

Strengthening European citizenship education

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- The Council of Europe and European Union play the most important role in meeting the objective of active citizenship
- The debate on civic education has not been assigned the position that it should in the European level.
- At a time when EU citizens remain uninvolved in the democratic life, civic education should contribute to the building of a European identity.

The article intends to identify whether and to what extent the educational activities supported by the European action programmes of the Council of Europe (CoE), as well as the European Union (EU), contribute to the promotion of active European citizenship. Taking into consideration that an effort is taking place to actively involve citizens – especially the youth – in public life at the national and European level, and that active citizenship is not limited exclusively to voting, a question arises: How to activate and enhance the participation of young people in public life? With reference to the EU, this question could be formulated as follows: Has a sense of belonging to a European demos been consolidated? Alternatively: Are young – mainly – people familiar with the democratic processes at the European level, such as European elections? In a Europe characterised by political apathy, social racism, racial discriminations and high unemployment rates, what would be the outcome of the efforts of the CoE and the EU on civic education? What has been recorded in the European countries where relevant programmes are implemented?¹ This analysis will also provide an answer on the future of Europe and its transition to a more democratic construction.

Keywords: civic education, active citizenship, young people, Council of Europe, European Union

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1 Introductory remarks

Mankind is currently undergoing one of the biggest crises in its history. It is mainly a social and political crisis, a crisis of institutions and values, which concerns representative democracy (Economou, 2009, p. 11), with citizens having fallen into a state of “lethargy of political apathy” or “political indifference” and depreciation of active citizenship (Spanou, 2008, p. 215).

Indeed, disaffection and distrust in respect of democracy and its functioning has grown among vast swathes of society. While representative democracy remains firmly anchored in Europe, its credibility has been tarnished in recent decades by the growing public distrust and dissatisfaction concerning the *modus operandi* and the performance of the institutions representing them. The reasons for this crisis are deep-seated and concern the policies implemented, the functioning of European democratic systems and their institutions as well as the technical complexity of the decision making process; sometimes these decisions are taken by faceless, unaccountable bodies removed from the national democratic sphere and most of the public finds them hard to fathom. Lastly, the global financial and economic crisis of the past 10 years has caused a serious loss of social status among the working and middle classes of the Western world, has severely curtailed citizens’ trust in politics and their representatives, leading to increased discontent with the system.

Citizens, who are becoming ever better informed, demand increased involvement and transparency in decision-making, and greater possibilities for interaction between politics and the public. Civic and political participation/ active citizenship, has been a focus of academic interest for a long time and most studies emphasize its fundamental role in healthy democracies. But what does active citizenship mean?

The EU takes active citizenship and the related topics very seriously: “Active citizenship is the glue that keeps society together. Democracy doesn’t function properly without it, because effective democracy is more than just placing a mark on a voting slip. By definition, participative democracy requires people to get involved, to play an active role [...] in their workplace, perhaps, or by taking part in a political organization or supporting a good cause. The area of activity does not matter. It is the commitment to the welfare of society that counts” (European Union, 2012, p. 4).

Robert Putnam (2002) states that “active citizenship is strongly related to civic engagement and plays a crucial role in building social capital.” Social capital is defined as “connections among individuals –social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000). Brannan et al. (2006) argue that the concept of active citizenship holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential of being a citizen. It is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. While involvement in local clubs and societies is seen as valuable, they argue that the involvement must speak of public-mindedness and have a purpose beyond that of a small group of people. They state that it is active citizenship if someone volunteers in public service provision or by acting as a governor deciding on a public policy or service; either as users of such a programme or service, or as general members of society (Brannan et al., 2006).

Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) defined active citizenship as participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy.

We define the concept as someone who participates in public life (civil society and political life), who takes a role in the community, seeks information and is inspired by the aim of common good and the respect of human rights.

Having explored some of the definitions and meanings of active citizenship, a question arises: Are we willing to develop the skills we need to keep democracy alive?

As philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues, we are in the midst of a global “crisis of education” (Nussbaum, p. 33-34), an inherent element of which is the crisis of “civic education/education for democratic citizenship”.

