

Scenario-Workshop as a preparation for the NECE Conference 2013

*“The European Union and the Promise of Democracy:
What can Citizenship Education and Civil Society contribute?”*

7 - 9 July 2013
The Hague, the Netherlands

Input

Words of Welcome / Aims and Purpose of the Workshop and the NECE Conference 2013

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Dear colleagues,

First of all let me thank Kars and Tatjana for hosting us at ProDemos and for the excellent cooperation in the preparation of this workshop. I am glad to be back in The Hague, which seems to me a most appropriate venue for our workshop on the future of Europe and citizenship education.

And we are grateful for the cooperation with Markus Lux and Mona Hinz from the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the generous cofunding of this workshop within the framework of the programme Shaping Europe Civic Education in Action...

And a special welcome is due for Nelly Corbel from the Center for Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo – AUC who made it possible to join us despite the volatile situation in her country. We are really looking forward to your assessment of the developments in Egypt. Let me very briefly outline the basic aims and purpose of this workshop.

I'll confine myself to two basic remarks. The first thing to bear in mind is that this is a preparatory workshop for our NECE Conference 2013 to be held in November in The Hague.

This will be a public conference for stakeholders of citizenship education, formal and non-formal from all over Europe, for academics and teachers and for people active in NGOs and citizens initiatives. And we will have guests from Egypt and other Arab countries as well, I am sure.

The purpose of this conference will be to discuss the current crisis of the European Union which can be summarised in very basic terms: Trust in EU institutions is at an all time low; citizens feel they have no influence on decisions taken in Brussels and the turnout at European elections has fallen at every poll since 1979.

A sense of failure and uncertainty is clearly in the air when we talk about the European project these days. We believe there is an urgent need to discuss the short and long term consequences for citizenship education and civil societies in Europe.

The mission of our workshop today and tomorrow is to find a connecting line between these two issues, (the crisis of the EU and its likely evolution and the field of citizenship education and civil society). In other words, we should try to link up the political developments in Europe to the practice of citizenship education. The focus though should be clearly on the consequences for the field and the role of citizenship education and its many actors and stakeholders in Europe.

The ideas and results of this workshop will form part of the programme of the NECE Conference in The Hague. We shall discuss at the final session the best way of feeding this input into the November conference.

The second remark refers to a basic thesis or premise the organizers have been discussing prior to this workshop. As we are watching the debate on the democratic deficit of the European Union and the many contributions made by intellectuals like Habermas, Ulrich Beck, Etienne Balibar, Niccolo Milanese to name but a few (and we should refer as well to the valuable op ed comments on [opendemocracy](#) and to the websites like [European Alternatives](#)), we feel that somehow the field of citizenship education may missing out on this debate. Should – as we have put it on our background text for the conference- citizenship education examines its European policy campaigns more critically in terms of their coverage and effectiveness? The question of course being here:

Aren't we preaching to the converted? Shouldn't we try to listen more to the critics and the frustration of European citizens vis-à-vis a very complex and as everybody knows for a lot of historical reasons still elitist organisation? This is of course not a scientifically tested assessment but a shared observation, which nevertheless may spark our debate in the next two days...

I am very much looking forward to this workshop and its results.

Thanks to all of you for your attention.