

Education and Europe: European citizenship

7 June 2004

Background

The concept of 'citizenship of the European Union' finds its legal basis in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992). The treaty establishes a common citizenship status for all persons holding the nationality of one of the European Union member states, the purpose being to strengthen and protect the rights and interests of all European nationals. Citizenship of the Union is complementary to that of an individual nation: it does not replace or supersede it. European citizenship entails a number of rights and obligations which are over and above those attaching to citizenship of a member state.

A survey conducted by the Social and Cultural Planning Office reveals broad support for the European Union in the Netherlands. However, this does not mean that *involvement* in Europe is particularly great. At the end of 2002, fewer than one third of Dutch respondents felt any attachment to the EU. This low level of involvement is partly due to the lack of firm information concerning the achievements of European cooperation to date, the meagre coverage devoted to Europe by the media, and the role which Europe plays (or does not play) in the formation of the Dutch self-image.

Education can play a part in increasing interest and involvement, which is seen as an essential precondition to societal, economic and political participation in Europe. Existing European and national programmes may form a useful starting point in achieving the aim of bringing Europe 'closer to the people'.

Further to these considerations, the Minister of Education has included European Citizenship in the working programme of the Education Council. Her specific instructions (here in translation) are: "... the Council will advise on which aspects of education and culture can contribute to the promotion of 'Europe for the citizen' and to potential European citizenship." In fulfilling this remit, the Council will concentrate on the contribution which can be provided by the educational sector in promoting European citizenship.

Objective and terms of reference

The objective of this advisory document is to offer suggestions by which European awareness may be raised among the general public during the Netherlands' presidency of the European Union in the latter half of 2004, the intention being to strengthen the concept of societal and political citizenship of Europe. In this context, the proposed national referendum on the European Constitution demands individuals to adopt a politically active stance in exercising their right to vote. Societal participation is therefore not only a goal in itself, but is also a precondition of political participation and of ensuring appropriate European awareness.

This advisory report seeks to answer four questions:

- (1) What may be understood by 'citizenship' in the European context?
- (2) What contribution can the educational sector make (in the form of programmes and projects) to the promotion of European citizenship at this time, and to what extent does European identity play a role in this undertaking?
- (3) What programmes and projects may be regarded as examples of 'good practice', and what is their contribution to European citizenship and the European identity?
- (4) How, and under what conditions, can central government, regional and local authorities, and educational institutes cooperate with other such organizations throughout Europe in strengthening the development of European citizenship, based on 'state of the art' practice?

The concept of European citizenship

On the one hand, the term 'citizenship' refers to a formal legal and political status which confers a set corpus of specific rights and obligations upon a person holding the 'nationality' of a certain state. This form of citizenship therefore entails the (legally established) '*cans and musts*'.

On the other hand, 'citizenship' entails the ability and willingness to form part of a community, and to make an active contribution to that community. Terms such as 'a good citizen' and 'doing one's civic duty' reflect the significance of citizenship in this sense. This form of citizenship therefore relates to the (informal) *ability and desire* to participate and is therefore an expression of involvement.

This dual definition of citizenship, which formed the basis of an earlier advisory report by the Council on citizenship in the Dutch national context (*Onderwijs en burgerschap*: 'Education and Citizenship') now forms the starting point for the Council's conceptualization of European citizenship. The difference is that the definition and scope of the term citizenship are now to be applied at European level, whereupon 'European citizenship' refers to being a citizen *of and within* Europe: it is complementary to national citizenship and to membership of Dutch society.

Within this approach to citizenship, citizenship entails a knowledge of the societal and political practices of the European community as a whole, and infers an ability and willingness to contribute in this regard.

- Based on this approach to citizenship, the process of developing European citizenship can be geared to a consideration of the various European national communities, taking the form of adequate participation in social activities organized at supra-school level and possibly extracurricular (e.g. as work experience), in the various European member states (the *meso level*). This modality primarily addresses the student or pupil as a participant in the European educational field, as a future participant in the European member states, and as a (future) European citizen in relationship to other European citizens (societal citizenship), e.g. as an employee required to respect national values other than his or her own.
- The process of developing European citizenship can also aim to instil knowledge of the societal and political practices of European society at the *macro level* (particularly with regard to the creation and functioning of the democratic EU as a legislative and judicial system) and the encouragement of willingness and ability to participate in this society in future. Here, the focus will be on the student or pupil as a future active member of the European constitutional alliance, and as an individual in relationship to the various European institutions and national governments (political citizenship), e.g. as a voter in European parliamentary elections.

Citizenship in the European context is a concept which relates to supranational and intergovernmental developments in Europe.

One significant supranational development was the definition of 'Citizenship of the European Union' undertaken by the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992. Within the terms of this document, EU citizenship is in fact a combination of practices based on both the traditional national citizenship and on supranational and transnational developments. National citizenship would at first appear to curb and restrict EU citizenship. However, given the dual character of developments within the European Union (being both supranational and intergovernmental), the EU citizen also has direct access to European institutions (such as the European Parliament, European Commission and European Court of Justice) outside the national framework.

European citizenship, in the context of preparation for full societal and political participation, entails having knowledge of the societal and political practices of European society, and being willing and able to make a contribution to that society. Education offers preparation for both political and societal citizenship in a manner that can support national citizenship while also having a value of its own.

Citizenship in the European context must be regarded as a concept which is subject to ongoing development.

