



European Youth Manifesto



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About

I am very proud to present the new European Youth Manifesto on behalf of the entire Youth Council for the Future (YCF), which has worked with great effort to produce this result.

It has been a long process for all the brilliant and committed students from across the world involved in the project. Guided by a dynamic group of academics, politicians, business leaders and journalists, we were able to benefit from their knowledge and freely discuss our ideas.

The main topic areas we have chosen this year as the most concerning for youth across Europe are: gender equality, education, religion, diversity and employment.

In April 2015 we had the privilege to attend a series of meetings and workshops in Madrid. Each team working on a different topic was able to speak to a set of experts in the sector in order to discuss about our ideas and possible solutions.

The Manifesto's previous edition has been a success, but we are pleased to present an improved new version with many different topics, hoping that many readers will be attracted and interested in our visions. Even though we are only a restricted amount of students, we hope to represent a much larger number of young people across Europe, making our voices heard.

Alessandra Maffettone
Chairwoman of the Youth Council for the Future

Introduction

The world is undergoing major changes. This is not only visible in the many crisis zones all over the globe, but also in changing values. What are the values of individuals in Europe, but also of our societies? To shed some light on this issue, we asked the 70 members of the Youth Council for the Future (YCF) from 16 European countries about their values. We were curious: What are the most pressing issues in Europe today? What does the youth consider to be of highest importance? And what needs to be changed nowadays to lay the foundations for a better future for everyone?

I would not have dared to guess the answers of the 15 to 24 year olds in advance, but their response gives me hope for our common future. There is a very strong consensus on gender equality being the most important value in Europe. Equality between men and women still is not achieved in our modern societies; men still earn more than women doing the same job; violence against women at home, in the streets or on the internet is repeatedly still a taboo; and parents just as teachers often still do not break with stereotypes. It is not surprising that many of these aspects, just like many other problems, lead us to education. We indeed need a change in the minds of people; we need education for children and teenagers that enables them to unfold their potential, that shapes them as self-confident, active people who care about their community. Although religion has a different impact on public and private life in every European country, the YCF members agree that religion "is a living, breathing worldview, a form of culture that is simultaneously social and deeply personal." They ask for dialogue, impartial religious education courses from an early age and stricter secularism. Moreover, they present our diverse religious heritage in Europe and take us on a journey to famous religious buildings. The diversity of European culture, however, is not only visible in churches and mosques, but also in its citizens. Ethnic minorities enrich our society and should be protected by the law. More European countries should also protect the LGTB+ community and guarantee equality. Through imaginary dairies of homosexual and transgender teenagers, the authors demonstrate how difficult it is to be "a little bit different". Furthermore, they take us on a voyage through time as regards tolerance, which leads from ancient Rome to today's China. Last but not least, employment is considered as basis for a good and satisfying life. Therefore high rates of youth unemployment are dangerous for future prosperity, but also little respect of the elderly workforce is fatal for our economy.

Such ideals as equality, freedom of expression, access to education and knowledge are not new. However, in 2015, they still have not become full reality. We have to continue to fight for our freedoms, for open-mindedness and respect. Everyone in Europe should support democracy and a free market economy. Let us join the members of the Youth Council for the Future from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey in their mission with this second European Youth Manifesto. We need to act now to ensure a better future for all of us.

Prof. Dr. Manfred Pohl
Founder and CEO of the Frankfurter Zukunftsrat (future think tank)



Gender equality

Introduction

By Leonor Frade

“What is Gender Equality?” and “What should it be?” were the first questions to pop up in our minds when we started to work on the subject. The answer was clear to all of us. Gender Equality is an issue that should become a non-issue, something so enshrined deep inside our society’s mind that it should not be necessary to have it discussed, just as murder is not discussed as a good or a bad thing.

Therefore, when we were asked to choose three topics to work on, it was clear to all of us that the topics should concern why Gender Equality is still an open issue. We realized then that stereotypes were the main reason there is still inequality between men and women, the role each party is expected to assume in society is too strict to let equality become unquestionable. Following the same reasoning, we realized that gender based violence is an actual and present problem, although most people seem not to be aware of it. It is not as spoken as it would be desirable and there is not as much information about it as there should be. And we were not just talking about physical violence, domestic abuse

and similar forms of violence. These are important issues of course, however, psychological damage resulting of both physical and psychological violence, inflicted both on men and women, was something we were concerned about and the lack of information on the topic concerned us even more. We therefore decided on two of the three topics we would be working on.

For the third topic, we had initially thought of working on the rights of the LGBT+ community, concerning especially those of the transgender community, but this topic had already been chosen by another group. Having already concluded that Gender Equality was a matter of collective mentality, our options to change it in the short run are limited. Still, there are a few gaps in the Law that must be closed and we decided that that should be our third topic: inequalities in the Law and what we could do to help change the situation, hoping that, in turn, it would help change people’s mentality.

And this is how we set our topics of discussion under the Gender Equality theme: Gender roles and stereotypes, Gender-based violence and Gender equality and the law.

Gender roles and stereotypes

In our daily lives

By Carol McGill

Gender roles and stereotypes each shape our lives every single day. In the working world, men are questioned or criticized for choosing careers such as nursing, while women make up less than a quarter of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) workforce. The average woman loses over €385,000 in her lifetime due to the gender pay gap. In a majority of mainstream movies, women hardly feature except as a “love interest” (e.g. nearly 70% of Hollywood speaking parts go to men, but female characters are five times more likely to strip down to underwear). Street harassment (catcalling, being touched without permission, etc.) is the norm for women across the world.

Where do these few quick examples come from? Children are fed gender roles from an incredibly young age. Children’s toys are often just gender roles made of plastic. Girls are given life-size babies to take care of, or dolls that work in hair salons and ride horses



“It is urgent for world leaders to fully understand that gender identity goes beyond male and female to make sure everyone has the same rights”

Madalena Ravara
(17, Lisbon)

– the emphasis is on nurturing qualities, or appearance. Boys’ toys generally have action settings – war, superheroes, pirates, etc. They are geared towards action, power, strength. Children can feel guilt and even shame if they want toys from the “wrong” section of toy shops, as though they are breaking (unwritten) rules. All this seems to echo segregation. But would segregation on any other basis be so blatantly, so willingly enforced?

Blatant or subconscious, all stereotypes have a direct impact on people’s mind-sets after they have grown up. Gender marketing is based on gender roles, but it also reinforces them. It is a vicious cycle: toy cookers being aimed at girls, reiterates the idea that toy cookers ought to be aimed at girls...and, later in life, that a woman’s place is in the kitchen.

The media (especially in advertising) also uses gender roles to perpetuate ideas of feminine and masculine perfection which are unachievable (and whose rigid lines make the world even less accepting towards non-binary people.) Toys help to introduce these dangerous ideals: the average action figure today has

more muscle than the world's largest body builders, and some Barbies are so thin that if they were real, they would not be able to lift their heads. Women are told to shrink and men are taught to impose, and this can lead to low self-worth and self-shame, which can then lead to serious mental and eating disorders.

In conclusion, we believe the main danger of gender roles and stereotypes is that they are so ingrained, so subtle and so often subconscious – many people do not even realize they exist. Therefore, awareness is vital. We want information regarding them to be widespread and accessible, by promoting resources (e.g. websites) and encouraging discussion (e.g. with a conference or event).



Disposables of the world unite! Women vs Sex Inc., Men vs Death Inc.

By Bogomil Gospodinov

For once I would like to live in a city where one can find a cenotaph erected in honour of all the prostitutes who ever fought the war against society's sexual repression and deviation; a city with red-light districts full of helpless soldiers whom you can pay to stay with for the night and listen to their stories of loneliness and ostracism. You see, all the traffic signs agree – a city like this is very distant at least in this space-time continuum. But do not worry, I can bring you there. Just answer a couple of questions and I will meet you inside.

What is the name of the garbage man who collected your trash for the last ten years? What was his favourite bar and what drinks would he order on a Friday night? What was the dream holiday of the girl in that cranky video you masturbated to a while ago? Would she rather read a novel or play the guitar? What was the real reason your neighbour enlisted in the army? Was Afghanistan his ultimate spiritual trip? Why did he kill himself when he was blessed with God's grace to survive what he survived? What about the cheap hooker your mates were bragging about last year? No, not that one, the other one. I hope they are both fine and dandy. What happened to the father of your high school girlfriend (a beautiful gal with glossy flowing hair) who used to work in a coal mine and one day suddenly turned into a bald pale skeleton? Do we care? On the other hand what is the serial number of the iPhone you received as a birthday present 5 years ago? And the barcode

of the pack of cigarettes you bought today? What kind of battery charger did your old laptop fit? What happened to your first car after you sold it to that skanky London lad? Is the car still okay? But do we really care?

I am afraid this fantasy city of ours is getting more and more out of reach. It does not really matter who these people are just as it does not matter what these devices were as long as the job gets done. The disposables of the world are not only to find in grocery stores – the most efficient and economically viable products do not come up in the packaging we would expect. Women and men in the millions are exploited anonymously every day on tape, on the wire, on your screen, on the streets of L.A. and the battlefields of Baghdad.

Society has been trying to tame women's sexuality for millennia either by making them invisible by setting unrealistic standards of beauty and behaviour or by turning them into queens of kingdoms that are not worth ruling. The sad and unsurprising news is that a whole century after technology made it realistic for women to have a liberation movement, the status quo is better just for a fistful of very educated, very liberal ladies while the majority of people of the lower classes in the developed countries as well as hundreds of millions of people in the developing countries have never been exposed to any feminist philosophy whatsoever. It seems to me that while the works of Western Feminism improved the well-being of a certain social strata significantly in the last 50 years or so, the people in most desperate need of equality are completely ignored and sent to damnation.

Virtually all prostitution and pornography worldwide is done by women who have barely if ever heard of

the suffragettes or Simone de Beauvoir.

The people experiencing the most brutal and alarming physical abuse in the face of genital mutilation, rape and beating are hardly what the electoral base of contemporary feminism seems to be – upper-middle class white Western women (and men). Note that this was not true of the same movement in the 1920s. Precisely because the bulk of society is not seriously part of the conversation, objectifying women seems to aggravate these days as the movies in the box-office revolve around hypermasculinity, primordial aggression and feminine submissiveness and, gosh, nowadays mainstream porn is like a congregation of inflated plastic mannequins who decided that working in a clothing store is not heartless enough for them.

Men on the other hand are the usual suspects to blame for the monstrosities of patriarchy. And this by and large holds in my opinion. However while the average man's terrible ignorance is one of the pillars keeping patriarchy on its feet, it is not simply a gender war that is going on here. It is also class warfare. It is mainly the W.A.S.P. culture supported both by its elitist males and females that makes this system look like an idyll. While the oppressiveness of men towards women has been widely discussed (and so far truthfully), embarking upon a gender war in which intelligent and open-minded men are isolated from the discussion is exactly what the elitists of this world wish for before Christmas. While women are both victims of their role in society and their male counterparts, men are also victims of social conditioning. Nearly all soldiers who died in wars are young boys, majority of miners, firefighters, policemen and every other deadly and navy profession are also predominantly men. Suicide rates amongst men are frighteningly higher. As Warren Farrell writes: if any other single group (the examples he lists are Jews, Afri-

can-Americans, and women) were selected based on their birth characteristics to be the only group required by law to register for potential death, we would call it anti-Semitism, racism or genocidal sexism. He also adds that societies have generally socialized boys and men to define power as „feeling obligated to earn money someone else spends while we die sooner.“, but obligation is hardly the power anyone wants to have. All in all, while I do not want to be an



advocate of shifting attention to male social problems, I believe it is a reasonable topic, which gender equality proponents should take into account not only because it is the ethical thing to do, but because it will multiply the auditory for female-centred problems and will increase their influence on society in the long run.

It is important to be noted that most of us as individuals are considered disposable and exploitable by our society. Of course this is not to say that we are equal in our tragedy. These days when children are considered a wishful

and expensive asset and war is becoming more and more mechanized, women are risking less and less their lives in childbirth and men are not as endangered by war and violence as before. In the years to come, we will come closer to each other in what we are disposable for and I hope male and female problems will be discussed as human problems instead. I hope that the great charade of society summed up by Farrell as “men’s weakness is their facade of strength; women’s strength is their facade of weakness” will come to an end in my lifetime.

I do not agree that “men are from Mars and women are from Venus”. In the end of the day, we, the proletarians, have to remember that all of us are disposable together - here on Earth. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. We have an Earth to win.

Gender roles and stereotypes in school books

by Sandra Eriksson

In a year from now I will leave 12 years of compulsory and secondary school behind me. After my graduation I will hopefully be starting my further education at a University. I am a very lucky girl that is given the opportunity to continue my studies at higher level of education. It was not too long ago women were first allowed to attend universities in Sweden. Since given the key to knowledge, we have taken this opportunity pretty seriously. Year 2013, 60% of those who applied to universities in Sweden were women. Swedish women are in general more, and to a higher level, educated than Swedish men. We are doctors, teachers, professors and scientists.

Soon leaving school, I cannot help but to feel certain sadness over the fact that our schools keep mediating a picture of the world from a male perspective. During my almost 12 years in school, book after book has been read; we have studied everything from English literature to historical wars and world politics. We have (most often) tried our hardest to inculcate all those historical epochs and political ideologies, and with that meaning all of the great names of history, to our minds the days (or day) before our exams. Aristotle, Julius Caesar, Martin Luther, Napoleon Bonaparte, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx.

“Men are obviously smarter than women, just look at history; it is men who are always referred to”

A classmate with an old fashion view of the genders opened my eyes to how the school substantiated the theory of the two sexes,

the strong sex and the weaker sex. By curiosity, I went through my social science book, and found out that there was nothing written about feminism. Nor were it possible to find "gender equality" in the book. In my Swedish and English classes all of the writers I have read in school have been male. When we learned about the suffragettes in my history class, we got our material on loose papers. Our history book did not cover that subject.

Women have since the first communities in Mesopotamia been disadvantaged. In history, women often had to take the role of reclusive housewife while her husband has been given freedom and responsibility in society. It is therefore perhaps not too surprising that our history is mainly created by men.

But explaining the lack of women and a female perspective in our syllabus is to simplify the issue. **There are a lot of women whose stories deserve to be told. Women, who despite their sex took place in a world coloured by patriarchal structures**, some of them are well known: Cleopatra, Jeanne d'Arc, Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher. Many of them do unfortunately not get the recognition they deserve; how many boys and girls in our school knows that Murasaki Shikibu is believed to have written the first novel in history? That Vigdís Finnbogadóttir actually was the first woman in the world to be elected President in a national election?

In 2010, the Swedish Ministry of Education published an official report on stereotypes and gender equality in Swedish history books. The conclusion was quite depressing; the four books in the study, four of the most frequently used in primary and secondary

schools, showed all a lack of a female perspective of history. The books suited for secondary pupils dedicated only 13-14 pages each to women's history. These books had a page number of over 350 pages. A remarkable difference between the number of men and women mentioned in the books were also observed. Three of the books were considered to have an aged view on the genders, and in fact, sexist. The final conclusion was that the books spread a picture of the genders that were not appropriate for neither boys nor girls.

The experience of an unequal education is something I share with many others, and it is also an experience that is supported by the Swedish government's public inquiries. Being aware of women's inferior status throughout Europe leads me to hope that this is a prob-

lem we can solve together. **Let's make Europe a pioneer in the issue of equal education. I am looking for awareness in the question of gender equality from school book writers, teachers and politicians.**

That the writers are actively working to include more influential women and a general female perspective in our school books. That teachers consciously are working to give an authentic and fair view of our society and gender equality. And to give teachers and schoolbook writers the opportunity to deepen their knowledge, I finally hope that politicians will take their responsibility in making our schools and education more equal. To give more space for women and a female perspective in our syllabuses, demand for

more consciously written schoolbooks where both gender perspectives are told, and do quality checks on them. Maybe a certification on our school books could help with this. And finally, better education in gender equality for teachers. After all, the issue with gender stereotypes can only be solved by one thing: more knowledge.

Some people are claiming that a more equal education would



be falsification of history. It is simply not. To only give a male perspective of the history on the other hand, is. **To fight gender stereotypes and create an equal society, we have to open our eyes for both of the genders' history and reality.**

The root of the problem

By Madalena Ravara

According to the dictionary, stereotypes are widely held but fixed and oversimplified ideas of a particular type of person or thing. They endanger society once they rarely communicate accurate information about others. As far as gender is concerned, they mislead us to make simplistic generalizations about one's attributes, differences and roles as individuals or groups.

While subtle and well-accepted, stereotypes have a major impact not only on social stratification but also in the role embraced by men and women. We classify gender roles as the way people act, what they do or say to express being women or men. They limit us once they determine how we should think, speak, dress and interact within the context of society.

So why do we give in to these bias and judgments that tend to shape and force us to be fabricated puppets?

To answer this question we have to go through the recorded history and realise there is a certain pattern on women's and men's behaviour within the family, at the workplace and in social environments. Traditionally, women are expected to get married, have children and take care of house-related matters while men should be the family's financial provider and therefore career-focused. Although there have been significant improvements, women still take back seat positions in society and men continue to have more social power and status.

All the gender stereotypes mentioned are, most of the times, passed along from one

generation to the next which results in the emergence of a series of norms and behaviours based upon each sex. To understand this, several studies have showed that children learn gender roles from an early age (2-5), being influenced by their parents, teachers, peers and the media. Furthermore they will most likely choose to play with "gender appropriate" toys even when cross-gender toys are available. So, here is the second question: are we letting our children develop freely or do we want them to fit in even though that may mean they lose their real selves?

More than realising this is a great issue, actions should be taken to reverse stereotyped thinking. For instance, parents and adults in general must be educated in a more open-minded and understanding view on the subject. Moreover, to get to the root of the problem kindergartens and primary schools must have appropriated programmes concerning the empowerment of the children's full potential, either more masculine or feminine.

In more practical ways, parents should vary their responsibilities, making sure their children know it is okay for men to do house-keeping and cook and for women to fix and build things.

Romantic Love

By Carla Urbano Valero

What girl has not dreamed of fairy tales? Who has not expected to find her prince charming? Attentive, protective, strong, brave, who rescues us in the worst situations...



It is in the most subtle details for us the real cause of gender inequality. The stereotypes we have so ingrained in us make these differences become more pronounced and to remain.

One of these cases that are in our day to day life and that we take for granted is romantic love. Since childhood in Western culture we have accepted stereotypes of this kind of relationship that we see in movies, in books... we have come to even wish with all our heart. But something considered as idyllic as romanticism leads in many cases to particular

stereotypes which can lead to domestic violence and we do not dare to fight.

We let ourselves go by the idea that it should be the man who takes the initiative and the woman the one that must wait and never vice versa. Man must be the one buying you roses and paying for dinner, because, after all, they are the breadwinner? It is nice to be jealous because... this shows they are really in love with you? So, he is jealous because he loves me? And then that justifies that... he controls me? That I cannot talk to other guys?

The fact that, in romantic love, the man is the head of the relationship, makes it unfeasible to consider women at the same level of man, when in fact, we should not even ask ourselves if this is true or not.

But bringing this to an end does not mean we should put aside the nice gestures or pamper the other person... but to be aware of the situations and not let these inequalities occur.

We, as citizens, have to start thinking, since we have the privilege to be free and live in a Europe that allows us to have our own ideas and ways of acting. We have to stop looking for a prince to serve and look for a person who respects us and considers us equal to him/her, since, after all, we are all the same.

We are all human beings, no matter our gender, race or religion and we have the right to be treated equally and we have no obligation to follow any settled stereotypes or to feel tied to a certain role.

"The Law is a set of rules that establish how people should behave in society. We believe that by making sure both genders are equal in law, people will be forced to face Gender Equality as a right, as something unquestionable, and that is what we believe should happen." Leonor Frade (16, Lisbon)



Gender and law

The quota system

By Leonor Frade

The quota systems in administration boards, as a way of implementing gender equality, have been particularly discussed. For the last few decades, women have been fighting to find a way of having the same opportunities as men always had. The easiest way of making sure some women accede to power was by imposing quotas on administration boards. So, the easiest solution was adopted. This means that for an x number of men, in a certain company managing board, there must be a certain number of women, usually a percentage. For example, in an administration board with ten seats, four must be held by women. Nonetheless, I have come to the conclusion that quotas themselves are, in a way, contrary to gender equality. If men and women, as radical feminists defend, are equal in every way, does that mean that they should always be treated the same way? Regardless of the concrete circumstances? Or, in other words, should equality in gender be treated as an absolute right, with no exceptions?

One of the main domains where gender equality is a recurrent issue is equality in the work place. When addressing such equality, it is mandatory to speak of equality of opportunities, another one of the major principles/objectives in a society that we want to be as fair and just as possible. Maybe not everywhere in the world, but at least in Europe, we can be proud to say that both men and women have equal access to school, university and the world of employment. Women can, just as men, become whoever they dream of becoming, whether that is a doctor, a lawyer, a mechanic or a housewife.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that there are more men in power positions than women. That is undeniable. However, I believe that **it is a woman's job, just as it is a man's job, to prove themselves better than everybody else.** It is our job as people (men or women) to prove ourselves better. To prove that we deserve that job, up to us to do

well in that job interview, men or women alike. That is true equality.

