

Opening Speech at the NECE Congress 2005:

“EYCE 2005: National Experiences – European Challenges”

Thomas Krueger, President of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education

Dear Minister Wanka,

Dear Ms. Olofsdóttir,

Dear Ms. Ferreira,

Dear Dr. Otte,

Dear Mr. Annerberg,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Europeans,

In a few weeks, the “European Year Of Citizenship Through Education” called into being by the Council of Europe will come to an end. After the Council’s EDC-project, which ushered in 1997, the EYCE 2005 has once again emphasised the importance of education for democratic citizenship – or civic education, as it is known here in Germany. While discussions on the necessity of citizenship education continue to develop at a national level, the last few years have also shown the particular relevance of education in democracy, active citizenship and human rights at the transnational level. Indicators from the EU that citizenship education needs more attention have also increased in volume, fortified by the crisis of failed referendums on the European constitution and expressed both in Margot Wallström’s “Plan D” and other ways.

All of our societies are confronted with a variety of challenges, and experience a variety of reactions, albeit to differing extents. These include: alienation on the part of citizens in relation to political institutions, falling numbers at polling stations, and the effects of globalisation or the increasing diversification in society and the need for people to actively agitate for social cohesion. In a very disturbing way, recent events in France have shown how far we still have left to go on this last issue.

In confronting these challenges, we need to institute regional as well as national measures. However, there is also an ongoing need for both international exchange of experiences and models, and development of transnational educational starting points to counter these regional and national processes. At the end of the day, for everyone involved -- and I would like to actively include myself here -- the European discourse must also be about developing a European identity in addition to a national identity. Creating a European public sphere in which European citizens can actively take part must be the goal of both European and transnational educational policy. Today, active democratic citizenship must be considered over a wide range of dimensions, including those of the EU and the Council of Europe, but also those that fall within a global context. Civic education/citizenship education can only work and look to the future when the people who are active in the discipline begin to view things from both a European and an international perspective.

Often, however, both those who are active and the discourses taking place are more or less isolated, even in Europe. There are of course a few international co-operative projects, the occasional European congress, or co-operative agreements on what will appear in this year’s schoolbooks. But the people who influence citizenship education in research, education and training – including the largest group, that of teachers – hardly registers issues outside of their nation’s borders.

With the exception of a few newsletters such as ‘e-DARE’, which is produced by our partner DARE-Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe, literature often only quotes national sources.

Professional journals in Europe that one could call transnational are scarce, much less journals that one could name international, and conferences and congresses continue to be heavily influenced by a focus on

national factors.

In 2004, after many years of sporadic Europe-related policies and several European conferences, these findings prompted the bpb to begin developing a broad strategy to 'Europeanise' its work. The "European Year Of Citizenship Through Education" has been both an inspiration and motivating force in the pursuit of this goal. Our new focus on "NECE-Networking European Citizenship Education" is one of the bulwarks of this Europeanisation strategy, and has provided the contextual background for this conference.

We launched the NECE project last year with a European Conference in Santiago de Compostela.

This year we carried on by setting up six workshops for experts in areas that participants in Santiago had determined to be particularly relevant: migration, quality control, film education and European identity, citizenship education for hard-to-reach learners, models of citizenship education, and school as a democratic space. During this conference we will elaborate on the results from these workshops, both in terms of content and personal experience.

The initial expansion stage of the NECE database, which is being presented to the public for the first time here in the atrium, contains listings of providers in the field of citizenship education – to begin with only from countries within the EU. It also offers users the chance to search for organisations, experts, potential co-operative partners, and projects. Those who have not yet registered in the database, of course, are hereby heartily invited to join. At this Congress we will also be introducing the 'eurotopics.net' internet portal, and we would like to extend a warm invitation to join us for the presentation at the dz-Bank building near the Brandenburg Gate this evening. It is well worth the visit.

Dear Participants,

Everyone who has helped organise the conference that begins today hopes it will provide a platform for drawing some initial conclusions about what has happened during the "European Year Of Citizenship Through Education". But we also want to look to the years ahead, and to the challenges that will confront not just academics and professionals in the field of citizenship education, but also policymakers.

This Congress is extremely important for us because it represents a chance to bring together a very diverse mix of players and relevant actors from politics, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as the sciences and areas of practical application, with the goal of creating a network to facilitate the exchange of ideas and concepts. I think that this wish is also reflected by the both the programme and the organisers and sponsors who have chosen to take part.

I want to take this opportunity to offer my express thanks to Hannelore Chiout from DARE, Janos Toth and Ellinor Haase from the EAEA, and Siegrid Steiniger from the Austrian Ministry of Education for their hard work in preparing for this Congress.

Let me close with a quote from the opening speech you heard given by our new Interior Minister, Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble. You can find a copy of the speech in your conference binder:

"The Council of Europe declared initiatives such as the "Education for Democratic Citizenship" project in 1997 both to find out what values and abilities individuals must have to become citizens that are also active participants, and also how those abilities could be conveyed to others. Since then, we have seen a large number of bilateral and multilateral co-operative ventures, studies and projects flourish. Once again, civic education has proven to be a valuable tool in helping to form a European public. I am confident that in the interaction between institutions and civil society – which is what this Congress stands for – we are taking a big step closer to a Europe made up of European citizens."

I am looking forward to the exciting and inspiring presentations and discussions, and hope that each of us will return home motivated for the future. Thank you.