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VALUES, EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

REPORT

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With the participation of President Metsola, the Lifelong Learning Interest Group of the European Parliament met on the 17th of May 2022 to discuss the question of values that are - and should be - taught in the education system and in non-formal learning. Chaired by Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP, the meeting brought together Members of the European Parliament, Civil Society Organisations, decision makers and practitioners, reflecting a variety of views on the role of value education in the European project and beyond.

PRESSING QUESTIONS IN CHALLENGING TIMES

The meeting was opened by Gina Ebner, Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults, who sparked the conversation by proposing a number of questions on the link between values and education: what values should be at the forefront here, and what role can lifelong learning play to strengthen these values? What status should values such as solidarity, democracy, sustainability, and cultural diversity have? How can transformative lifelong learning convey these values? And how can education and learning build resilience and promote skills needed to deal with those who think differently?

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Mr. Csaba Borboly from the Committee of the Regions (SEDEC), brought into the discussion the important role of regions and local authorities in promoting values in all areas of education

Initiated by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and by the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) together with a number of MEPs, the European Parliament's Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning was the new Juncker's European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. These topics represent an even greater transformative point, on the account of the digital and green transitions of the von der Leyen Commission.

The interest group works as a "watchdog" to what the European Union is doing on lifelong learning, and builds on its transversal composition to foster lifelong learning policies in Europe.

and, in particular, in adult education. Highlighting that there are many areas of Europe where a rich – but undervalued – local culture and traditions exist, Mr. Borboly emphasized that many of these traditions are in line with European values and should, therefore, find a home in our understanding of values and in learning trajectories developing and teaching/learning values. In addition, he stresses that access to education and training in rural and other marginalized areas of Europe is key. Far too many adults are still denied the right to education, and the opportunity to shape their own future. Finally, he recognized that: ‘The teachers in the 21st century are facing many changes, we need to invest in professional development of teacher.’



CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Turning to the international dimension, Ms. Robin Sclafani (CEJI) recalled the international instruments that enshrine important values for our society, as the 2018 European Council Resolution on antisemitism. She discussed the neuroscience behind biased responses that neglect our values, and illustrated the impact of the trainings that CEJI promotes: by devoting time to forge quality relationships and bonds with partners, they can begin to become aware of their biases in an open and safe space, where people can share their experiences and self-reflect for triggering deep change.

In addition, she underlined the contribution of social capital theory to understand baseline measures for assessing our promotion of values and its inclusivity. Reimagining the current legal framework, she affirmed: ‘Cultural change requires more than criminal legislation, it requires education legislation. Our values are human rights, equality, social responsibility, the only way is through education.’

TEACHING AND PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

‘Teachers and students need to develop the curriculum together, so that everyone can have ownership of the objectives and the process.’

The European Commission JRC’s speaker, Ms. Clara Centeno, presented her research on teacher professional development and training for diversity and inclusion. Resonating with other panelists, she showed that, in terms of professional development, teachers need a concrete ‘experience of democracy’ rather than teaching about democracy. School heads will need more support and time to build cultures of welcoming and inclusion – which comes with a profound transformation. Ms. Centeno also stressed that one key area that needs to be addressed is the peer learning aspect and the transferability of programs to adapt, contextualize, and replicate them in different areas.

VALUES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The roundtable was closed by Prof. Peter Mayo from the University of Malta who contextualized all the findings into the current neo-liberal and corporation-driven vision that dominates, in his view, society today. ‘We don’t teach about education and democracy by talking about it, but by doing it – already in the classroom.’

Tying the elements of our relationship with nature and environmental sustainability, he referenced several seminal works on values, inclusion and the education of adults, while simultaneously pointed



ROBERTA METSOLA, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, MEP SIRPA PIETIKAINEN, AND GIUSEPPINA TUCCI, PRESIDENT OF LLLP

to the fact that research is not the issue at hand, rather the implementation of that research and policy change is what has not changed enough over these last few decades.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Introducing President Metsola, MEP Pietikäinen emphasized the importance of values for our civilization and society, stressing the need for empathy, mutual understanding and tolerance from an early age. Building on the insights presented by the speakers, President Metsola concluded the event recalling that knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal education are essential in an ever-changing world. In her words: 'Learning to think, inclusivity, promoting a holistic vision of lifelong learning is a priority - we can, and should, still do more, for example, by increasing the budget of the Erasmus+ programme'.



MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WHO SUPPORT THE INTEREST GROUP

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