Quotas in administration boards mean that people are not chosen for their worth, for their accomplishments, their goals. They are chosen based on their gender. Six men and four women will be chosen. Not ten people will. If one wants to be successful, one must work for it.

With a quota system, in the end, we are artificially crea-

Official gender recognition of transgender people

By Feargha Clear Keena

In 1992, the European Court of Human Rights recognized for the first time that not allowing transgender people to change their gender on their official documents was a violation of the Convention of Human Rights. However, today, over 20 years later, many transgender people are still denied this right.

Put simply, a transgender person is someone whose gender identity (the gender that they feel they are) is different to the gender that they were assigned at birth, the one that corresponds to their physical sex. In many cases, this is a woman growing up in a "man's body" and being raised as male, or a man growing up in a "woman's body", being raised as female. There are also people who feel they do not fit into the traditional gender binary of male and female, who fall in the middle

ting an equality – that does not exist in reality, based on merit and competence, as it should – but exists only on paper. Gender Equality cannot be imposed by decree. It has to exist naturally. It has to be taught and learned, thought and discussed, felt and applied. To the point where it becomes a non-issue!

on the spectrum of male and female or off this spectrum entirely. According to some of these estimates, there may be about 30,000 transsexual people (people who have gone through medical procedures to align their physical sex with their gender identity) in the European Union.

However, those estimates fail to take into account all transgender people who do not undergo medical transition. Other estimates, conducted more recently using medical data and gender identity related questions, say that there is approximately 1.5 million people in the EU who do not fully identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth. And while we are finally beginning to educate ourselves on transgender and non-binary identities, in most cases the law does not reflect this progress.

According to an index made by TGEU (Transgender Europe), some countries will change the gender on one's official documents on several conditions: the person must be diagnosed with a mental disorder; they must agree to go through medical procedures like

Gender equality

hormone treatment and surgery; they must be of a certain age; they must be sterilized; and they must be single. However there are many more countries that won't legally recognize one's gender at all.

In conclusion we believe **transgender people should be able to get legal gender recognition through procedures that are efficient, accessible and work around their own perceptions of gender identity.** States must ensure that transgender, including non-binary people can get legal gender recognition, and without the current invasive conditions. It is not the job of the state to dictate what someone does with their body in accordance to their gender identity, but to facilitate, support, and recognize them, so that the individual can be seen by the state the way they see themselves, the way that they are.



"Although I think we have progressed a lot in past decades, gender-based violence remains a problem in Europe. On the other hand new platforms, such as the Internet, raised where gender based discrimination is widely spread. It is unacceptable that violence is encouraged or legitimized by gender or gender identity. In order to become a more tolerant and diverse society we still need sensitization towards this issue." Jeannie Schneider (18, Zurich)

Gender-based violence

A closer look

By Alessandra Maffettone

The accepted definition of gender-based violence (GBV) is the following: "any form of violence directed against a person due to their gender, gender identity or expression of that identity, potentially resulting in physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm as well as financial loss". Although GBV is used mostly to identify violence against women, a minority of men are also subject to this kind of violence.

Gender-based violence includes all sorts of violence such as violence in close relationships, sexual violence, human trafficking, slavery, and other harmful practices, including forced marriages, female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes.

These types of crimes result in a global violation of human rights, including the fundamental right to life, liberty, security and dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical and mental

integrity. Unfortunately these violations are widely spread, affecting all levels of society, regardless of distinctions based on age, level of education, social position or country of origin.

In order to understand the issue, we have to start from the major causes, which are unequal gender relations and lack of respect for human rights, disruption of social structures, cultural tolerance for practices that justify men's physical aggression, as well as alcohol and drug abuse.

Gender-based violence is also evolving in different forms, for instance violence against women, which takes place in homes or on streets, is now occurring in online spaces whereby women become targets

of cyber-stalking or digital voyeurism.

Often women's images are being displayed on the internet without their knowledge or consent and, in the hands of domestic violence abusers. Spyware and GPS are also being used to track and control women's mobility. New types of actions are necessary to prevent these crimes from spreading, but the online types of violence are even harder to track.

Before 2012, projects that addressed GBV were typically subcomponents within larger projects, small-scale, or primarily financed by trust funds, but since 2012, the number of investments is rising and an increasing numbers of projects have a GBV focus.

What many people ignore are the consequences that these crimes involve, including costs, which are of three main types: lost economic output; personal impact (physical and emotional) on victim; and provision of services (further divided by category of service). To give an example, the cost for the UK alone of gender-based violence against women is higher than €28 billion per year. Measuring the costs of violence demonstrates how violence drains resources from many affected groups, not just the perpetrators and victims, but also presents significant costs to businesses and the private sector, all levels of government, and civil society. The costs have become too high to ignore.

This reason, amongst others, also justifies the importance of prevention, but many of the interventions rely on access to the internet or are designed for smartphones, which are not necessarily widespread. For example, there are different choices of safety applications, such as FightBack and StreetSafe, that incorporate functions such as panic buttons and alerts to notify friends and emergency services when someone is being attacked or ab-

used, but the main issue is the lack of access to smartphones, for example low smartphone penetration is higher in low and middle-income countries, at 22% globally, 19% in India (2013), and only 4% (2012) in sub-Saharan Africa. This is a major problem that limits the effectiveness of these measures. It seems that many mobile apps are not being developed with the end user in mind; the technology may not be user-friendly (for instance, using SMS messaging for a primarily illiterate audience) or the content and mode of delivery do not address users' experience or realities.

Actions are necessary on an international but also national and local level. It is fundamental not only to increase the prevention plans, but also the plans to tackle these crimes once committed. A global strategy backed up by a directive would give the concept of violence against women a common definition and facilitate its regulation, and would be reflected in all national legislation, resulting in similar levels of protection from all forms of violence being afforded to women and young girls across the EU.

Gender-based violence should be included in transnational crimes and prevented as such. To tackle GBV it is fundamental to start from education and women's empowerment including economic empowerment, voices against violence are a strong tool to prevent the crimes from happening.

At a local level it is necessary to challenge stereotypes, behaviour and attitudinal change among boys and men is an important step to solve the gender inequality problem, one of the main causes behind GBV. A common definition of GBV would definitely facilitate a common policy framework.

Awareness-raising campaigns and education programmes that involve as many young people as possible are the first step for in-

creasing knowledge about these crimes.

Furthermore, all EU member states should sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, as it is the most far-reaching legal instrument for preventing and combating gender violence.



Regarding the fast pace at which these crimes evolve, it is important to increase access to technology and internet, but at the same time provide control to prevent these crimes from spreading online. Another important aspect revolves around the mobile technology industry, which should be encouraged maybe through state aid to serve resource-poor women and to promote solutions to women's barriers to usage, but unfortunately it is reported that over 300 million women are missing out on the benefits of mobile phone access.

Regarding forced marriages specifically, a legal framework should be introduced in order to prevent or at least protect minors from being forced into marriage at a young age. For example in Italy the civil law does not allow marriage for people under 18, unless there are specific conditions. Concerning response interventions, the system should be implemented and more efficient.

The costs for social services related to victims of gender-based violence are very high, but certainly necessary. The response interventions include psycho-social care, community-based healthcare, psychosocial counselling as well as legal assistance and counselling, but what Europe is missing is an information system to have a real knowledge of the crime's dimensions. In order to achieve this, a European monitoring centre should be created.

In conclusion ending GBV is everyone's responsibility.

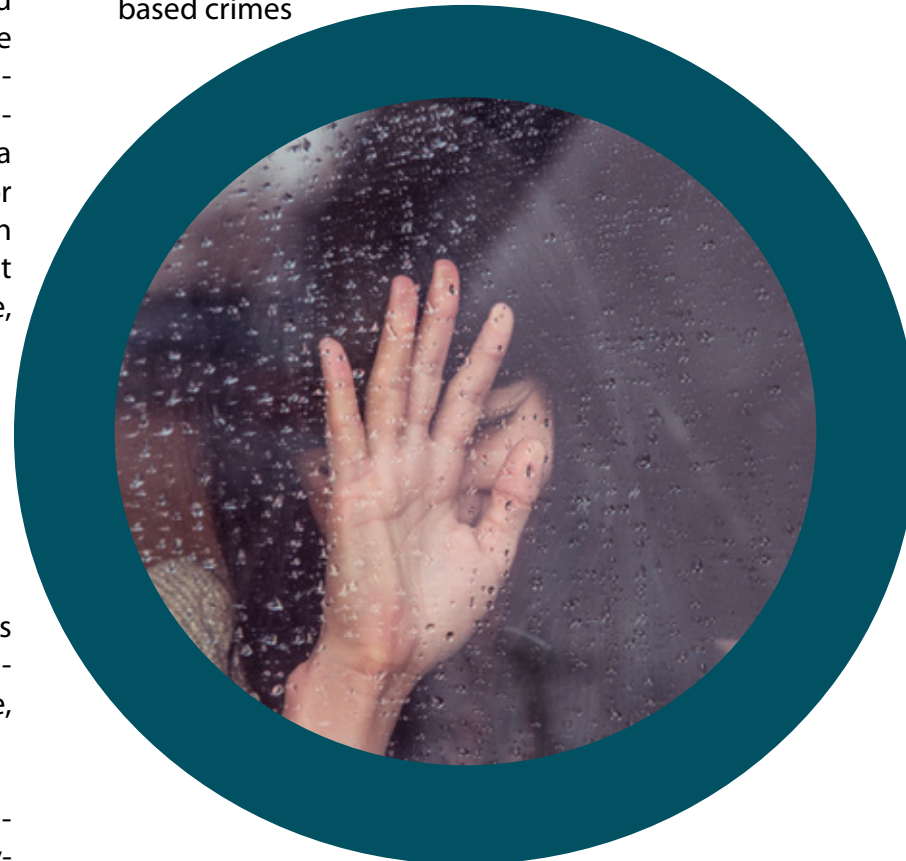
Gender-based violence in Europe

By Jeannie Schneider

Gender-based violence occurs all over Europe. Europe has diverse cultures and the continent considers itself to be one of the most progressive. Nevertheless the gender-based violence issue is not nearly solved. Violence in and of itself is something to be condemned harshly. But violence that is encouraged or legitimized because the victim has a certain gender or gender identity is a major problem for an emancipated society, which Europe considers itself to be. Furthermore it is a widely spread phenomenon in Europe, for example **45% to 55% of the women from the age of 15 who live in the EU have already experienced sexual harassment.** Even if several countries have launched campaigns in order to educate their citizens on gender-based violence, the need for action is urgent.

The scope of gender-based violence in Europe is big; it reaches from physical and psychological to sexual violence. It reaches from catcalls to forced marriage and rape. Handling this problem is really difficult, since for example sexual harassment is overall a cultural problem and genital mutilation confines itself to a few minorities. Therefore the political reactions differ from culture to culture. In some member states domestic violence is still considered a private matter, which is rarely shared with friends and colleagues and much less reported to the authorities. In general, a high number of women have already been victim of sexual harassment. The high-

est prevalence rates range from 71% - 81% in Sweden, Denmark and France. Furthermore when men happen to be victims of domestic violence or harassment, society stigmatizes them as weak. The LGBT+ community suffers from bullying or sometimes hostility. But to date the collected data on this issue is insufficient and a proper comparison is therefore impossible. One main problem is that the perpetrator is often not reported. Many gender-based crimes



happen within intimate relationships or familial bonds hence the victim hesitates to register the violation fearing the possible consequences. Secondly blaming the victim is still an attitude spread in Europe. Even if statements such as "her skirt was too short, she was asking for it" get less frequent they remain a considerable hurdle for every victim. While blaming the victim is more often applied to female victims, men suffer from other social pressures. In some European countries sexual harassment is de facto not acknowledged if a man is the

victim. The acceptance towards gender-based crimes is progressing only slowly. For example, the different levels of acknowledgement of sexual harassment in national legislation and its prioritization in specific policies and political debates might be reflected in women's overall level of awareness of sexual harassment as a fundamental rights abuse. Crimes, which sight a specific group of persons because of their sex, are mainly due to the lack of equality of the different sexes. It is unacceptable that a wide spread public opinion forbids men to be victim of domestic violence just because its narrow view considers them always stronger than women are. Furthermore, it is unacceptable that sexual offences towards women are legitimized because of their clothes. Gender equality is about equal respect and once this respect is achieved one will no longer reduce someone to their body. Gender-based violence would not be such a major issue if equalization advanced further.

A historical and cultural perspective on gender-based violence

By Fredrik Lorentzon

Gender-based violence is one of the most common violations of human rights in the world. It occurs in every culture of the world and historically, it has often been ignored. In order to reduce gender related violations, it is necessary to learn from the mistakes we have done throughout history and to integrate minorities into society.

In the meantime two steps must be regarded in general. **First of all gender-based violence must be considered a crime and not a trivial offence.** Victims must be encouraged to report the violations and not be stigmatized by society. All reports must be collected in sex-disaggregated databases, which each country has to record. Only by knowing which crimes are the most numerous can the government react properly. Then the EU and the member states can focus on the particular issue and launch awareness campaigns. Once again education is the key to minimize those crimes. Neither women and men nor transsexual nor queer people should be offended just because of their gender identities. This change of mind will only gain ground by education and public campaigns but it is both practicable and necessary in order to build more a tolerant European society.

The history of gender-based violence is dark. For example, domestic violence has for long been rejected as private matters and globally, the problem did not receive much attention before the 1970s. Rape has for long been considered taboo and many victims have not had the courage to report what they have been subjected to. The first time human trafficking was internationally fought on a high level was in 1904 when the International Agreement for the Suppression of „White Slave Traffic“ was signed. However, **what is mutual for all the gender-based violence issues, regardless of historical period or cultural**

differences, is the intention: to construct or sustain fear, and therefore power.

In most cases, it is men who try to diminish women but there are situations when it is the other way around.

In times of conflicts and wars, gender-based violence often has a central role. The purpose with that sort of psychological warfare is mainly to destroy the morale of the civilians in enemy territories. One of the most common gender-related warfare methods is sexual harassments, such as rape. This method is frequently used in conflicts all over the world. In Europe, some examples are the Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars. In the Second World War, both the Axis Powers and the Allied Powers used rape in their warfare. In the Yugoslav Wars, rapes were even more recognized. During the ten years the wars lasted, it is roughly estimated that between 12,000 and 50,000 women were raped. Apart from the horrible fact that those crimes are committed, many people see the rapes and gender-based violations as something unavoidable during conflicts. This is a common misconception that leads to a normalization of violence against civilians. In times of peace, the sexual harassments have to be discussed and condemned as much as the military harassments.

We have to teach people that rape is as horrible in times of peace as in times of war.

Of course there are also silver linings in the history of gender-based violence, especially in the last century. An important milestone was when UN's Universal Declarations of Human Rights was signed in 1948. The article which is considered to be most related to violence is article 5. It says as follows: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhu-

man or degrading treatment or punishment." According to article 2, the promises of the declaration apply to everyone, regardless of factors such as gender. Though the document is not a treaty, it was adopted for the purpose of defining the meaning of the vague term "human rights". Since the declaration was signed it has been used as a tool for states to put morale pressure on other states which fail to follow the articles. In order to get rid of the gender-based violence it is important to use this tool and to put pressure on nations which do not fight against gender inequality.

There are not just historical differences in gender-based violence, there are cultural ones as well. Europe has many examples of minorities where gender-based violence, such as honour crimes and genital mutilation, is a part of the culture. However, there is a danger to give culture the entire responsibility since it always takes an individual perpetrator to commit the crime. According to Moira Dustin's report *Gender equality, cultural diversity: European comparisons and lessons*, there is little evidence of whether cultures or religions are to blame for gender inequality. Dustin also states another problem: that media often highlight extraordinary cases of cultural violence, such as for example honour crimes. The exploration of specific cases can condemn an entire community, for example the Muslim community. This can create a vicious circle, where the minority does not get integrated in the society and they maintain their illegal habits, since no other option is available. In order to overcome the cultural problems with gender-based violence, it is crucial to integrate minorities into the society. Furthermore, it is important to stress that entire cultures should not be blamed for the work of individuals. To achieve this, media have to balance their news reports to make it clear for the media consumer that it is not the entire culture that is rotten; it is the act of a single perpetrator.

E ducation

Introduction

By Simona Mihalca

Beyond our age, our gender, our nationality, the one thing that defines who we are, that makes it possible for us to be a valuable part of society, to be integrated and respected is our education. It is the best way to know the world, to know yourself and others. **Still, learning is a process that should continue life-long, a process that includes many parts and many forms.** Bear in mind that we are talking about a European process here, which makes it even more entangled and complicated. While we cannot yet reach an universal solution for "traditional" education, there are so many more things out there that comprise your education, that help you grow as a person and prepare you for the world.

That being said, we have decided upon three topics derived from the education cupola:

"Volunteer work and non-formal education", "Homework and normativity" and "School identity". These are concepts we stand by, that are intertwined with any educational system, the gears that must keep spinning for everything to work. In order to have the most comprehensive education, we must look in all places, in every-day life, in organisations that will give us more experience than school could ever do, we must turn to the core of said school and realise what makes it good, what its values are and how we can apply it and we must find a balance between requirements and voluntary involvement. **Keep an open mind, go out there and get educated and remember that normal is not always the norm.**



“The more we learn, the more we understand how much we still have to learn. We strive to expand our horizons and it is our definite belief that the greatest way to do that is by adhering to the concepts of volunteer work and non-formal education. There is never going to be a better suited teacher for yourself than yourself. Let us tell you our thoughts, our experiences and if you are not convinced, we’re sure that MEP Sabine Verheyen’s words will have a great impact on you.” Simona Mihalca (21, Bucharest)

Volunteer work and non-formal education

By Simona Mihalca, Paulina Lewitsch, Vytautas Žarskus and Morris Wolf

“We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.” - Winston Churchill

There is no greater thing in life than having a purpose, having a cause you believe in with all your heart. When you are able to give your all, to work with the utmost passion and fight whatever may come and only wish to be making a difference, it is then that you have made something of your life. What better way to be everything you could ever be, to make you as a person, to shape your views, your character and to allow you to shape the world around you than volunteer work?

There is no doubt that volunteer work can be a great factor in the development of both society and the individual person. While supporting organisations and their causes, cultural activities or any kind of endeavour one strives for in one’s free time, we are building

our character, enhancing our skills, gathering precious experience and building virtual bridges around us. It brings people together while creating a better society. It is both rewarding and necessary.

We had the opportunity to interview Sabine Verheyen, a member of the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education and a great believer in the positive impact of volunteer work. She believes that “volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community but also has many benefits for the volunteers. Volunteering is ultimately about helping others and having an impact on people’s well-being. Thus, it is a great way to connect with your community and give a little back. As a volunteer, you certainly return to society some of the benefits that society gives you.”

As far as the skills and experiences one gathers through such activities, she noted that “volunteering is also the perfect vehicle to develop new skills, to connect with a com-

munity and broaden the network. By meeting a diverse range of people, communication and interpersonal skills will be enhanced and one gets life experience and inspiration. [...] Volunteering can boost career options and credibility and could give an edge when it comes to finding a new job. Also, if one is thinking of a career change then volunteering is a perfect way to explore new fields, to expand the work portfolio and to gain a real insight into a chosen path.”

Sabine Verheyen believes that “volunteering is a very rich and useful experience and a chance for intercultural enrichment. This engagement, in all areas of social life, is also an expression of active citizenship and therefore essential for the development of the values of democracy and solidarity as well as of European identity.”

We strongly believe that non-formal education can educate people in a way that no school or university is able to. When we asked Sabine Verheyen about what she understands by non-formal education she notes that “non-formal education is any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system. Usually it is flexible, learner-centered, contextualized and uses a participatory approach. Non-formal education and learning have again and again proven to be effective in helping people to find approaches and solutions to overcome disadvantage they possibly experience and to become active and constructive contributors to the development of their communities and society as a whole. Furthermore, the development of non-formal learning opportunities can be seen as a measure to tackle the problem of early school leaving in European

countries. Through non-formal education people with very different interests and background get a chance to meet and talk with each other. These are good meetings where people get time to reflect and share views, which is immensely important for democracy.”

It is important to always remember how hugely rewarding volunteering can be: “The most important skills one should look to develop through volunteering or non-formal education are,” according to Sabine Verheyen, “leadership skills, such as planning projects, managing time, motivating individuals, giving feedback and building teams. These skills, often termed ‘soft skills’, are considered to be very important for successful business leaders.”

“While working side by side with others from very diverse backgrounds, you will develop interpersonal skills. In a professional workplace, the ability to interact with others is important to advancement. Through volunteering, you learn how to handle not only different types of people but also different situations. You will learn the value of diversity, strong communication, mutual respect, shared planning, cooperation and working towards common goals.

Volunteers learn to plan effective meetings, organize events and coordinate other volunteers. Through planning an event, you learn how to set goals, define actions and track results. These planning and organization skills are transferrable through all career paths.

