

Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education

Reflections and Messages





EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

PROMOTING COMMON VALUES AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Reflections and Messages



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PREFACE

In the on-going debate on the future of Europe, it is paramount to underline that the European Union is a union based on common values. Education plays the most important role of preserving the values of our European family for generations ahead. While aiming for excellence in education, we need to make sure that every citizen has access to high-quality education from early childhood and throughout life, and according to their individual needs. If we want to generate the best ideas, we need diversity of thought and an inclusive educational environment in which everyone feels welcome to participate and to offer different perspectives.

Denitsa Sacheva

Deputy Minister for Education and Science of Bulgaria



INTRODUCTION

This publication presents the results of the event organised by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education at the Council of the European Union on 21 June 2018. It builds upon the *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching* and the *Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area*, adopted by the Council of the European Union on 22 May 2018.

Inclusive education is the approach for education in the 21st century. It is based on relevant concepts and values. First of all, inclusive education is an effective means to avoid discrimination and exclusion. Inclusive education is always related to the provision of high-quality education for all, combining excellence and equity. Recent research on the link between inclusive education and social inclusion indicates that inclusive education increases opportunities for peer interactions and close friendships between learners with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities. At the same time, learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities educated in inclusive settings may perform academically and socially better than learners educated in segregated settings.

The Education and Training (ET) 2020 Working Group on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education has clearly indicated that education should go beyond equal opportunities and ensure the inclusion of the diverse range of learners and that values need to be shared by teachers and learners. Values are part of the ‘whole-school approach’, where learners, parents, teachers and the wider community are all actively involved.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is aware of the challenges of putting inclusive systems of education in place. The *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*, approved by the representatives of the Ministries of Education, states that inclusive education systems are seen as a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to



ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union highlighted inclusive education as one of its horizontal priorities. This Presidency fully supported policies aimed at reducing the number of school drop-outs and increasing the quality of education so that no learner is left behind.

This event provided an opportunity to share and discuss key issues related to the implementation of values within inclusive education at both policy and practice levels. Presentations and discussions were shared by policy-makers, professionals from the field and young students.

The policy approach was provided by speakers who were requested to give their opinion on the following questions, regarding the adopted *Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*:

- Does the Recommendation bring an added value?
- Are common values effective vectors of integration?
- Is it possible to build a cohesive society without a common denominator everyone adheres to?

The practice approach was provided by speakers who were requested to give their opinion on the gap between policy and practice and provide an example of implementation at national or European level, as well as an example of changes based on fruitful co-operation among countries.

This publication includes a summary of all the presentations.



KEY MESSAGES

A number of key messages were expressed during the event, closely related to the adopted Council Recommendation.

Inclusion cannot remain a mere recommendation; it needs to be a real practice

Member States have the important task of implementing the *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*.

It is fundamental to place the principle of inclusion at the heart of all education systems. Member States, with the support of the European Commission, should intensify and join efforts towards reducing early school leaving by keeping all learners in the formal education systems. This also applies to learners from socio-economically disadvantaged regions and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including the children of workers who relocate to another Member State.

Countries can use and benefit from the guidance and expertise of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Schools should be the first place for inclusion

Schools need to be the first place and the first example of inclusion.

Curricula need to be flexible enough to be adjusted to the special needs of pupils. The first step is to put in place universal measures, applying to all pupils, and move on to more specific measures for pupils requiring them.



There is a need to balance academic and social inclusion when talking about school outputs.

Diversity and inclusion are something to be experienced not only by pupils, but also by teachers. Pupils need to be active actors in their education. Learners need to build relationships and share spaces and time to be involved in situations where diversity does not create inequalities.

Education and culture have a clear impact on all areas of life

Education and culture are sources of knowledge and mutual understanding.

Every European citizen has the right to acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values, fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination.

The chances offered to people with special needs and the challenge of integrating migrants raise the question of maintaining open and cohesive societies.

Tolerance, respect and diversity are among the major common values.



WELCOME REMARKS



Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Bulgaria



Ms Denitsa Sacheva began her career at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and held a number of positions – from specialist to head of sector – at the National Centre for Social Assistance. In 1999, she took up the post of Head of International Co-operation, European Integration and Projects Directorate of the National Health Insurance Fund. She was then appointed Head of the Cabinet of the Minister for Health, with responsibility for relations with international institutions, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Commission. She then served as Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policy before being appointed Deputy Minister for Education and Science.

In January 2018, we announced the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the field of education. Bulgaria took over the Presidency in a key moment for the education sector. As a result of the attention paid by the European leaders to the sector within the Gothenburg summit and the European Council Conclusions from last December on education, our sector continues to be very high on the European agenda.

With all Member States, the Bulgarian Presidency worked on projects and strategic documents related to digital skills, key competences for lifelong learning and inclusive education and successfully concluded the work on the first education package. With the support of the Member States, all Presidency goals set six months ago are now accomplished.

In the *Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area*, the Bulgarian Presidency, alongside Member States, managed to agree on an ambitious common agenda for the education sector in our Union. It set out the priority areas that need special attention in the years to come. It will be an important reference point for all of us.

The European Education Area should be underpinned by the lifelong learning continuum – more explicitly: from early childhood education and care, through school and vocational education and training, to higher education and adult education.

One of the key pillars in the common vision of the Bulgarian Presidency is high-quality and inclusive education. As Member States, we should intensify and join our efforts towards providing all children – including those from socio-economically disadvantaged regions and backgrounds, as well as the most talented children – with access to early childhood education and care systems and high-quality education.



Inclusive education is a horizontal priority for the Bulgarian Presidency and the Bulgarian Government. The mission of providing all learners with access to high-quality education should be central for all work in the sector.

Last July, the Bulgarian Government announced the first action of an interinstitutional mechanism, comprising of teachers and municipal workers. With this, the government managed to bring 22,000 students back to school; 22,000 children back to school is a third of a generation. It is also 22,000 destinies that will be changed. Out of the 22,000 children brought back to school, only 1,200 have dropped out again.

A particular problem faced during the action of tackling the drop-out rate was that there are difficulties with children and pupils who travel together with their parents who do not know or have precise information about how the right to education is executed.

