

Citizenship in Europe 2030

Four Scenarios



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NECE Scenarios on the Future of Citizenship in Europe

Introduction

NECE is concerned with networking citizenship education in Europe and therefore with the future of citizenship in Europe in general. What opportunities and challenges for citizenship in Europe lie ahead? And following from this, what does that mean for networking citizenship education in Europe?

Dealing with the uncertain future

It is impossible to predict the future. Who could have predicted the economic crisis, the Arab spring, or the new forms of active citizenship through social media? However, we can explore the future by imagining possible scenarios. Developments and surprises like those mentioned above were foreseen in scenario-exercises. Scenario thinking helps people and organisations to anticipate and prepare for future circumstances. It is therefore important to look ahead, especially in relation to education. Education helps citizens to be prepared for the future, not the past!

Much is uncertain: what will be the effects of the harsh economic crisis on the political cohesion of the European Union? What will be the impact of the ageing European population on participation in and support for democratic processes? How about the growing role of social media, and new, often virtual forms of participation? These are only a few of the developments that will collectively shape the future of citizenship in Europe.

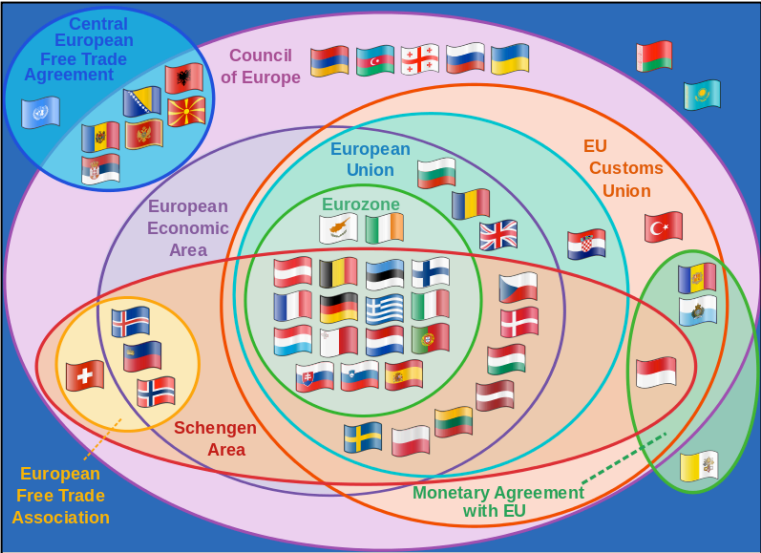
Scenario Thinking = this approach provides a structured method for collectively imagining possible futures and thinking about uncertainty. Based on a number of relevant trends, a set of two, three or four future scenarios is developed. Each scenario is a comprehensive story describing a plausible, relevant and novel future situation. The set as a whole covers a large bandwidth of future uncertainty by describing different possible outcomes in their extremes in each scenario. Scenarios are an instrument for learning with the future instead of about the future. They do not only help people to share their ideas and assumptions about the future in a meaningful way, they also enhance understanding of the causal relations shaping the world around us and find possible leverage points for intervention. Most importantly, perhaps, they help us stretch our 'mental models' of the world. Scenarios can be used as reference points in the future (next to reference points in the past) to 'test' existing ideas and visions against and to generate options for action, intervention and innovation. In short: scenarios broaden our horizon, they help us to anticipate and innovate.

From these trends and uncertainties a number of plausible future situations (scenarios) can be imagined. How can we prepare a future generation of citizens to deal with uncertainties and different scenarios for Europe? And even more important, how can we as citizenship educators help this generation to start shaping a European future they desire?