Also, communication skills will be improved. Clear, concise and organized communications are essential to almost all professional positions. Volunteer activities typically require you to communicate what you are doing and to persuade others to assist in your cause. Through practice, your communication skills will improve.

Furthermore, volunteering requires that you learn how to juggle your work, family and volunteer priorities. In order to maintain a reasonable balance, you learn how to manage your time.

Volunteering also allows you to grow your professional and personal network.

It is a very social activity that allows you to interact with and meet many new people. You will establish contacts and make friends who can introduce you to job leads, or provide recommendations for future employers. You will meet not only individuals sharing a common passion for an activity or cause but also individuals from very diverse backgrounds. Last but not least volunteering is about „giving back“ to others or a community some of the benefits you have received from society. This engagement, in all areas of social life, is also an expression of active citizenship and therefore essential for the development of the values of democracy and solidarity as well as of European identity.“

However, there could be more commitment to these pursuits. As we see it, there are two main issues whereby the present situation can be explained: appeal and availability.

Appeal, as we think that volunteer work should be esteemed in a way which lives up to the importance of it in our society. An action becomes a lot more satisfying if you see that it is valued. As the 'normal' everyday activity is already so occupying and time consuming, there is a certain inhibition level to do some extra commitment. Therefore, people who are willing to do this should be rewarded, not with money but with different benefits.

Regarding availability, we believe that most people do not know where it is possible to do volunteer work or where their help is really needed. It should be easier both for non-profit organizations that need volunteer workers

and for the workers to be found.

Due to the very urgent problems of unemployment, it would be a very attractive incentive if volunteer work gave better chances to get a job.

Another issue that doubtlessly impedes many people to volunteer is the lack of time.

Therefore we think:



- **Volunteer work should count as work experience throughout Europe.**

In addition to this elementary necessity, the familiarization with volunteer work can start already at school.

A small avail could give the required impetus to commit oneself to a good cause. The very same applies to universities and their students.

- **A platform should be created so that**

volunteer work counts as extra credits in schools and universities.

And if someone has acquired a liking for volunteer work, it should be possible to pursue this passion also after the first steps into working life. Nevertheless, there appears the same problem: the lack of time.

Concerning this call for action, Sabine Verheyen believes, "This is an interesting approach since credits might enhance the motivation for participation and, at the same time, acknowledge the extra efforts. Still, what needs to be considered is: credits should always be connected to activities with an academic relevance, to clearly defined learning outcomes and criteria for assessment. Also they should be limited and meet certain, pre-defined standards in order to make them comparable to other attainments. Such credits could be accrued for example to research-based or curriculum-related work undertaken in vacations (like structured internships) or for approved extra-curricular courses (run for example by Humanities or the Business School) during term time."

- **We would like to see a programme implemented that gives incentives to employers to urge their employees to be volunteers.**

This could happen either through a stricter social responsibility policy or by giving a very small number of days yearly for volunteer work that would be paid but for which there would be no taxes. We think that even if the volunteers only work for a few days a year it would give them, like aforementioned, many benefits.

- **Employers or the state should create a platform e.g. a website, where employees and employers for volunteer work can find together easily.**

This would minimize the problem about availability and it would be a lot easier for everybody to do volunteer work, if it is easier to find it, because nowadays work and worker often do not necessarily converge.

To conclude, **we would like to revisit our motto and invite you to make a life, to reach out for your full potential, to believe and to create the world you want to see, to educate yourself and others. Find what you love and work for it, volunteer for it!**



@FKPH

Interview with MEP Sabine Verheyen

By Simona Mihalca

1. Let us get really into the subject. What would you say are the most worrying problems of the European educational system?

The EU has only very limited competences in the area of education policy. In the educational sector, the European Union institutions only play a supporting role. The EU is contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States, by promoting the mobility of citizens, designing joint study programmes, establishing networks and exchanging best practices as well as information the European Union.

In most Member States, education and training are facing a difficult situation (missing plans for structural reforms, insufficient financing, etc.) at the moment. Even at EU-level, the importance given to education and training is not really reflected in the budget priorities of the Union. Nevertheless, for the period of 2014-2020 a budget of 14.8 billion has been assigned to the programme Erasmus+. The budget was significantly increased compared to the previous programme period of 2007-2013.

The Commission's task will be to make sure that these funds have real impact on the education and training systems in Europe. However, this is only possible with the help of the Member States that have to design a strategy for education with clear, concrete and measurable targets, milestones for each educational level and age-group as well as specific time-frames for implementation with tools for monitoring progress.

Also other challenges such as demographic changes, new forces in the global competition and sustainable development do affect the educational systems and need to be considered. Europe has to deal with extremely high youth unemployment, a new age structure, a reduction in the working age population and a higher share of people at retirement age. To overcome the social and econo-

mic consequences of these evolutions is a key challenge for European politics and not least for the educational systems.

Personally, I am committed to the German dual training system and believe it is a recipe of success. Dual training can surely contribute to tackle youth unemployment, to counteract skills shortage and is essential for the technical and handicraft positions as well as for Europe's future. Further, I believe that Master craftsman training contributes to the stability of the European labour market. That Germany has the lowest unemployment rate among young people (only 8%) is due to these systems.

2. If you could instantly change education laws and platforms across Europe, what would you do first?

The most urgent task for the coming years would be to close the gap between political demands and the amount of resources made available, if Europe is seriously trying to maintain global leadership in the field of education and training.

In addition to this major challenge, a number of other issues need to be addressed, including

- ensuring a high quality of education and training at all levels and the reduction of regional differences with the clear goal to achieve excellence;
- ensuring a contemporary teacher training, for example by placing greater value on the education of teachers and the acquisition of new skills;
- the promotion of modern curricula and teaching methods with a clear emphasis on skills development and independent thinking rather than pure knowledge transfer;
- the reduction of discrepancy between available skills and the needs of the labour market, for example by intensifying the dialogue between politics, educational institutions and economy, without, however, aligning the education exclusively to the needs of the economy;
- the internationalization of European (university) education, and not only through the improvement of trans-European and international mobility of students and university staff, but also by other possible measures (developing and promoting open-access teaching and learning materials, distance learning, more joint degrees etc.);
- better and close cooperation between schools and companies, foster entrepreneurship and close the gap between theory and practice.

3. How do you think that teachers should prepare in order to assume that post?

Teachers do need high-quality education and an adequate and eligible university degree in order to be prepared for their position. Teacher education should be an ongoing process, from initial teacher training over early career support and continuous professional development. This continuum of teacher education helps teachers confront challenges in their classrooms, at school and system level. Furthermore, with high-quality education I am not exclusively referring to academic education, I also advocate entrepreneurial and social competences. Creativity, dealing with unforeseen events, being able to plan and working independently are abilities which do belong to entrepreneurial spirit. Those skills, as well as knowledge about corporate activities are essential nowadays and need hence to be transmitted to our teachers in order for them to be able to teach it to the next generation. Teacher training is high on the political agenda in many countries and reforms are generally both targeted to meet the challenges encountered and in line with the recommendations made in the EU documentation.

4. What is your opinion on the lifelong learning initiative (LLL)? At this point in age, what can we do in order to eradicate illiteracy?

The term „Lifelong learning“ comprises all the different kinds of learning that a person might experience during his or her lifetime. Everything that builds knowledge and creates new qualifications and competences are included here. The learning might take place in your personal life, in civic endeavours, in your social commitments and in the workplace. Adult education and lifelong learning are not only important for the personal development of people and their social and civic participation, but also for keeping their employability high in a world of constant change. For this reason, the EPP supports the renewed European Agenda for Adult Education, which was passed in 2011 by the Council of Ministers for Education. The agenda drafts guidelines for cooperation up to and including 2020. The central concern in the agenda is the issue of raising participation in adult education to at least 15 percent, until 2020. At present, only 9.3 percent of all adults in the EU participate in adult education. In comparison, the participation rate for further education in Germany is 49 percent. Next to the agenda, the EPP strongly supports the new EU programme Erasmus+. The budget for the programme, currently at 14.8 billion Euros, will also support transnational measures in adult education until 2020. This includes mobility projects – in order to enable experience exchanges for adult education staff.

Lifelong learning is a key driver for growth and employment. This educational ideology is based on the conviction throughout society that everybody has a democratic right to learn, educate and develop him or herself. This conforms to some extent with the European view on learning competence. That education is a very good way to move forward if you are redundant or between jobs is self-evident. We are aware that if we fail to invest in human resources and adopt a lifelong learning approach in order to be competitive and cohesive, there will be no sustainable, long-lasting development. It is essential that we ensure that the skills required for new jobs, not just in the IT sector but also for creativity, active citizenship and entrepreneurship education, are continually updated and that university, research and business, knowledge partnerships' are encouraged.

Illiteracy is a complex problem and it needs to be addressed with a holistic approach. First of all, it is known that enlightenment regarding this problem is lacking and that the fact that social follow-up costs are very high is often overlooked. It is hence essential that more attention and alert will be given to that subject matter.

A very important measure is prevention: e.g. reducing the number of early school leavers, since it can be assumed that a large proportion of people without any school-leaving qualification have significant deficiencies in the literacy and numeracy skills.

I believe we need further actions that could help Member States to perform better in this area in the future. The different policy responses taken by EU countries to address early school leavers are informed by many values and perspectives, as well as being influenced by the history and traditions of the Member State concerned. Furthermore, each individual early school leaver has a unique history and finds him/herself in a specific context (leaving school early is typically caused by a cumulative process of disengagement as a result of personal, social, economic, geographical, education or family-related reasons). Responses to early school leaving therefore need to be tuned and tailored. For these reasons there is no single response to early school leaving and a kaleidoscope of policies, programmes, projects and approaches have been found across the Member States. Thus, preventive measures, aiming to tackle early school leaving, are typically more cost-effective than reintegration measures. We need policies and measures providing support in particular to young

people who are at risk by identifying individuals, groups of individuals, schools or neighbourhoods with a higher risk of drop-out.

In order to fight already existing illiteracy among Europe the principle of lifelong learning is a key driver.

We need to encourage people of all ages to consider educational offers. As already mentioned before, the renewed European Agenda for adult education is focused exactly on the issue of raising participation. Also, an advanced course catalogue with inexpensive offers for different age groups and specially trained teachers to help properly with reading and writing difficulties are essential among educational institutions in Europe. Therefore more resources need to be allocated since funds are currently insufficient.

One other possible way to help fighting illiteracy amongst all age groups are mobility projects in adult education for organized learning or teaching stays. Such mobility projects include training courses or teaching purposes. The projects are organized by adult education institutions (e.g. adult education centers, associations, church organizations, etc.). Also, volunteering work within the educational sector offers various options for people of any age to learn how to read and write.

Sabine Verheyen

has been a MEP for the German Christian Democrats (CDU) since 2009. She is coordinator for the EPP in the European Parliament's culture and education committee and a substitute member in the internal market and consumer protection committee. She focuses in particular on media policy, intellectual property and digital agenda issues. She took part in the conciliation committee on the telecom package and has been a member of the European Parliament's annual delegation to the Internet Governance Forum since 2009. As former mayor of Aachen (1999 to 2009) she focuses additionally on issues that are of relevance to the local authorities.

5. Are you in favour of an educational revolution over a natural development and growth?

I believe a balance between educational reforms and the natural development and growth is needed. Education and training need to be designed to fit to young people's needs as well as to the labour market. Therefore, the comprehensive package of policy in-

itatives on education and employment for young people in Europe called „Youth on the Move“ is part of the Europe 2020 strategy and a very important measure. „Youth on the Move“ aims to improve young people's education and employability, to reduce high youth unemployment and to increase the youth-employment rate across Europe. Besides being an engine for economic growth, education also needs to serve the development of personality. Young people need to develop their full potential and all Member States should work together to make this possible.

6. Have you ever been involved in any volunteer projects? What do you think is their biggest merit?

Yes, in many. I do obtain numerous memberships and sponsorships of non-profit organizations and voluntary associations. For example, I am a member of the advisory board of the donations for CARITAS KINDERHILFE, chairwoman of the association of RAA - Regional job center for children

from immigrant backgrounds and patroness of the Cystic Fibrosis self-help organization, whose members have already visited me in Brussels. Also, the traditions in my constituency mean a lot to me. Hence, I am supporting several cultural associations as the Foundation for Music and Culture St. Severin, the Franco-German Cultural Institute Aachen and the Association for the Promotion of the Aachen Carnival Children. Besides the carnival, I am also promoting another important tradition in Aachen, the equestrian sport. I am member in the Horse Charity e.V. and in the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein e.V.

There are several merits for volunteer work: Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your

community but also has many benefits for the volunteers. **Volunteering is ultimately about helping others and having an impact on people's wellbeing.**

Thus, it is a great way to connect with your community and give a little back. As a volunteer, you certainly return to society some of the benefits that society

gives you. Volunteering is also the perfect vehicle to develop new skills, to connect with a community and broaden the network. By meeting a diverse range of people, communication and interpersonal skills will be enhanced and one gets life experience and inspiration. Volunteering can boost career options and credibility and could give an edge when it comes to finding a new job. Also, if one is thinking of a career change then volunteering is a perfect way to explore new fields, to expand the work portfolio and to gain a real insight into a chosen path.

I believe volunteering is a very rich and useful experience and a chance for intercultural enrichment. This engagement, in all areas of social life, is also an expression of active citizenship and therefore essential for the development of the values of democracy and solidarity as well as of European identity.

We have integrated the European Voluntary Service into Erasmus+, so that young people now have the opportunity to try to work in other countries, without sacrificing pay and social security. It is time that volunteering, also with regard to professional qualifications, is upgraded. Supporting voluntary activities of young people by expanding the number of volunteer centers, facilitate volunteering by removing obstacles, raising awareness of the value of volunteering and recognizing volunteering as an important form of non-formal education, is very important and needs to be continued.



7. When hiring people in your team, have you ever taken into consideration whether the applicant had been a volunteer?

Yes, this is an integral part of the general assessment.

8. What do you understand by non-formal education? How important is it in the educational system of a country or region?

Non-formal education is any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system. Usually it is flexible, learner-centered, contextualized and uses a participatory approach. Non-formal education and learning have again and again proven to be effective in helping people to find approaches and solutions to overcome disadvantage they possibly experience and to become active and constructive contributors to the development of their communities and society as a whole. Furthermore, the development of non-formal learning opportunities can be seen as a measure to tackle the problem of early school leaving in European countries. The most important task that non-formal education has to fulfil today is certainly our united responsibility for the society that we all share. Through non-formal education people with very different interests and background get a chance to meet and talk with each other. These are good meetings where people get time to reflect and share views, which is immensely important for democracy.

The political strategy "Europe 2020", which was proposed by the European Commission, should contribute to employment, productivity and social coherence in Europe. At the same time, the EU wants to accompany the economic growth – which is visible since 2010 – with reforms created to secure a sustainable development for the upcoming decade. Against this background, non-formal and informal learning, especially for underprivileged and unemployed people – or for people at the brink of unemployment – is very important. Through the validation of their participation in non-formal education, their access to the job market is improved. Qualified employees, at the same time, foster growth and further employment across Europe. For this reason, non-formal adult education has a facilitating function within the EU market – in the sense of securing economic growth. Promoting non-formal and informal learning will continue to be subject to the EU. It appears that non-formal education can provide basic skills in particular to those people, who in formal learning settings can record only few learning successes.

Within Erasmus+, "Youth in Action" is the part of the European programme for all young people in the field of non-formal and informal education. With the EU youth strategy, all EU countries have agreed to improve by 2018 the situation of young people significantly. One of the points is to promote voluntary activity for young people a lot more. The recognition of non-formal learning is one

of Germany's priorities in implementing the EU Youth Strategy on a national level. **Education - formal or non-formal - remains primarily the competence of national government and their regions.**

9. In your opinion, could there ever be a unified education system across Europe? Should we look behind our borders in order to do that?

Education systems across Europe are very diverse, they follow different traditions, policies, programmes, projects and approaches across the Member States. I do hence not believe in a unified education system, but I do believe that we should learn from each other and exchange our best

practices. As for volunteering, I believe it must also be possible across borders. The European Skills Passport will help to make skills and qualifications more transparent and comparable and thus enable people to work without bureaucratic hindrance also in another EU country.

10. A lot is being said about non-formal education, yet there are many schools and systems where there is no such thing. How can each of us help in that direction?

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an important measure. Non-formal and informal learning is one of the foundations of the EU programme Erasmus+. The Youthpass is a solid instrument of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. As in the previous programme, the Youth Pass will also be in Erasmus+ the tool of recognition in order to describe and confirm non-formal learning outcomes. The Youthpass for funded projects from Erasmus+ "Youth in Action" can be created on the portal of the Youthpass since August 2014. In a first step it will then be possible to use the Youthpass for youth exchanges, European voluntary service, for training courses, seminars or youth initiatives, which have been supported by Erasmus+ "Youth in Action". At a later stage also long-term processes should be documentable.

Non-formal education and quality youth work have a strong innovation potential and more should be invested in this. Further work must be done on the recognition of non-formal education. Each of us can help promoting or organizing possibilities of non-formal education, e.g. to schools, associations, universities or directly to pupils, parents or to students.

11. Would you be in favour of students receiving extra credits in schools and universities for their extra-curricular activities?

This is an interesting approach since credits might enhance the motivation for participation and, at the same time, acknowledge the extra efforts. Still, what needs to be considered is: credits should always be connected to activities with an academic relevance, to clearly defined learning outcomes and criteria for assessment. Also they should be limited and meet certain, pre-defined standards in order to make them comparable to other attainments. Such credits could be accrued for example to research-based or curriculum-related work undertaken in vacations (like structured internships) or for approved extra-curricular courses (run for example by Humanities or the Business School) during term time.

12. What would you say are the most important skills one should look to develop through volunteering or non-formal education? (e.g.: teamwork, project management, leadership, NLP, etc.)

Leadership skills, such as planning projects, managing time, motivating individuals, giving feedback and building teams, are definitely important skills one can develop through volunteering. These skills, often termed 'soft skills', are considered to be very important for successful business leaders. Volunteerism develops and improves these and other critical business skills, such as problem solving, coaching and communicating effectively.

While working side by side with others from very diverse backgrounds, you will develop interpersonal skills. In a professional workplace, the ability to interact with others is important to advancement. Through volunteering, you learn how to handle not only different types of people but also different situations. You will learn the value of diversity, strong communication, mutual respect, shared planning, cooperation and working towards common goals.

Volunteers learn to plan effective meetings, organize events and coordinate other volunteers. Through planning an event, you learn how to set goals, define actions and track results. These planning and organization skills are transferrable through all career paths.

Also, communication skills will be improved. Clear, concise and organized communications are essential to almost all professional positions. Volunteer activities typically require you to communicate what you are doing and to persuade others to assist in your cause. Through practice, your communication skills will improve.

Furthermore, volunteering requires that you learn how to juggle your work, family and volunteer priorities. In order to maintain a reasonable balance, you learn how to manage your time.

Volunteering also allows you to grow your professional and personal network. It is a very social activity that allows you to interact with and meet many new people. You

will establish contacts and make friends who can introduce

you to job leads, or provide recommendations for future

employers. You will meet not only individuals sharing

a common passion for an activity or cause but also

individuals from very diverse backgrounds.

Last but not least volunteering is about "giving back" to others or a community some of the benefits you have received from society.

This engagement, in all areas of social life, is also an expression of active citizenship and therefore essential for the development of the values of democracy and solidarity as well as of European identity.

13. What is your opinion on the proposed Finnish education reform? Do you think it is a good idea to replace teaching subjects with teaching topics? After all, they are indeed one of the most successful examples, achieving it all without homework or extreme normativity?

The integration of subjects and a holistic approach to teaching and learning are not new in Finland. Finnish education policy has been built upon periodic change and systemic leadership led by commonly accepted values and shared social vision that resonate closely with contemporary ideas of sustainable educational change.

Finland's plan to add to the teaching of classic school subjects such as History, Mathematics or English, also broader, cross-cutting "topics" into the education such as the European Union, community and climate change, or 100 years of Finland's independence, brings in multi-disciplinary modules on languages, geography, sciences and economics. Receiving a broader view on such topics while also being taught the „classical subjects“ can surely be enriching. For the teachers this might mean additional challenges and it still needs to be waited and seen how students' test scores will develop. Regarding this point, educators in Finland support the idea that schools should teach what young people need in their lives rather than try to bring national test scores back to where they were. In this regard it is important to underline that Finnish education governance is highly decentralized, giving municipalities a significant amount of freedom to arrange schooling according to the local circumstances and needs. Thus, in this educational system such a reform might work well .





“Tests are not the only way to review the knowledge of students; we believe that proof of dedication in the form of rewarding completed homework is crucial in the final grading of students.”
Noah Boivie (19, Stockholm)

Homework and normativity

Proof of dedication in homework

By Noah Boivie

The future work force in Europe, today’s students, live in countries where the structure of the educational system differs greatly from country to country. One part of the school system is homework, which also is a part of the systems where the differences are great depending on the country. Some countries today have systems where completed homework is rewarded and the opposite if it is not, while others have systems where tests are the only factor which will affect the final grade. **We, as the subgroup of homework and normativity, believe that tests are not the only way to review the knowledge of students; we believe that proof of dedi-**

cation in the form of rewarding completed homework is crucial in the final grading of students.

