



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

NECE Expert Workshop
“Crossing Borders. Migration and Citizenship Education in Europe”

July 8 – July 10, 2016
City Hotel
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Opening Statement

**Dr. Caroline Hornstein Tomić,
Head of the Operative Division of the Federal Agency for Civic Education**

Dear Professor Šabič, dear Colleagues,

Thank you for kind words of welcome and your support of this workshop, dear Professor Šabič.

We are most grateful to Marinko Banjac and Tomaž Pušnik of the Faculty of Social Sciences, our long-standing and reliable NECE partners here in Ljubljana, for helping us in so many ways in the last few months with the preparation of this meeting. Sandra Mayer and Rachel Owoko from labconcepts have been coordinating logistics and organisation of this event, many thanks to you as well.

I would like to welcome all of you on behalf of the Federal Agency for Civic Education, my colleagues Petra, Christoph and Sascha and all our NECE partners to this expert workshop in Ljubljana.

Before I am starting to outline a few ideas on the purpose and aims of our workshop let me briefly introduce myself:

I joined the Federal Agency a few month ago as head of the operative division. My background is in social sciences and social anthropology, and I have been engaged in research and teaching for the past ten year; as between 2000 and 2005 I was working for the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation in Bosnia and Hercegovina, from 2001 as head of office, which meant involvement in civic education in a post-conflict, ethnically divided environment. I have since been working at the crossings between academia, civil society, and politics.

Dear colleagues,

When a conference takes a long time to plan it may be that the subject matter is highly topical during the planning process but might be an old one by the time your event starts.

Or the opposite may happen: when you started organising the thing, no-one could have predicted how timely the choice of topic would later prove to be.

And now, looking back at the events unfolding after the BREXIT vote on June 23, I think we sadly – and I really do mean ‘sadly’ – have to acknowledge that there could hardly be a more fitting moment to discuss the issues of migration and citizenship education in Europe.

Why?

The Brexit vote, I believe, will go down in history as proof that Churchill was right when he remarked a long time ago: “The trouble with committing political suicide is that you live to regret it.”

And indeed, how should we describe the situation and atmosphere in the UK now: as Shakespeare (history, tragedy, comedy?) As Game of Thrones or House of Cards?

Timothy Garton Ash is probably expressing the feelings of many of our friends and partners in the UK when he speaks of the Brexit as a nightmare from which he is still trying to awake.

I am very glad that we have a number of British colleagues with us today who will share their insights about post Brexit UK...

For me, Brexit will always remind me of the vulnerability and yes, weakness of citizenship education when confronted with prejudice, propaganda, scape-goating, naked xenophobia and callous fear-mongering on a scale not witnessed in recent years.

The initiatives and institutions of citizenship education have not been too successful – I daresay – to find adequate means and formats to intervene in such/similar situations.

Dear Colleagues: What is our meeting here about?

I would like to use my privilege of welcoming you to add a few thoughts and ideas which may spark our conversation.

Four points/propositions seem vital to me; they are directly connected to the question of why we are here:

The **first** and most basic point:

This workshop is intended as an intellectual laboratory for the upcoming NECE conference in Zagreb in November 2016. Let us experiment here in Ljubljana with new ideas about the conceptual as well as the practical aspects of citizenship education. Our ideas and recommendations will be documented and be fed into the Zagreb conference programme.

Second, it goes without saying but needs stressing: The Brexit vote is as much about Britain as it is about Europe. And it is of principle nature, as it points at the state, its representatives, and the future of our international political order. That political entrepreneurs such as Trump, Marine Le Pen and others who are keen on changing the liberal substance of Western and European politics have been hailing the result speaks for itself.

Federica Mogherini sums it up when she says in her European Union Global Strategy Report (published just a few days ago):

“We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned.”

I would suggest therefore to conceive of this crisis as a symptom of a declining international order in which existing structures are weakened or imploding.

But what will emerge from it? How can we engage in shaping new transnational structures and alliances?

Social and economic inequalities are growing in many and between societies. But has globalisation only produced widening gaps and inequalities? What about the positive developments which are brought about by globalisation, and European integration, in terms of equal access, greater openness, mobility, and decreasing poverty?

We need to differentiate and look carefully at who are the winners and who are the losers. Citizens have lost faith all over in the globalisation – and apparently in the European - project. Social groups and whole societies are turning inwards, are trying to defend themselves against the risks and dangers of an ever more complex and dynamic world.

One of the aims of our workshop is to explore the wider implications of the European crisis in more detail. We want to compare notes from different national and professional perspectives, mobilize your expertise in order to gain an understanding of what lies ahead of us in our different fields of action in the coming years.

The scenario exercise with Oliver Gnad tomorrow will try to identify key drivers which shape the debate on migration and integration in different countries or regions in the European Union.

We should then be able to discover at least a few trends and actors which we need to address in citizenship education.

Sharing a vision and agreeing on some action points is what we would envisage as a good outcome of this exercise.

My **third** point refers to the issue of migration which we chose to put in the centre of both the workshop in Ljubljana and the conference in Zagreb. The starting point here is the analysis most eloquently laid down by Ivan Krastev (a long standing contributor to NECE events) in an op-ed piece earlier this year (we have sent you the link).

When you read his analysis about – what he calls – **the migrants’ revolution** and its impact on the European mindset you cannot help feeling like receiving the famous Jewish telegram with its classical message: “Start worrying! Details will follow!”

And indeed we should worry if we share Krastev’s view of the new divide between attitudes in Eastern and Western Europe which according to him “strongly resembles the divide between the large cosmopolitan capital cities and the countryside within Western societies themselves – two worlds that are deeply mistrustful of each other.”

And he is right – I believe – when he urges us to take a closer look and consider the differing attitudes about migration in general and the current refugee crisis in particular as a potential force to change European politics and to threaten the European project in a way that neither the financial crisis did nor the conflict with Russia is doing.

How then, and this is my last/**fourth point**, should we react as citizenship educators to these worrying developments in the wider world and in our societies? To be very frank – I do not see a satisfying answer to this question at least for the moment.

The only thing I am convinced of is that neither we nor the institutions of the European Union can carry on as if nothing had happened.

To quote a desperate post Brexit comment by Laurie Penny, a feminist writer: There is not enough tea in the entire nation to keep calm and carry on...

We would like to invite you to use our workshop as a think lab for re-examining existing citizenship education approaches.

The guiding question here is: Do we need and are we able to develop more effective responses, formats and projects in polarized societies – mostly divided by issues of migration and diversity or conflicts about religion or gender equality.

Another suggestion is – and that again is taken from a conversation between Krastev and Oliver Schmitt from the University of Vienna, published some time ago (in German only, unfortunately) – that we should take more time to listen more carefully to the very people mentioned earlier by Krastev; to people who are afraid about the future in an uncertain world, who resent the current social transformations and most of all cultural diversity.

We should attentively listen even to polemic statements from political leaders such as Orban and others who frame what many seem to think by saying: “We do not want a multiethnic society”.

What we need is a serious debate and maybe a new culture of controversy in our seminars and conferences, and we need capacities and competencies for that as well.

Especially in a time of growing tensions and conflicts we should consider more deeply the very foundation of politics, that is, the conflicts of interests and their ideological and political justifications – and peaceful and thoughtful ways of dealing with them. There is too much at stake here.

Citizenship education has to be political, and it has to be more daring: the point is not to challenge the notion of democracy as such but to question the ways our democracies currently work.

On that note, I would like to thank all of you for sharing your ideas and time with us today and tomorrow.

I wish us all a creative and “daring” seminar. Thank you for your attention.