Political education, whose necessity has already been extensively pointed out since the era of the ancient city-state, is in its manifestation and expression the ability of critical controversy; the understanding of the relevance of life but simultaneously the political ownership as attitude of public life. It concerns the values that determine the individual behaviour and attitude.

Over the last twenty years, on the occasion of the strong interest around issues concerning civic education, a strong debate is taking place on the content and the objectives of citizenship in democratic states, and particularly European citizenship.

From the Second World War onwards, Europe is faced with a new social condition, the multicultural society. Immigrants coming to Europe, originally from the former colonies of the European states, create a new form of society with citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds. Subsequently, as a result of globalisation which caused multi-dimensional changes at the social and scientific level, compact homogeneity of societies was literally dissolved; there are elements that cause changes in the determination of citizenship, too, as the need develops for co-existence of people who are neither blood-related nor have they long co-existed in the same area.

This “new” citizenship presupposes the acceptance of the “other” and its recognition as an equal member of the society where he/she lives (Tarrow, 1995, p. 223-251). Therefore, the question that arises is: What does it mean to be a citizen of Europe today, in an era characterised as postmodern, multicultural and globalised?

In this context, and in order to define the obligations and rights of citizens in Europe, there have been efforts at the European level to constantly seek strategies to shape the concept of European citizenship through various actions and programmes.² The new identity of citizens of Europe and of the world, the European citizenship, attributes to persons characteristics of citizens with supranational and cooperative spirit, a sense of solidarity, tolerance to cultural differences, acknowledgment of common traits and differences.³ Today, European citizens must be imbued with creative, critical, autonomous and systematic way of thinking and action, and with flexibility (Grollios, 2000, p. 47-55 and Cogán Derricott, 2001).

These concerns have been of course also transferred into the field of education (Giddens, 2001, Sasson, 1996 and Marples, 2003) because it’s the latter that will implement the “vision” of the modern European citizen and will lead to the development, in every person, of the sense of belonging into a social, cultural and democratic community (Commission of the European Communities, 1993), through the promotion and adoption of common values.

But going beyond knowledge, the education based on the principles of law, justice, democracy and society (Karakatsani, 2001) will inculcate a culture of Human Rights, ensuring respect to diversity and understanding of the obligations arising from them, with the ultimate goal of global consolidation of equality, freedom, justice, social cohesion, mutual understanding and solidarity within the context of democratic citizen participation.

To the question, therefore, whether education could be the springboard for the evolution of European society, which has been continuously changing over the years, giving a new dimension to the political awareness of its members, we answer yes. Moreover, we become citizens through a complex process, in which education plays an extremely significant role

(Karakatsani, 2004, p. 3). As Dimitra Karakatsani argues, “the pursued civic education should include an education for citizenship” (Karakatsani, 2008, p. 154); an education which does not simply aim at shaping an up-to-date and informed citizen-student, “but an education which should help students develop knowledge and understanding tools, and skills, competences and values which enable active and responsible participation” (Karakatsani, 2008, p. 154).

2 The Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU)

Although the CoE and the EU are separate entities, both are built on the same ideas and values (human rights, democracy, and the rule of law); both sharing a common vocation for preserving these values and spreading them further.

Current actions and initiatives of both the CoE and the EU share a component; they highlight the role of education in shaping political and active citizens, who should have the necessary civic education, namely the knowledge, competences and skills, attitudes and values for active citizenship.

Starting from the Council of Europe, the Education for Democratic Citizenship Programme - adopted by the Organization in 1997- is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and holistic approach at the European level for the conservation and the development of democracy through the promotion of democratic education. The primary aim of the Programme is to enhance the substantive involvement of citizens in the democratic society through their best possible preparation. The citizens, being socially equal, must be able to enter in the “realm of political influence”, with a view to preserve a vital public sphere and create a kind of political commitment based on a joint understanding of the common good. This refers to the creation of a sustainable political network that will give both to individuals and organized groups of citizens, the same opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

The success of the Programme lies in the fact that, as an initiative which has been embraced by national governments not only at political but also at a practical level, it is simultaneously implemented in all Member States of the CoE⁴ — albeit with different success levels.⁵ It is estimated that since its conception, although in the early phases of its implementation steps were more hesitant and investigative, swift developments have occurred during the “European Year of Education through active Citizens” (in 2005) and onwards, culminating in the adoption of the Council of Europe’s Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (in 2010), the larger *acquis* of the European civic education.