The definition of homework today in Europe fluctuates depending on which country one lives in. For some, homework means 2.8 hours a week, while for others it is three times that time. Students in Finland and Sweden spend little time on homework, while students in Italy and Spain spend much more, at least according to the statistics. Finland’s example has been wildly discussed lately. When the topic education comes up, Finland will most likely be included. Few hours are spent on homework, yet, the success in the Pisa tests is a fact. Sweden, a country with close to the same amount of homework hours, still does not perform well in the Pisa tests. Both Spain and Italy perform below average in the Pisa tests as well. The amount of time spent on homework seems to not be the issue, in all cases, when it comes to producing good result in the Pisa tests. This shows the appa-

rent differences in the educational systems of each country.

The educational systems in Europe are changing, and many are moving towards more standardized testing, like in the American system. This may be fairer, and may also help countries work towards more alike systems, for a just situation at university, when different nationalities



are fighting for the same spots. However, it is important to not only base a final grade on the specific knowledge that has been acquired on a few tests every year. It is also importance to reward the work behind the acquiring of knowledge, the dedication put into the work. This is where many countries have chosen different paths today. Some have a specific percentage of the grade which is based on homework, while others base the final grade on just a certain number of tests. We need to work towards a shared path, where homework and testing is com-

bined, to some extent, on the same level all the EU countries. **We need to reward students who work hard, who show dedication and spirit in their work, while not necessarily perform in the top class on the tests.**

In conclusion, we need to value knowledge, as well as dedication in our grading of students in Europe, to move towards a common goal of success as a union, people and human race.

Changing approach to homework

By Katarzyna Kujawa

Times are changing unexpectedly quickly, but unfortunately school systems do not always keep pace with these changes. We still read the same books that our parents did, we even learn the same things they did, but worst of all homework still looks the same – it is about writing in notebooks, doing repetitive exercises, answering questions, trying to meet the expectations of its author. We do not even realize that homework, as a „school tool“, if used properly, can turn out to be enormously efficient.

Not so long ago teachers noticed that learning by heart is not so important anymore, as internet connection is widely available and finding any information takes just few minutes. Students no longer go to libraries to find answers to their question in books - they google them instead - it is not only faster but also more convenient and no one will try to prove me wrong. Noticing that, governments started to change school systems, as attending school is not about learning by heart, but more about learning how to find the information, properly use it. **Students should be taught to understand mechanisms, processes, but when it comes to some less important details, they should be taught where and how to find them.** Sure, the fact that our memory is less efficient and that we simply remember

less as we are aware of the fact that anything can be found on the Internet, may be considered as the “dark side” of the technology progress. Obviously is not like you do not have to remember or learn anything - not at all! It is only that knowledge is less important than it used to be as other skills have recently gained some importance and the school system, instead of trying to fight it, should take more advantage of it and try to adjust to the new reality.

The school system should not only be adjusted to the needs of the current, rapidly changing reality, but it also should meet the demands of the labour market, which expects its future workers to know how to find information, use it, know how to work in a group, meet deadlines, be responsible, etc. Surprisingly, homework can teach us all of these skills. However, this goal is not going to be fulfilled as long as we continue to follow the beaten track in terms of structuring homeworks.

Sure - the type of homework depends on the subject - you learn maths by doing as many exercises as possible - according to the rule „practice makes perfect“, but when it comes for example to geography or history - I think that making projects is the best way not only to convey knowledge, but also to teach students many useful skills. (By making projects I mean creating groups of 4 or 5, choosing a leader, giving each of the groups certain, but different themes of their project and a deadline. In the end the group is to present their project in front of their classmates, presenting what they have done in the recent weeks). First of all students learn how to work in a group which nowadays is crucial. Some of them can even develop their leadership skill. They also learn how to manage time - they are given a deadline which they have to meet, which teaches them another skill - responsibility. What is more they learn to gather information and use it - which I explained

in previous paragraphs. In addition they become masters in using PowerPoint etc. which employers find very useful these days. They also learn giving presentations. To make all of this more effective students should not be given marks for their knowledge only, but also for the way they present it - the mark should be very complex and should cover every step of prepared project: team work, project, presentation, etc. Such type of homework also

Changing approach to homework can have a huge impact on what we learn at school. This is not only about academic knowledge – in fact nowadays it should be less about it, but more about a specific set of skills like ability to work in a group, gather and process information, give presentations, meet deadlines and be responsible, in order to be ready to meet the expectations of future employers.



To what extent is homework positive for children?

By Marta Figueredo Cantalejo

teaches students a very important and priceless skill - dealing with stress. Many young people fear speaking in public. Giving such short presentations would be an amazing opportunity for them to practice. And last but not least - preparing projects makes them learn things! They become masters in what they talk about – all in all for certain period of time they were devoted to a specific topic. They even did not realise that they did learn so much! Isn't it amazing?

Most people, including teachers, parents and sometimes students, consider homework as something necessary in the education of a child. Some of them even discuss about the amount that is necessary, but the fact that sending homework is something that has to be done does not leave their minds, it is something as obvious as associating the heat to the summer and the cold to the winter. Let's just say that it is considered to be natural in the “what to do for school” list. Teachers are to send homework and students have to do them because it has always been this way and because this is the way education works. However the idea of no pain no gain (associating good results with the amount of home-

work that is done) that has been passed on to children is not the only solution.

When teachers are asked about the advantages of sending homework to children, most of them reply that they fulfil three functions: they reinforce what has been learnt, it teaches children responsibility and it creates a work habit. This is what their previous teachers passed on to them and what they are going to instruct children to do. It does not matter if countries such as Spain and Portugal are still at the bottom of the list of the advanced countries in terms of school performance, despite the fact that they have more classes and dedicate more hours to doing homework than the rest of the European countries. It does not matter if international studies prove that countries where less homework is sent (Finland for example) are the ones that obtain better results.

Versus these arguments, repeated by so many teachers, my personal experience, as an 18 year old who has just finished high school and experienced several teaching methods, tells me that all the amount of homework sent to little ones is useless, anti-pedagogical and it takes away time from other activities far more important.

First of all dedicating 5 hours a day during 5 days a week for 9 months, for a person aged between 6 and 12, is by far enough time for them to create a working habit. Nevertheless, these children are in the age of running and playing not spending the rest of their afternoon sitting on a wooden chair creating a working habit. In addition the repetition of several (and usually the same type of) exercises does not reinforce what has been learnt some hours ago in school, it makes them dislike what they are learning changing their attitudes towards something that could be fun and productive into something hateful, and last but not least, who can talk about the responsibility of a six year old? That is something that children acquire progressively in time.

Homework takes away so much time that children cannot carry out other activities far more important for their physical and psychological development such as sports, music, languages, reading, art etc. not to mention social skills and manners.

What children need is to spend more time with their families, play with other children, learn how to play an instrument or another language a



few days a week to improve others of their many skills. Homework should also be sent but in a fewer quantity: a couple of exercises to make them practice what has just been learnt for the next day and a small booklet as summer homework to help them in the year that comes. The rest of the activities should be done in class and taken into account.

Developing soft skills through homework

By Leonor Zuzarte

Soft skills are related to the individual, being often described as one's emotional intelligence or "interpersonal skills", they refer to how the person interacts with others, their communication, time management and leadership skills, how they handle criticism and a lot more. In contrast we have hard skills, these refer to specific knowledge and abilities, that is to say measurable skills one might have such as a degree, basic knowledge of a foreign language etc.

Nowadays, employers look for soft skills to mark the difference between their best candidates. These skills are valuable in the workplace, only having the required hard skills or technical competence for a job does not mean you will be good at it after all, and employers know this. Another argument presented is that teaching a future employee a new hard skill, such as working a particular computer programme, is easier and faster than helping them improve soft skills such as patience or ability to take criticism.

All around Europe we have different educational systems, but most of them are currently moving towards an evaluation based more on standardized tests. This is good in the sense that it can create a more uniform education inside a country, and maybe one day, all throughout Europe. But one thing students have been trying to bring to the spotlight is how this does not help them develop the soft skills so valuable when trying out for a job. After all, is this not one of the objectives of education, to prepare us for 'the real world'? How can it do that when all of us are supposed to learn the same things the same way? Is there any room left for individuality and the

development of these interpersonal skills?

We think one solution could be working to have these skills incorporated into homework. In many countries in Europe, although admittedly not all, students spend a lot of their free time doing homework, in places like Italy, Ireland and Romania students are assigned almost eight hours of homework a week and one complaint that is often heard is that it is, sometimes, quite pointless.

What we suggest is to combine these two problems (lack of time and structure in the current systems to develop interpersonal skills, and pointless homework) to create a unique solution.

By giving out homework less like repetitive exercises (which we admit might sometimes be needed) and more like research projects and group efforts, teachers would be helping their students, not only learn the subject, but also work on skills such as cooperation, communication and time management. All this while taking away a little of the tediousness of homework, making it more exciting for students, who will hopefully respond by being more motivated.

If homework is to be an obligatory part of our education then not only should it be valued it should be made into something a little more useful, and help the system atone its flaws in other areas.

"We wish to see that in the future every child could say that although many things that were learnt at school did not withstand the passage of time, school has formed him/her as an individual who respects differences, understands the value of cooperation and is an active member of community."

Silvija Kalinauskaitė
(19, Vilnius)



School identity

Cooperation, respect and social awareness

By Silvija Kalinauskaitė

We believe that the education system can be improved by raising the values of cooperation, respect and social awareness at schools.

When the sound of gunshots and political orations cease, only one true solution to overcome difficulties remains – thriving for change and welfare through culture and education. History has shown that the most effective way to make a difference and to reach for positive changes is by empowering people to think independently, by teaching the importance of human values and rights.

Education has become the only peaceful weapon to ensure the safety and well-

being of humanity. However, as many topics of high significance education cannot elude contradiction. Ironically, the antidote can become the poison itself if it falls into the wrong hands, is in poor quality or is used incorrectly and inefficiently. In other words, having said that education is the key to resolve numerous issues, education, or to be more exact, the lack of it is also the main origin of many of them. The European Youth Manifesto approaches a lot of essential problems of the present concerning gender equality, religion, diversity, and employment to which new educational reforms and therefore change in attitude and outlook must be attained. For all the reasons stated, we believe that it is a matter of great importance to discuss the issues of the European education and empower young minds to seek for efficient solutions.

The first lessons of life are learnt at home, but the true educational journey begins at school. School education has become the main focus and research object of our subgroup because in order to change and analyze the education system, we need to start from its very

first steps. Schools are established to begin the educational process of an individual and therefore are the first public places where children "experience" what education is. Its influence on a child does not end with filling one's mind with academic knowledge. 12 years spent in a community undoubtedly have an enormous impact on forming one's personality, especially because individuality starts to develop at a young age (many kids start attending school at the age of 6-7). Schools are also the first places where children get to acknowledge and interact with other individuals, which also means being introduced to different social statuses, religions, sexualities, races, cultures and so on. It is crucial to encourage and teach understanding towards these differences at schools when kids are still receptive and open enough to concede the positive influence. Issues that innocently start at school in forms of bullying, violence, intolerance or "common" adolescent obliviousness transfers to the world outside school after graduation creating many problems that we face nowadays.

These contemplations bring us to the point that although knowledge has always been the focus point of education, teaching children about values such as respect, cooperation and social awareness is just as important. Individual governments, national students' organizations, the European Students' Union have already made a lot of positive actions towards a more understanding and active school community by encouraging team work during classes and various campaigns which embrace tolerance towards other individuals. We support all of these significant changes, but, having said that, we believe that there is still an alternative that has not been completely exploited to the benefit of creating a better school community and therefore society.

The alternative we encour-

rage is the development of self-governments at schools.

The modern-day Europe is built on democratic values which have become the guarantee of stability, peace and welfare on our continent. The aim of democracy is not only to give people the opportunity to be involved in the progress of their nations and communities, but also ensure equal rights and possibilities for all. These are the exact values and views that need to be taught and adopted at schools because although democracy is already a reality, we still face many problems related to the lack of social awareness, responsibility and tolerance. Democracy should not merely be studied, it needs to be experienced that is why the solution we are offering is giving children the opportunity to actively participate in their school life, learn how to communicate and reach the best compromise for everyone in a form of self-government. Many school students are getting increasingly passive to everything that is happening around them, some are not aware that their voice is important and is able to make a difference even in a small school community. Twelve years of the most important time of a child's life while his/her personality is still forming spent in a democratic school community would bring up children who not only know how to stand for themselves and their views, but understand what to stand for.

Self-governments at schools are not as strong or common these days for many reasons, such as resistance from the school administrations, lack of organizing and faith in the maturity of pupils and so on. We strongly believe that this attitude could change by embracing the European governments to support the establishment of strong self-governments at all schools.

Albert Einstein once said that “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learnt at school” reminding us that it is not only the relative knowledge that each child takes from education that is significant, but more the values and learning experience that he/she has gained. We wish to see that in the future every child in reply to Albert Einstein’s thesis could say that although many things that were learnt at school did not withstand the passage of time, school has formed him/her as an individual who respects differences, understands the value of cooperation and is an active member of his/her community.



Community spirit

By Aurora Ruiz de la Puente

We want schools to embrace the community spirit to develop a better educational environment, which represents and transmits EU values.

Spirit, esprit, Geist, espíritu, spirito ... The very same word in different languages embodying the very same meaning: the force within a person that is believed to give the body life, energy, and power; the immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person. A unique quality that can be found inside every single human being on Earth, despite their age, colour, sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Furthermore,

re, aside from its individual presence inside each one of us, the spirit is also characterized by, and this is what makes it a remarkable and extraordinarily exceptional value, its social dimension: the spirit can be shared within any kind of community.

There are two types of communities: the close-related communities (including family, school, neighborhood, etc.) and the distant-related ones (city, country, etc.); each one of them possessing its own singular spirit. However, it is absolutely essential to understand that all of these apparently “different” spirits

are, in fact, intertwined; they are constantly influencing and transforming one another. It is rather relevant to take this in consideration when analyzing the two communities that concern us today: the European Union (EU) and the school system.

Nowadays, due to the recent economic crisis the EU has endured, the original European spirit, which could be described as optimistic and unitarian, has slowly started to vanish, leaving room for growing opinions of pessimism and division to appear. The apparition and steady rise of this negative vision represents a significant setback in the goals and objectives of the EU and therefore should be promptly lessened and eradicated if possible. But... how can this be achieved? Simple answer: through education.

As it was previously mentioned, all different kinds of spirits are by some means connected. Thus, the European spirit and the school spirit are connected too. School is an institution that plays a quite significant role in the life of a person; it is an institution in charge of raising and educating people. It is a place where people are taught not only maths and biology, but also values such as respect, tolerance, integrity, etc. School leaves an indelible mark inside each one of its students, and that should be taken in consideration, when creating the curriculum or general school

planning. **If we want a united Europe, we should foment this idea and feeling of unity and belonging from the cornerstones of education: from kindergarten to university.**

Collaboration after graduation

By Federica Basile

“In life, a person can take one of two attitudes: to build or to plant.” Paulo Coelho states in one of his books. According to him, builders spend several years over their task and then, the meaning of their lives is lost, once the building is finished. What is different in a garden is that it never stops growing. Gardeners may not often rest and they have to endure storms, but the meaning of their lives will always be on, “they know that in the history of each plant lies the growth of the whole World.”

Let’s consider schools as a great field: the gardener as a teacher and the soil as the student.

“To teach” in Latin is translatable as “insignere” which means “to plough a student’s mind”. Beside the classic roles of “showing, pointing out, demonstrating”, a teacher is expected to leave a mark in the mind of the student. The memory of advice and teaching of a former teacher is deeply cherished, especially because teenagers spend a lot of their time at school with their tutors. This recall that teens have can only take place if the teachers were worthy the memory when the cultural and personal path of the scholar that they have traced proved to be very good. This path is certainly not always clear at the beginning, the flowers in the garden have not blossomed yet, the teacher and the students are still in a sort of “hostility” and the judgement is influenced by this relationship. Only the ones who received some kind of teaching can really say if they were of use throughout their life “after gra-

duation". The 'evaluation' about the merit of a teacher can only be given by his ex-pupils. In fact, how can we judge if the gardener made a great job with his field? What if we could ask the flowers in full blossom?

Curricula, self-commitment in several projects, innovative activities nowadays seem to be the only best evaluation methods for professors in secondary schools. Things change at university. In Italy, students can judge their preceptors for their behaviour and of course for the way they teach. There is no probing will in all this, only the purpose to improve the system and help the professors with their job. Anyway, being a judge is a really delicate role, and it has to be taken seriously and with enough maturity. This can be easily expected from university students who are 'fruits already ripened' in a certain way because pupils could not judge their professors in the right

way while still at school. **What we propose is a method of recollecting memories and opinions regarding their previous professors from ex-students who already graduated and still feel their school identity to be strong.**

The spirit is certainly not to make teachers fear the tyranny of the students or to punish the bad ones (though this would eventually lead to that in the worst case), the spirit is to improve the quality of teaching and help the school system to have the best educators in circulation. If a teacher is not seen as a real educator to some extent, then he needs to change, to get better, or otherwise be fired. The gardener has to endure the storms and the vicissitudes of the season, to

be ready to improve and never stop learning.

The ex-students' school reports would affect the school environment too: buildings, facilities...any kind of advice would be welcomed.

Cooperation after graduation would not stop to that only. There could be a way to acquaint the best ex-students with the actual life of the school and make the chain of the "school identity"



stronger through an "after school tutoring system". It would benefit the school and help ex-students to have a little acknowledged job, recognized as first job experience, making afternoon repetition courses without the need to pay teachers to do that, treating them as great partners of the school.

School is a garden which never stops growing...

A unified school system

By Maria Carmela Minonna

One of the fundamental aims of the European Union is to guarantee the free movement of citizens all around the union for whichever reason: tourism, exchange projects, job, and so on. In order to guarantee this freedom, some countries spontaneously, in 1985, stipulated "the Agreement of Schengen" that soon found the consent of many other states and became a community act in 1999. The Agreement provides that every citizen of the countries involved has the right to move and travel around the Schengen area without any particular document or endorsement needed from the state, the only duty is to show his own identity card to prove the citizenship.

The removal of borders is considered an historical event with no precedents!

To make the freedom actual the European institutions have already enacted tons of acts and laws, but it is the European Court of Justice that made first the biggest steps: it led the institutions through the changes (mostly making the changes itself and then the institutions converted them in rules), it sentences states that do not respect the rules and the purposes of the Treaties of which it always does an evolutionary interpretation.

It worked till some intellectuals realized that there are some obstacles to a real affirmation of the four fundamental liberties not directly related to them, but that affect them quite a lot; for example, the free movement of workers faces different knowledge, trainings and studies among European people. So states and institutions worked on communal standards for the education system, subjects,

professional trainings and all that things that can influence the education and qualification of a person. That are the reasons why people sometimes have difficulties finding a job abroad in Europe or are unwilling to move abroad in order to avoid problems that their sons, daughters or spouses may have in the new country.

The first step states tried to do was to develop a single educational system to apply everywhere in Europe, but the differences there were among states, the jealousy of each state for its system and the difficulties to point out the best one in Europe to emulate, led to a failure.

So, the new strategy was the "method of mutual recognition" of professional and educational qualifications introduced with the directive 2005/36/CE. This method is quite complicated in practice, but on the other hand states could keep their educational systems; the legislation, in effect, established some criteria to evaluate qualifications and so each country is only obliged to recognize foreigners titles as equal to its own in accordance to that scheme.

Other professions have different rules, for example for lawyers the directive 98/5/CE established that their degrees must be recognized abroad, but in accordance to the different subjects studied, states can subordinate that recognition of equivalence to an apprenticeship in their country or an exam to prove the knowledge of the domestic right.

The system can seem almost satisfying, but it is not the final step. Nowadays many things changed, the scenario in Europe is different so is the possibility to adopt a uniform (not equal) school system still impossible?

Especially because of the economic crisis we are going through, more and more people

leave their homes to move abroad looking for a job and difficulties they are finding are non-insignificant; moreover the free movement of workers is one of the first aims of the European community.

Having said that, we think that it is time to make another step towards the fulfillment of a real unified Europe and an effective European citizenship, because the European Union is not only economic problems or Euro, but mainly a community of people that share a common culture, history, tradition and more. If we do not want to renege the deep reasons that brought six states, after the Second World War, to create something that could prevent events like those just occurred, we should seriously think to all that.

Of course, our proposal is not to intervene on the contents making the schools all around Europe exactly equal, because history taught us differences are necessary. The aim is to intervene firstly on the structure: each student will keep studying the history of his/her country and subjects his/her country thinks are important, but, for example, the years of compulsory school should be the same. It is a big problem if someone finishes to study at a certain age and others later because that means that the first ones will be able to look for a job, to make experience, etc. in advance rather than the others and so they will have more possibilities to find the job they like.

