

## **Statement of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/Federal Agency for Civic Education for the**

### **Public consultation on EU funds in the area of values and mobility**

**Bonn, March 7, 2018**

**This is to supply further information on the NECE platform financed and managed by the bpb for more than ten years now with partners in the Netherlands, France, Poland, The Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia and Luxembourg. More information: [www.nece.eu](http://www.nece.eu)**

By choice, NECE is a forum rather than an institutionalized body. This allows it to be open to very different institutions and people from different backgrounds and with diverse political ideas. It also can build and enhance cooperation among practitioners from the formal and the nonformal fields of civic education. NECE strives to act as an intellectual think tank addressing urgent issues of European and international politics relevant for citizenship education. It seeks to strengthen exchange and synergies on research, and aims to serve as a showcase and dissemination platform for good projects, new ideas and practical transnational cooperation across Europe, its eastern neighbours and countries of North Africa. In its annual conferences, 300 participants from more than 40 countries come together to discuss challenges in society and citizenship education. With a rich variety of lectures, workshops and open formats, NECE invites participants to actively co-organise and invest in these events. NECE also serves as a marketplace and a bridge between academic concepts and practical solutions in the diverse field of citizenship education. In addition, there are focus groups which work together over a couple of years on topics of common concern, or run joint projects. These include, for example, focus groups on hard to reach learners or on initiatives and ideas for citizenship and political education in the eastern neighbourhood of the European Union. In short, NECE can be seen as a network *sui generis*, with a great ability to communicate and adapt to changing conditions.

#### **Why NECE?**

Citizenship education – defined as a constant, enduring and critical process of reflection and deliberation on the ideas, structures and practices of democracy – has to reflect the dynamics of a changing and increasingly interconnected world. Global challenges – be it climate change, migration, economic and social inequalities or war and terrorism – are

beyond the reach of the nation state, and require new forms of thinking, exchange and cooperation. But at the same time we can observe rising and exploited polarisation within societies and between – and within - countries and regions. For many, globalisation has brought less prosperity and diminished social security. The repercussions of the economic and financial crises, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, civil wars in the Middle East and the rise of international terrorism have shaken up the European Union, and have widely contributed to a disconnection between elites and the people.

Bearing in mind that global changes and crises will continue to affect citizens in Europe and beyond, NECE can contribute to the development of new responses to these challenges for citizenship education:

- By embracing controversy and using dialogue and a change of perspectives as a basic tool
- By promoting cooperation and transnational exchange on a wide range of practical levels and by using its wide network of partners able to implement and deliver in the field of civic education.
- By supporting and encouraging those who work in adverse political environments (as in some countries of Eastern Europe)
- By operating with a broad and inclusive understanding of citizenship education, driven by the diverse stakeholders, which can also encompass actions or artistic interventions which are subversive and willing and able to question power structures and to contribute to a recreation of democracy.

### ***What does NECE propose?***

We welcome the European Education ministers sharing this concern in their recent declarations on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism” (May 2015) and “Securing democracy through education” (April 2016). They remind us “that one of the fundamental goals of all education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”.

### ***Consequences for EU funding***

As a consequence, we see a need to add citizenship education as a specific objective of the Erasmus program. The program has always had a double objective: on the one hand to provide young people with experience of Europe so that they increase their skills and linguistic competences and therefore their chances of employment on the European labour market and on the other hand to learn from the mobility experience how to become good citizens. Under the 2014-2020 financial perspectives it is perhaps not surprising, although regrettable, that following the financial crisis and unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment, the first objective has taken precedence over the second. This has also been the case at national level in many countries.

There is now a swing back towards the second objective of putting emphasis not just on how young people can manage their finances but also on values-indeed European values is a leitmotif of the consultation on the MFF. A powerful signal of this swing back is the Paris declaration by Ministers of Education with its explicit demand for civic education. Within the NECE network we see three factors as driving this support for renewed efforts:

- the risks of radicalisation of young people in Europe following home grown terrorist attacks
- rise in populist and anti-EU political parties
- threats to the rule of law and democratic values in some EU member states

There is a huge gap between the rhetoric of the Paris and other declarations and what is actually happening on the ground in our schools and out of schools with the pressures on educational and civil society budgets. The EU could take the lead in bridging this gap, but only if it designs a specific strand for citizenship education in the Erasmus program. We demand therefore a specific flagship program on education for human rights and democracy. This would be the EU contribution to implementing the Council of Europe charter which has been accepted by all member states and beyond the EU. This could provide a model of excellence for citizenship education to become part of other programs-ie for research, history, languages, the rule of law or Europe for citizens.

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