Today, the Council of Europe Education Department runs a programme of inter-governmental activities “Learning Democracy and Human Rights” with a view to facilitate exchange and cooperation among its 47 member states. Trainings for education practitioners are also organized in the framework of the “Pestalozzi Programme” as well as regional Summer Academies.

The EU, approximately during the last twenty years, has also prepared a series of actions⁶ aiming at shaping a new generation of European citizens with increased European conscience, for whom participation in the European affairs is considered an ongoing process. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, shook the EU construction, since an important percentage of European citizens showed in the most clear way their opposition towards political choices made solely at the top of the hierarchy without their participation (Voskopoulos, 2009). The incomprehensible internal structures and the complex system of procedures, rules and functioning of the EU, impeded and continue to impede (despite the fact that the Treaty of

Lisbon provides for more open procedures), the involvement of the citizens in the European affairs. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts, with the most well-known and still very vaguely comprehended challenge, the so-called European democratic deficit, substantial decisions have been made for further actions at the European level, with the aim to foster political engagement and to put citizens at the heart of its policies.

In this context, new experimental participative structures of decision-making have emerged. See for example the “European citizens’ initiative” -the new tool for direct democracy- which was designed by the European Commission in 2012 to help bridging the gap between citizens and institutions and to create a real sense of common European identity. It is a unique and innovative way for citizens to shape Europe by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal.

Or the European Solidarity Corps in 2016 that aims to foster solidarity in the European society, engaging young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities. It offers young people opportunities to show solidarity, express their commitment to the benefit of communities and help resolve challenging situations across Europe. One of the main intentions is to encourage a sense of belonging to the European project as well as to embody European civic values more concretely. This also fosters social cohesion, makes it possible for young people to experience the value of the European project and helps young people build the necessary soft skills to participate actively in an inclusive and democratic society.

The cooperation between the two European “Institutions” in the field of education and youth led to the development of a common framework for the active participation of young people in the political and social arena. The Joint Programme “Democratic and Inclusive School Culture in Operation (DISCO)” which was launched in 2013 under the name "Human Rights and Democracy in Action", provides funding to enable at least three States party to the European Cultural Convention to cooperate on projects of common interest within the field of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE). The basis of each project is to make information on current democratic citizenship and human rights education practices in the participating countries available to help improve them in each of the countries. The Programme intends also to:

- Encourage discussion and sharing of best practices for addressing EDC/HRE issues;
- Raise awareness and increase visibility of the role of EDC/HRE at all levels of society;
- Promote cooperation between national, regional and local authorities and civil society organisations;
- Contribute to the promotion and continued development of citizenship and human rights education in Europe.

In general, it can be said that the current relevant programmes of action of the CoE and the EU offer the appropriate scope for the promotion of learning focused on active citizenship, making the European dimension an important aspect of this objective. However, are these steps sufficient?

3 The impact in the member states

This section seeks to outline the degree of effectiveness of civic education in Greece, England and France.

To begin with Greece, citizenship education acquired its present form in the period between 1981-1985 when the country had its first socialist party government, which came to power in 1981 (Karakatsani, 2002). The major aims of the Curriculum in Primary and Secondary education (described in law 1566/1985), were personal development and knowledge acquisition, social and political education. Citizenship education, considered that it should promote a common sense of belonging based on equality, justice and peace. School is one of the principal agents to contribute to this achieving, but in addition citizenship is seen as a social dimension that includes social education as well. The above mentioned developments had a direct impact on the orientation of citizenship education since “the curriculum no longer aimed at the enforced adjustment of the student to community life but instead at the student becoming an active, critically thinking citizen who participated in community life” (Ibid, p. 61).