We are not politicians or legal experts, but **we firmly believe that a commission of experts, composed by teachers from all types of schools, employers, workers, etc. should work together to think of a sys-**

tem that, respecting the identity of any single state, is able to respond to nowadays' job market demand and that belong to the European Union as a union of people with the same rights, the same minimum level of culture, the same spirit and feeling of belonging to something shared.



Introduction

By Miguel Ribeiro

Religion has long been a driving force in Europe, reaching from the distant past into today, shaping so many of our customs and views throughout the continent.

In 312 CE, the vision of a cross came to Emperor Constantine, heralding the rise of Christianity in Rome. Five centuries later, Emir Abd-ar-Rahman crossed the Mediterranean and founded an empire in Iberia, setting off a blossoming of Islamic culture and science. Then, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the flames of the Reformation swept through the continent, upturning the established order, and establishing a colourful mosaic of thousands of denominations.

Still, in a growingly irreligious Europe, it may seem we are growing away from this past. Of what use is religion, so often a divisive element, so often a cause for war, hate and violence? Why study such an arcane topic?

A religion, in a more abs-

tract sense, is more than simply a set of rules and symbols. It is a living, breathing worldview, a form of culture that is simultaneously social and deeply personal. It is in constant interaction with its surroundings, changing and adapting.

Religion is a guiding light in the dark for many; it is a fearsome spectre for others. These two extremes sometimes coincide. In truth, few other political forces can galvanize such large and widely different masses. This is as true in Europe as anywhere else.

Thusly, this Manifesto would be sorely lacking if it did not approach this topic. On the next pages, we will seek to analyze Europe's religious situation. We will be presenting an overview of various faiths and examining European laws, the current state of religious education as well as the topic of extremism, to provide a comprehensive view on this matter.



“Education and knowledge are really important for young people to grow up and understand the world, especially if they cover aspects such as religion, a fundamental part of human life. We want an international religious education and the chance for young people to learn more about all religions that coexist in Europe. Studying religion is the best way to delete the fear and prejudice and knowing is the only way to fully understand and accept each other. This way we can encourage integration, respect and peaceful coexistence for all people.” Alessia Tavarone (24, Parma)

Religious education

By Alessia Tavarone and Margarida Vaz

Study mathematics, because mathematics is the basis of everything. Study history, because only if you know the past you can understand the present. Study science, so you can understand the world. Study literature, because art leads man upward. Study religion, because... Why study religion?

Because religion is a fundamental part of human life.

It is difficult to calculate the precise number of faithful in the world today, but billions of people believe in something and, for this reason, it is easy to understand that religion is not just something private; it is also a cultural phenomenon and influences public life. During the millennia, religion has always accompanied and changed human life and also religion has influenced the history of the world as much as the wars or the most important inventions. There are many different religions and coexistence was never easy: too many struggles have been waged in the name of God, whatever God you believe in, too many people have died for religion and this is no

longer acceptable. **Today we want a Europe and a world where different religions coexist peacefully with mutual respect - we want freedom of religion without fear of oppression or extremism.** How can you get this? By studying and knowing world religions.

Studying religion is the best way to erase fear and prejudice, and knowledge is the only way to fully understand and accept each other. We want an international religious education and the chance to learn more about all religions that coexist in Europe. This way we can encourage integration and collaboration between people belonging to different religions. This is the basis of peaceful coexistence. Knowledge of different religions can give you the chance to choose what you want or do not want to believe. We want children to free-

ly follow their heart and mind without oppression and external impositions.

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

If we mention Shakespeare, Einstein, the Second World War, we all know what we mean, you have probably studied this in school, because they are important things; in a different way they have forever changed the history of the world. We know that just as history, literature and art, religion is a fundamental part of the culture of every people, but despite this we never know enough about the different religions. In spite of this we have no adequate religious education. Especially today, in a globalized world where people travel and often live abroad, it is important to learn languages and cultures different from ours and therefore the religion that is a fundamental part of human life.

What we would like is a religious education internationally, perhaps a course for schools where young people can learn more about all religions that coexist in Europe and throughout the world. We want a secular course, where impartially and without influence, the students discover the history of the various religions and the most important aspects. An education like this is the best way to experience the culture of other peoples, delete fears and prejudices and educate young people to respect other religions.

Respect is a value that we learn as children. The family is the first place where children are developing their ideas, their values and their way of being, but it is at school that children begin to learn about the world and to deal with others. Education is also done at home by their parents, but if you want a message to be received by all, you have to use public education. For this reason it is important that the school, through religious education, promotes respect for others. In addition, students of different religious backgrounds should be mixed in the same class, in order

to have contact and share their beliefs, and to increase respect and acceptance - values that should shape the future Europe citizens.

FREE TO BELIEVE, FREE TO KNOW

Knowledge gives power and freedom: power to choose, freedom to be. Promoting international religious education is not only useful to increase the knowledge of the culture of other peoples or respect for other religions, but also to give young people the means to decide what they want or do not want to believe. Obviously, young people must also be free not to believe in anything, and for this reason the religious education must be an opportunity, not an imposition. If a student thinks a course in religious education, as what we propose, is against his religion or he is not interested, he is free to not participate.

Can the state leave the same freedom of choice? Even in countries where religion is more rooted, we want children to be free to follow their own ideas. In Europe different religions coexist and each state has different relations with the Church and religion, also the state is free to decide with its ministries about programmes for schools. For all these reasons it is difficult to think that the same religious education can be accepted in all countries of Europe - although this would be the right spirit of a community that supports their integration and progress. One idea would be a European super-partes organization that decides a “politically correct” programme of religious education that could be accepted in all EU member states.

EDUCATION AGAINST EXTREMISM

In addition to the state and to the young people, to complete our project of international religious education, we need teachers.

We believe that everything can be taught, it only depends on the way we teach it - even such a sensitive subject like religion. So why is religion a big taboo? Maybe because it is something so personal and subjective, a private perception of the world and religious conflicts are very common, for some religions, in their genesis and over their history, found it difficult to accept and respect other creeds. And it is something that the believers really feel; it is a different experience than maths, history or literature. But again: school should give the tools to reach knowledge, respect, and to form future citizens - and that must include the contact with different religions.

In order to attend complete and opened religion classes, teachers should not indoctrinate the students. They should teach the history of the bigger religions around the world, as well as the main principles and figures of the scriptures, and talk a little bit of Philosophy regarding religion. In addition, it would also be enriching if classes explored a compared approach between creeds in an impartial way, but also had a space to debate what is atheism or agnosticism. Teachers should have training on these themes (formation on theology, provided by universities) and some classes could have a "special guest" connected with religious institutions, providing a diverse approach on religion, but never being something imposed - after all, tolerance is a message present in many religions. Besides this joint effort between academia and religious authorities, it would be interesting if students of different religious backgrounds could present in class not only their own experiences with faith and religion but also to be encouraged to explore other religions. If a student follows the Islam he should talk about his relation with it, but he could also do an essay on Judaism or Buddhism, for example, developing tolerance through an interfaith education.

Giving young Europeans education with experienced teachers of religion, would of course avoid the risk of letting young people look for answers on the internet. The power of social networks and the internet is to give the kids the opportunity to communicate with anyone anywhere in the world and to have an unlimited amount of information. This is fantastic, but of course there is also the risk of finding negative things, such as religious extremism. If the kids have the instruments to analyze the world and distinguish between good and evil, they probably will not fall into the virtual traps.

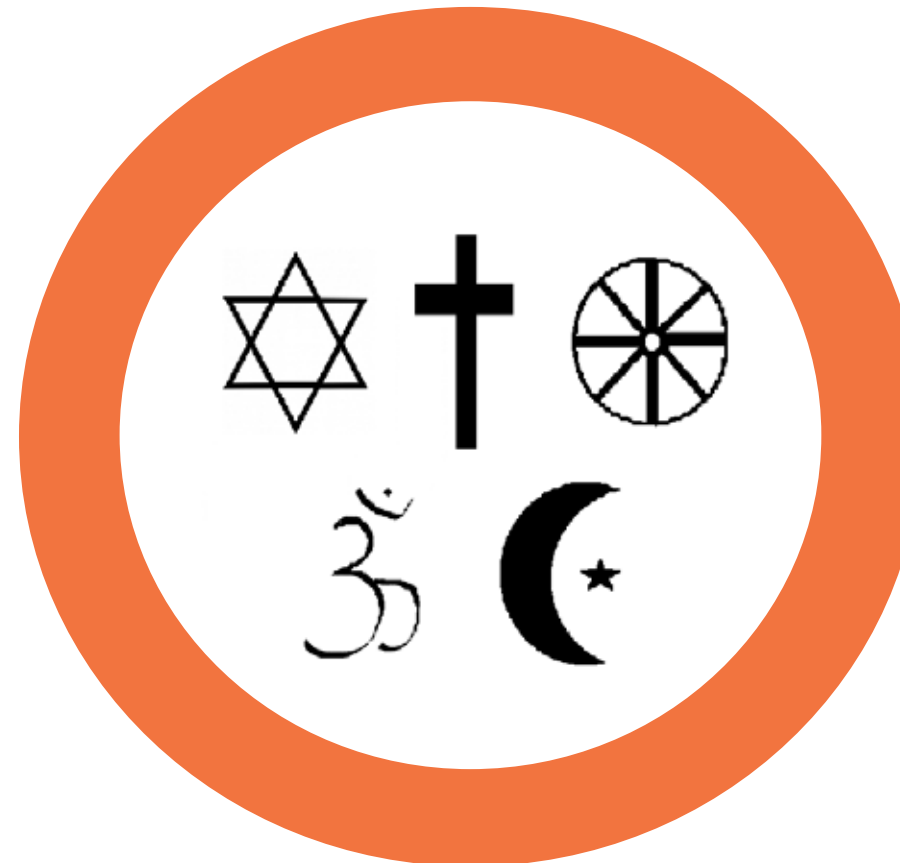
We think that lessons about surfing safely through religious content on the internet should be provided, as is it regarding sexuality and pornography websites. As young people have a tendency to believe in everything they find online, they can be attached to fundamentalist pages and join these communities. To avoid that isolation on "online bubbles", it is imperative for the creation of a space in the religious education course to teach students what is the safe and correct information (but also avoiding possible censorship in these themes), in order to promote acceptance and diversity.

CONCLUSION

We do not endorse a confessional religious course (that exists, in an optional way, in European countries), but a secular education that includes a subject on religion, so that religious knowledge is brought out to the school sphere, in the primary and secondary

education. In many countries of the European Union (France, Czech Republic, etc.) religion is integrated in the syllabus of other subjects (such as History or Civic Education) - this is interesting too, but we think that it would be more complete if we had a space only to talk about religion. It should also be optional, and not compulsory (as it is in Ireland, Poland, and other countries) and should not give more importance to one religion (in

With religious education it is not our intention to decide which religion is better and we absolutely do not want to make a comparison between religion and science or any other subject. We know that religion is something much more profound, it is not only rational because spirituality touches the hearts of men. We just want people to start to consider religion as an important cultural component of human life and that its knowledge is promoted in this context. We want more free and fair information, we want less prejudice and fear, we want more respect and acceptance. Even if sometimes you do not understand why, it is important to study mathematics. Even if there are "only memories", it is important to study history. Although you might not like formulas and chemical elements, it is important to study science. Although perhaps not reading is your passion, it is important to study literature. Even if you do not believe or you believe in something totally, it is important to study the religions of the world, because knowing more is never a bad thing, for it can either strengthen your opinions or open your mind. But above all studying the religions of the world can bring you closer to others because remember: maybe the God you believe in is different, but people are all the same.



Europe it is frequent the Catholic domination).

We do not want a religious education class, we want an international religion education course.

“Religion is interlocked in our society, it will never be completely gone. Religion is not the problem, the way we deal with its existence is. The only reason extremism exists is because people feel unsafe and not free to express their religious habits. You cannot fight violence with more violence, then everyone will lose. I think we can overcome this through greater acceptance and more freedom for expressing religion.” Shinouk Ettema (16, Amsterdam)



Religious extremism

A common path to the future: More local publicity work

By Anissa Asli

After the September 11 attack, the “spirit of religious extremism” hovered over the entire world. Also the terroristic atrocities against the satirical weekly newspaper “Charlie Hebdo” revived the discussion: Why are Europeans - especially the younger ones - becoming radicalized? People being well socialized like you and me.

How should a confident Europe react to religious and political tendencies, which are incompatible with the European consensus of human rights? Fact is: A value-free Europe placing no limits encourages intolerance and extremism. We need an agreed common, clear message of the EU instead of neutrality of value. This means, that **we should keep our values like gen-**

der equality or freedom of religion and make it very clear that we stand up for them. In order to avoid further “young extremists” we need to develop measures. In the following I would like to demonstrate two possible ways to face the new challenges:

First of all we could undertake more preventive and repressive measures. In fact this would mean that Europe has to institute new laws for increased safety. Such laws could include for example a “restriction of freedom of travel” or “a permanent monitoring of religious institutions”. The consequences of such an EU legislation would be a restriction of fundamental rights of each of us and a surveillance state which compromises the privacy of citizens. This solution has to be rejected for two very important reasons: The EU should keep the high standard we hold on human rights. In our history people have stood up for their rights. For rights, which we take for granted today. Any tendencies for restrictions should be rejected. It is noteworthy that any European country faces different expressions of

“extremism”, so a generalized law will not be able to meet all special circumstances and cases. For a long-term solution we need a “bottom-up-approach”, a European consciousness and solidarity between citizens. Legal penalties cannot and will not solve the causes, they only could handle the consequences.

Rather we need an alternative to the concept “EU as a surveillance state”. Therefore we could use institutional measures. To prevent every form of extremism, we need a dialogue in the framework of the right social conditions: We need a rule-free, independent communication! We have to accept the partners in dialogue (not opponents!) as equal and therefore we have to recognize that we can learn from each other. To reach this the EU could establish a European Authority for Tolerance (EAT). This institution - having an office and registered office in every member state of the EU - could work close to the local population,

Prevention by education

By Hazel English

The acts of violent religious extremism that are becoming increasingly, and alarmingly, common in the present day, are very often the result of a distribution of misinformation, or a lack of information all together. There are, of course, exceptions to this, but on a grand scale the key to preventing acts of violent religious extremism is education.

It is often suggested that to avoid religious indoctrination in the youth, religion should be eliminated entirely from state-provided education, however this does not tackle the

consider their anxieties and keep an eye on the specific on-the-spot circumstances. This brings simplification and would guarantee a more effective and intense work on the local level. Under the patronage of this institution we would be able to address new projects. Projects promoting a dialogue which leads to lasting peace and security. Main objective of this dialogue is to make people understand that we have to open up to each other and to all kind of beliefs. This assumes that we could face every religion without fear and prejudices. For this understanding we need educational work, which is essential for an open mind. We have to understand the history, fundamentals, principles and also cultural context of each religion. Then we would deal with lots of empathy and comprehension with each other. For example the EAT could introduce broadcasts on public TV channels giving a knowledge-background of each religion or establish workshops in schools.

issue of religious extremism, which is often the product of misinformation in the home, or online.

Religious education, provided with the intention of lowering prejudice and misinformation held towards outside religious groups, would be most effectively provided from the youngest age possible. Primary school is one of the few institutions that all European citizens attend, and it is a prime location for diffusing the toxicity of prejudiced opinions that young people may be exposed to at home.

Compulsory unbiased education on the concept of religion, and importing a basic knowledge of the dif-

ference and similarities between different major world religions, would create a basic level of awareness within young people, and lower their susceptibility to religious extremism. The education provided would cover a range of topics related to religion, such as the basic teachings, and history/evolution, of major religions, as well as classes in theories of moral developments, agnosticism and atheism, and historical religious conflicts (especially ones that still bear relevance in today's society). **Classes in how to recognise, and avoid, religious extremism online could also greatly lower the amount of young people being indoctrinated online into religious causes.**

This education would not have to conflict with individual beliefs, and could be taught by an external, state-approved body, so as to preserve the religious ethos of schools (especially in non-secular states), while still providing a comprehensive religious education. The underlying tone of these modules should, however, be one of commonality; while the differences between religions are significant, the common humanity behind all faiths is what is most important. This means placing an emphasis on similar teachings in

contrasting religions, and investigating the reasons why people do, and do not, keep faith.



Without liberty, security is worthless

By Miguel Ribeiro

To declare that terrorism is a difficult matter is quite the understatement. In the 14 years since 9/11, we have been reminded time and time again that this threat hangs over us. However, to conveniently shrug away the complicated mechanisms that drive terrorism is not just intellectual laziness - it is also a severe threat to the democratic and pluralistic ideals that Europe has pledged to defend. The European Union as a whole must be able to develop and implement a programme that aims to prevent radicalization, acting within very well defined parameters and being equally respectful of all individuals and communities.

Perhaps more than ever, the fight against violent extremism lies in preventing it. Europe has been rocked by the bizarre spectacle of youths leaving to fight in Syria on the side of ISIS. Perhaps most bizarre is the diversity among those engaging in terrorism: some were unemployed and part of marginalized, low-income communities; others are middle-class and well-educated, sporting college degrees. Many are extremely recent converts to Islam.

In short, the only variables in the equation of terrorism are, firstly, that it is of diverse cause and motivation, and secondly, that youth are those most prone to recruitment. Thus, any measures to fight it must take into account its complex nature, seeking to prevent the radicalisation of those at risk, whatever their background.

A good case study in how this can be handled is the United Kingdom's "PREVENT" programme. "PREVENT" managed to alienate the very communities it ought to serve by being at once secretive and discriminatory. One of its

most egregious stunts was the use of funds allocated to it to install surveillance cameras in a largely Muslim area of Birmingham - therefore implying that counter-terrorism necessitated the close monitoring of Muslims going about their daily lives.

It is clear that such policies must be implemented with the consent and cooperation of communities at large. The struggle against radical ideology cannot be viewed as a witch hunt. Indeed, to single out a group only serves to marginalise its members, sabotaging the programme. Governments must jointly develop measures that promote dialogue between law enforcement and society, while promoting the flexibility required to adequately deal with various scenarios of radicalisation.

With this in mind, it is my view that member states must implement a multi-pronged policy that: a) improves social services in low-income neighbourhoods, particularly in the field of youth counselling; b) creates a flexible structure designed to approach and engage youths who are in the process of becoming radicalised; c) interacts in a straightforward manner with community representatives who are worried or seeking redress; d) promotes law enforcement officials' awareness of cultural and religious sensibilities; and e) establishes and maintains strict law enforcement oversight.

In truth, Europe needs concrete measures aimed at stopping domestic terrorist recruitment. However, we must make sure that these policies are effective and transparent, and also that they are applied without breaching civil liberties. This is tall order, but the European Union can and must seek to tackle the problem head-on, without tumbling into the pitfalls of islamophobia and guilt by association. "Extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice" (B. Goldwater) is exactly the sort of thinking it must avoid, lest it become like its enemies.

Greater acceptance means less violence

By Shinouk Ettema

"Today on CNN news: IS expands its territory, dozens of people killed during a demonstration for freedom of speech and a synagogue bombed leaving 80 people heavily injured."

If this news was on a regular Tuesday night's broadcast, no one would be surprised. Since when did this become normal in our eyes? People are killed, discriminated, bullied, and what for? Because of their religion. Because they choose to believe in something other than another human being.

We wonder why violence is often related to religion in the world. Why do extremist organisations like Al-Qaida exist? Why are there so many attacks from terrorists? The answer is loud and clear. Because they do not get the freedom to express themselves. Because they experience hospitality and prejudices. Because they are feeling unsafe, and disrespected. Because they feel like they are not heard and above all, they are not educated. Without education, people can easily be brainwashed by other extremist people, who feel like violence is the only way to fight back in order to convince them of their position in the world. Without education, they do not know that violence is never the right option.

We need a system with better religious education. When people know why other people practice their religion in a certain way, they will automatically have more tolerance and understanding. We need a subject that teaches pupils something about every religion, not just the religion of the country they live in. We, as a society, need to provide a safe place for every religion to practice their habits and cultural traditions. In order to achieve

ve this we need more attention for people's feelings regarding religion. Hurting somebody either physically or verbally is not the way to go.

Religious extremism is not uncontrollable. With a better education programme, with less negative media attention and a bit of tolerance we can achieve a lot. Do not try to fight it, instead, try to look at these solutions, because in



the end religion will always be there, and it will always be a part of your life, whether you are religious or not.

To prevent extremism, we must have greater awareness of people's sensibilities towards religion. We need to fight prejudice and hostility! Most of all, we need more tolerance for people of all faiths, more understanding of religious habits, and more safety in practicing religion.



"While not every European state is secular, there seems to be a common understanding throughout Europe that each and every citizen should be able to practice his or her religion freely and without intrusion from the state. In theory, those two realms are totally separated but in practice it is not always the case." Marie-Claude Hykpo (19, Abu Dhabi)

Religion and the Law

By Marie-Claude Hykpo

What does the law and by extension the state have to do with religious beliefs and practices?