In the May Conclusions, Member States agreed to join efforts towards reducing early school leaving in Europe and increasing the opportunities for equal access to education and basic skills for learners, including the children of workers who relocate to another Member State for a period. The Bulgarian Government has had conversations with countries that might be interested in exploring common information data projects to further explore the extent of the problem. Children in mobility often are children that live for several months in different countries. They are not enrolled in any system. This is a problem that will evolve.

As a result of the work under the Bulgarian Presidency, now we as Member States have the important task of implementing the *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*. Values are extremely important and, therefore, they are the foundations not only of the education systems, but of society.

There are two current global challenges around the world which influence our everyday decisions.

Trust influences our lives on a global scale. Facts and disinformation are used as weapons. People have greater access to information. They are more disinformed than ever and credibility is a problem for every sector of life, industry and organisation.

The increase in the population is linked with education failure. Education is regarded as a major contributor to the future of humanity and wealth. Education is expected to save the world. How do we create this education sector superhero role? Through sustainable targeted investment in teachers, especially in attracting more young people to the profession. It is our duty to make the teaching profession an equally important and preferred choice for young people as professions with innovation and which are linked with science because, these days, education and social innovations are very closely linked.

The trust barometer measuring trust in governments, businesses, non-government organisations and media shows there are three sectors which not only remain ranked as the top three, but have also increased in trust: technology with 75%, education with 70% and professional services with 68%. Politicians think education is one of the most important sectors and citizens think education deserves 70% of their trust. We are in a unique moment where we must unite all our efforts so all the documents and declarations that we adopt turn from concept into action. Action from the top down, reaching the most



remote areas and regions in the countries. We need a balanced approach, where talents and disability do not contradict each other and are in co-operation.

Mobility is a part of our future policies. We need to keep this in consideration and transform the expectations from the public institutions. Mobility requires more interinstitutional actions and the mechanism mentioned above. We need to invest a lot in teachers and digital technologies and a lot in infrastructure in order to serve all the decisions that have already been taken. All the funding instruments must co-operate with one another and must be in cohesion.

Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport



Tibor Navracsics is the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in Jean-Claude Juncker's Commission (2014–2019). Prior to this mandate, he served as Head of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, Member of the Hungarian Parliament, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Public Administration and Justice, and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. In the 1990s, Tibor taught at the Budapest University of Economics. From 1997 until taking up office as a European Commissioner, he taught at Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Law and Political Science in Budapest, where he became an Associate Professor in 2001. Tibor is responsible for improving the quality and efficiency of the European Union (EU) education systems, in particular through the European Semester and the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework. Education in the EU must be modernised and made more inclusive if we are to meet the challenges of employability and innovation in the digital age and build resilient, cohesive societies. Tibor is also in charge of the implementation of Erasmus+, as well as other programmes in the field of culture (Creative Europe) and youth (European Solidarity Corps).

In January, the Commission proposed a crucial initiative: a Recommendation to Member States to promote our common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.

Member States adopted the Recommendation on 22 May – only a few months later – under the Bulgarian Presidency. This is a milestone; never before has the European Union said so clearly how important it is to promote our common values, to create a sense of



belonging and to give a fair chance to all pupils, whatever their educational needs and irrespective of their social background.

This Recommendation comes at a time when the EU and its Member States face important challenges: violent radicalisation, divisive nationalism, disinformation. The chances offered to people with special needs and the challenge of integrating migrants raise difficult questions about our ability to maintain open, cohesive societies. They also test the capacity of our education systems to promote common values, provide basic competences to everyone and ensure social mobility.

How can promoting our common values make education more inclusive? How can we better promote our common values to create a sense of belonging at local and national level? Is it possible to build a cohesive society without a common denominator everyone adheres to? These are crucial, sometimes sensitive, unavoidable questions that are discussed in this document and are at the core of the Recommendation I proposed to Member States.

That is why this event was so important. Allow me to thank the Bulgarian Presidency for co-organising it and for its support during its Presidency. Let me also congratulate the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education for its remarkable work in this field.



Ana Magraner, Chair, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



Ana Magraner joined the Spanish Administration as a civil servant and worked in the fields of social services, culture and for the Presidency of the Government Spokesperson's Office. She then joined the European Commission as a civil servant and worked for the Directorate-General (DG) Environment. The Spanish Government invited Ana to work for the Secretariat of the Schengen Convention in Brussels and for the 1995 Spanish Presidency as Counsellor in the related field of Home Affairs. In 1996, she returned to the European Commission in DG Education and Culture, where she first worked in the field of culture and then mainly in the field of education. In her last Commission post, she was Desk Officer for Spain and Portugal in the field of Education and Training in Europe 2020 until 2013. Since then, she has been actively involved in social and cultural voluntary activities in Spain and, more recently, has acted as Chair for the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

The importance of this event, organised by the Bulgarian Presidency and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, is very clear: inclusive education should be at the core of policy development of the EU Member States.

We have a responsibility to add further weight to the *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*, so it reaches as many policy-makers, 'influencers' and civil servants as possible at national, regional and local level. This enables the Recommendation to reach its final beneficiaries: learners of all ages and conditions, schools and families.

Inclusive education is at the core of the work conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Progress has been made; nevertheless, there are challenges and barriers we all must overcome. How could it be otherwise, if speedy complex changes are taking place now and everywhere? One of the main commitments of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is to support and accompany ministers of education on the journey of reflection and analysis of what has been achieved and what could still be done.

Inclusive education and lifelong learning go hand-in-hand with openness and an openness to the future of Europe and the world.



**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON PROMOTING
COMMON VALUES, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION,
AND THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF TEACHING**



Figure 1. Rodrigo Ballester, Marie-Martine Schyns, João Costa, Brando Benifei, Stefaan Hermans and Andrea Sebastianelli participating in the first panel discussion

Introduction by Rodrigo Ballester, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Navracsics



Rodrigo Ballester started his career with a two-year stint as an academic assistant at the College of Europe before moving into the private sector where he worked as a lawyer for the American law firm Latham and Watkins. He then moved to the European Parliament where he was an adviser to the Spanish Delegation of the European People's Party (Partido Popular). In 2008, he joined the European Commission, firstly DG Justice, and then, as from 2011, DG Home Affairs where he was in charge of the external dimension of the EU's migration policy in Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa. He is now a member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Navracsics. He is in charge of education and oversees, among other issues, the Europe 2020 strategy, the Education and Training 2020 Framework, the Skills Agenda (including entrepreneurship) and the role of education in tackling radicalisation.

