welcomes the recognition of the importance of active European citizenship in the European Commission's recently adopted communication on *Communicating Europe in Partnership*¹, especially its practical approach to provide teachers with publications and downloadable material on European themes. Encourages the European Commission to make these available as soon as possible;
6. acknowledges that, for young people to espouse European citizenship, they must understand the basic aspects of a European identity – in other words, they must receive a positive education on Europe: the discovery of shared values and a common history, interaction between cultures, similar social and political rights and duties. Moreover, they must understand that Europe concerns them both in their daily lives and their future;
7. concludes, from the results of a recent survey (Eurobarometer, July 2007) indicating that although it is relatively easy for Europe's "elite" to grasp the basic aspects of the European identity, the same cannot be said for the EU's younger citizens, that the basic idea of European citizenship must be included on the school curriculum taught to all young people;

¹ COM(2007) 568 final.

8. welcomes the Urbact II programme prioritising the social integration of young people and information and communication campaigns by European institutions, and the positive impact of the Socrates programme; recognises the utility of teachers' groups and associations of or for young people, which aim to initiate their students or members in the realities of Europe;
9. welcomes the exchange of best practice at regional and local level in Europe, so that children and young people have the opportunity to learn more about Europe and the Member States. Remains nonetheless convinced that, to be truly effective, an initiative aimed at all school-age children should be undertaken in order to achieve a real sense of ownership of European citizenship;
10. to this end, highlights the importance of the non-formal education initiatives that exist and should be developed in tandem with formal education on Europe, as these initiatives generally lead to an initial, voluntary assumption of responsibility – the precursor to active citizenship;
11. encourages the use of the Youthpass which allows for the recognition of social work carried out by young people in the context of the Youth programme, and the Europass which promotes the mobility of young workers in Europe;
12. is aware that school education falls within the powers of all governments of the EU Member States, but highlights the decision of the EU's education ministers recommending that the core subjects taught to schoolchildren include a basic knowledge of the European Union;
13. does not propose that the EU should take the place of education authorities in Member States, but would encourage the Union to assess practices for improving knowledge of the European Union;
14. considers that, in this context, the Committee of the Regions has a part to play, owing to the responsibilities that regional and local authorities in some countries have towards young people's education and to their proximity to young people, in order to encourage them to begin to show civic involvement;
15. supports the communication measures that the Commission is expected to take in connection with the ratification of the future Lisbon Treaty;
16. emphasises that any modifications or additions of new aspects to teaching in schools designed to promote active citizenship would require careful thought and planning, and that the effects would be felt over a number of years;

With regard to the espousal of active citizenship by young people

17. considers that for young people to achieve active European citizenship, they must grasp the diversity of European identity, based on a knowledge of Europe's past and development

trends, its internal conflicts and values, its cultural wealth, its democratic traditions and, more recently, the recognition of the fundamental rights of its citizens;

18. believes here that art and culture generally, and formal and informal cultural education in particular, are very important for the development of active citizenship among young people in the Union;
19. firmly believes that this knowledge should be gained through both formal and informal education;
20. calls on the European Commission to update the survey conducted by Eurydice on citizenship education at school in Europe;
21. suggests that all relevant subjects taught formally include a European dimension. This open teaching approach will help to create citizens who have a realistic attitude to the utility of the EU and ambitions for its development;
22. emphasises that the learning of several languages should be a necessity as young people see multilingualism as a career asset; welcomes the conclusions of the High-Level Group on multilingualism set up by Commissioner Orban, and the Commission's forthcoming communication on multilingualism, which should benefit young people first and foremost;
23. calls for the nature of the European institutions and the powers and institutional workings of the EU to be taught as part of the school curriculum. Just as all young people learn about the administrative and political institutions of their country, so all young Europeans should know about the EU equivalents. The local and regional authorities can promote the concrete actions applied at their level, such as economic aid and assistance from the Structural Funds provided by the EU;
24. appreciates that particular attention should be given to young people from immigrant or underprivileged backgrounds in order to respond to their specific needs; if they are well integrated, they can bring cultural enrichment and solidarity to the community. Indeed, 2008 has been designated the European year of intercultural dialogue, to ensure greater knowledge and understanding of the other countries of Europe and the world;
25. appreciates that a greater teaching focus on languages and Europe cannot be achieved without the influence and support of those responsible for the political, administrative and economic sides of education, nor without the teachers themselves: it is important that they be offered relevant further training, if required;
26. notes with interest the initiatives already taken by education associations outside the public education system;

27. suggests that new information and communication technologies be fully harnessed in EU- and Europe-related teaching of languages – especially the Internet, which can be used to involve young people more effectively in their education and reach out to those who cannot enjoy a normal school education;
28. endorses the proposal to focus on developing and encouraging possibilities for action in the field of non-formal education for young people, which is at least as important as formal education in creating a dynamic sense of European citizenship;
29. considers that non-formal education is an important rung on the ladder towards active citizenship for young people: the assumption of responsibility as volunteers in associations, openness to others, acceptance of the common good, interest in public life, local political commitment leading to a sense of accountability for the political future of the EU;
30. by focusing on the voluntary participation of young people and remaining closely linked to their centres of interest, needs and aspirations, non-formal education enables young people to acquire new skills (which may even enhance their schooling) and specific qualifications. The range of initiatives offered through non-formal education are particularly appropriate for young people from underprivileged backgrounds. Lastly, it helps to encourage young people's awareness of the need to adapt to the EU's economic and social development;
31. believes that parents and their awareness of the EU play a central role in the active citizenship debate. In general, something should be done to help increase the awareness of parents because as the EU develops further, knowledge about it must be constantly expanded and updated;
32. calls on local and regional authorities to become involved in supporting or implementing initiatives for this education about Europe, whether by organising school twinning schemes, providing material encouragement for initiatives by associations of or for young people, receiving classes of young Europeans, opening up their leisure or sports facilities and their own institutions and highlighting the powers that are shared with European institutions;
33. emphasises the need to encourage debate about the challenges and ways for young people to acquire active citizenship. This will enable young Europeans to participate effectively in the EU economy in a globalised world, and to assume responsibility for its political development;