Well, nothing really. Indeed, **while not every European state is secular, there seems to be a common understanding throughout Europe that each and every citizen should be able to practice his or her religion freely and without intrusion from the state.** In theory, those two realms are totally separated but in practice it is not always the case.

Let us consider France for example. It is, without a doubt, one of those countries where

the separation line between state action and religion is blurred. Indeed, since 1905, the state has separated from the church meaning that there is no state religion or concordats of any sorts between state and faith. However, if we look closely at French legal texts, we notice a pattern of the state getting involved and - in a way - regulating faith. Some years ago, a law was passed that prohibited "ostentatious" religious signs in public spaces such as administrative buildings or schools. While this might sound quite reasonable considering the secular status of the country, it actually discriminates against Muslim young girls who decide to cover themselves and wear the hijab as a sign of their faith or even the young Jewish boys who might want to wear a kippa in their everyday life. A similar dilemma occurred when the wearing of the burqa was discussed on the political scene. It was finally prohibited as well, not only in public places but everywhere - even on the street. While the main reason advanced for this decision seemed to be overall security and the ability to see people's faces at all times, followers of the Muslim faith objected this law would become a hindrance in the practice of their faith.

To be noticed also, is the fact that while most of the Muslim religious signs are quite visible; most of the signs relating to other faiths - Cross, Star of David to cite a few - are easily concealable which might seem unfair. Indeed, a few years ago a kindergarten teacher was fired for wearing a hijab in the school; something that would not have happened to a professor wearing a necklace with a cross for example.

This trend of inequality between religions - at least in front of the law - is in my opinion one of the factors that might incite young people to turn to radicalism as a way to protest against those double-standards and in a roundabout way, reinforce religious intolerance.

I firmly believe that this situation needs to change and that **people should either be allowed complete freedom in terms of religion or the exact same laws should be applied to each and every religious confession.**

Talking, thinking, reflecting and planning are great but what we need is concrete steps towards a more tolerant Europe and a better, more secure future for all young Europeans, regardless of their religious beliefs. Therefore, we propose the following calls for action:

We believe that a strict separation between religion and state (no state religion) is essential if we want

to promote a "perfect" (or at least as perfect as it can possibly be) equality between different faiths.

Moreover, we think that the separation needs to be made clearer in a country like France (and any other that might show the same tendencies): indeed, some religions seem to be more respected - if not privileged - when it comes to the law while others are limited in their ability to practice according to one's will. That situation can open the door to discrimination or even, a sense of rejection and isolation from the broader community that might lead the people from those faiths to adopt more radical - if not extremist - views. To conclude, we strongly believe that laws should consider and treat all religions fairly and not show implicit preferences or more regard towards one over the other.

Photobook

By Semih Karadeniz

Religion has had a huge effect on Europe for a long time. Many wars, clashes and controversies have happened in history due to religious conflicts that European countries had for centuries. Ottoman-European tensions, Thirty Years' War, Eighty Years' War... one thing common with all these wars, they were fought in the name of religions, Christianity, Muslim and so forth. Despite all suffers we had, **we still think religion is one of the driving forces in Europe and as the youth of Europe, we still think it is an important value we have.** Therefore, we chose religion as one of our topics to discuss, and furthermore we decided to publish a photobook. Our photobook will basically consist of photographs of important religious monuments and buildings across Europe, plus basic information about them.



"We still think Religion is one of the driving forces in Europe and as the youth of Europe, we still think it is an important value we have." Semih Karadeniz (18, Istanbul)

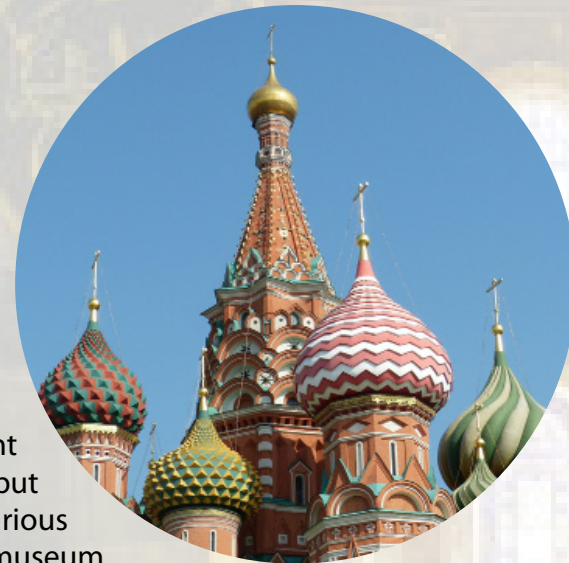


The **Cathedral of Cologne** is a famous Catholic cathedral located in Cologne, Germany. It is a Catholic church made in 632 years and is considered to be one of the most important religious buildings in Europe and the world. Its gothic structure is visible and considered one of the world's heritage sites, hence being protected by the United Nations.

La Sagrada Família is a very famous basilica located in Barcelona, Spain. It is commonly known as an incomplete building, because it has been under construction since 1883. The famous architect Antoni Gaudí started to build the basilica but the project got halted in 1926 when he died. It is still an on-going project and it is being built very slowly because of its complex structure. It is one of the most important projects contemporarily.



Saint Basil's Cathedral is an important Orthodox cathedral located in Moscow, Russia. It was built in 1561 by the Russian tsar Ivan the Terrible to celebrate the Russian victory over Khanate of Kazan and Astrakhan. Its eight domes represent eight different victories of Russia. At first, it was made by pure gold but in the late 17th century, it has been coloured with various different colours. It is currently open to the public as a museum.



The **Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican** is probably the most important sacred place in Europe. It is located in Rome, Italy and is the heart of Catholic Christianity. In Vatican City, the Pope, considered to be the leader of Catholics, lives. It is being visited by millions of people every year, and it is being guarded very carefully. It is considered to be a nation with a population of 900 people, including Swiss guards and cardinals who live there.



Hagia Sophia is a very famous mosque located in Istanbul, Turkey. Hagia Sophia was built as an Orthodox church by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I in the year 537. It was one of the central churches of the Byzantine Empire until the Conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire. After Ottomans captured Constantinople, Mehmed I – Sultan of the Ottoman Empire by that time – converted the church into a mosque and it was used as a mosque until modern Turkey was established. The modern Turkish government decided to convert the mosque to a museum, which is currently open to visitors all around the world.

Westminster Abbey is located in Westminster, United Kingdom. It is a famous Anglican Church and it is also the shrine of Edward the Confessor and burial place of many rulers. It is considered to be the first Christian church of the Southern Saxons in the UK. Furthermore, it has been established as a minister, many famous British rulers and scientists are buried here.



Notre Dame Cathedral is located in Paris, France. It is a world-wide known cathedral and has been named after Mary. It is one of the most distinguished Gothic structures and considered to be one of the first Gothic churches. It is the official chair of Archbishop of Paris and considered to be the most important religious monument in France.



Jerónimos Monastery is situated in Lisbon, Portugal. It has been built during the Portuguese explorations of the New World, and has been financed by Portuguese merchants. Its internal structure is inspired by maritime elements. It includes various designs of sea creatures and such. Its construction started out in 1501 and lasted 70 years.

St. Stephen's Cathedral is located in Vienna, Austria. It's located in the centre of Vienna, and considered to be heart of the city. It is been built in 1171, and it has been an active religious building since then. Because it has witnessed tons of Habsburg and Austrian incidents, it is considered to be a national symbol and it is still the most important structure in Austria.



Diversity

Introduction

By Alex Sieber

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations. The declaration fiercely condemns any kind of discrimination. In its second article the declaration states: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

All European countries have committed themselves to the UDHR. This does not make discrimination a thing of the past. As the following examples show, even in 2015 there are still many people discriminated against in Europe due to certain distinctive features.

The European refugee crises, which itself is not being discussed within the Manifesto but can neither remain unmentioned in this introduction, has provoked all sorts of political and public responses. Many of them – be it comments on social media, newspaper articles or official statements by top-ranking European politicians – were characterized by subliminal racism and dubious fears of the unknown.

On another note: In nine EU member states it is still not possible to achieve legal recognition of same-sex relationships although the EU is supposed to protect LGBT rights under its treaties and law. According to a European Social Survey, majorities in eight member states do not agree that "gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish". Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania consider passing laws banning public speaking about homosexuality.

No, Europe has not overcome discrimination, be it racism or homophobia. An honest and pragmatic dialogue is needed in order to tackle the problem. Europe has always been diverse and is becoming more diverse from day to day. To deal successfully with this challenge,

diversity must be considered a source of strength and richness rather than a sign of weakness and decay.

As My Europe's Working Group dealing with diversity we will broach this issue and try our best to foster this positive understanding of diversity. Let us speak up for a strong and diverse Europe!



"Discrimination has a lot of layers that make it tough for minorities to get a leg up". This quote from Bill Gates perfectly reflects the situation of ethnic minorities in Europe nowadays. Even though some structures may have been put in place to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities in our society, many of them still have to face discrimination on a daily basis. To counter these movements we will have to foster education on those topics. In my opinion, we can consider, that "Education is integration". Clara Hachmann (18, Nancy)

Ethnic minorities

By Clara Hachmann, Lidewij Folkertsma, Alex Sieber, Adinda Blank, Rokas Stasiulis

We believe that ethnic membership is not the determining factor for a possible identification with the state one lives in. On the contrary, history has shown cruelly what consequences it may have when ethnic identity becomes the only thing that matters (e.g. WWII or post-Yugoslavian wars in the 90s).

For this reason, we do not readily support intentions of secession like they for instance arise at the moment in Catalonia, Lombardy or Corsica.

Do we want a Europe whose countries divide more and more into little pieces of ethnic

groups? No. **We want a strong, diverse Europe!**

1. Every ethnic group should have its rights protected by the state they live in, not depending on whether they are the titular nation or not.

2. Ethnic minorities and majorities have to cooperate. Up to a certain point, the minority groups have to integrate themselves and – even more important – the majorities have to make sure that the minorities' identity (language, culture, traditions, etc.) are in no danger when they do so. All inhabitants of a state should show interest in and respect for the others, no matter what group they are part of.

3. Big ethnic minorities do often feel that they are not seen as an entity of the country. We would therefore strongly recommend the establishing of one day, in which the biggest ethnic minority of the respective European country is presented in schools, press and television (this would, for example, be a north-African day in France). By this, the ethnic minority will know that their being does matter in the country they are living in and the "native inhabitants" would learn something new about the way of life of this minority.

4. Not knowing about other regions of one same country often causes hate and a will of separating the region from the others to

create a new independent state. In order to improve the understanding between the regions of a country, we say that there should be school exchanges between pupils of different regions so that they get to know each other better.

Before we can try to accomplish these goals, we should try to gain more insight in how we should achieve them. Our second call for action, to get minorities and majorities to cooperate, would have been realised a long time ago if it were that easy.

To deepen our knowledge on ethnic minorities, Alex interviewed Stefan Wolff, a political scientist, who expertises in management and settlement of ethnic conflicts. He confirmed that

education is the key to knowledge of different ethnic groups and thus can stimulate cooperation and mutual understanding. He

also implies that segregation is not always inflicted, but in some cases self-imposed, which is one of the causes that this understanding is not established yet. To ensure that our calls for action, which all have to do with education somehow, are being realized, the attitude of

the different groups need to change. **Curiosity and respect should bring groups together.** Wolff

emphasizes that every minority has its own needs, so to begin with, those needs must be phrased. In order to realise our goals, we need to boost integration through education.



@ Neil Freeman

Interview with Stefan Wolff

By Alex Sieber

What are, in your opinion, the biggest challenges that Europe is currently facing regarding ethnic minorities?

There is a relatively great variation in terms of how well included different minorities are, which depends both on the country they live in and the minority group itself. National or so-called indigenous groups, which have basically lived in the same place forever and are only minorities because of the way states have been created and borders shifted, are normally better integrated than immigrant minorities. This is why the first challenge for European countries and institutions such as the European Union is to identify the different minorities and their specific problems. There is not one policy that is applicable to all minorities. Another challenge is to tackle the growing islamophobia in Europe. There is a sense of danger, which is primarily due to the habit of generalising. The degree, to which let's say Turkish or North African people are committed to Islam, let alone radical Islam, is greatly overestimated. Last but not least, there is the challenge of an inclusive notion of citizenship, which is still not fully implemented in practice.

What exactly do you mean by 'inclusive notion of citizenship'?

Countries must recognise that there are ethnic minorities and they must guarantee that their rights are protected. But it is dangerous to focus only on the civic notion of citizenship. "Equal rights" does not necessarily mean "the same rights". It can also mean that there are additional rights, which guarantee equality, for example certain religious or cultural practises, native language education and so on. If a concept of citizenship is not flexible, everybody has to be the same. And "to be the same"

means to be like the majority of the country, which creates tensions and problems and is just another way of exclusion. Therefore, the focus should be shifted onto inclusive citizenship.

How would you evaluate Europe's handling of these problems? What needs to be changed?

There is no doubt that the EU tries to come to terms with these problems. Having said that, it is still far from being perfect. Members of ethnic minorities are in many countries still less well off economically and have fewer opportunities in their lives. That has not always to do with policies or insufficient legislation. More often it is because laws are not fully implemented. Another reason is that some minorities tend to self-exclude themselves. Especially among immigrant minorities, there is a tendency of living fairly separated from the rest of the population, which is often due to the fact that newly arrived immigrants from a certain region work all in the same sector.

What needs to change are attitudes; but attitudes must change on both sides. Migrants are often perceived as people who come only to benefit from social welfare. In reality, they are often young, hard-working and they pay their taxes. Therefore, most of them are net-contributors to the country's budget. Many European governments are afraid of tackling the problem because they think of their re-election and know how delicate immigration as a topic is. They do not sufficiently tell people how important foreigners are for their economy. This is why the EU and other organisations such as the OECD or the European Council are doing – as institutions – more than their actual member states. There should be an open discourse, which focuses on the positive aspects of

immigration as well. **People should see citizenship as a mechanism of integration which guarantees rights, but which entails responsibilities as well.** In a situation where everybody has equal responsibilities, everybody is equally contributing, too.

How should the money that governments have at their disposal in this area be spent best?

Again, we have to distinguish between different minority groups. Every minority has its own needs, so to begin with, those needs must be found out. This process should be based on evidence, coming partially from the minorities themselves, rather than on mere assumptions made at the cabinet table. In general, I think the money ought to serve the following three main purposes. It should help the minorities to develop or preserve their own identity. Minorities should be given the ability to secure their cultural reproduction. Secondly, the money should be spent on ensuring equal opportunities in a broadly economic sense, which means above all, making sure that everybody has got equal access to education. In addition to that, certain programmes must be set in place to foster economic opportunities of groups who have previously been underprivileged. The third purpose would be to make sure that there are proper mechanisms through which minorities can participate politically. That does not involve a lot of money, actually; I am more thinking of resources, human resources, to be precise. Creating some sort of advisory groups of minorities, for example, which would counsel the governments, could attain this. It should be as visible as possible in order to let the people feel that they are included in society and its decision-making.

The word 'diversity' has mostly a very positive connotation. Rightly so? In what way does society benefit from diversity and in what way does it have a harmful impact?

I think that 'diversity' is a good catch of word because it is so broad. It does not just divide into majority and minority but it accepts the fact that there are multiple ways of being different, be it in terms of ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexuality or whatever. For this reason, I definitely think that it is something positive. And it is even more positive if you see diversity as difference and not as deficiency. But, again, diversity has to be understood as an inclusive concept. There is a decade-old EU slogan saying 'Unity in Diversity', so in that sense I think that the EU has been quite constructive in promoting diversity. Where there is, on the other hand, a potential of negativity in diversity is that by recognising diversity, you recognise difference. This difference can then be exploited for various purposes that create division rather than unity and therefore lead to animosities between different groups. I am, nevertheless, very much in favour of recognising diversity, but the potential for disruption needs to be recognised all the same.

Do you think that there is a tipping point in diversity where it is becoming too much?

Well, all the research that has been done on this topic suggests that it works like a bell curve. The greatest potential for disruption is at a medium level of diversity. If there is no diversity, it can obviously not cause any disruption. If there is a lot of diversity, it is usually fine, too. But, as many studies on ethnic conflicts and civil wars show, situations involving only two or three major ethnic groups are much more likely to end badly than those involving fifteen.

And in terms of immigration?

Well, that is a different issue, of course. Some immigrants are not actually citizens, so their rights are determined by other standards. And, I mean yes, there is a problem. A perceived problem of too much immigration. But I would say that it is rather a question of how it is managed. How can you manage the intake? And how can you distribute this intake? I do not think that we necessarily are at the point in Europe where we have reached satiation. If you look at demographic patterns of West European countries you will notice that the population pyramid does not look very healthy. In the long term we do need immigration to actually sustain our existence. Immigration has to be managed more constructively, though.

The question is not only how many immigrants we provide with access, but also how they will be integrated once they are here. If there are political policies that enable the migrants to fully integrate, nobody has to fear a loss of their own cultural values or 'foreign infiltration'.

But that is easier said than done! What is the perfect balance between integration and the preservation of cultural values?

I think one needs to carefully distinguish between assimilation and integration. Assimilation is always something forced; forced to become like the majority, basically. Whereas integration, I think, is a more normative concept saying: If you choose to live in a particular country, you will have to accept certain norms and values of this country, which does not mean that you have to give up all the rest. The fine line that we have to draw here is: How far can we go in demanding a certain acceptance of our society's values? And to what extent can we expect the 'local' population to respect and accept the values certain immigrants bring with them?

And – how far can we go?

I do not know. I mean, for me it is a range of basic things, really. A commitment to democracy, to equality... Every decision should be made in a way that whoever is affected by it, can live with it. So the policies that are to be developed should, when equally implemented, not harm anyone. Many of those things have to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Quite often it is just common sense, I think.

Speaking of immigration – why is it that immigration is the probably most discussed and most controversial topic in Europe at the moment? Why now?

There are three main reasons, in my opinion. The first one clearly is terrorism. The second one is that we in Europe are still undergoing an economic crisis or are only about to get out of it, a time in which immigration is always difficult. And the third point is that immigration itself has increased. This is on one hand due to the fact that the way they get here has become more efficient by means of organised crime, and on the other hand, because the problems in the countries the people are coming from, have got worse. Those three causes come neatly together at the moment and explain why immigration is so hotly debated.

How can we respond to anti-migration parties such as UKIP or Front National?

Well, quite simply by sending a much more positive message about the contribution immigrants actually make. And by having a more honest discussion about why they are here and what they are running away from. Even left-wing or centre parties are nowadays talking about how they want to get tougher on immigration. In this question, all the parties seem to swing towards right, trying to absorb the votes of UKIP, FN or whatever right-wing party there is in the country, rather than actually saying: 'No, this is wrong'. And yes, getting tough on immigration might be part of the response, but it cannot be under any circumstances the whole response. Having more aggressive border control does not address the problem. It is the general embrace of a negative discourse that needs to change. We need to become much more positive and fact-based in what we are saying.

What can we young people in particular do in order to change this negative discourse?

Travel as much as you can. Get as many experiences of other cultures as possible, and therefore hopefully recognise that

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differences are not a problem. Be critical and question the established wisdom. Do not take for granted what politicians and media tell you. Be as inquisitive as possible and try to identify and define the problems in the way you see them. Because, the way you define the problems does quite often shape the solutions to it. Embrace exchange programmes like Erasmus, which I believe is very promising to create a generation of leaders who will look at things differently. These sorts of exchanges will help you to see communalities where other people see differences. And it will make you experience the differences as enrichment rather than as a struggle. **It is my hope that young people will challenge the established discourse and foster different attitudes towards diversity.**

We have not touched the subject of indigenous minorities eager for independence yet, although it is quite topical at the moment, given the current situation in Scotland, Catalonia, etc. Do these intentions deserve to be supported, in your opinion?

Well, it is there, whether we like it or not. We have to recognise that there are significant parts of these societies that see more benefits in being independent. The referendum in Scotland was won on the basis of a positive campaign, which emphasised the benefits for Scotland of remaining in the UK. Simply pointing out possible negative consequences of a separation, as they initially did, would have been the wrong strategy. It also shows that countries get into trouble when they had not been proactive in promoting inclusion in the first place. This was what created the momentum, which made the launching of an independence campaign possible, both in Scotland and in Catalonia.

But is it in Europe's interest to keep the countries together as they are?

Well, I would say that it is in Europe's interest to avoid conflicts. I am not a fan of redrawing boundaries, but it is still better to redraw boundaries than to have a bloody ethnic conflict. I do not think that this is really on the agenda in Scotland or Catalonia, of course, but politicians on both sides bear nonetheless the responsibility to manage this problem constructively and peacefully. If that means that Catalonia becomes an independent state at some point, then so be it. Provided that mechanisms are found to enable a reasonable process with the least negative impacts, separation would not be the end of the world.



"As people have continued to ask me about my sexual orientation or „what I identify as“ I have learned to always give them the same simple answer: I fall in love with whoever I happen to fall in love with.