In October 2001, a major general curriculum reform in Greece reorganised the subject content of Citizenship Education, reconsidered the place of the subjects, and redefined the wider educational philosophy. This reform was both structural and functional, as it promoted new curriculum contents and at the same time decentralisation and greater school autonomy. “In these reforms citizenship education appears different to earlier content-driven curricula” (Chelmis and Matsagouras, 2002, p. 63). Emphasis is placed not upon the number of the subjects taught but mostly upon the themes discussed and the outputs achieved, such as the knowledge regarding Greek state, EU etc. (Flouris and Pasiyas, 2008, p. 209).

The 2001 curriculum stresses the development of personal skills, personal empowerment and active participation, in contrast with the earlier conservative stance (Chelmis and Matsagouras, 2002, p. 64). Moreover, it “does not propose specific methodologies or models of teaching, but offers general instructional guidelines* that might be adopted to maximise student learning” (ibid, p. 66). According to the Greek curriculum, citizenship education encompasses all the contexts of a person’s development and learning, by discussing individual rights and the limitations of personal freedom in order to enable them to coexist peacefully within society. In addition, it is seen as a process that takes place throughout people’s entire life, and in that sense it is approached as a type of public and continuous education.

Greek curriculum after these reforms, conceptualizes citizenship close to the Greek national identity incorporating though to a bigger context that of European identity. Greece integration in EU has influenced both the directions and the content of the curriculum as can be seen by the fact that this new Greek Curriculum framework is in accordance with the European Education Policy Framework as can be seen by the following aims: “To provide opportunities for personal growth and communication skills as well as positive attitude toward co-operation and initiative taking in order to enable individuals develop as responsible citizens. To assist the development of European citizenship identity while preserving national identity and cultural awareness. To assist lifelong learning. To promote a spirit of co-operation and involvement in community affairs” (Coloubaritsis, 2007, p. 3)

It is essential though to note an important evolution of the Citizenship curriculum of 2001, which is the way, that European citizenship is promoted, not as an extension of national border, but rather as a broader idea as a sense of shared community.

In general, in Greece, particular emphasis is given in civic education as a procedure of youngster’s political socialization, however, it begins at the last two classes of primary level –

one hour every week. In the third grade of secondary education level pupils are taught Social and Political Education for two hours per week. In the first class of lyceum students are taught civic education for three hours per week and the same goes on in the second class. There are also specific directions that students should choose when they finish the second class. If humanities are chosen, then the student attends a subject that is called Basic principles of social sciences. In 2018, a new subject was included in the curriculum of the second class of lyceum which is called Modern world: citizen and democracy. In the last class of lyceum students are taught History of social sciences and Sociology (the last subject replaced Latin as the major subject –together with three others– for the university entrance), a fact that shows a turning point in Greek educational policy as far as politicization is concerned.

In short, as regards Greece, the educational system itself and in particular its strongly reforming nature at purely the national level and at the level of implementation of policies that are dictated from above, shows lack of political stability, real intentions and substantive objectives regarding civic education. Taking into account the results of surveys I, it could be briefly said that young people in Greece in general have EU knowledge; however, this knowledge is superficial while their attitude could be classified as “EU-friendly” but with contradictions.

In England, the modern history of citizenship education commenced in 1998 with the publication of the report by the Advisory Group on Citizenship. Under the chairmanship of Professor Bernard Crick, the group recommended the introduction of a new subject to the curriculum. Citizenship education was formally introduced into the curriculum in 2002, following concerns about declining democratic involvement and worries about social decline (Tonge J., Mycock A., Jeffery B., 2012). It was implemented in a variety of different ways across different schools; some of them chose to combine it with teaching of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) whilst others taught it as a stand-alone subject. There was also a wide variety of teaching methods and differing levels of training given to teachers who taught the subject.