With regard to actions

34. bases its proposals on the education ministers' decision to bring key skills to all Europe's young people, including a real knowledge of the European Union, on the Commission's recent Europe for Citizens programme, adopted by the Parliament and the European Council, and on the proposals of the Beazley report on the measures needed to incorporate the European dimension into school curricula;

35. believes that including a European dimension in school teaching will help to lay the essential groundwork for real, lasting espousal of active citizenship by all young Europeans in the Member States. This European dimension has two components: a) incorporation into all relevant subjects taught of the "European connection", i.e. the relationship between Europe and each one of these subjects, and b) specific teaching on the construction of the European Union, its basic aspects, values, institutions (including the way they work and their impact on young people's daily lives), its development and its links with the rest of the world;
36. proposes, on the basis of the conclusions of the High-Level Group on multilingualism, that young Europeans should be encouraged to practice two European languages other than their mother tongue. Multilingualism opens a door not only to other cultures but also to economic and professional exchanges and a community of research and innovation;
37. it would also be useful to encourage the mobility of young people and teachers and the provision for this in their school or professional curriculum;
38. recommends that appropriate steps be taken with the active involvement of teachers, so that a safe learning environment can be established in schools, based on mutual respect and cooperation, so as to prevent or nip in the bud any violence or intolerance among young people;
39. recommends the development of initiatives targeting school-age children by education associations outside the public education system, and non-formal education, such as twinning, school exchanges, sporting competitions, and sports or language training during school holidays;
40. encourages the development of schemes similar to the Youth Ambassadors nominated in the context of Youth Summer Schools, an initiative of the Assembly of European Regions. Young people should be made responsible for communicating the message to other young people on various topics, including active citizenship. The work on exploring the concept of citizenship in a multicultural Europe, and tackling issues such as multi-faith societies, multiculturalism in schools and the workplace and cultural responses to issues affecting young people should be given increased focus;
41. calls upon regional and local authorities to provide material encouragement for these initiatives targeting young people, and to build on them with specific initiatives such as role-playing scenarios based on the European institutions, along the lines of municipal councils or regional assemblies for young people so that they become aware of their European political responsibilities;
42. suggests that each of the actions recommended by the Europe for Citizens programme incorporate initiatives from or aimed at young people, whether they be "popular" projects,

civil-society programmes, the creation of high-profile events or actions to protect the European heritage;

43. suggests that the possibility be considered of assessing the impact of actions already undertaken by teachers' groups and associations of or for young people, so that these bodies can exchange and develop good practices which can be included in the EU's programmes for action. The most effective way of raising young people's awareness of active citizenship is through practical experience, by putting them in a situation where they feel that their decisions matter and directly impact on their lives. Students' councils in schools offer considerable scope for putting this into practice; at a higher level, there are children's and young people's local councils. The influence of the latter is particularly noticeable in small towns and villages;
44. this would represent the official recognition of the role of non-formal education in promoting the social inclusion of young people, helping them adapt to a changing labour market, become involved in public life and, eventually, acquire active, motivated citizenship;
45. stresses that teaching on Europe must match up to the aims, as it is essential for the future of the EU and its citizens. It encourages the necessary renewal of traditional educational concepts in order to help young EU nationals adapt to their professional futures and their social and political commitment in a world dominated by economic globalisation. It brings formal and non-formal education a civic objective: to participate in building a democratic Union;
46. explicitly points out that active take-up of EU and national programmes, and of the many NGO projects, is essential for the development of a broad formal and informal cultural education strategy in the EU, and that this should be further stepped up.

Brussels, 7 February 2008

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Luc Van den Brande

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Own-initiative opinion on Promoting the active citizenship of young people through education
References	
Legal basis	Article 265, 5th indent of the Treaty establishing the European Community
Procedural basis	
Date of Council referral/ Date of Commission letter	
Date of Bureau decision	5 June 2007
Commission responsible	Commission for Culture, Education and Research (EDUC)
Rapporteur	Ms Claude du Granrut (France, EPP), Member of the Regional Council of Picardy
Analysis	10 July 2007
Discussed in commission	21 September 2007
Date adopted by commission	23 November 2007
Result of the vote in commission	Adopted by a majority
Date adopted in plenary	7 February 2008
Previous Committee opinions	<p>Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on A new impetus for European youth – Proposed common objectives for voluntary activities among young people in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, COM(2004) 337 final, and on A new impetus for European youth – Proposed common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, COM(2004) 336 final – CdR 192/2004 fin².</p> <p>Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on European policies concerning youth. Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship COM(2005) 206 final – CdR 253/2005 fin³.</p>

² [OJ C 43 of 18.02.2005, p. 42.](#)

³ [OJ C 192 of 16.08.2006, p. 15.](#)

	<p>Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems and The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, COM(2006) 479 final – CdR 335/2006 fin⁴.</p> <p>Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Youth participation and information follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth, COM(2006) 417 final – SEC(2006) 1006 – CdR 334/2006 fin⁵.</p> <p>Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Key competences for lifelong learning, COM(2005) 548 final – 2005/0221 (COD) – CdR 31/2006 fin⁶.</p>
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4 [OJ C 146 of 30.06.2007, p. 77.](#)

5 [OJ C 156, 07.07.2007, p. 8.](#)

6 [OJ C 229, 22.09.2006, p. 21.](#)