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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 22 May 2018

on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching

(2018/C 195/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) The Union is based on the common values and general principles of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, stipulated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. Pursuant to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, it is the aim of the Union to uphold and promote its values.
- (2) Inspired by these values, the Union has succeeded in bringing countries, communities and people together in a unique political project, enabling Europe's longest period of peace, which in turn has fostered social stability and economic prosperity. Member States' adoption of the values set out in the Treaty creates common ground that makes up the distinct feature of the European way of life and identity and gives the Union its place on the global stage.
- (3) The Union and its Member States are faced with a variety of challenges, including populism, xenophobia, divisive nationalism, discrimination, the spreading of fake news and misinformation, as well as the challenge of radicalisation leading to violent extremism. These phenomena could pose a serious threat to the foundations of our democracies, undermine trust in the rule of law and democratic institutions, and hinder a common sense of belonging within and amongst our European societies.
- (4) A lack of awareness of the origins of the Union, the reasons for its creation and its basic functioning favours misinformation and prevents the formation of informed opinions on its actions. Knowledge of the diversity of the Union and its Member States supports mutual respect, understanding and cooperation within and amongst Member States.
- (5) Education in all of its types and at all levels and from an early age plays a pivotal role in promoting common values. It helps to ensure social inclusion by providing every child with a fair chance and equal opportunities to succeed. It provides opportunities to become active and critically aware citizens, and increases understanding of the European identity.
- (6) At the Leaders' Agenda meeting in November 2017 in Gothenburg, European leaders discussed the importance of education and culture for the future of Europe. Informing this debate, the Commission set out its vision for a European Education Area and proposed a number of initiatives in its Communication on 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture'⁽¹⁾, which states that 'strengthening our European identity remains essential and education and culture are the best vectors to ensure this'.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2017) 673 final.

- (7) Following the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, the European Council in its conclusions of 14 December 2017 highlighted that education and culture are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness ⁽¹⁾.
- (8) One of the objectives of the ET2020 framework for European cooperation in education and training ⁽²⁾, namely to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, has been established on the basis that education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights, prevent and combat all forms of discrimination and racism, and equip children, young people and adults to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.
- (9) The Paris Declaration adopted on 17 March 2015 by European education ministers indicated the commitment by the Member States to promote common values, enhance critical thinking and media literacy, inclusive education and intercultural dialogue. Responses to an EU-wide public consultation ⁽³⁾ clearly show that inclusive education should be promoted. Only 16 % of the respondents feel that education is currently achieving this goal; 95 % feel that education should help young people understand the importance of common values and that the Union should help Member States in achieving this task (98 %).
- (10) A 2017 Eurydice survey on Citizenship Education at School in Europe shows that citizenship education is currently in the spotlight in a number of European countries. However, nearly half of the countries still have no policies on including citizenship education in initial teacher training. Therefore, teachers should be supported and empowered through measures to create an open learning culture and environment and deal with diverse learning groups in order to teach civic competences, transmit Europe's shared heritage, promote common values and act as role models for learners.
- (11) Radicalisation leading to violent extremism remains an acute problem in several Member States. Promoting common values as a vector of social cohesion and integration, including through education policies, is an integral part of the solution. In order to support Member States in their endeavours, in July 2017, the European Commission established a High Level Group on Radicalisation ⁽⁴⁾ to identify support measures, including in education.
- (12) The most recent results of the PISA survey and the 2017 Education and Training Monitor emphasise the link between educational inequalities and students' socioeconomic background. PISA data illustrate that students from poorer households are three times more likely to perform worse than their wealthier counterparts and that students of migrant background are more than twice as likely to be low achievers as other students. To prevent the marginalisation of young people, it is vital to have inclusive and equitable education systems that foster cohesive societies and lay the foundations for active citizenship and enhance employability.
- (13) The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 suggests that national and European identities can positively coexist and do not contradict each other. The study also shows that students with higher levels of civic knowledge also tended to be the students expressing more tolerant attitudes.
- (14) Eurobarometer surveys highlight a remarkably low level of knowledge of the Union. According to a 2014 opinion poll, 44 % of people feel that they have limited understanding of how the Union works while a 2011 survey shows that a relative majority feel they are not well informed about the European Union. The same study also revealed that a third of people do not know exactly how many Member States there are in the Union. The 2017 Eurobarometer survey shows that 89 % of young Europeans agree that national governments should strengthen school education about their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the Union. Finally, the most recent Eurobarometer survey highlights that 35 % of respondents consider comparable education standards to be the most helpful for the future of Europe.

⁽¹⁾ EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1

⁽²⁾ 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) — New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25).

⁽³⁾ SWD(2018) 13 final.

⁽⁴⁾ Commission Decision of 27 July 2017 setting up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on radicalisation (OJ C 252, 3.8.2017, p. 3).