Although there was a wide variety of quality in teaching after the initial introduction of citizenship education, over time its quality began to improve. It peaked between 2009 and 2011. However, in 2013 the national curriculum for key stages 3 and 4 was revised to create a new slimmed-down curriculum. The aims were to ensure that all pupils (Department for Education, 2013):

- “acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government;
- develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society and how laws are shaped and enforced;
- develop an interest in, and commitment to, participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity, that they will take with them into adulthood;
- are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs.”

Citizenship was also an optional subject in primary education which has a curriculum framework for key stages 1 and 2 (Department for Education, 2015). This framework focuses on broader concepts such as right and wrong and how to articulate opinions.

The current state of citizenship education is poor at a time when it is needed more than ever. “If we look at the fact that education regulators no longer focus on it; that there is not the support needed for teacher training [...] Whether young people are receiving high-quality citizenship education is a lottery; it is by chance as to whether they are getting it in their school or not” (House of Lords, 2017). “Very few schools take Citizenship Education seriously and most secondary schools are failing their statutory duty to teach it [it is often hidden in (PSHE) and pupils are unaware of the difference between the two subjects]” (DECSY, 2017). This decline of the subject is partly a result of the review of the curriculum in 2013. The evidence suggests that citizenship was never fully embedded into the education system, and recent changes have damaged what attachment there was.

In the case of England as well – a country increasingly skeptical towards the EU – the need to establish a European political culture seems more urgent than ever, taking particularly into account the outcome of the recent referendum on the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU family.

In this context, it is necessary to put active citizenship back at the top of the agenda of the European and British policy, so as to attract ordinary citizens, especially young people, back to the decision-making process at all levels of governance.

Indeed, after the shocks caused by the British referendum (and on the occasion of the anniversary of 60 years from the Treaty of Rome), European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker with the presentation of the White Paper on the Future of Europe, called on nationals of Member States, with a focus on young people, to actively participate in the public debate on the future of the EU and to express their views on the Europe in which they want to live.

As for France, it would definitely not be an exaggeration to say that the country is a role model on actions related to civic education, and this is because there is an established, substantial and deeply democratic tradition from which one can learn a lot. France puts a strong emphasis on citizenship education as it is one of two EU countries where citizenship education is provided as a compulsory separate subject for all grades of general education. The topic is also a cross-curricular theme incorporated in other subjects. Recent official documents place respect for others within the scope of basic skills, alongside reading, writing and mathematics. So why shouldn't Greece and England follow the French example?

It is true that change and redefinition are under way in the French society; a trend which has been evident after the elections of 7th of May 2017 when ‘traditional’ parties were defeated by the newly-appeared “non-politician” Emmanuel Macron and the anti-European Marine LePen, despite threats for Frexit (exit from the Euro).

However, as early as 2015, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the priorities in the French educational system have changed. The action plan for the “Great mobilisation of schools for the values of the Republic” led to a stronger focus on moral and civic values and critical thinking. Since then, particular emphasis has been put to pupil’s moral education, by strengthening the values of freedom, equality and justice, while teacher’s training and assessment is a sine qua non. There are no specialist teachers of citizenship education but since then, increased efforts have been made to strengthen their competences in transmitting values related to civic and moral education, both in initial teacher education (ITE) and in continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. The role of teachers in this area has

moved towards helping students to learn, for instance by promoting their ability to engage in debates and develop critical thinking. This requires a significant shift from the traditional central role that teachers have played to the role of facilitator of student learning.

In 2016, a “Citizen Pathway” (Parcours citoyen) was launched, consisting mainly in moral, civic and media education, and targeted at all levels of school education (MEN, 2018). In continuation of this initiative, France will launch a one-month universal national service for all young people aged 16 in 2019.

France also promotes the active participation of students in the social and democratic life of the classroom or school. Elected student councils have become a requirement for each lower secondary school as places for learning democracy. In general, student participation in the collective life of the school has been assessed as having a stronger impact on civic knowledge or voting later on than participation outside the school, making student participation particularly relevant (CNESCO, 2016). According to the EU-SILC survey, France has the highest proportion of citizens who are active in social, civic and political activities with a strong correlation with educational attainment.