Because at the end of the day, terms such as 'homosexual' or 'bisexual' are nothing but labels that all result in what is probably a human's most powerful emotion: Love. I dream of a future where all of us can finally embrace this beautiful emotion, where all of us can lovingly hold our partner's hand as we walk down the street, where all of us can legally marry the person we want to spend the rest of our lives with, regardless of who or what they identify as. I dream of a future where society considers your sexual orientation or gender identity to be just as important as your favourite colour. Let's fight in the name of love." Benedict Winkler (17, Vienna)

LGBT+ Youth in Europe

By Benedict Winkler

These following hypothetical diary entries by LGBT+ youth are to show that bashing and intolerance towards minorities represent an extensive human rights abuse that we cannot afford to overlook. Several studies conducted by the European Union illustrate that LGBT+ youth are up to 40% more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers, a devastating number that is to be attributed to social exclusion, bullying and a general lack of acceptance and tolerance in our society.

Meanwhile only a small minority of member states are legally fully tolerant, meaning that they treat LGBT+ citizens equally in all aspects of life. Out of 28 member states, only 11 have legalized same sex marriage, while seven have even banned it. Also when it comes to transgender laws, 73% of transgender individuals in the EU think that better legal gender recognition laws would allow them to live more comfortably.

We believe that in our Europe of the 21st century, we have to look at diversity and differences between humans as an enrichment, rather than an obstacle. By teaching values like tolerance, acceptance and kindness towards everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, from an early age, Europe could soon also live up to its acclaimed title as the "most tolerant place on earth". As we are the future of this continent, it is up to us to end such things as homophobia or transphobia, it is up to us to fight for fully equal treatment, it is up to us to make Europe a better place.

Marie, Belgium

20 September 2006

Dear Diary,

I'm so happy! Today is my 10th birthday! My parents invited my best friends to celebrate and I got plenty of gifts: a CD, a stuffed bear, a soccer ball, and of course you, my diary. Mom said I could write anything I wanted in here, so I'll start by introducing myself to you: I'm brown-haired, brown-eyed, I love princess stories and later I want to be a writer or a journalist. Also, in here my name will be Marie because I think Jonathan is a stupid name.

3 April 2010

Dear Diary,

I had The Talk with my parents today. Dad cried. Mom started screaming, asking what was wrong with her child. Can you imagine? The person who is supposed to give you unconditional love thinking there's something wrong with you. Dad said that he raised a boy, not a girl. When they found out that Mom was pregnant they did not care whether their baby would be a boy or a girl, they would love it, regardless of its gender. Why is it different now? What changed? I think they were just confused, because when I told them I was leaving they seemed to realize that I was still their child. They came around and hugged me and Mom said with an almost aggressive certainty "We love you, you're not going anywhere!". And I guess they accepted me, although it feels funny for Dad to call me Marie instead of Jonathan. But he will get used to it, to me, eventually.

18 May 2012

Dear Diary,

I know it's been a long time since I last wrote something. I just got back from the hospital and the therapist said it would be a good idea to write down what happened. So I'll do it, I'll write why I swallowed all those pills and lay down on my bed with the certainty that I would never wake up again. When I did wake up in the hospital I was angry: angry at myself because I had survived, angry at my parents because they didn't let me die, angry at my schoolmates for chasing me home after school, for calling me a freak, an animal, because I wore the dress Mom had bought me, because I didn't act like a male, because I can't be who I am.

Afterwards, as I lay in the hospital bed, I remembered what Dad had said all those years back when my uncle asked my parents why they allowed me to behave that way. He replied "I would rather have a living transgender daughter than a dead son!".

9 December 2014

Dear Diary,

I finally turned eighteen so I am now legally allowed to proceed with a change of sex. I have been told that I cannot officially change my papers and request a name change until I undergo a surgical intervention. So I made an appointment with a psychologist who examined my case before deciding my fate. I felt like I was being interrogated for a crime I did not commit. "Why do you wish to change your sex?" "When did you first realize you were different?" "Is there a history of mental illnesses in your family?"

He finished the examination by saying that I would be able to proceed with the surgery, but warned me that sterilization was mandatory. Sterilization? Sterilization is for animals and today, I felt like an animal, again.

22 February 2015

Dear Diary,

Today I went to my very first job interview. Mom found me a job at the editorial office of a local newspaper through a friend of hers. I was really excited! Until I had the interview: it was the interrogation room all over again. "So are you a man or a woman?" "Transwoman? Really?" "You've had surgery?" "What was your male name?". All I could hear was the deafening sound of

violence and oppression. So I left. **And on those days when my life is filled with hatred and despair, I look at the sky and pray, pray that the future will hold joy, peace, understanding and justice. Because justice is what love looks like.**

Tyler, Austria

15 May 2015

I have never really believed in diaries to be honest. It just always seemed so absurd and ridiculous that people would actually sit down and practically write to themselves. Well, I've never really believed in them up until today. I'm Tyler, by the way.

Where do I even start? To give you (actually nobody is supposed to read this, but I guess this is how you write a diary...?) an idea of who I am, let's maybe start with a little description of my dear self ... I'm currently 16 years old and therefore in my junior year of high school. People don't really notice me all that much, some might even think of me as something like a "wallflower". I live in a typically suburban house in a rather calm neighbourhood with my two parents and my dog (now that I'm reading this, I realize that it sounds like I have the most boring family ever – but don't be fooled, we're actually really crazy). Anyways, what I want to say by all of this is that I'm pretty much just a normal teenager. Oh and one more thing: I also happen to be gay.

To be honest, I've always been very happy to be homosexual and, even if I had the choice, I wouldn't have it any other way. However, I'm not going to lie, there are really rough times where I wish I would just fit in like everybody else and "be normal", as they say. Especially high school can very quickly become the reality of all your worst nightmares when you dare to be different. Boys' locker rooms quickly turn into your least favourite places, conservative Religion teachers trying to force their views on you become your least favourite people and "So, do you have a girlfriend?" becomes your least favourite question. A walk along the hallway is marked by everyone staring at you, mostly in combination with them whispering or giggling. Teenagers can be extremely judgmental, but "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger", right? Especially straight men, and mostly groups of them, pose a constant threat to your human dignity, mental and sometimes even physical well-being. You learn to avoid them, but the occasional "fag!" or "homo!" seem unavoidable. It was only yesterday that someone threw an apple, along with a series of unrepeatably words, out of a bypassing car at me. This cannot go on like this.

Aaron, Germany

30 May 2015

Here we go again: Today, I went to town with my friends to do some shopping and have lunch. Sounds like a plan for a Saturday afternoon, but the people there had to do it again: „Why would you use the men's bathroom? Aren't you a girl? Well, don't worry, we all make mistakes sometimes.“ And afterwards they all have that smile on their faces as if they had been extraordinarily nice or merciful. Oh, I hate it so much!

Yes, I know that I still look pretty much like a girl, even though I've already done so much to myself. I cut my hair. Put some hair gel in it to make it look boyish. Didn't do my makeup. Didn't do my eyebrows. Put on a Yankee hat and a hoodie. But in the end, it's probably hard to change one's face to look less feminine without surgery, so now people get to call me a lesbian. The nice ones. Others go with "dyke" or even more absurd names for me. It appears that most people actually think I was attracted to other females from the self-understanding of being a woman, aka. lesbian. But that's just not it. I am not a girl, even though I was born as one. How am I supposed to convince people?

My friends know all about it, and **it's just the real friends who stayed in contact with me after me coming out of the closet and telling people who I really was.** They protect me from other's aggressions and fight back for me. However, I know they won't always be there. At some point in my life I'll be all by myself. I'll have to learn to be self-confident and stick with my decisions, like going to the men's restroom and explaining those, who might be offended by it, how I feel.

I don't think that solely society is to blame for my situation. Of course; in the ends it's always the people who let those affected feel how they are thinking about us, but it's much more of a mixture from traditionalism and the politics influenced by it. Religion is another factor that needs to be considered.



“Ethnic minorities have been and will be a problematic subject as long as centralist governments exert pressure on them. Europe must not remain stuck in its past ways. We must learn to move forward as a new, better Europe and build a united, diverse future, no matter the ethnicity.” Ana Ilinca Ilie (21, Bucharest)

Diversity throughout time

Without Borders

By Ana Ilinca Ilie

Elena Miruna Ilie is currently a student, majoring in International Economics and Business at a university in Beijing, which she will be graduating from in summer 2015. She has also studied at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, which she has already graduated from. At present, she is also taking part in a Master's Programme at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, majoring in Economics Diplomacy in Foreign Affairs. In her spare time, she is a volunteer English teacher at a Learning Center in Beijing.

What did studying in China, as opposed to studying in Europe, bring to the table?

I believe that pursuing your studies in China is an excellent opportunity to explore the world's most populated country. You can experience China's unique blend of ancient and modern civilization, as well as its scenic beauty and bustling nightlife. Being here will provide you with a new way of visualizing the

world and give you the kind of insight that just does not come from textbooks. But what played a key factor in my decision to come here is that, in terms of economics, China has been the world's fastest growing country for the past 30 years. China serves as a huge market for multinational corporations, and employers are well aware that a real understanding of China, Chinese culture and Chinese people is a big plus for those who want to become the world's next generation of leaders. Honestly though, I wanted to challenge myself and make sure I stand out, when I start applying for jobs, both in Europe and outside.

What is your definition of diversity?

My definition of diversity is having the courage to be different, no matter what. Since childhood, we keep on hearing that each of us is unique. Yet, in the humdrum of life, as we walk along with millions of others on the eternal quest for success, what really makes us stand out? Can you put your finger on your unique feature? A human being is a single being, unique and unrepeatable. In my opinion, the best way to challenge stereoty-

pes and promote sensitivity and inclusion is to treat everybody equally and with dignity, no matter of their circumstances. However, equal does not mean that we are all the same. Each of us is different in our own special way - but we also have the common qualities that make us all human. So each of us should be treated with respect and dignity and we must treat others the same. Not one person should be discriminated against.



Do you think that the concept of diversity should be taught from early on?

I do. Parents play a key factor in the way a child thinks, at least for a period of time. Being taught to think that diversity is natural can help you develop as a human being. For example, with the help of my parents, I came to value the diversity that exists in the world around me; first on a small scale, in my school, community and friends I interacted with, then in a larger framework, as I inevitably encountered diversity in the media. Television, videos, books, newspapers, magazines and the Internet continuously underline

the concerns, needs and accomplishments of people of all types from different cultures and ethnicities.

What would you say was the most challenging aspect of studying abroad?

Language barriers, definitely. What native speakers often do not realize is that, more often than not, it is not the other person's accent but their own way of speaking that creates the greatest barriers to effective communication. Cross-cultural communication takes more time. If not at all times, certainly initially you cannot expect your communication to occur with the same speed and ease as when you are communicating with someone from your own culture.

What is one thing you wish you could change, regarding the way natives view immigrants?

The most important thing I wish I could change regarding the way that natives view immigrants is that immigrants do not take work away from the native-born. Even though economists insist that foreign-born workers do not affect the employment rate positively or negatively and that immigration has a good impact on the economy of one's country because immigrants help create new jobs, natives will stoutly insist that it is not them who are hired for these jobs, it is the immigrants that take advantage of these opportunities. I strongly believe that all of the countries should be more open to high-skilled immigrants. They are good for the economy, and an uptick in demonstrably uncontroversial immigrants might mitigate anxiety about the group as a whole. We live in a world that was founded on the principle of fairness, of giving everyone a chance to make his or her own way in life, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or other characteristics, so I think it is important that native-born realize that they are not competing with the immigrants - they are given an opportunity to coexist.

Diversity in the past

By Jakub Sieradzan

Europe is the second smallest continent on Earth, being at the same time third in terms of population. We have forty-seven countries, and only Africa has a few more. It is noticeable that we are probably the most diverse land of all. So many cultures, languages and traditions. So many people, origins and behaviours. Through ages, something could go wrong. It unfortunately did so. I want to present three, in my opinion, most interesting periods, and also the most important ones in the subject of diversity and tolerance in the past.

The Roman Empire is associated with power, Colosseum, and one of the biggest territories one country ever had. However, not everyone knows that Romans persecuted Christians for hundreds of years. The hardest times were during the reign of Caesar Nero. He was even believed by many Christians to be the Antichrist. The worst thing he probably did to them was shifting the blame on them for the Great Fire of Rome. It resulted with unleashing pure hate towards followers of Christ. However, they were not the only ones having a rough time. There were a lot of slaves in the Roman Empire. They had no rights, neither freedom of speech. The number of them finally was so high that it led to the famous Third Servile War. Plebs had it better, but was still far from the patricians as the richest people of Ancient Rome. Although free, they did not have many rights until the republic period. It is clearly to see that society of the Roman Empire was built upon diversity.

The Middle Ages were not the first era when someone thought "You are different. I do not like you". However, it surely could be a motto of that period. They are called Dark Ages for a reason. Being different in any way was

really hard. People feared what they did not understand. Women suspected of practicing witchcraft were being thrown into the lake. If a woman floated, it meant that she was using magic. Then she was dragged from the water and burned alive on a pile. She could be considered innocent only when she drowned. Either way, she died. Human fear may be indeed horrifying. People in the Middle Ages in most European countries were even more unequal than in Ancient Rome. Society was not uniform and was divided into three estates, that differed in terms of rights and duties. In the First Estate was the entire clergy. In the second one, nobility. And in the last, the Third Estate, belonged everyone else, mostly peasants. Women had unfortunately additional classification. They were divided into virgins, wives, and widows. It was awfully chauvinistic and unfair way of categorizing for them.

The last time period I want to describe is the Victorian Era. It was a period of peace, prosperity, refined education and imperial power of the British state. Although it could look great, there is always the other side the coin. Of course there was a division of society for poor and rich citizens. There was a huge gap between them, as they hated each other to the core. Upper class despised working class, considering them filthy and inferior. They even tried to make their rights as low as possible. The biggest injustice during that age met women. The female part of the population could not vote, sue, or have their savings in bank accounts. The assets a woman had, after marriage became the property of her husband and even in the case of divorce remained in his hands. A husband had a right to his wife, always, anytime. Refusal to co-existence could result in beating. Often rapes occurred in relationships. Wife suspected of treason could be thrown out of the house immediately. It was also a sufficient reason for the divorce, but only for men. A man who committed adultery was not judged so

harshly, moreover, it was even considered natural that at some time he may need variety in the form of the body of another woman. When it came to the education of women, they did not have the same opportunities as men to study. They rarely had the opportunity to attend university. Despite this, some women fortunately devoted time to learn „male subjects“, e.g. law, the arts, engineering and physics, thus contribute to increasing future equality.



Taking all these points into consideration it is clear to see that **ages pass, empires fall and eras change, but prejudices and injustice are still present. They just evolve just like society does. That is why it is so important to fight against**

them in every way. People need to be aware that gender, skin colour, beliefs and circumstances of one's birth are irrelevant. It is what you do with the gift of life that determines who you are. We end the vicious cycle of mistakes, and work as one for the brighter future.

Diversity in the present

By Nicolás de Larramendi Enjuto

In the recent decades, Europe has become one of the most diverse societies in the world. Migration movements, fostered by the freedom of movement and the EU enlargement policy, have produced a great variety of ethnic and cultural groups. The change in Europeans' mentality has also broadened our society. We live in a much less restrictive reality. We are freer to decide our way of life, without being judged or rejected by the rest of society. We can dress as we like, we can vote who we like, we can love much more freely. We have become much more able to choose. However, this diversely rich society is far from being perfect. How do Europeans cope with this diversity? Are we really that free to live as we like?

Intolerance has proven to be one of the great challenges of our time. Many people do not accept diversity. We must not forget that some Europeans have been brutally murdered because of their religion. Other Europeans continue to protest against immigrants, Muslims or the LGBTB community. This progressive diversity and multiculturalism has caused repulse in some parts of society. Why? Probably ignorance and closed-mindedness have caused some of this. As human beings and citizens we tend to simplify things. It is much easier to classify people or facts as "black" or "white", "good" or "bad". But reality is not that simple, it is filled with overtones. Diversity is rich, but it can also be very complex.

The speed of information in the western world has also contributed to enlarge this simplification of diversity. Social networks, the digital media and the internet have quickened the transmission of information. Every mass media firm or professional wants to produce a headline or a hashtag as quick as possible. This makes people express their views about issues they do not really know about. **There is no time for reflection or critical thought. Novelty calls for priority.**

Another concerning issue is the beauty canons advertising has imposed. Many young people in Europe do not feel comfortable with their bodies. We live surrounded by pictures and advertising spots that show tall, skinny girls and muscled young men. We unconsciously assume that those are the beauty models we should follow. If we do not look like that, we are not keeping up with the standards. But as one walks in the streets of any European city, how many people can one see who look really alike these top models? Most Europeans do not fit in this cannon of beauty. This can cause a great deal of distress among teenagers and young people. But it does not

mean Europeans are not beautiful. Diversity also exists in our physical appearance, and we must cherish and value this richness, and try and free ourselves from this "tyranny" of the body worship.

To deal with the challenge of diversity we must use the same instruments that tend to simplify it. Media and advertising can be part of the problem, imposing a certain "way of life" to a



diverse society. These two agents must try to be part of the solution, acknowledging and cherishing the rich differences we perceive among Europeans. Their enormous influence in public opinion must be used wisely. Young people must push to defend the peaceful co-existence between a great amalgam of cultures, lifestyles and opinions. The State must ensure that the youth are educated in values of respect, tolerance and open mindedness. The combination of civil movements, governments and the media will undoubtedly achieve the change of mentality Europeans need. After all, the motto of the EU is "united in diversity".

Diversity and tolerance in the future

By Georgi Kirkov

Undoubtedly, Europe has become more diverse than ever. The core reason for this continues to be the unprecedented rate at which people from outside of Europe have been immigrating to it. According to a 2012 ageing report by the European Commission, the net inflow of immigrants to the European Union in 2010 was 1,018,000 people and this is going to increase to 1,217,000 by 2020.

Unstable social, political and economic situations in their country of origin, has pushed millions to immigrate to the 'old continent' in pursuit of a better life. However, the ageing population of Europe - it has been estimated by the European Commission that by 2025 more than 20% of Europeans will be 65 or over - has arguably been another primary cause which has contributed to this process. Acknowledging the 'greying' of (native) Europeans, governments across Europe have realized that in order to keep their economies on the rise, they need more people of working age and have thus been welcoming immigrants from outside of Europe for decades. This is not surprising, since never in history has economic prosperity been accompanied by depopulation.

Following this mass immigration of people to Europe and the current age structures and the number of live births per European wo-

man and immigrants, some are wondering whether these will threaten the diversity of Europeans. Essentially, if these trends continue, the diversity of Europeans will decrease following the decrease in their numbers. Assuming that Europeans will not want such a scenario, due to the fact that few human beings would like to see their identity and culture disappearing, the decreasing number of Europeans compared to the immigrants in Europe could be perceived as a huge problem for Europeans. Let's discuss now a number of solutions Europeans can come up with in order to tackle this assumed problem.

Firstly, the most obvious solution may be to raise the fertility rate of Europeans. Some European countries like Denmark and Sweden have already been trying hard to do this by giving all sorts of economic benefits to households with more babies. In Denmark, dating websites for people who want babies have even been created (e.g. <http://loveandkids.dk/signup>). Despite all of these efforts, very little success has been recorded. The truth is that Europeans have enjoyed tremendous improvements in their standard of life and their opportunity cost of having more babies have increased significantly. Moreover, just telling people to have more babies for whatever reason is odd. People should never have children as a duty, but only as something they really want to do.

Secondly, let's go back to the aforementioned immigration. On the one hand, if European countries suddenly close their borders to immigrants, this would mean that not only will Europe's economy be in great danger, but such a measure will not be particularly in line with European ideas such as multiculturalism and openness to the rest of the world. On the other hand, if Europe continues to welcome immigrants at the current rate, the issue about Europeans slowly losing their identity and culture becomes quite real. Maybe that is why many political actors in Europe are ur-

ging for a more moderate approach whereby immigration is minimized.

Thirdly, some people believe Europeans should wage a form of 'war' against immigrants becoming more numerous by trying to forcefully Europeanize them or even dispel them from the continent. Personally, I strongly believe such an approach to be insane and not up to the moral values which I hope every one of us is aspiring to. Despite my belief, it appears that xenophobia amongst Europeans towards immigrants is on the rise and unfortunately tension is building up. Nevertheless, we should not be fooled by propaganda and opt out of violent confrontations with immigrants.

Maybe Europeans will inevitably lose their identity and will see other nationalities and cultures take over the continent. Maybe this process is something natural and no solutions are available to change it. Or maybe the assumptions that there is such a process and it is problematic is wrong in the first place?

The bottom line is that European governing institutions should as soon as possible create an honest and productive dialogue with their citizens about the future population and thus the cultural outlook of our continent.



E mploym ent

Introduction

By Anatheia Cristea

The issues of employment have been ever-present in the discussions of contemporary societies. Widely debated by the media, the people and the political class, employment is being broken down into sections: employment legislation, the economics of employment and the cultural aspects partaking employment. As a group we have identified several problems within these sections in the EU, such as: high youth unemployment rates, persistent employment discrimination and decreasing rates of elderly employment.