- (15) Against this background, it is of the essence that Member States step up their efforts to further implement all the objectives of the 2015 Paris Declaration. It is particularly important to continue promote common values as vectors of cohesion and inclusion, favour the implementation of participatory learning environments at all levels of education, improve training for teachers on citizenship and diversity and enhance the media literacy and critical thinking skills of all learners.
- (16) Ensuring effective equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners, including those of migrant origins, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, those with special needs and those with disabilities — in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — is indispensable for achieving more cohesive societies. In this endeavour, Member States could benefit from existing Union instruments, notably Erasmus+, the European Structural and Investment Funds, Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, the European Solidarity Corps and Horizon 2020, as well as the guidance and expertise of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.
- (17) The Erasmus+ programme shows that mobility and cross-border contacts are an efficient way to experience European identity. It is essential that all categories of learners across Europe benefit equally from the opportunities offered by this programme; notably through school exchanges between Member States. Virtual mobility, especially through the e-Twinning network, is an excellent tool to enable direct contact between pupils, and shall be used on a larger scale in the following years, and in combination with physical mobility.
- (18) Introducing a European dimension of teaching should aim to help learners experience European identity in all its diversity and strengthen a European positive and inclusive sense of belonging complementing their local, regional and national identities and traditions. It is also important for promoting a better understanding of the Union as well as an understanding of its Member States.
- (19) This Recommendation fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The content of this Recommendation is without prejudice to existing national initiatives in these fields, notably in national civic education,

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

The Member States should:

Promotion of common values

1. increase the sharing of the common values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union from an early age and at all levels and types of education and training in a lifelong perspective to strengthen social cohesion and a positive and inclusive common sense of belonging at local, regional, national and Union level;
2. continue to implement the commitments of the Paris Declaration, notably through:
 - (a) promoting active citizenship and ethics education as well as an open classroom climate to foster tolerant and democratic attitudes and social, citizenship and intercultural competences;
 - (b) enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the internet and social media, so as to raise awareness of risks related to the reliability of information sources and to help exercise sound judgment;
 - (c) using existing or, where necessary, developing new structures that promote the active participation of teachers, parents, students and the wider community in schools; and
 - (d) supporting opportunities for young people's democratic participation and an active, critically aware and responsible community engagement;
3. make effective use of existing tools to promote citizenship education, such as the Council of Europe's Competences for Democratic Culture framework;

Provision of inclusive education

4. promote inclusive education for all learners, notably by:
 - (a) including all learners in quality education from early childhood and throughout life;

- (b) providing the necessary support to all learners according to their particular needs, including those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, those from a migrant background, those with special needs and the most talented learners;
 - (c) facilitating the transition between various educational pathways and levels and enabling the provision of adequate educational and career guidance;
5. make effective use of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, on a voluntary basis, to implement and monitor successful inclusive approaches in their education systems;

Promotion of a European dimension of teaching

6. promote a European dimension of teaching by encouraging:
- (a) an understanding of the European context and common heritage and values and an awareness of the unity and diversity, social, cultural and historical, of the Union and the Member States of the Union;
 - (b) an understanding of the origins, values and functioning of the Union;
 - (c) the participation of pupils and teachers in the e-Twinning network, in cross-border mobility, and transnational projects, especially for schools;
 - (d) grass-roots projects to raise awareness of and improve understanding of the European Union in learning settings, notably through direct interaction with young people, such as an annual celebration, on a voluntary basis, of a 'Day of the European Union' in learning settings;

Support educational staff and teaching

7. enable educational staff to promote common values and deliver inclusive education, through:
- (a) measures to empower educational staff helping them convey common values, and promote active citizenship while transmitting a sense of belonging and responding to the diverse needs of learners; and
 - (b) promoting initial and continued education, exchanges and peer learning and peer counselling activities as well as guidance and mentoring for educational staff;

Implementing measures

8. review and, where necessary, improve existing policies and practices in the field of education, training and non-formal learning with a view to acting on these recommendations;
9. identify needs and enhance public engagement, using existing data or, if necessary, collecting new data with a view to improving evidence-informed policy making on the social and civic dimensions of education and training;
10. continue collaborating in EU strategic cooperation frameworks in the fields of education and training, youth, sport and culture through peer learning, peer counselling and exchange of good practices with a view to promoting common values;
11. make effective use of EU funding instruments, in particular Erasmus+, European Structural and Investment Funds, Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and Horizon 2020 with a view to implementing these recommendations;

WELCOMES THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

12. support the Member States in implementing the provisions of this Recommendation through the available tools and funding instruments, such as the Erasmus+ programme, particularly through learning mobility at all levels of education, with a focus on schools, transnational projects, the e-Twinning network as well as Jean Monnet activities;
13. support national and regional policy reforms and practice improvements through the ET2020 framework for European cooperation in education and training and any successor framework;

14. where necessary, develop and regularly review practical reference tools and guidance documents for policymakers and practitioners and support research and stakeholder engagement to meet knowledge needs;
15. assess and evaluate the action taken in response to this Recommendation, in particular through the ET2020 framework, including the Education and Training Monitor.

Done at Brussels, 22 May 2018.

For the Council

The President

K. VALCHEV