In 2015, on the initiative of France and following the terrorist attacks, the rise of the right-wing and neofascism in too many places in Europe, a meeting was convened in Paris where the EU Education Ministers agreed on the need to reshape the educational policies of the Member States, with a view to enhance civic education and the values of democracy in the national educational and learning environments.

Undoubtedly, the curricula of the countries studied aspire to build the framework for a democratic school with liberal features that will contribute to the promotion of free thinking and democratic awareness of citizens, transmitting values and assisting in the development of skills with a view to ensure their active participation in issues of citizenship. In addition, they aim at shaping modern democratic citizens inspired by liberal universal values and virtues, and with a spirit of social justice and solidarity, fully aware of the importance of human rights respect (Petrou, 2011 and European Commission, 2000).

Indeed, taking into account the latest (for 2017) report of the European Commission on education and training monitoring, “given the recent wave of populism and extremism in Europe, [...] EU Member States have recently introduced policies to ensure that children and young people acquire social and intercultural skills and citizenship skills. Policy measures to enhance the capabilities of education to respond to social challenges have been introduced primarily at the primary and secondary level” (European Commission, 2017).

The exploration of the impact of the European programmes in the countries under consideration reveals that the necessary and critical basis, upon which the European project will be built, exists, with sufficient potential for more far-reaching actions. Now, the challenge for Europe is to build on this momentum and to come back into contact with the general public, by adopting a new approach/attitude.

4 Proposals

This paper has made the point that the Council’s EDC/HRE programme as well as the relevant programmes of the EU can act as a civic learning ground for democratic empowerment through active citizenship and institutionalized participation at all educational and societal levels. However, a challenge confronting the countries studied is to find new and more imaginative ways of adjusting their policy tools, strategies and institutions into the development of core educational skills and civic competences that would allow students to see

themselves as members coexisting in a wider European society, whose educational culture treats citizenship as a participative process that equips young people to make informed and quality choices. This paper also argues that whilst Greece, England and France have integrated an EU dimension into their curriculum, this is uneven and fragmented, too general and not progressive enough and with a lack of consistency and complementarity with other subject taught and in those that have done so.

We are experiencing a period where the effects of a major – mainly – social crisis leave room for the development of intolerance, violence, racism, social intimidation and Human Rights violations. Furthermore, the “democratic deficit” remains as one of the main challenges for the EU. This perceived gap between citizens and the European level of governance coupled with an economic crisis, has arguably resulted in an upsurge of Euroscepticism in Europe which is reflected in major gains for Eurosceptic parties.

Although the latest elections (May 2019) to elevate the members of the European Parliament have opened a new chapter on political and democratic process in Europe - the significant increase in participation in the electoral process, with a record 50.5%, reaching the highest level of the last 20 years, is an important milestone for the Union, but also for democracy itself - the following is proposed in order to further develop political conscience among young European citizens:

- Revision of the educational systems, making Education for Democratic Citizenship a main compulsory subject. As argued by Professor Andreas Kazamias (Kazamias, 2016), it is not possible for “Civic Education” to be replaced by substituted inter-thematic teaching (via other courses) or assignments/projects. Moreover, the necessary cognitive functions (critical, analytical, synthesis and creative thinking) necessary for complex courses such as “Civic Education” develop mainly in adolescence.
- Revision of the syllabus based on the identification of the needs of both teachers and pupils. Civic education should be a lively course, as in the case of France, and not obsolete, so that understanding, participation and active learning is favored instead of learning by heart.
- Specialized training and retraining of teachers with a view to adopt more learner-centred teaching.
- Linking school to society: strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders through their participation in initiatives with pupils.
- Instilling in students the spirit of collaboration and dialogue, in a Europe where actors do not belong only to the national level, but also to the sub-national and supranational one.
- Each education system needs to ask self-assessment questions, such as: “Do we offer education that promotes healthy humanitarian ideals and critically thinking citizens?”; “What can be done to enhance not only the level of information and skills but also the level of engagement and participation in all aspects of democratic culture?”.