It is important to realise the importance of the Recommendation that the Commissioner has been working on for a long time and that gave us good surprises. We never thought this would be approved with the spirit of consensus it has been. In three months, this Recommendation entails some messages that are not so usual to hear. It is not every day



the European Commission speaks about the sense of belonging at national or local level. Nor that the European Agency is inserted in the Recommendation.

The Recommendation speaks about the sense of belonging at national and local level. Why is the EU doing that? Never has the EU spoken so loudly about those topics in a Recommendation.

Is there any added value to do that at European level? This is the first issue that has been discussed.

The Recommendation mentions the importance of creating a sense of belonging at local and national level, based on our common values. Are those values and, more specifically, local and national identities effective vectors of integration? Is it possible to build a cohesive society without a common denominator everyone adheres to? This has been the second issue discussed.

I would like to highlight some aspects from the discussions. Diversity and inclusion are something to be experienced; let us help not only the students, but also the teachers. School is the first place of inclusion, no matter if you speak about a newly-arrived migrant or someone with special needs.

The impact of socio-economic conditions and of poverty is one of the messages that the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results give. The level of basic competences and socio-economic background are linked.

The importance of culture, to be able to understand our common heritage. We can identify the common denominator and identify the diversities of the Member States. Praising diversity and welcoming it applies to the different Member States. We are 28 Member States; we do not know each other well enough to develop the sense of belonging at the EU level. This cultural dimension is very important.

The Recommendation has been welcomed by the Member States. It is their turn to implement it; we will do our best to support them.

In the field of education, a Recommendation is the highest instrument we have: we do not have a more powerful instrument.

Andrea Sebastianelli, Student, Liceo Scientifico e Musicale 'G. Marconi', Italy



Andrea Sebastianelli is a third-year student at a scientific secondary school. He took part in the 'L'Europa inizia a Lampedusa' (Europe Begins in Lampedusa) project with his school, and for him it was a really fantastic experience that allowed him to help his school organise meetings and events on integration and inclusion.



After experiencing the European activity, Europe Begins in Lampedusa, participants created concrete actions to build up a project and laboratories for meetings where the cultural and socio-economic disadvantages of fellow students do not matter. This is what is needed as a student: opportunities to form and to facilitate the process of inclusion in the country. This includes a need to build relationships, spaces and time to share, as well as circumstances where diversity does not create such inequalities. Educational school staff have a challenge: working towards educating communities of students that welcome diversities. We do not need special classes, we do not need different roadmaps, but projects which create a common sense of participation and belonging to Europe.

The common values of human respect and dignity, freedom and democracy for young European citizens need to become concrete and strong. Inclusion is a common value. Poverty is a common problem. Students that live in socio-economic disadvantage need help and school staff are in a position to provide this to all who ask for help.

Communication and information alone do not help to eradicate populism, xenophobia and discrimination. However, schools are able to provide experiences. People in power can help create an education system with cultural exchanges which can dissolve prejudice. Inclusive schooling is the only way in which to build Europe.

It is not easy for us to live in a period where the values that founded the European Union are difficult to find within political choices. As far as these political choices are concerned, how much do policy-makers believe that this commitment to education should start at school and not from other educational agencies? School should be the first example of inclusion. While policy-makers are debating the Dublin Regulation for the reception of migrants, channels should be created to allow foreign minors to be included in mainstream classes – not only to offer them educational courses, but also to help them build strong relationships, giving them the opportunity to leave the centres where they are hosted.

There is a need to talk and confront each other. The European Union promotes cultural exchanges by allowing thousands of Europeans to travel and live throughout the Union. A European day dedicated to integration and inclusion, every year and in each school, would engage students in actions to disseminate what has been experienced and received thanks to European education programmes.



Marie-Martine Schyns, Minister for Education, Wallonia-Brussels Federation



For 10 years, **Marie-Martine Schyns** worked as a teacher and as deputy mayor in Herve. In 2007, she became deputy to Melchior Wathelet, and for two years sat in the Chamber of Representatives in the Public Health and Climate Commissions. After the elections in 2010, she retired from her post as deputy mayor, but remained active as a councillor and as President of the Tourist Information Centre in Herve. She then resumed her role as Member of the Chamber in the Public Health and Interior Commissions. In 2013, she was appointed Minister for Education, to replace Marie-Dominique Simonet. She spent two years as a Walloon Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and as Head of the cdH (Humanist Democratic Centre) group in the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. She is currently Minister of Education and School Buildings in the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Common values have been adopted by the Member States of the European Union in the form of a Recommendation, but this goes far beyond Europe. There must be common values all around humankind.

Member States have come out in favour of a society of pluralism, and equity for women and men. As such, sharing common values does not mean a common youth identity in every subject. On the contrary: tolerance, respect for one another and diversity are among the major common values. School should be the first place for inclusion.

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, all pupils are not only offered educational courses, but the opportunity to build strong relationships among themselves. Teachers welcome pupils and give them a lot of self-confidence, both at school and in society, thanks to the Federation's educational system.

Regarding the *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*, there is progress to be made in welcoming students with special needs in education. We know it. We are currently working for better integration for these students with special educational needs.

In Belgium, there is a long track record of special education and one cannot give up a full special education system to create a new, fully inclusive system overnight. In Belgium, a lot of parents know the special system and they agree with the system which gives good educational results. It is not possible to start from scratch; however, we are working towards better integration of people with special needs in education into our mainstream schools. For example, there is a system of integration of pupils with special needs who are helped within mainstream education by specialised teaching staff. Another example is the



recent creation of inclusive classrooms. This means that the special classroom is included in a mainstream school. Of course, it is still a special classroom, but with the importance of organising common activities together between students with and without special educational needs.

João Costa, Secretary of State for Education, Portugal



João Costa is Portugal's Secretary of State for Education. He is a Full Professor of Linguistics at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the Universidade Nova in Lisbon. He graduated in Linguistics from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Lisbon, and completed his PhD in Linguistics at the University of Leiden. During his studies, he was a visiting scholar at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). His areas of research are formal linguistics, language acquisition and development, and educational linguistics. He is the author of several books and over 100 articles and chapters of books. Until November 2015, João Costa was Director of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and President of the Scientific Council of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Foundation for Science and Technology. Costa has been a member of the Scientific Council of the National Reading Plan, of the National Commission of the International Institute of the Portuguese Language, and of the Consultative Council of the Camões Institute. He has been President of the European Association of Language Students (SOLE) and of the Portuguese Linguistics Association, and has taught at a number of universities in Brazil, Macau, Spain and the Netherlands.