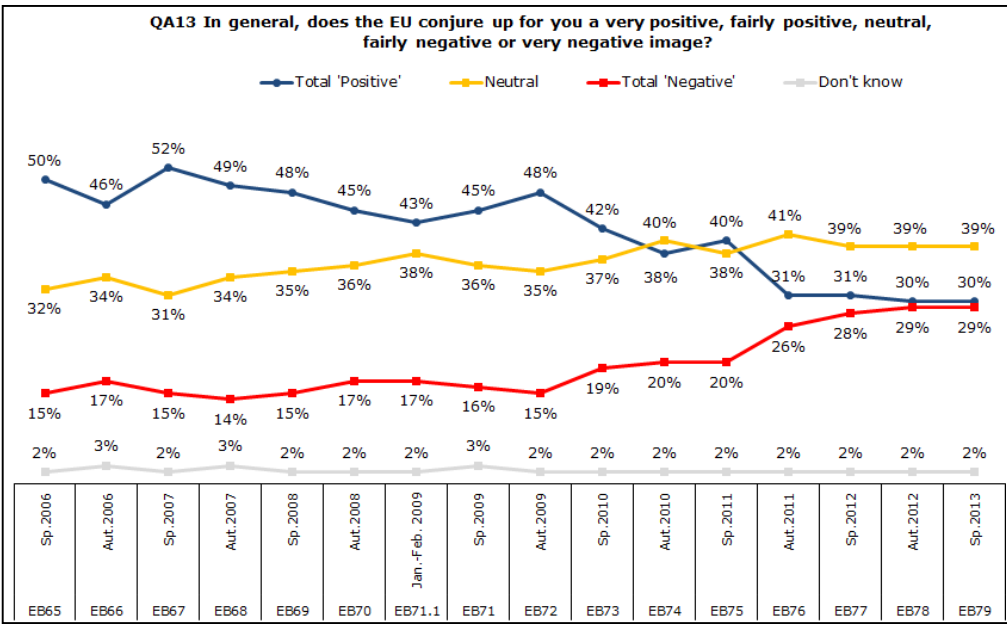
During a NECE preparatory workshop from July 7th- 9th some 40 participants explored various scenarios about the future of Citizenship in Europe. We used their input to create four different future images of Europe in 2030. In this short paper you will find a description of these four scenarios: **Great Europe, Network of Nations, Unity of Communities and European Spring.**

Key uncertainties

The daily lives of all people in Europe are strongly influenced by the European Union and its institutions. Basic human rights, possibilities to trade, travel and work abroad, and the Euro most of us pay with are all shaped by it. In the last few decades we have seen an enormous expansion of co-operation on a European level between our national governments. In a period of twenty years, we have seen the opening of borders, the expansion of member countries, the introduction of the Euro and a closer unification on many fronts.



At the same time nationalistic and populist feelings among citizens demonstrate the extent of a great collective uncertainty in European societies. European citizenship educators are facing at least two major challenges resulting from this state of affairs. Firstly, Europe’s ongoing economic crisis has engendered a crisis of confidence in the European project and the costs and benefits of further European integration. Secondly, the economic crisis is dividing Europe and may ultimately lead to the breakup of the EU. The democratic deficit of the European Union is becoming more and more visible and contributes to the backlash in support for the EU.



How will this develop in the future? Is Europe going to turn out to be the “*Eierlegende Wollmilch-Sau*”¹ as we all hoped at the start of the project? Is the Union going to solve everybody’s problems ranging from security to food safety and from unemployment to climate change? Are the next decades going to lead to even more unity and integration or will citizens drive the Union to break up into regions? Will we witness the “End of technocratic Brussels” and the introduction of a stronger European Parliament or even more direct forms of democracy? Or will citizens disengage from the European project altogether and vote, or even fight, for no Union at all?

In this scenario set we have not gone so far as to describe a total ‘EU break-up’ scenario. Participants at the preparatory workshop did not find this plausible in the timeframe to 2030. The two key uncertainties for our scenario framework we collectively decided on are:

1. A European Union in which top-down government prevails vs. a European Union in which bottom-up forces become dominant.
2. A unified European Union vs. a diversified European Union.

Four scenarios



¹ “egg-laying wool-milk-sow” means the ultimate solution to everything

Scenario A: Great Europe

In 2030 the European Union has prevailed. A “Great Europe” is on its way.

