

NECE Conference 2016
Crossing Borders. Migration and Citizenship Education in Europe

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Zagreb, Croatia

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A keynote by Thomas Krüger
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Dear Ambassador Schultze, sehr geehrter Herr Botschafter,
Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and guests, dear speakers and moderators,

Let me warmly welcome all of you to NECE 2016 in Zagreb, our host city this year.

We are happy to be here not only because Zagreb is a beautiful place to meet: even in the middle of November it is to be preferred to many locations further north. And we are grateful to be here in the spacious - some would even call it spacy – Lisinski Hall – a landmark of social and cultural life in Zagreb. More importantly, Zagreb is an excellent location for a conference on Migration and Citizenship: Both issues are at the heart of Zagreb's history as well as its civic and political life.

I am therefore happy that we have been able to reach out to important civic education NGOs here in Croatia, who are co-hosting our meeting, such as GONG, the CMS, the Stiftung Wissen am Werk (in Croatian: znanje na dejelu) and other partners here in Zagreb. All of you have been indispensable in helping to open doors in the city and in preparing this conference – in particular our field trips tomorrow afternoon: Thank you very much!

Dear colleagues,

As we have an ambitious agenda and the opening panel will start in a few minutes let me focus on just three remarks.

1. First, I would like you to bear with me for a short 'commercial break' for three new NECE products we have created just in time for you.

This is our new logo designed to illustrate the diversity, openness and creativity which is, I believe, the core of our mission.

And here is the beautiful cover of our new NECE Magazine which we are very proud of. This new magazine is meant to help us and you better advertise and disseminate results of our work and explain what NECE is all about. Copies will be given to you after this session.

Last but not least we now have a new book on offer about "Hard to Reach learners" in Europe, an outcome of the work of the Focus Group active in this field. Tomorrow morning the focus group will present the book and its work in more detail.

2. Secondly, let me draw a link between the most fascinating event yesterday: the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America and our agenda here.

Trump's victory – is – to be very clear here nothing less than “a sickening event in the history of the United States and liberal democracy” as David Remnick from The New Yorker has called it. And I am sure, since yesterday many of you in this room look at the world through different eyes. The impact of Donald's Trump presidency on the United States and the world is today only up for speculation. The panels and workshops here in Zagreb surely will come back to this question over the next two days.

And the link to our conference here is clear: As in the USA, Europe is confronted with a new type of politician: one who argues

- that the world is a dangerous place,
- that migrants threaten ethnic and cultural homogeneity,
- and that sealing your nation off from the outside world is the only way to keep "otherness" out because otherness is perceived of only as "trouble".

And indeed, we should be worried about the impact of the auto-destructive and paradoxical effects of globalisation on the mindset of the European public. Social and economic inequalities are growing in our societies. We face challenges from a broad backlash against globalisation and against the idea of an open and diverse society.

As Mark Leonard, a British analyst, said after the Brexit shock: (I quote) "What's happening now is a powerful countervailing force where people are saying, "Stop the world, I want to get off it. I want to return to previous certainties." And their language is of independence rather than of interdependence.' (Unquote)

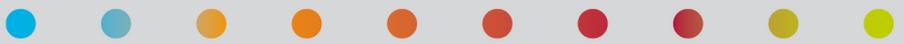
Other observers speak of an "axis of fear", fuelling resentments and advocating nationalism as a solution. These forces pervert the political climate and weaken the democratic consensus, endangering the future of the whole European project.

Dear colleagues, let us face it: All these developments remind us of the weakness of citizenship education when confronted with prejudice, propaganda, scapegoating, naked xenophobia and callous fear-mongering. Democracy – as we know it – is threatened on all levels, and cannot be taken for granted. And this makes our task – in a growing number of countries – riskier and less rewarding than before.

3. How then and – and this is my last point – should we react as citizenship educators to these worrying developments in the wider world and in our societies? To be frank: I do not think there is a satisfying answer to this question at the moment. The only thing I am convinced of is that neither we nor the institutions of the European Union can – as the famous British sign says - Keep calm and carry on. To quote a desperate post Brexit comment by Laurie Penny, a British feminist: "There is not enough tea in the entire nation to keep calm and carry on..."

We therefore would like to invite you to use this conference as a "think" AND as a "do tank":

- Let us re-examine existing tools and approaches in citizenship education to see whether they still are up to the task.
- And let us also rethink and discuss the fundamentals of our work in uncertain times.



Some guiding questions here could be: Do we need to develop more effective responses, formats and projects in our polarized societies? What kind of competencies do we need to deal with fears about migration and the “other”, often combined with widespread pessimism about the future of the “West”? And a very important proposition in my view: How could we organize controversies around these very topics dividing our societies?

These controversies may start a new conversation and a critical dialogue about core issues which are on our agenda whether we like it or not.

Let me also mention a few ideas in line with Wolfgang Streeck, a well-known social researcher and also a critic of the European Union: He asks: ‚How should we balance local and cosmopolitan identity, and how to deal with their different combinations of places, classes, interests? Are there ways to combine local protection and global participation?

To distinguish protection of traditional ways of life and diversity from xenophobia and racism? Where to draw the lines, where to open up, where to defend borders, work out compromises, accept living with conflicts and contradictions, and respect passions and interests that we don't share?

On that note let me invite you to use this great networking opportunity here in Zagreb. Yesterdays political earthquake shows: Citizenship education is more important than never. Together, let us find new answers in these times of crisis and great challenges.

Thank you for attention!