The Portuguese Government started an initiative of giving students a voice through participation in an international network of student voice. When we listen to young students, we see there are common values and common concerns shared by all students.

It only makes sense to have common values and a sense of belonging in the education system if it turns into practice, if it turns into a reality, in each classroom, in each school. Inclusion cannot be about a recommendation. It must be about real practices.

Portugal has approved a new law on inclusive education. It is based on a step we need to take from integration to inclusion. In the Portuguese education system, about 97% of students with special needs are in mainstream education, but in schools they are often separated. They are in units. These are called segregated curricula spaces, even if they are in the classroom.



The most difficult step is to try to move from integration to inclusion: to bring the students into the classroom and bring these students to be part of the group with their peers.

This new law is based on individual needs and not on diagnosis, so it is not based on clinical reference. This is also an important step because what we want to do is to ensure that the way the curriculum is developed is adequate for the special needs of the children and not to find a new set of methods that are delivered in terms of a diagnosis that can be very differential.

It is also a law that is not based on disabilities. It is based on difficulties in accessing the curriculum. For the first time, Portugal has a law on inclusion that is not about a physical or cognitive impairment, but about all those students that are not able to learn – due to socio-economic conditions, due to socio or emotional impairment of any kind, or due to something that happened in their lives. This is not directly about the migrant communities and the problems they face when they come to the country without their families. It is a law about disadvantage in general. We want an education system that is not about privilege. Poverty is the main predictor concerning Portuguese school drop-out.

When talking about inclusion and leaving the socio-economic condition as a marginal aspect while only talking about disability, we are failing to make sure that all students learn. The curriculum has to be flexible enough to be adjusted to the special needs of the children that are left behind on a multi-level approach, starting with universal measures that all students benefit from and then move on. Adapting what is done, moving towards more selective measures and specific measures for students that are not able to learn with these universal measures.

Differentiation is the starting point in the classroom – with all students in the classroom. The law does not only target the children who are not included. All students will benefit from contact with students who are not able to learn in the same settings. The whole class moves, sometimes slower, but they get much further when all the students are together.

Inclusion is a common value because peace is a common value and poverty is a common problem. It is not the problem of a specific community or country; it has to be faced and shared globally. Segregation is not the solution. Segregation can sometimes be disguised as the good intention of integration. If we do not take the step from integration to inclusion, we do not move to real practice.

The new law took more than two years to be designed. The basis of the law is evidence-based, with consideration given to recommendations from the European Commission and from the United Nations. This was also based on academic studies on inclusion and on governmental data showing that when students are mixed, when the classroom is mixed, the success for the disadvantaged children is much higher than in level classes or separate measures that allow the privileged ones to go on, but do not allow the disadvantaged students to progress as much as they could. There were also focus groups with all kinds of sectors, including students, parents and all social actors, involved in this process.

Non-formal education also has a role. Many children do not have access to it. Having talked a lot about quality education, we have to ask the question: what is quality education about?



One aspect of the Portuguese educational reform was to introduce citizenship as a compulsory topic from pre-school to the end of secondary school, with interculturality as a topic to be addressed with all students at all levels. School is the only way to make sure that we reach all the citizens in the country.

When asking about the quality of schools, it is often forgotten to take inclusion into consideration. A good school cannot be seen as one that has good exam results, but a school that brings in all children and includes all children in the classroom. This is something Portugal is starting to do: to change the standards for evaluating schools and include inclusion as one of the key aspects in the assessment of the quality of the schools.

Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament, Italy



Brando Benifei, European Federalist, is from La Spezia, Italy, and is one of the youngest MEPs. His main areas of legislative work in the European Parliament are Employment and Social Affairs and Foreign Affairs. He is co-chair of the Youth Intergroup and vice-chair of the Disability Intergroup. Brando Benifei's parliamentary activities in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs include his current role as Rapporteur for the European Solidarity Corps. He has drafted key legislative and non-legislative reports on the social inclusion and integration of refugees into the EU labour market; on youth employment policy, such as the Youth Guarantee scheme and the Youth Employment Initiative; and on digitalisation and rights of persons with disabilities. He was recently awarded the MEP Award 2018 for his commitment to employment issues, particularly youth unemployment.

Including young people's representatives and youth organisations is one of those common values we need to promote. There is a need to involve young people and not just impose policies on them, having active dialogue with them at all levels. It is crucial to have this kind of instrument and strategy to be endorsed by the Member States in the form of the Recommendation. It is very important for different reasons.

One point is that we have a common value system in Europe, which is mainly based on our common constitutional and rule of law and rights-based approach, that is at the centre of our systems. When we look at values, we need to be careful. We have a lot of diversity inside our continent. We need to be attentive on how we frame the discussion. It is important that we promote diversity, tolerance and support for pluralism. Our institutions and constitutions are the base of our common living together. There is also a cultural element. Europe has been united by culture since before the institutions. This is a dimension that must be developed and supported, especially when we look at the local



level and communities. This includes supporting young people and students, through exchange and dialogue between local communities.

The European dimension of teaching is also important. Civic and European education does not have the same level in the various Member States. There should be more investment in learning common European history and about European institutions, which are governing institutions, but also instruments for people – including young people – to have their rights and their needs upheld. Especially for those young people who are from vulnerable backgrounds, migrant backgrounds, asylum seekers, people with disabilities. They need to be informed on what they can do and they need to learn it also from school; otherwise it is easy to leave school and not know what European is for them, how we are in Europe together. If you do not know, you will be easily cheated by governments, by whoever can act towards you in a way that might be for their own political profit, telling you that it is Europe's fault.

Local governments say, 'It is Brussels' fault'. When there are Council Conclusions saying we need to do this, it is not Brussels imposing anything; it is the governments that have signed that. Maybe the day after, they say they did not want to do it or did not read what they signed. It is important that young people are given the instruments to construct this kind of rhetoric. When looking at the European dimension of teaching, this should include telling young students what Europe is today and learning how to change it. To change something, you need to know how to do it.