In this scenario the European Union gets through the crisis more or less in one piece. European government has centralized, integrated and scaled up at high speed in the pressure cooker of economic and financial strain. Every time they just managed to keep up with the pace of change and finally came out on the other side around 2020, with almost everyone still on board and more developed unitary structures in place. Complete with a European Banking Union, a Tax Union and a Budget Union with Union-wide stabilization mechanisms to support member states, who face economic downturns or external shocks. The democratic deficit has been addressed by transferring more power, i.e. legislative initiatives and rights to the European parliament.



The UK left the Union in 2018 after the results of the ‘Cameron referendum’ in 2016 showed that an overwhelming majority of British citizens wanted to do so.

During the crisis years nationalistic and populist movements grew strong while at the same time many citizens disengaged from formal national and especially European politics. In the European elections of 2014 only 30% of the electorate showed up to vote. Basically, this constituted a legitimacy crisis of European representative democracy. With all attention and efforts going to managing the economic crisis, this one was at first completely ignored by the European government.

However, from 2014 onwards, European economy improved. Most countries had taken the necessary reforms and most of the ‘pain’ from the austerity measures was digested. Things started to improve: unemployment rates dropped, consumer confidence grew while economic growth returned to modest rates. Despite being badly shaken up, citizens started to settle into the new reality. Populist parties grew in size in national parliaments, but they did not win conclusive victories anywhere. When things started to pick up, support for populist parties declined. People were tired of negativity and complaints, they want to get on with their lives. Despite protests, social unrest, massive unemployment and political crises in a number of member states, the process of complying with the Union’s demands was never severely disrupted.

At first citizens remained sceptical about European government, although public support for the EU did not decline any further. Once the crisis was under control the EU embarked on a renewed attempt at further political and social integration. Flaws in earlier designs were repaired. Meaning for instance that the democratic deficit has been addressed. Power has been transferred to the European parliament and it now also has legislative initiative.

There are new tax laws, making competition between member states on tax benefits for multinational corporations a thing of the past. There is a Union-wide minimum wage and Union-wide rules on social welfare, health care, pensions and labour market conditions have been negotiated.

In 2028 this culminated in a new attempt at a constitution. Referenda were held in all member states, and this time it was accepted by the majority of citizens and therewith by all member states.

It is now 2030. Mobility in the Union has increased immensely, most young people move to wherever the action is, physically or virtually. The elderly do the same to find the best place to retire. Differences between member states have slowly become smaller. Poland is now a strong regional economy matching Italy in size and Rumania is on the rise.

From the immense pressure the European Union was under during the crisis years, it emerged more unified than ever. A powerful Union ready for its next phase as 'Great Europe' taking up its position among the other great regions in the world.

Scenario B: Network of Nations

A world in which power is transferred away from Brussels back to nation states.

In this scenario the centralized one-size-fits-all idea has been completely abandoned. A European network of nation states is the result. Varying, sometimes temporary alliances are formed around economic, environmental, political and military issues. Another consequence of this is that the EU is pushed back to its essence of a single market: a free trade association. In other spheres there is no consensus, so nations make independent choices in those realms. Diversity is embraced and member states can now act with the speed and flexibility of a network instead of with the rigidity of a block.



During the crisis years up to 2015 resentment towards “Brussels” grows. All national governments use “Brussels” as their scapegoat. In national media, it is “Brussels” who imposes the austerity measures, and it is always “the others from other member states” that are the problem. Between 2014 and 2020 the true costs to citizens of the 2008 crisis are felt. Citizens lose their jobs, their businesses. They feel the pain of falling house prices, pension cuts and reduced services from their governments, while at the same time they have to pay more tax and face rising costs. The promise of the fruits for all of a free market and a single currency in Europe is not being delivered.

So national parliaments started to take back their sovereign powers. After all, that’s where democratic accountability resides. This meant that all EU national governments started exercising a right to veto in the Council. This led to an institutional gridlock and thwarted central control. Unification aiming at the same level of integration for everyone grounded to a halt, but at the same time countries started using the Union as a platform for co-operation and to set up bilateral deals outside the EU framework.