Young people are of vital importance to the well-being of societies and due to the last financial crisis and a struggling job market there is intense competition in the age group of 18-30 years olds. We believe that better communication within countries can lead to perfected educational systems that cater for the needs of the job markets and thus create individuals with more exact professional paths.

Discrimination in the workplace is another

issue of great concern to us. Age, gender, religion, appearance, handicaps, sexual orientation - we believe all these should not prevent individuals from acquiring opportunities they deserve. We therefore ask the EU to revise its regulation and strengthen the laws to prevent companies from voluntarily or involuntarily denying certain minorities their employment or failing to cater to everyone's well-being within their workplace.

Lastly, we chose to focus on the fact that the older generation is getting less work, at a time when the European Union has a preponderantly ageing population. We believe that older people could continue to be of great use in a variety of industries and should not be forced to retire. As mentors they could pass on their professional expertise and experience gained throughout the years.

In conclusion, we are greatly concerned about the issues of employment throughout Europe and we have tried to propose doable services with achievable goals for the revival of employment.



“Communication is key, especially when it comes to youth unemployment. How should neighbouring countries otherwise know what talents are maybe hidden right across the border?” Smaranda Vedrasco (17, Vienna)

Youth unemployment

By Smaranda Vedrasco, Chloe McDonnell, Karl Maximilian Weber and Armand Naessens

Current situation

With information collected from www.europa.eu, we found out that the youth unemployment rate in Europe is rising. In 2007 the youth unemployment rate was at 15.7%, until 2011 it increased to 22%. Even the long-term youth unemployment rate has risen, from 26.1% to 30.1%. This means that more youths are left unemployed annually.

6.6% of youths are self-employed, as opposed to 47% who would like to be. In 2010, 27.8% of youths between the ages of 20-29 were on a temporary contract. 29.1% of youths aged 18 to 24 are at risk of poverty. 10.1% can also not afford to pay for things such as rent, mortgage, utility, phone bills, car costs and refrigerators. These can only be paid for with a stable income at hand.

In 2011, it was reported that 32.6% of people under 30 had an artistic skillset which could help them get a job, such as the abi-

lity to play an instrument, sing, dance, film make, act, or photography skills. 93% of these had taken part in a sporting or leisure activity that could get them a scholarship to a college or university such as attending a sport club, youth club or any kind of leisure organisation. With these skills, young people find it easier to get into college and get their degree, in turn getting them a good job.

In 2011, 24.6% participated in organised volunteer activities such as helping out a charity or charity event and received a certificate or diploma for their work.

Decisions already taken by the EU

The European Commission is very concerned about these high numbers of youth unemployment.

Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility: “I have made the fight against youth unemployment my utmost priority.” This is a very good sign and has already translated itself into a lot of decisions taken over the past few years.

In 2012 the EU Commission presented their Youth Employment Package and, more specifically, their recommendations on the Youth Guarantee. These are country-specific recommendations addressed to the national governments on how to tackle the problem of youth unemployment in their country. These are country-specific for the reason, that one size does not fit all and every country has different conditions upon which the solutions have to be based. Although the way of succeeding is different in every member state, their goal is one and the same: they want all young people up to the age of 25 to receive a job offer, continue education, start an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

In 2013 the EU Commission reinforced the Youth Employment Package with the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). It contains a 6 billion euro boost to the Youth Guarantee to quicken the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the member states for the period of 2014 to 2020.

On 22 May 2015 the proposal of Commissioner Marianne Thyssen to pre-finance 1 billion euro for the Youth Employment Initiative got approved by the member states, three weeks after the approval by the European Parliament. This means an extra boost to the YEI programme and is necessary to counteract budgetary constraints faced by member states and the lack of available funding at the initial stage of the programming period.

Another measure to boost youth employment was the Youth on the Move programme. A programme that aimed at making working or studying abroad more popular among young people to solve the European youth unemployment problems. Unfortunately this programme came to an end in December 2014. However, under Erasmus+ there are new initiatives for 2014-2020.

We can conclude that the EU is taking a lot of decisions to tackle the youth unemployment problems but that the communication about these decisions is very poor and that they have not yet achieved their objectives.

Our proposals

Our continent is maltreated by economic crises and their consequences in recent years. The solutions we propose are of course planned in long-term since realising them within only a few months is just as unlikely as Europe being able to recover from its defeats in short time. Besides, all of these actions are not only restricted to the employment sector but often to other fields as well. However,

we must all pull together in order to overcome our social, financial and employment-related problems. This makes our solutions different from the European strategy. Maybe in combining both ways, we will have a chance at giving every work-interested person a place in the European community.

The first step that came to our mind was intensifying communication between cities, regions and nations in Europe. The respective ministers of all EU member states and, ideally, the other European nations as well, should exchange ideas and information about what kind of employees their own economies need. This issue is of course highly related to the educational basis that has to be in accord with the employment sector and its requirements, in order to increase efficiency and determination in this field. In addition to this, by combining these needed working skills with the results of education researches, as for example PISA, we can all enumerate and name our problematic fields on the one side and work on them, as far as our educational systems are concerned, on the other side.

One day, "this communication will hopefully exist on a global level", says José Luis del Olmo, Managing Director at Deichmann in Spain and Portugal.

An advantage of our globalised and internationalised world is the simplicity of sharing up to anything within seconds. So why not applying this principle on our job market? Why not extending the key of communication to cooperation?

Our idealised image of a transnational labour market would imply European young workers having the chance of developing or even working in other European countries, if they are unable of doing so in their native country. Due to the many language barriers on this continent, several countries would have to build their own labour market alliances with each other to ensure their own one to be balanced in case of needing special working groups. This brings us back to educational systems, on which the European nations would have to hold up education in several languages, to prepare the youth to study abroad. The majority would even benefit from financially supported internships in foreign European countries.

"But first we should start on a regional level, before we get to the international market," says Dr. Ulrich Ott, Head of Clariant Region Europe and Managing Director of Clariant Germany.

The third point which seemed plausible to

us has another relation to education. Many students regret their first choice at university or other education institutions due to insufficient demand in the specific field. Conversion is what they are searching for. They should be given the opportunity to easily swap subjects. It is very important that those who do not get the right start in their career get the possibility to find a new job in a demanded area, after they changed their direction of formation, and, if necessary, receive help in moving to their new job locations. This and the two aspects shown above are extremely woven into each other. Flexibility in education, working place and location are the crucial parts in finding an appropriate job in time. However, regarding this point, it is of high importance to not take it, or the other proposals, as excuses for national political failure.

"We have to do our homework first", remarked Jorgo Riss, political scientist and director of Greenpeace European Unit, quite justly.

To round this European Labour Market off, EU officials should connect the public and private sector with civil society. Since our target is growing wealth by creating new jobs, the market's deficiencies have to be solved as soon as possible.

Sharing experiences, work forces, resources and expertise, achieving our goals will become a lot easier than running on our own. Obviously these are no guarantees for the solution of youth unemployment. It will be a long process until the labour market has recovered but the process can be accelerated by the cooperation of as many people as possible. Many projects and initiatives must be started to evaluate which solutions work best for young people. In a union of solidarity, interacting and helping each other is a vital issue that can hold it together in case of a crisis.



"Employment discrimination is something that is very important to me. There should not be anyone who is discriminated due to any way they look or in what religion they believe in, especially not at a workplace." Eliot Robinson (17, Stockholm)

Employment discrimination

Discrimination: a problem to be dealt hand in hand with companies

By Sophia Guermi

"Some people are more likely to be selected than others. [...] Skills should be the only thing that matters though". These are the words of Christopher, a 19-year-old Frenchman, who also happens to be Black, when he is asked about employment discrimination. His words embody the common prejudice against the working world and the criticism from those who have already faced its inequality. The ethics of companies are, and too often rightfully questioned. Therefore, the purpose we seek is to propose measures and consulting bodies enforced on a European scale improving working life without overwhelming regulations tightening companies' free will and functioning.

According to the 2015 International Labour Organization report "Employment and social matters in the world", the classic work pattern is jeopardized for the benefit of the rising of temporaries and informal economy. The workers belonging to these categories, mostly women and young people, benefit from less or no social coverage at all, and are social uncertainty prone, more exposed to social exclusion. Thus employment discrimination has direct consequences on the social gap.

The figures as well as workers testimonies show that equal job does not mean equal wages. Indeed, when young people are interviewed about their greatest fears regarding employment, this topic is ranked first among

women. **One of our calls for action is to enact a measure about transparency on wages.**

The objection we faced from the panel of experts at the Get2Gather in Madrid was that each company had its own philo-

sophy towards the skills required and salary therefore granted. Thus they would not communicate a salary prior to the job interviews: for instance proposing periods to complete their training or have a reduced salary when a candidate with all the skills demanded is unavailable. To meet the working world halfway, **our idea would be to elaborate for each occupation a table matching the professional skills required with wage brackets.** This table would be disclosed only in case of complaints from interviewed candidates. Moreover, demanding such a table from the companies would also be a way to protect job seekers in a more difficult situation from accepting a salary inferior to their competences.

Above the consideration of money, in order to prevent or at least to keep employers from having a discriminating attitude, **the creation of an employment non-discrimination office would greatly change things.** Indeed, by analyzing statistically and leading inquiries on the levels of discrimination, this office would ensure that companies keep a fair selection, without always meddling.



"Ageing population is a great challenge for the European society. And as every challenge, it has its solutions."

Gediminas Goda
(18, Vilnius)

Elderly employment

By Martin Velichkov

The population of Europe is ageing – a fact that is attributable to improvements in the social and healthcare systems. This change of the socio-demographic structure has inevitable consequences on the structure of the labour force. In some countries, the growing number of old age pensioners is beginning to exert an economic pressure on young working people, whose labour is required to sustain the economy of the country, including all the pensions. Another problem is related to youth unemployment – should people who have reached the retirement age be forced to retire and thus vacate their positions to give a chance to younger people who are looking for a job? Or can this be viewed as employment discrimination?

Elderly people are not preferred as employees due to their perceived lower productivity and high absenteeism in the workplace – often a result of age-related sickness. They are less flexible with evolving technologies and often require more attention and assistance.

However, **an increase in labour force participation rates at**

higher ages is necessary for achieving a sustainable economic development. In addition, research has shown that part-time occupation of elderly people is associated with an improved quality of life because it gives them a feeling of contribution and accomplishment. It is, therefore, important that strategies for the inclusion of elderly people in the labourscape be designed and implemented. This should be done in a way that does not directly compete for working places with the younger labour force. Part-time occupation and voluntary work are attractive solutions to this problem since they entail less or no employment competition and give elderly people a sense of self-fulfilment by enabling them to pass down their knowledge and expertise to younger generations. To improve inclusion of elderly people, specialized programmes and platforms should be established that would reach out to everyone, especially to those people who do not have access to modern technologies. These programmes should provide elderly people with a direct link to part-time and voluntary job offers and will thus make these possibilities more easily accessible.

Early retirement

by Stéphanie Susswein

In Europe, early retirement is a social achievement which is extremely valued but at the same time highly expensive. Currently, the pension reform in Belgium is once again the centre of our attention since we are facing an increment of an aging population paired with a financial state of the public pension more and more precarious. The retirement age was kept untouched since the 2004 reform, but once more the reform discussion is switching to the pivotal retirement age of presently 65. It is obvious that raising the retirement age seems to be a solution in order to solve issues for Social Security, but at which prize?

It is true that life expectancy is increasing and average people are living longer and it is equipollently true that the baby boom generation of the post-war reached retirement age. Social Security will have to surmise the increasingly paramount of pensions and of health care. The main question is: How do we handle this?

We can be confronted with two completely opposed visions: Stimulate the “everybody for themselves” or create solidarity? **Do we desire a society based on profit, competition and the hunt for dividends, or a more human society?**

According to the first point of view, pensions are naturally a pristine burden, because cash is spent on non-productive people. Pensions yield thus nothing. It would certainly be better to place these amounts on the stock market or invest in the economy in order to keep the statutory pensions at the lowest calibre,

just above the impecuniosity line. Thereof, people will be coerced to build their proper retirement capital. And with that money, pension funds will be traded.

Furthermore, from this perspective, it is also much more remuneratively lucrative to keep older people at work. It is a manner to reduce expenses of the company and, to keep pressure on the labour market, availing to maintain wages low. Besides, if people work



longer, increasing the retirement age will lead to the amplification of the amount of revenue coming into the Social Security system.

However, there is another way of examining the problem of pensions, starting from the human dimension.

If incipient needs arise and if society changes, it will be necessary for us to find ways to fund these desiderata ingeniously. It is in the interest of all of who contributed for thirty or forty years to the prosperity of

their society to have the possibility to relish in good health of their pension. Through the contribution throughout one’s life, one is entitled to a solid state pension, and should not additionally to that, have to build up a pension savings through pension funds, which, moreover, are incurring jeopardies.

In fact, the regime made us work longer without analysing employment opportunities for older workers. Due to the astronomically immense surplus of labour in the labour market, these chances are minimal. According to the statistics from a university team of the KU Leuven, increasing the retirement age was liable to lead to an incrementation in unemployment. This means more unemployed, which is obviously not a solution for the funding of statutory pensions. Instead, it puts pressure on wages, which in turn has negative consequences on the volume of social contributions that must finance statutory pensions.

In conclusion, our solution is to supersede more early retirees by young people rather than delay the retirement age. The percentage of people at work would remain precisely identically tantamount. Indeed, the difference is that it then gives chances, which are for the moment minimal, to a new generation, and to the older generations the possibility to enjoy their senescence. We will engender more wealth with less workers. Additionally, a better distribution between generations, through which seniors who have worked all their lives can take their pension early and be replaced by younger people who are unemployed will need to take place, while keeping the maintain of the purchasing power. In this way, employment will be ensured for all without harming the economy of our society.

Arts & Crafts and Agriculture

By Elena Draghici

Getting older generally means accumulating more life experience, more wisdom and more professional knowledge, though, sadly, it also means a gradual diminishment of opportunities to find a job in the labour market. Sooner or later, depending on the area of work and on the personal constitution, health and set of skills of particular individuals, they all come to the same conclusion: it is best to stick at the workplace they have for as long as they can because the chances of getting employed elsewhere are minimal. What happens though if the misfortune does occur and they are let go? Where can they find a job at an age which is beneath the retirement age and yet far from what is considered as desirable in a new employee? Most of them will search everywhere they can; some will succeed but the majority will fail. However, there are also some categories of people whose work fields are far better off than the rest in such a situation because their work is always needed and professionals take time in order to be formed. These people should all be able to overcome an eventual replacement by younger contenders for their jobs, even if the event were to take place before the official retirement age. It is them and their circumstances that are considered in the arguments that follow.

Examples of such categories of people are the artists (working in anything from clothes and furniture designing, to artisans who reach artistry and whose specialties lie within making traditional objects, souvenirs and beautiful trinkets, stage actors and state-employed musicians), craftsmen, or agriculturists.

The people from the first category, the artists, often provide entertainment and cul-

tural stimuli for their audiences, enrich their perspectives, refine their taste in aesthetics, furnish their houses with their designs and help them express their individuality through their clothing. Their work never really ends as long as they have their muse favouring them and the desire to work for their prospective goals, as the artistic vein does not grow older or weaker with time. Why then should they be forced to give up their means of financially sustaining themselves because of their age and because of new contenders for their jobs? They could easily carry on with their work to at least the retirement age, if not even further, with a little help from society.

That help might be directed in the organization of workshops or courses in which the elders would teach younger and inexperienced potential artists the inner workings of their art and mentor them towards success, while simultaneously continuing performing within their field. This way, the **elderly artists would still carry on with their passion while also contributing to the formation of the next generation of artists, a generation which will, in due time, carry on with their legacy.**

The ones from the second category, the craftsmen, provide essential assistance to society, anything from fixing and renovating our houses - the plumbers, electricians, mechanics, locksmiths, carpenters, house painters - to tending to the finer necessities of life-tailors, watchmakers, piano tuners -, to the ones delighting the world with their savoury creations - bakers and chefs -, and to all the rest who improve our daily lives with

their services. Their work is always necessary and professionals are always needed, therefore they must be aided to stay employed as long as they are fit and willing, period which should quite extend till the retirement age and maybe even surpass it.

The help could come in the form of funds allocated to them in order to hire some apprentices whom to train and whom to share the



work with, apprentices who would, in exchange, help them raise productivity. This way, there would be more people employed and giving back to society their respective dues and the initial cost of the programme would, in not so long, be amortized.

With this solution, **both elderly as well as youth, as they are usually the ones to seek traineeships/apprentice-**

ships, would benefit and be active in their respective professions, some sharing their experience and others receiving and learning from it.

Finally, the agriculturists are also essential to society as they provide fresh basic foods. Whatever happens though when they are not owners, but rather workers on a farm? Sooner or later they will be replaced by younger labourers, even if they are still quite fit to work if they are considered to render less productivity than desired, and forced onto unemployment as they many times do not qualify for other jobs outside their field, or, if they do, they are still generally overlooked by employers because of their age and lack of comparative experience in other work fields.

The help in their case could consist of assistance with the purchase of relatively small areas of land which they could work at their own rhythm with crops or animals of their own choice and which would not overtax their strength, to both personal benefit and commercial purposes. Assistance with getting their home-grown produce on the market should as well be provided. Also, for the agriculture workers or even regular people who are unemployed or in search of extra revenue, who happen to own a piece of land of their own and who harvest enough to cover their personal needs and still have some to sell, the help would consist only of assistance with their entry on the market.

Because the relatively small crops of home-grown produce are usually finer in quality for their lack of fertilisers and other chemicals and therefore of an elevated price, it could be helpful to have them sold separately from the mass production and advertised in their own right. Currently, small producers advertise their produce and gain their customers by word-of-mouth or by the Internet, but it can be assumed that far more could benefit by

using a more organized system to get them in touch with potential customers, as not all are comfortable or willing to use the Internet and not all have a big enough clientele who could spread the word about them. Therefore, with a bit of marketing and organization, small producers would be able to make a decent living for themselves and keep themselves well employed.

As a conclusion, getting older should not be looked upon negatively in the labour market for many of the elderly are substantially better prepared and knowledgeable in their work than their younger colleagues. They can, with a reasonable amount of help from the society and government, carry on with their work until the retirement age and maybe even beyond it even after a potential rebuttal, and be active, contributing members of society. The effects of that would reflect positively from an economic point of view as well as from a social one, as the elderly would get a sense of accomplishment caused by them being able to fully partake in the social life as well as sustain themselves financially, and, in most areas of work, the youth could also benefit from the interaction with the ol-

der generations and learn from their experience.

Let age not be more than just a number in the labour market for all who are fit and willing to work.



Transmitting knowledge

By Gediminas Goda

One of the biggest challenges that the European Union will have to face in the future is the ageing of the population. The International Monetary Fund estimates under conditions that are present nowadays, in 2050 the ratio of retirees in the society should increase from four working people per retiree to two working people per retiree. The only way to avoid serious economic consequences would be increasing the retirement age. However, this is going to lead to another problem: representatives of some professions will not be able to continue working because of their physical state.

A significant part of the population in the European Union has jobs requiring physical fitness. However, it becomes difficult for a mason to carry stone blocks or for a mechanic to lie under a car as he or she grows older. They are no longer able to continue working properly but at the same time have no other possibility because they are specialists of only one area.

To ensure the transmission of their knowledge and experience and to provide such people with a possibility to continue working in their professional fields, the European states should encourage enterprises to create programmes, during which the elder employees could focus on helping the younger ones to master

the craft and be able to replace them after their retirement. Such cooperation could take place via professional schools or apprenticeship programmes.

In some cases, the idea could be implemented not only in jobs where menial work is involved. For instance, aged surgeons, who can no longer perform long operations by themselves because of the physical reasons accompanied by new specialists or medical residents could also be a good example of how the idea of transmitting knowledge of the elderly could be applied.

In conclusion, the implementation of such ideas would ensure the opportunity for the elderly to continue their jobs and help the enterprises and institutions to preserve the quality of their production or services.

“My Europe”



The Frankfurter Zukunftsrat (future think tank) is coordinating a unique series of “My Europe” workshops in 30 European countries.

Students aged 15 to 20 come together with representatives from media and business as well as politicians and academics. After discussing European affairs with the experts, the students are trained by the editors of the respective media partners on how to express their visions of the future through writing. All contributions are part of a writing contest, whose winners become members of the pan-European Youth Council for the Future (YCF).

Since the first workshop in 2011, a strong network of students, academics, politicians, business leaders and journalists from throughout Europe has evolved. Subsequent intercultural and cross-generational dialogue between these five groups is maintained through the network.

Spotlight Europe is the official blog of the “My Europe” network and a place for all young Europeans to share and discuss ideas about the future of Europe. The students of today are the leaders of tomorrow and should start dealing with their own expectations for the Europe of the future. This blog encourages dialogue between all young people in Europe as well as experts from politics, media, academia and business.



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