

NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education

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Welcome

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Dear guests,

I am delighted that so many of you have accepted our invitation and made their way to Santiago de Compostela. In a world in which the factor of time has shrunk to a *relative dimension* and distances no longer represent a hindrance, there is still less and less room to retreat nowadays for to be able to contemplate and reflect: This so important city of Santiago de Compostela, steeped in history and culture, is surely one of the most beautiful places where it is still possible to do this, and I have the wish that a part of these myths and visions that the city possesses will shine down on our conference.

Let me briefly go into some of the points on the programme associated with this conference. The change in global framework conditions and the increasing Europeanisation of politics has already for some years been stirring my institution – a public institution affiliated to the Federal Ministry of the Interior and primarily committed to a national educational mandate – to expose the concept of civic education to a European comparison and an exchange of experience, in order thereby to learn for its future structure and to develop new methods at a national level. Since 1996, the Federal Agency for Civic Education has been holding events in Europe annually in association with alternating European partners on topical issues on the EU socio-political agenda, and indeed with the following goal options:

1. Identification of further European partner organisations and players at the European decision-making level as well as the development of a corresponding network association;
2. Formulation of a qualified benchmark for to further develop a subject-related didactics of extra-curricula civic education that is Europe-related;
3. And finally the processing of discourses in politics, education, and culture, in order to enable European thinking in the national context become a stronger component in the process of forming public opinion.

In doing so, we are again and again confronted with the question of which concept of political/civic education we are going to use here as the basis in a European context: Political education is – directly translated – a cumbersome term which causes a great deal of irritation, and which we – for these reasons – have not used for the English translation of the name of our organisation and also not for the titles of the previous conferences. Currently, the concept of a European civic education is being subjected in Germany to a debate on subject-related didactics. Within this context, so far it still has not happened that a binding term has been stipulated, either “political” or “civic education” or “citizenship education”. I see the outcome as still open. Impulses on this from this conference will surely be taken up.

But in this case it must nowadays be a crucial factor that we work on the basis of a widely-held concept of education; for in a Europe of 25 countries, which will be soon characterised by the reality of a common constitution and whose multiple cultural identities make this complex entity of states into an exceptional union, it can no longer be sufficient to convey only knowledge on political associations and structures. The growing demands on a European civic society, the influence of the media, the significance of intercultural dialogue and the pursuit of a sustainable political concept require new forms of a democratic citizenship education that is necessary for the transformation process away from a consuming democracy towards an active, participatory democracy.

Also in our understanding, civic/political education must be more than just a cognitive process; it embraces a continual process of education and thereby at the same time it also shapes life and moulds personality. I would like to outline only 3 core points that reflect this comprehension on the contents and the work of a modern civic education.

- 1) Civic education conveys the necessary knowledge on systems, mechanisms, and the interdependences of human society. This knowledge is not isolated but concerns everyone in his or her relationships in life. Civic education helps to ascertain, to analyse, and to query both local

processes and worldwide complexities. The training of the ability to criticise – i.e. the abilities to differentiate, to discuss, and to solve problems – is the goal of this transfer of knowledge.

- 2) Civic education on the basis of social sciences and as democratic education lives from the insight into the multi-dimensional nature of problem situations. Different interests, situations of power, dilemmata and complexities count among the challenges of civic education to present the ways and means, to make non-violent and just decisions.
- 3) Civic education is capable of promoting the individual competences needed to shape the things around us and it wants to put everyone in the position to participate both in shaping the future and in political and societal decisions. Its aim is the enablement and capability to participate.

These models find expression in our work, e.g. in a varied pallet of services, these include a variety of printed products and formats of events, congresses, festivals, fairs, exhibitions, study trips, competitions, film seminars and cultural presentations as well as events and retraining of journalists. A particular highlight is the online offer of the Federal Agency for Civic Education. You can access us under bpb.de and inform yourself about our entire offer as well as about current controversial topics and their relationships via our background reports and dossiers.

In the coming four days we would like to discuss with you about topics, agendas and field of practice, subject-related didactics as well as country-specific problem areas and a European civic education. Best-practice examples will be presented in order for you to achieve a better understanding of the already existing concepts of a European civic education. Moreover, we promise you not only an intensification of the contacts, an active networking; but also the working out of the first parameters for a basic canon on the norms and standards of quality for a European civic education.

And we have chosen a good time for this educational discourse: The European Commission passed in the spring of this year a new “Community Action Programme to promote active European citizenship”; the Council of Europe has nominated 2005 as the “European Year of Citizenship through Education”. We shall correspondingly process the results of this conference and make them available to both levels. And we shall continue to accompany these processes and to monitor them intensively.

I would like to warmly express my gratitude to the University of Santiago for their engagement in preparing this conference; to Professor Ramon Suarez, the Rector of the Faculty of Political Science and his colleagues; to Professor Fernando Vallespin, our partner and friend of many years' standing, on whose suggestion we have come to Santiago; to the Galician regional government, which has invited us this evening to a reception in the parliament; and of course to our cooperation partners, who have supported us with this conference, particularly Manfred Wirtitsch and Siegrid Steininger from the Austrian Ministry of Education; Hannelore Chiout of the European Network Dare and Teodor Celakoski from the Multimedia Institute, Croatia.

I am very pleased that we are all here in person and I am looking forward to us all working well together.

Finally I have to unfortunately inform you of a sad change in the programme. I know that most of you have been looking forward to seeing Adam Michnik here and I of course as well. However he has suddenly become ill and cannot travel. Many thanks goes out once again to Professor Bodei, who is giving a lecture on “Europe and Democracy” on Saturday.