There is at the same time more competition and more collaboration between nation states. The paradoxical effect is that through the regained ability to compete and co-operate on a national level, many countries actually improved their situation in their own way. The British remained British, Italy has become more Italian, France more French and Denmark more Danish. Feared increases in welfare inequality between nations have not materialized, even though the monetary union and the Euro did not survive.

Citizens use their secondary European identity in a practical way; to travel for pleasure or work. They use the single market to their advantage when possible. Now they are no longer forced into its unifying regime, most people feel part of the European family again, but they primarily see themselves as nationals from their respective nation states.

In the rest of the world, Europe is no longer seen as a power block. The 'Network of Nations' is seen as a soft power, with a civic orientation. It is a set of free democratic member states pursuing the ideal of co-operation.

Scenario C: Union of Communities

A world in which the “Do-it-Ourselves” generation takes the lead.

In this scenario it is more important for your job, pension, health or education to have a good social network than to belong to a country or to the EU. Everyone is a member of multiple communities and associations. People avoid working with governments as much as they can. They steer clear of institutions and take the existence of a single market and open borders for granted, using it to their advantage when possible. Philanthropy and social entrepreneurship thrive. Participation in civil

society has become a necessity for most people. There are de facto two separate societies. The formal and institutional sphere of national and EU governments with their focus on economics and finance, and a large informal sphere in which many networks of communities operate, unified in their multiple and diverse efforts to shape civil society for the benefit of its members.



For more than 30 years the turnout at the elections for the European parliament has been decreasing from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2009. This trend of disengagement from European politics continued. People no longer perceive the European project as beneficial and turn their backs on it. In 2014 only 20% of the people voted, barely providing democratic legitimacy to a new parliament.

European and many national governments were mainly occupied with managing the crisis and their budgets. Austerity measures had the effect that many national governments retreated and left individuals and communities more and more to their own devices. In many member nations old welfare state structures were dismantled to very bare basics, which meant that for help and care in difficult times people became more dependent on each other.

These developments coincided with and reinforced the EU's tendency of transferring competencies to regional levels. Examples of this in the early '10's are the Baltic Sea corporation, joining all states around the Baltic Sea and working together on shared interests, and the Danube area strategy. The latter is an association of ten states who facilitate citizens' initiatives across borders along the Danube to protect its environment and its water quality.

Corporations like those mentioned above in combination with business associations, cities, networks of cities, regional communities, communities and all sorts of initiatives based on shared professions or interests, started to organize cooperation around a variety of projects and goals. This process was facilitated by social media and the open structures of the EU. People started building their own civil society bottom up. Many societies in Europe already had strong associations on all levels; local, regional, national and European. Where these organizations saw a steady decline in membership up until 2014, their tide turned dramatically. By 2025 civil society in Europe was a widely branched network of communities, organized along all sorts of different lines and shared interests: regional, local, professional, environmental, cultural etc.

People are still aware that they belong to a nation state and the EU, but living in a 'Union of Communities' their local and interest-based (cross-border) identities and affiliations are much more important to them.

Scenario D: European Spring

A world in which large groups of people take to the streets and more direct democracy is demanded and realized.

In this scenario the trend of centralization in the European Union is reversed. Traditional power hegemonies are besieged by all sorts of movements that use combinations of liquid democracy and charismatic leadership. Citizens reclaim their political power and democratic right, forcing the Union's institutions to the sidelines. Power is decentralized by the introduction of direct and participatory forms of democracy. People align (temporarily) on issues and choose their political leaders by following them on liquid democracy platforms and then voting them in and out of office, by 'liking' or 'disliking' them and by very quickly mass-mobilizing around certain topics.



