

Invasion of Ukraine. War in Europe - Appeal from the AdB European and International Civic Education Commission

"Russia is bombing missiles in almost all of our country. Volyn is currently being shelled. Unfortunately, we are not ready either morally or physically here ... in pharmacies queues, at ATMs - too Education has stopped, everyone has to sit at home. I want to speak out. I want to believe everything will be fine. If we have to run away, please shelter our kids! "
(from a WhatsApp message of a Ukrainian cooperation partner)

The attack of Russian forces on the territory of Ukraine represents a sinister and brutal breach of international law and the nihilistic perversion of the European peace order.

Current developments are the bitter consequence of authoritarianism, nationalism, the restriction of basic democratic rights and freedom of expression, the suppression of civil society, electoral fraud and ruthless restrictions on the rule of law. This has led to war.

The aggression against the land, people and elected government of Ukraine, a sovereign European state, shakes the foundations of the peace order and democratic coexistence and negates our fundamental convictions of human rights and democratic negotiation processes on which Europe is built (e.g. Helsinki Final Act, OSCE process, European Convention on Human Rights).

We do not know how this war of aggression against Ukraine, which broke out on February 24, 2022 in violation of international law, will develop in the medium and long term, in what situation we will wake up tomorrow and what consequences this will have for young people.

As actors of international citizenship education work in the AdB, we demand action on the following concrete steps:

European youth, education, and fundamental rights policies must ...

... put Ukraine in the spotlight for humanitarian, moral and practical support.

Young people everywhere in Europe are helpless in the face of current developments and need concrete support in dealing with this situation. European youth policy creates the framework conditions for this.

All levels of European youth, education and fundamental rights policy (EU, governments, representatives of NGOs and young people) have to become more aware of their own political role and function within a global field of tension. We should recognize the bitter truth that there are different global-political, economic and power-political interests and actors that negate the fundamental convictions of human rights and the democratic processes on which Europe is built.

Simultaneously, European youth policy must also focus its actions on the basic human needs for dignity, equal treatment and, above all, peace, and actively promote these. Civil society plays an eminently important role in this and must be supported on a supplementary basis.

European (youth) policy must not rest on the fact that the EU is an alliance of states without war within its own borders, but must recognize that the problems in close proximity also affect people in the EU. Therefore, it must make more promotion and educational work possible and support encounters between young people.

We call on European actors to make the EU Youth Strategy and Youth Goals a core part of European democratic policy.

Now that there is a threat of fragmentation in Europe, especially due to developments in the EU partner countries and member states of the Council of Europe, youth and education policies in Europe must deliver on democracy-building commitments.

The different fields of European youth and education policy in the Council of Europe, the EU and the OECD are valid for actors and institutions and refer to young people all over Europe. Therefore, we demand the following concrete measures from the European programs of education and youth policy:

- The EU Commission is called upon to open the Eastern Partnership Window immediately to civil society actors in Eastern Europe and the program countries.
- Immediately reverse the current budget reductions in the Erasmus+ program in cooperation with partner countries.
- To integrate young people from Ukraine directly into ongoing, already funded programs and projects in Erasmus, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) program and European Solidarity Corps, even if they are not part of the project partnerships.
- To put democracy promotion at the forefront of the Erasmus+, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values and European Solidarity Corps programs and others, in conjunction with the European Economic Area mechanisms, but also in conjunction with initiatives of the Open Society Foundation et al.
- Establish programs for youth work and youth citizenship education in the countries of Eastern Europe within the framework of the EU Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

International encounter work must ...

...stick to its mission and make encounters possible. In doing so, it should involve, inform and foster solidarity in its international networks, which extend to Europe as well as to other continents.

... create awareness that democratic values are not self-evident. They are threatened every day. The current development is a slap in the face and a lesson for our political naivety.

...focus on people and on creating dialog spaces for opinions, views and debate.

...to bring peace education concepts and approaches more into focus in our work.

We advocate for long-term job shadowing programs for youth and young adults from Ukraine in citizenship education institutions.

We remain convinced that a rational discourse is the concern of large parts of civil society and that people do not want war. This is where encounters can and should start. We have many years of experience in conflict mediation and peace work.

We must specifically address Russian disinformation policy in the international and national context, sensitize people to this approach of destabilizing societies and democracies, and promote their resilience.

We demand:

- that the Federal Foreign Office massively increase funding for measures with Ukraine in the area of transformation partnerships. As citizenship education institutions, we offer ourselves as partners.
- a massive expansion and continuation of programs such as the German-Polish-Ukrainian Encounters (DPJW), the "Meet -Up! -Polish-Ukrainian encounters (DPJW), the programs "Meet -Up! Youth for Partnership" (Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft, Federal Foreign Office) and "Ukraine Calling" (European University Viadrina, Federal Foreign Office) in order to carry out meetings and measures with Ukrainian partners and young people. We call on sponsors to actively shape these.
- to focus the mandate of the Foundation for German-Russian Youth Exchange in terms of democracy policy.

AdB, citizenship education institutions, educational institutions must ...

... intervene and offer. Peace and democracy are not self-perpetuating. Citizenship education must not remain in its comfort zone. The attack on Ukraine is also an attack on democracy and open societies. Democracy and peace are not only abstract objects of non-formal youth education. Rather, we as actors are continuously working actively to establish reliable and tolerant relationships and to create spaces for dialogue between different worlds of experience and opinions.

We must not only rework the questions underlying our work on war, peace, international law, the rule of law and international treaties as core issues and questions of citizenship education work, but also understand questions of peace, security, foreign policy as fundamental questions of our field of work of citizenship education and take very clear positions. Qualification offers are necessary for this.

The AdB as an association of citizenship education is called upon to set appropriate priorities thematically and programmatically in all areas of work. We have no direct influence on the violent conflict itself, but we can offer people on the spot platforms for exchange, make voices from Ukraine and Russian civil society visible, also in Western European discourses, and especially in offers for professionals.

Our institutions and educational centers can serve as host organizations for actors from Ukraine and open citizenship education work for activists and, with our resources, offer the possibility to continue their work for peace and an open society.

We call for opening our educational institutions to refugees when necessary.

We should increasingly seek dialogue with the more than 145,000 members of the Ukrainian diaspora and their migrant organizations in Germany.

In the Russian Federation and Belarus, the states from which aggression emanates, civil society has long been brutally repressed, and freedom of expression is life-threatening. As citizenship educators, we must strengthen and support those who currently have no voice. As providers of citizenship education, we are challenged to look for new channels and ways of cooperating for long-term, meaningful support.

We must consciously involve young people from Ukraine, but also - as difficult as this is - from Russian and Belarusian civil society in programs and enable job shadowing for specialists.

We hope for an intensified exchange with other European institutions and actors of citizenship education in order to ensure the exchange of knowledge and experience about the situation and to explore common possibilities of dealing with it.

In our institutions, we should support actions and activities of young people and civil society organizations on this topic in order to make its immediate importance visible, but also to counteract feelings of powerlessness and helplessness.

Civic education is challenged to move from spectatorship to active engagement.

We must unlearn helplessness!

AdB, the members of the Commission for European and International Educational Work on 25 February 2022.

The members of the Commission for European and International Work are

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