Digital education is an important step. Not only for work, but also for young people to be conscious citizens, to be able to know how the new digital world is, how to be a digital citizen. It should be a crucial democratic objective; otherwise, again it is easy to be manipulated and governed by the machines and digital world. When something is free, it is free for real. It needs a strong educational effort.

We have many systems today that have been put in place, experimented with, to recognise and to certify competences in informal learning. It is important that organisations working in this sector also have a clear message from Europe on which instruments will be used to measure competences acquired in informal learning and also to find ways in which social funds are used to enable all those who wish to access available opportunities and promote access for those who have disabilities.

The European Commission and European governments need to put citizens' needs – especially young citizens and students' needs – at the centre. They need to be given this European dimension of teaching that needs a European initiative. If it is left only to each Member State or each local initiative, it will not have the dimension and scope that is needed.



Stefaan Hermans, Director, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture



Stefaan Hermans is currently Director for Policy Strategy and Evaluation at the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Before this, he was Head of the 'Skills' Unit in DG Research and Innovation (RTD) at the European Commission. His tasks included the promotion of the development of the skills base to foster the European Research Area, the creation of an open and attractive labour market for researchers, and the modernisation of the research and innovation dimensions of universities. Before joining DG RTD in 2008 as Head of the 'Universities and Researchers' Unit, he was Secretary of the European Employment Committee, following a number of posts in DG Employment, Social Affairs, Industrial Relations and Equal Opportunities. He has also worked as a project officer in Education and Training at the European Commission.

Inclusive education is not only a Bulgarian issue. It is relevant in each and every Member State, although it manifests itself in different ways matching different situations. The principle is that we care for every young person and leave no-one alone or behind.

The Treaty on European Union defines our model as a social market economy. It is an economy which should be dynamic with freedom to take initiatives, and where everybody can take their own chances. It is also an economy and societal model where we care for one another and where we ensure that everybody gets a fair chance.

When it comes to being integrated into society – thus being genuinely included in school and later in the labour market – there is still a lot of work to be done.

It is important to recognise that the Juncker Commission is doing a lot to advance here, including via the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Pillar of Social Rights has as its very first principle that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education – irrespective of your parents' background and social situation, abilities or disabilities – just to name a few objective characteristics.

In the Union, the notion of identity then imposes itself. Who are we as Europeans? What do we share? What values do we have in common? How do we make sure that these values are passed down? Knowing that at the same time, we all grow up in a given neighbourhood, have our preferred food, emotional ties. In short, acknowledging that what enriches us in Europe is our diversity, which is to be treasured and respected.

The Commission addresses this in its November 2017 contribution to the Leaders' Agenda meeting, 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture'.



The question of identity and who we are as Europeans is also part and parcel of the notion of the European dimension of teaching and the work dedicated to European common values.

Having common values is at the heart of being European, of having a European Union and the European integration project as such. It may indeed seem a bit strange that it has taken until now for Member States to explicitly subscribe to the objective of transmitting common values through their educational systems.

Indeed, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union lists a number of values which Member States consider to be common. These include, for instance, respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Following a Commission proposal in January 2018, the Council of Ministers adopted the *Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching* in May 2018. By doing so, Education Ministers pledged that these common values will be effectively learnt in school and thus transmitted via the national and regional education systems. It is then up to each Member State and educational system to determine how to do this.

Indeed, the responsibility on how to do this is at national or regional level.

The EU can and will support Member States. Transnational mobility obviously can play a role. Project work can also help in acquiring the common values. This is not only about formal learning, but also about experiencing these values within schools, in interaction among pupils, in interaction between pupils and teachers and head teachers.

The Commission supports numerous projects through its funding programmes, enabling pupils, students, teachers and administrators to work together. Youth organisations, sports clubs and civil society organisations also play an active role in project work.

These projects make a big difference. More than 100,000 projects have been identified as a valuable source for dissemination and use beyond the project participants themselves, creating an important wealth of experiences to build on.



**PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF IMPLEMENTING
COMMON VALUES AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**



Figure 2. Cor J.W. Meijer, Tanya Hristova, Patricia Pérez-Gómez Delaunay, Alen Kofol and Flora Selmani participating in the second panel discussion

Introduction by Cor J.W. Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



In his former position as staff member of the Agency, Cor was responsible for major Europe-wide projects on subjects such as special education provision and inclusion in Europe, financing of special needs education in Europe, and classroom practice studies. He has acted as a consultant to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on special needs issues, as well as to various other national and international bodies (European Union, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO). He is the co-editor of *New Perspectives on Special Education* (Routledge, 1994), *Inclusive Education: A Global Agenda* (Routledge, 1997) and *Implementing Inclusive Education: Issues in Bridging the Policy-Practice Gap* (Emerald Publishing Group, 2016). More recently, Cor has been writing a chapter of the *SAGE Handbook of Inclusion and Diversity in Education*.

The adopted Council Recommendation highlights the importance of agreeing on common values and supports inclusive education; we all are aware of the gap between policy and practice. This session will be devoted to presenting and describing examples of supporting



the implementation of policies in this area at national or European level. Furthermore, are there any examples to share regarding policy changes based on fruitful co-operation among countries?

The European Agency recently did an extensive study on the effects of inclusive education: *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion: A Review of the Literature*. The study has looked into the literature that is available in English on this area all over the world. The purpose was to identify answers to the question: what are the short-term and long-term effects of inclusive education? This extensive study shows that there is evidence to suggest that there is a link between inclusive education and outcomes in the areas of education, employment and living in the community.

Research indicates that:

- Inclusive education increases the opportunities for peer interactions and for close friendships between learners with and without disabilities.
- Learners with disabilities educated in inclusive settings may perform academically and socially better than learners educated in segregated settings.
- Attending and receiving support within inclusive education settings increases the likelihood of enrolling in higher education.

Regarding employment, out of all of the literature comes one single strong conclusion: inclusive education increases the likelihood of people with disabilities being employed. Regarding living in the community, inclusive education increases the opportunities for independent living. Also, youngsters with disabilities who are in segregated provision are less likely to have friends and social networks in their adult life.

What is crucial in all the areas mentioned is the sense of belonging. Belonging to the peer group in the mainstream setting is a strong facilitator for self-confidence, learning, social skills and employment.