In addition, at a time when EU citizens remain uninvolved while being ignorant on European issues and the functioning of Europe, with the latter being burdened with the “sins” of populist and nationalist governments, the following proposals are made:

- Strengthen and broaden the dialogue between citizens and the institutions to include contributions from the public. There must be a consensus from the base, i.e. the agenda should be shaped bottom-up, while the development of new partnerships with regional and local authorities seems to be the best way to reach out to citizens.
- Civic education should make its position clear on the issue of European integration, contributing to the building of a European identity and awareness. The approach of the EU project by school textbooks must go into depth and analyse the real dimensions of the problems, instead of merely describing the institutions and their functioning. Genuine civic education of the pupils can be achieved only through highlighting the intrinsic problems and critically understanding European affairs. Pupils should also be assisted in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to be smoothly integrated in an ever evolving and changing world, as well as to gain awareness of their common cultural heritage, the contribution of their own culture to the others, but also the loans from the others. Only by respecting the identity of the 'other', who will be perceived as part of an extended "we", a substantial "European political and cultural solidarity" will be fostered, as well as a substantial "European patriotism"; elements that will contribute to the consolidation, but also prosperity of the 'common European area'.
- The EU and the CoE play the most important role in meeting the objective of increasing citizens' participation. The most crucial step is to inform the latter about the actions taken at European level and the way in which they can actively participate. In this context, the dissemination of the relevant information on the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights is of paramount importance.
- Introduce European prizes, European scholarships, European summer universities with students from different Member States and other similar activities, which will develop and enrich the European conscience and identity.
- The regular citizens' dialogues organized by the European Commission across Europe undoubtedly help connect with its citizens. However, starting a new generation of dialogue with the citizens, involving personalities – perhaps – from the field of culture, arts and sport seems more urgent.
- Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs) which play an equally essential role in interacting with citizens and connecting them to the EU, should undertake a more central role.
- All EU activities on the European dimension in education should be structured into a single action program.

Unfortunately, in Europe we often react in the aftermath of crises. The debate on active citizenship has not been assigned the importance and the position that it should have in the European debate because there is national jurisdiction over educational policy issues; at the European level there is a mere coordination.

If we want a Europe of solidarity towards our common democratic concerns rather than a Europe that is scared of the foreign, the other, the different, we should revisit the major issue of civic education. European civic education is essential in fostering a sense of belonging and a

genuinely European identity. It is the instrument to enhance democracy and participation and to increase the involvement of young citizens in shaping the future of the European project.

Apart from the school aspect, we have to look for the way in which it can be disseminated to all possible recipients in society. This is something that we owe not only to the young generation, which represents the hopeful potential of Europe / the main protagonist of the future and our descendants, but to ourselves.

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Endnotes

¹ The example of Greece, England and France is studied.

² Eg. The online Active Citizenship Network (<http://www.activecitizenship.net>) launched in December 2001 as European and international Annex of the Italian organization (Cittadinanattiva) for the promotion of active citizenship.

³ Such objectives are set by the network Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe (CICE). A European Commission Socrates Programme—Thematic Network Project, in which people from the academia and education work together. The activities of this network include the study of the perception of young people for the society, the economy and the political domain. A European approach of practices is promoted - through which children's socialization is sought – along with the education of the teachers in European civic education. For more information on the Network see [Http:// www. UNL. AC. UK / CICE / start. HTM](http://www.unl.ac.uk/CICE/start.htm).

⁴ Especially if you consider that the Programme actions are not obligatory, but it is up to the Government to implement them.

⁵ In any case, there is an important positive aspect: even the uneven and/or problematic implementation of the Programme demonstrates the interest of Member States in Education for Democratic Citizenship, the willingness for change aimed at consolidating and/or developing democracy, and adopting objectives and methods that will lead to it.

⁶ For example: "Erasmus", "Lingua", "Euroscola Programme", "Socrates", "Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010) — Education and Training 2010", "Erasmus +", "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020), "New EU Strategy for Youth-Investing and Empowering 2010-2018", "European Parliament Ambassador School Programme", European Parliament's Initiative "Euroscola" etc.

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