Education for Europe

The Council considers it extremely important that the national educational system should be used to address the following aspects:

- *General familiarization with Europe as an essential field of knowledge, forming part of the general education of every citizen.* See also the key aims for basic education and the examination requirements for further (secondary) education.
- *General examination of Europe resulting in the acquisition of the most essential skills required for interaction within Europe* (a minimum of two foreign languages to be taught from an early age; development of European culture).
- *Critical opinion-forming with regard to Europe and developments relating to European integration.* Every citizen should be adequately equipped to form a critical opinion with regard to the integration process and to adopt appropriate standpoints. The Council believes that this should not only entail the ability to express such opinions verbally or in writing, but to do so through action such as voting in European parliamentary elections and by showing involvement in European events, etc. Education is, after all, a question of examining and instilling common values. The topic of 'Europe' involves not only the transfer of hard knowledge, but a consideration of opinions, preferences and suchlike. The current lack of involvement in certain European decision-making processes can be usefully addressed through the discussion of values and standpoints.

Based on these three objectives, the Council considers the development of a specific 'Europe competence' to be important. This will develop the ability to function within the European public domain on one's own individual responsibility, participating as a full European citizen.

The contribution of education to European citizenship

The Council has considered the question of how education can contribute to the promotion of European citizenship and identity by means of an inventory and analysis of policy documents and the national and European programmes addressing the international context.

Any accurate assessment of the contribution to be made by education is hindered by the lack of any comprehensive data across the board of all educational segments (and levels) with regard to effects and follow-up. Nevertheless, a number of programme and project descriptions are available. In general secondary education in particular, a sound body of experience has now been gained, albeit inadequately 'evidence based'. Schools and teachers have also developed some expertise in this area, although the number of schools taking part could be greater. The scale on which the European dimension is included in education remains rather limited.

The project descriptions available indicate that those taking part – and especially those students who have been involved in an exchange programme – have increased their knowledge and awareness of other countries. It is therefore regrettable that the number of students who have actually been part of such exchange programmes is so limited, particularly in view of the fact that it is this type of 'hands on' experience which has the most impact. A point for attention here is that primary schools and vocational colleges tend to take part in such programmes even less frequently than those in general secondary education. The outreach of students in higher education is also conspicuously low given the international character of the Netherlands. Efforts should be made to rectify this situation.

The descriptions of 'good practices' offer a general overview of the form, content, funding opportunities and progress of the projects conducted, as well as indicating their relationship with the regular curriculum.

The Council notes that 'Europe' forms an element of the curriculum in all sectors of publicly-funded education. The key objectives and examination subjects form a clear framework in both primary and secondary education.

At the national level, an infrastructure exists which covers all education sectors (European Platform, NUFFIC and CINOP).

At the European level, practical resources such as the *Europass* have been developed in order to facilitate the exchange of information about courses (or parts thereof) between European member states. In the national context, citizenship now enjoys a place in educational processes, in school organizations and in the environmental variables, but a more explicit relationship with the European dimension has yet to be established.

Recommendations

In all sectors of education, the various mobility programmes devote considerable attention to Europe. The Council advises that the European orientation of the courses should be further strengthened to address the various aspects of European citizenship. This is not yet a set component of the activities. 'Europe' is a work in progress. The challenge facing the education sector is therefore rather more complex, but no less essential. Preparation should address the two components of citizenship: constitutional and societal.

The combination of these two components can give rise to different 'Europes' being used as a guide in devising activities. Given the current state of affairs, this is unavoidable. Flexibility and creativity on the part of the educational sector are required when addressing the issue of European citizenship.

The analysis of programmes and projects reveals that consideration for Europe should be translated in terms of concrete objectives and resources. European institutions must join national governments in working on the further development of the ongoing programmes and projects. In order to realize the overall aims, the existing infrastructure of three organizations – the European Platform, NUFFIC and CINOP - should be strengthened. This will serve to maximize the contribution made by education.

All programmes and projects should have clearly stated objectives reflecting an explicit European dimension. It therefore becomes necessary to develop materials and resources to support these objectives. Such materials and resources will be particularly varied in nature: from a coursework package or textbook to search instructions for Internet research. The development of such materials must be undertaken in collaboration with the schools themselves. The Council advises the minister to order an investigation into the extent to which the existing key objectives and examination requirements in junior and secondary education can be used in pursuing the 'European competence' concept. This competence will bring method and order to the existing components and can therefore serve to strengthen the overall effect. It may also be appropriate to consider means of certifying the European competence.

A particularly effective approach is the physical exchange of persons (students and teachers) between the various European member states. Target figures should be produced and imposed in order to ensure that such exchanges are conducted on an adequate scale.

Based on the current numbers of students having gained international experience (28% in higher vocational training and 39% at university level), the following target figures may be appropriate: 50% of university students to take part in a European mobility scheme in some capacity (either as guest or host), 33% of students in higher vocational training, and 17% to 20% of students in lower vocational or continued education.

With a view to achieving greater critical mass, effective use of communications media such as the Internet is also desirable. Such use may take the form of 'virtual meetings' between students in different countries, or can serve as preparation for actual meetings as part of an exchange programme.

It is also necessary to establish a clear link between the regular curriculum and the various projects, in order to reinforce the European dimension of each.

Finally, the projects, programmes, experiences gained and evaluations ('what works?') should be carefully chronicled. Electronic records should be made readily available to educational institutes and other interested parties for the purposes of consultation and emulation.