Flora Selmani, Student, Campus Saint-Jean, Belgium

Studying in a foreign country comes with surprises – pleasant ones as well as unpleasant. There are a considerable number of impactful things which can make one outweigh the other.

The way in which foreign students experience their first contact with school education in Belgium differs due to the pupils' country of origin and their different cultural backgrounds.

From my experience, as well as that of some of my friends, as foreign students in Belgium we first started school in DASPA: the reception and schooling of newly-arrived pupils. There, we had the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and discover new cultures, while getting to know these people. This was different from our countries of origin – Kosovo for me, Pakistan and Afghanistan for my friends – where we were not confronted with multiculturalism as much as we are in Belgium. We found it to be a pleasant change from what used to be our daily school life. The fact of being able to meet a



variety of people and to share a classroom with students of different cultures helped us examine and break our social and cultural biases, while giving us a broader perspective of the world.

Comprehensively, for teachers to be confronted with students whose special need is the language barrier is a challenge. This language barrier can be in a way refreshing, as it enhances your gestic ability to communicate, but it can also be tiresome, possibly even irritating. Fortunately, in our experiences, teachers were all very patient and understanding. While making sure that no student was left behind or pressured, the learning process would often be accompanied by different activities. Everyone's sole focus was to understand one another. There was a positive energy which helped create a sense of comfort between the students and teachers.

The fact of having experienced multiculturalism in education has inspired me significantly to study foreign languages. I believe that with an understanding of another's language, it is possible to have a better insight into their culture. While it also helps you broaden your horizons, it can be helpful in understanding your own culture better.

Lastly, inclusive education is a very fortunate experience to have. It gives you the opportunity of being in a community where students are equally viewed, no matter their race, ethnic or social class. Multiculturalism and inclusive education have many positive effects. They help students to become more open-minded while giving them a broader view of the world.



Tanya Hristova, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Mayor of Gabrovo, Bulgaria



Tanya Hristova has been mayor of the municipality of Gabrovo, Bulgaria, since November 2011. She holds two Master's degrees in English Philology and Finance from St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo. In the period 2007–2010, she was deputy mayor responsible for sustainable development in the Gabrovo municipality as part of the team of the then mayor. From 2010 until she was elected mayor in 2011, she was head of the cabinet of the EU Funds Management Minister. In 2015, she was re-elected for a second term until 2019. She is the Head of the Bulgarian delegation in the European Committee of the Regions. She is a full member of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER) and the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC). Tanya Hristova is the rapporteur of the opinion on 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture', which was adopted during the 129th Committee of the Regions Plenary Session on 17 May 2018.

More than 70% of the laws which are debated in Brussels have a direct effect on cities and regions; they have impact on citizens.

During its first time presiding over the Council of the European Union, Bulgaria had the opportunity to put important topics on the table, among which education has the most horizontal effect and influence on every citizen and family.

Education and culture play important roles in bringing Europeans together. Unfortunately, with the onset of many crises and the threat to the stability of the European Union that came in the wake of these crises, various forms of negative initiatives appear, like nationalism and populism. In this way, they question the very nature of the European Union, raising doubts about the prospects of European common values. This is why it is important to rediscover the ties between societies. Undoubtedly, education and culture are sources of knowledge and mutual understanding. They have the potential to be one of the driving forces for this process by fostering a sense of belonging to the common European project.

How can culture and education contribute to strengthening the EU identities in values? The answer is that we need to promote the European dimension on teaching to increase the understanding of common heritage and to raise awareness of the cultural diversity of the Union. Inclusive education is highlighted in all learning environments and in a lifelong perspective, ensuring every European citizen has the right to acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social



inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship and intercultural dialogues. Believing the future of Europe lies on the shoulders of young people, we need to focus on the roles of the young people as the driving force of the future of the common Europe. They must be provided with the right opportunities to be equipped with the necessary skills to be active and involved citizens who can take control of their lives and who can benefit from the advantages offered by a globalised and knowledge-driven world.

The Committee of the Regions supports the general vision of a European educational area and agrees that education and culture are major factors in making Europe more resilient. The Committee agrees that it is necessary to foster support for the core set of values on which the European Union is based and to which all Member States have subscribed upon joining the European Union.

The Committee of the Regions also emphasises that education and culture have a broad impact on all areas of life and specifically on strengthening society. Citizen education is an essential element in this regard. Awareness-raising about European citizenship among the general public should be aimed primarily at, and with an emphasis on, young people.

It is important to mention that, due to the proximity of the local and regional authorities to European citizens, representatives of local and regional authorities are important partners who have a very significant role to play in using education and culture.

When it comes to providing inclusive education, the Committee of the Regions emphasises the importance of including all pupils in quality education from an early age and onwards and ensuring that equal opportunities and access to quality education are provided for every student, including those from linguistic, religious, ethnic or other minority backgrounds.

Quality education addresses the needs of all people. It should provide the necessary support for a stronger role of language learning and many other aspects that are very important for inclusive education.

For the municipality of Gabrovo, inclusiveness and openness are among the top priorities. We see this as an opportunity to work together for sustainable development and enhancement of the quality of living. Including all children and ensuring that each individual has equal and personalised opportunities for educational progress is still a challenge in our municipality.

Due to different reasons, without having a big presence of minorities in Gabrovo, we had established a segregated model in one of the schools. After analysing the situation and initiating a debate with the citizens, teachers, city council and the different administrations, we decided that the best way to eliminate this problem is to close the school because it is known that segregation is something that produces negative effects. While this may seem shocking, it allows us now to work with the specific needs of every child. Together with the rest of the schools, we end together with special educators. We are now following the interest of every student.

In Gabrovo, we have managed to implement many projects thanks to European funding. We managed to establish better physical conditions and access to all kindergartens and schools. We invested a lot in training teachers and establishing collaborative models for working with students with special educational needs. This is very successful in terms of



measuring the achievements of young people in Gabrovo. There are also many challenges in this field.