In October 2010 former ambassador and concentration camp survivor Stéphane Hessels wrote "Get Outraged!", which spurred the beginning of an ever-growing protest movement throughout Europe. Year by year the true costs of the 2008 financial crisis were being felt by more and more citizens. Where initially the crisis was felt mostly in Greece and Spain, with youth unemployment as high as 50%, by 2015 almost all citizens of Europe were feeling the pain of massive unemployment,

repossessed houses, lower salaries, the breakup of social welfare and increasing social inequality between rich & poor, north & south, old & young. More loans for Greece were on the European agenda. Interest rates of countries like Greece, Spain, Italy and even France started rising again.

This next round of crises proved too much for the already weak support for solidarity in the Union. Acceptance turned into refusal and then into rage. Demonstrations were held everywhere. The number of protesters grew bigger and bigger, spreading from capital cities to regional ones. Charismatic leaders “climbed on top of this bottom-up revolution” and joined the crowds. Country by country saw a new generation of charismatic political leaders take the stand. Leaders with hundreds of thousands of Facebook friends and Twitter followers started to win local and national elections.

In many countries this meant political instability for many years. Governments were elected and failed over and over again. Traditional political parties formed broad coalitions to counter these new forces. In around 2025 most national parliaments were made up by 40% or sometimes even 60% of movements that used liquid democracy platforms to determine their political agenda and choose their expert representatives. On these platforms citizens can put up issues they want addressed and vote for expert representatives and political leaders directly. Issues like ‘saving the euro’, the ‘financial system’ and the ‘3% criteria’ were hardly on the national agendas anymore, citizens’ interests were. However, common ground was hard to find. Fragmentation brought about conflicts between divergent groups and opinions. In many places separation movements sprang up.

These developments side-tracked the European Union completely; all it could do was loosely coordinate the policies of member states, which became increasingly difficult because of the increasing fragmentation between states and the volatility of their national politics.

In 2030 social media and virtual platforms, used by both young and old, have revolutionized the interaction between citizens and their governments at all levels. At the local level for instance virtual citizen’s tables structure unmediated horizontal co-operation between different stakeholders. Similar tables are formed regionally and even transnationally. The transition to direct democracy and the emancipation of citizens is not an easy process, but it seems that slowly but surely people are learning to use their new powers and responsibilities constructively. In the social media and on the virtual platforms, language is changing. Discussions with antagonistic and often abusive language are transforming into dialogue, appreciative inquiry and constructive design thinking.

In 2030, it is too early, either to celebrate the ‘European Spring’ as a victory for a new age of democracy and the empowerment of people, or to curse it as a system’s failure leaving us with a highly dysfunctional self-guiding team of 820 million European citizens.

The future of citizenship education

As mentioned in the introduction, scenarios are an instrument for learning with the future. None of the scenarios described above will come true, but we will probably see elements of all scenarios materialized in the future. What makes the scenarios valuable is the contribution they make to thinking about the future of citizenship education.

In each scenario citizens participate and define their identity in different ways, leading to different implications and options for Citizenship education.

For example: What would be the implications of 'A Network of Nations' or a 'European Spring' for citizenship education and its approaches and projects? How can we as citizenship educators anticipate and prepare for these opportunities and challenges? Which scenario is likely to lead to more citizens' participation and which are not? And what role can citizenship education play in each of these scenarios? Should we rethink our current projects and approaches towards European citizenship education? What options do we have? Thinking through all these scenarios might lead to ideas for innovation, new topics, approaches and projects. Or perhaps they help us see that some approaches or projects that have been successful in the past, no longer fit the future.

We have no political intentions with this set of scenarios. We have tried to write them in such a way that they contain both positive and negative aspects. Most probably, you will have a preference for and perhaps also a feeling of resentment against one or more of the scenarios. Naturally, we have too.

However, scenarios are only meant as tools to help you stretch your mind and think about things, even the things you do not like. Allowing yourself to imagine all of these situations might actually help you to find strategies to strive for the future you do want/or make sure some futures will never happen. Scenarios help you align your vision with, and test it against circumstances.

Therefore, we would like to invite you to allow yourself to imagine all scenarios as potential futures. Feel free to use them to your advantage when it comes to citizenship education. We are looking forward to your ideas! Enjoy the conference!

Colophon

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