Patricia Pérez-Gómez Delaunay, Structural Reform Support Service, European Commission



Patricia Pérez-Gómez Delaunay is a policy officer and project manager at the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) of the European Commission, where she has been responsible for technical support projects in education since June 2017. Before that, she worked as a policy officer within DG Education and Culture, Unit A2 of the European Commission, where she was in charge of monitoring education policies in Spain, Portugal and the UK in the European Semester framework and actively contributed to the annual Education and Training Monitor. In the European Commission, Patricia has also worked as a policy officer in DG Enlargement, responsible for Public Administration Reform projects in the Balkans region. In previous years, Patricia developed extensive experience in the field of international co-operation and worked for a number of international organisations in many different countries, including the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, the Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz (Toledo International Centre for Peace) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

The Structural Reform Support Service is a powerful tool that can help countries to work towards a more inclusive education system. The SRSS offers technical support to the EU governments, to EU Member States, ministries of education and other agencies in the preparation, design and implementation of policies, public policies and reforms that work towards more inclusive education. The service works with a wider range of sectors, but this new Council Recommendation creates a momentum that allows the service to focus our strengths and resources towards this common goal.

The SRSS works based on demand from the Member States. All requests can be discussed and a formal request can be designed in collaboration with the service, with submission before the end of October 2018 in order to benefit from our support as of 2019.

The type of support that the SRSS provides to ministries is tailor-made and uses a wide range of tools, such as individual experts, but also exchange of practices with other countries through workshops, training and seminars. One of the characteristics of the support provided is that the service takes advantage of the very valuable experiences other Member States have.



Member States are not requested to do any co-financing. The service also manages all the support provided, so there is no need to have a specific structure to manage such projects.

There are two on-going projects on inclusive education. In one of these, the SRSS is helping the beneficiary Member State that requested it to develop the tools to do a proper assessment of the situation of inclusive education in their country. The use of that tool will lead us to provide some recommendations for policy reforms and for the reform and improvement of the legal framework. The SRSS team will also assess the drafting of the legal framework if that is required.

There are also other projects, for instance that support the promotion of common values and citizenship and also the prevention of violence. There is a project in Slovenia that helps the government to find ways to make the measures in place for bullying prevention more effective. They want to know what they can do better from the experience of other countries. The SRSS can provide this opportunity.



Alen Kofol, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia



Alen Kofol is an educationalist in the field of special needs and rehabilitation, and has worked as a teacher, counsellor and headmaster, and as Director of the Directorate for Pre-School and Primary Education in the Republic of Slovenia. He currently works for the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport as a schools inspector and actively co-operates with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Alen is the Country Partner Representative for Slovenia in the Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems project, which is co-financed by the European Union. His professional path is determined by respect for the field of educational expertise. Alen firmly believes that by focusing on achieving goals, being open to innovative ideas and scientific achievements, and encouraging and fostering a co-operative relationship between different fields of expertise, parents and learners in finding the right solutions and in planning the educational future of learners, we can bring about considerable changes in the field of education.

Educational systems are primarily focused on achieving academic goals, based on the intellectual dimension of education. They seem to be leaving behind the social dimension of education. There is a clear need to balance social inclusion with academic inclusion. By balancing those two dimensions of education, we shall be approaching the right solution and will finally be able to make inclusion work. Until we have achieved that, all countries will face problems with systems that segregate children with special needs.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is an example of a community built on respect and mutual trust among all the stakeholders in the educational process of children with special needs. This is the key cornerstone for achieving a balance between the social and academic aspects of inclusion. The projects that the Agency works on have significantly affected the Slovenian legislation. They affect not only the legislation itself, but also the way head teachers, teachers and parents' associations think and work.

One specific example of this successful policy co-operation – namely the exchange of good practices and comparison of national policies in this field among the participating countries – is the Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES) project. This project was funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Key Action 3 'Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects' framework, with an advisory group consisting of representatives from Slovenia, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. The policy-makers from different European countries have recognised that appropriate funding mechanisms are the critical lever for reducing disparity in education. We can therefore claim that what you finance, you also support. That is: if we finance inclusion, we support inclusion; if we finance segregation, we support segregation.



This project highlighted a lot of key issues regarding the financing of inclusive education systems, how our educational systems are financed and how it could be done better, more efficiently, more accountably, more precisely. The project also established that we need to prevent costly exclusionary processes, such as labelling children with special needs. We need to provide incentives for a school-developmental approach towards inclusive education. We need to ensure innovative and flexible learning environments which will foster the development of competences that will enhance inclusion in those environments. Transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education are of key importance. The findings and results of this project have come from national policy-makers, which makes them even more important and relevant. The outputs from this project will be incorporated into our legislations and will improve our educational systems.

This project is a good example of supporting the change of policies and hence promoting common values and inclusive education. If inclusive education is to become truly inclusive, then we need such cohesive educational societies that the word 'inclusive' will actually no longer be needed. Inclusion will become an integral part of society. These cohesive educational societies are the path to greater respect, equality, tolerance and equity in any society.



CLOSING REMARKS



Figure 3. Daniel Bognar, Ana Magraner, Denitsa Sacheva and Devora Stancheva participating in the closing discussion

Daniel Bognar, Ministry of Education, Hessen, Germany



In 2017, the School Committee of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz) appointed **Daniel Bognar** as Agency representative of the German Länder. Mr Bognar studied education in special schools and in inclusive settings at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He worked as a special education teacher at an inclusive elementary school and at special schools, was in charge of a special education school and headed a department in the State Education Office. Since 2010, Mr Bognar is Head of Division in the Hessian Ministry of Education, responsible for primary schools, inclusive education and special education schools.

It is very important to come from recommendations into actions, reflecting on the different areas or aspects of the practical work, and giving the opportunity to learn further from each other. The Council Recommendations are the framework for our further efforts. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has a broad expertise to counsel in that field.

Different questions need to be reflected: how this framework can be implemented into teacher education and training; how important it is to learn the culture and background of each other, to understand each other; how to come to common values.



Let me give you what is known in Germany as an ‘African’ proverb when talking about inclusion: ‘It takes a village to educate a child’. To educate a child is really a very important matter for the whole community. Nothing progresses if we do not tolerate and accept differences, if we do not share common values. We need to recognise the dignity of each and every one.

Devora Stancheva, Student, Sava Dobroplodni Secondary School, Shumen, Bulgaria



Devora Stancheva is a ninth-grade student at the Sava Dobroplodni Secondary School in Shumen. She is studying music and English. She is a member of the school choir and takes part in concerts and competitions. She is a volunteer in the Shumen Youth Tolerance Club, where together with other volunteers she has taken part in actions, campaigns and celebrations to overcome stereotypes and discrimination among students. In April 2017, she took part in the ‘Tolerance Academy – Meeting of the Students’ Parliaments’ in Sliven. The meeting was attended by representatives of schools from all over Bulgaria. There, she had the opportunity to share views on the general similarities and differences between the children of all ethnic groups in the country, to acquire teamwork skills, to set goals and dreams and to learn how to achieve them.

In order to achieve your goals, you need to learn at school. This is why the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance is a very helpful organisation. For about 10 years, Amalipe Center has successfully used an early school leaving prevention programme. Initially, only 15 schools took part in the prevention programme, but the number has rapidly increased to 250 schools all over Bulgaria. This is due to the fact that, over the years, positive results have been achieved. The number of Roma students suffering from early school leaving has lowered to a minimum and the school results of Roma students have improved.

What does this programme include? The programme called ‘Each Student Can Be a High Achiever’ aims to introduce cultural awareness teaching and learning at schools. Students can learn about different ethnicities in the elective classes. In these classes, they develop their intercultural competences and tolerance towards others. Organised training for teaching in learning environments improves teachers’ competences and skills, as well as helping them teach Roma students better and more confidently. Training not only includes teachers and students, but parents as well. The main objective of Amalipe parental clubs at different schools is to make parents actively involved in the educational process of their children.



Another important part of the programme is the ‘School Parliament’, as well as students actively involved in peer teaching. High achievers help slower learners with homework and project activities. Annually, a meeting of the School Parliament is held under the title ‘Tolerance Academy’. Students from all over the country take part in this meeting. This involves role-playing and simulations to learn about Roma history and culture, about their early marriages and the way in which to help all children grow happily. It is there that students have the opportunity to share their opinion about the similarities and differences between children from the different ethnic groups in Bulgaria.

The theme of inclusive education is extremely important, especially since Bulgaria has been implementing an educational reform aimed at making every school attractive and inclusive for every student. The goal is to support each student to maximise their abilities. Inclusive education is a priority policy of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and of the whole education system in Bulgaria.

Ana Magraner, Chair, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Sharing thoughts, proposals and practices in an open way is as important and rewarding for the readers of this document as for the objectives of this event. This feeling encourages us to go on with this approach in the future.

There seems to be an agreement to reinforce the need for better understanding and transmitting what inclusive education means. This motivates us all, and particularly the Agency, to continue delving into this subject and following this path.

In this context, the recent adoption of the Recommendation by the Council of the European Union, based on the proposal of the Commission, is of great significance.

Therefore, the support offered by the Commission – and particularly by the Structural Reform Support Service – constitutes a unique opportunity for co-operating and moving ahead in the field of inclusive education.

Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Bulgaria

I would like to stress what is really important: to transfer and to transform high politics into local action because this is what everyone expects and would like to see.

This is a big challenge in Bulgaria. In my country, there is not even a single party against inclusive education. Everyone is united: inclusive education is important and inclusive education is not only an instrument for peace, it is also important for economic prosperity and an environment for evolution. Unfortunately, there are a lot of local practices and a lot



of decisions and a lot of problems that we face at a regional level. I guess this is a common problem for every country.

There are 5,000 Roma students in Bulgaria that are in higher education institutions – brilliant young people like Devora here, who have good education. There are places in Bulgaria that are regarded as the Roma Cambridge. However, there are also people living in ghettos where only 150 people have basic education. The problem is, when you ask a little girl ‘what is your name’, she does not understand the question. This is not even the problem itself. The bigger problem is that her mother does not understand the question. The only one that is able to translate the question is the grandmother. This is a second generation of people we are losing and that we need to have on our agenda and in our everyday efforts. How to involve them, include them in the education system, so we not only provide a future for them, but also for our societies.

Talking about the social dimension of education, I was thinking about an African proverb: ‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to reach far, go together’. This is, I think, something that we all have to remember. If we really want to build sustainable societies and if we want to create an environment for evolution, this is what we have to do: include everyone, so we get the best ideas out of everyone. All the children going into the education system should learn how to be creators and masters of their creations.



ANNEX 1: AGENDA

Moderator: Daniel Bognar, Ministry of Education, Hessen, Germany

Time	Session
09.00–10.00	Registration
10.00–10.15	Welcome remarks Denitsa Sacheva , Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Bulgaria Tibor Navracsics , European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Ana Magraner , Chair, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
10.15–11.15	Session 1: Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching Moderator: Rodrigo Ballester , Member of Cabinet (Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) Introduction by Andrea Sebastianelli , Student, Liceo Scientifico e Musicale ‘G. Marconi’, Italy Marie-Martine Schyns , Minister for Education, Wallonia-Brussels Federation João Costa , Secretary of State for Education, Portugal Brando Benifei , Member of the European Parliament, Italy Stefaan Hermans , Director, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture Questions and Answers



Time	Session
11.15–12.15	<p>Session 2: Practical Examples of Implementing Common Values and Inclusive Education</p> <p>Moderator: Cor J.W. Meijer, Director, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education</p> <p>Introduction by Flora Selmani, Student, Campus Saint-Jean, Belgium</p> <p>Tanya Hristova, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Mayor of Gabrovo, Bulgaria</p> <p>Patricia Pérez-Gómez Delaunay, Structural Reform Support Service, European Commission</p> <p>Alen Kofol, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia</p> <p>Questions and Answers</p>
12.15–12.30	<p>Closing remarks</p> <p>Devora Stancheva, Student, Sava Dobroplodni Secondary School, Shumen, Bulgaria</p> <p>Ana Magraner, Chair, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education</p> <p>Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister for Education and Science, Bulgaria</p>
12.30–13.30	<p>Networking and refreshments</p>



ANNEX 2: COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

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7.6.2018 EN Official Journal of the European Union C 195/1

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'.
 - (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 [\(2\)](#).
 - (8) One of the objectives of the ET2020 framework for European cooperation in education and training [\(3\)](#), 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 [\(4\)](#) 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 [\(5\)](#) 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.
- (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

⁽¹⁾ COM(2017) 673 final.

⁽²⁾ EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1

⁽³⁾ 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](#)).

⁽⁴⁾ SWD(2018) 13 final.

⁽⁵⁾ Commission Decision of 27 July 2017 setting up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on radicalisation ([OJ C 252, 3.8.2017, p. 3](#)).



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