EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY BEYOND BREXIT

Open space brainstorming session

NECE conference in Glasgow

11 a.m. Friday 25 October

Conference Room 3

Rarely has the background to an international conference been marked by such uncertainty. We do not know when, on what terms or even whether the UK will leave the EU, especially if there is another people's vote. At EU level, the mists swirling around the new European Parliament and Commission are beginning to clear, but many questions remain about who does what and the shape and size of the new programmes like Erasmus. **Let's therefore get above the fog and find blue skies to look further ahead towards the architecture of the new Europe!**

ECIT is a public foundation filling a gap in the dense world of European interest groups and lobbies in Brussels by being devoted solely to European citizenship. We have produced guidelines for this first transnational citizenship of the modern era based on rights, participation and belonging. These three components stand or fall together. This citizenship is more widely practiced, more legally based thanks to the European Court of Justice and with more DNA in all of us than we think. An EU approach based on freedom of movement and liberal rights needs to be counterbalanced however by more popular appeal and equality of access through European citizenship education. Hence NECE. **European solidarity means strengthening European citizenship**, precisely because it is potentially the weakest link in the chain, by creating a European public sphere which shadows the EU but reaches beyond. Three questions are worth exploring of which the first is the most difficult.

i) How to keep a wider European citizenship with the EU at its core?

EU citizenship is additional to nationality of a Member State, so that if your country ceases to be a member, the basis on which you acquired this status is removed. A significant minority disagree in academic studies and petitions, appeals to courts, the European ombudsman… A citizens' initiative on permanent European citizenship was signed by 112, 000 people. Brexit is unprecedented and no one considered the relationship between Article 20 which creates Union citizenship and Article 50, the basis of the withdrawal negotiations. The Treaties say nothing about how Union citizenship could be lost and there are no procedures to inform those affected in advance and seek ways of mitigating the impact. **The Council of Europe Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has made a link between preservation of citizenship and the right to a private and family life. According to the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg citizenship is a "fundamental status"**.

The majority in the 2016 UK referendum voted to leave, but democracy is not a perfect instrument. Most of the 3.7 million EU citizens in the UK could not vote and of 1.3 million UK citizens in the EU some 60% were also disenfranchised since they have been resident outside the UK for over 15 years. Where does this leave Scottish citizens who voted to remain and also identify themselves as EU citizens? To keep Union citizenship should the only answer be to seek another independence referendum (with EU citizens participating as last time), so that Scotland becomes a Member State? Why is a post national citizenship so tightly linked to nationality rather than residence or self-identification? Should not ways be considered to reduce disparities ranging from 5-12 years residence and remove other barriers to acquiring dual citizenships across Europe? Could some form of associate citizenship be created for those who identify themselves as European citizens in former member states, neighbouring and applicant States? Instead of shrinking a citizenry of 512 million, why not expand it to the whole continent?

ii)   How can civil society become the bridge between the EU and the wider Europe?

Such a conception of a broader, more inclusive European citizenship with the EU at its core would need the support of civil society to have any real substance. This is a far less contentious than normative issues round citizenship since the decisions rest with non-state actors. Legislation or Treaty changes are not required, so much as a Europe-wide culture of living together. Many international and European associations including those based round the European Institutions have already opened their membership to associations and individuals beyond the EU. This has been in response to successive waves of enlargement and the impact of the EU rules and standards beyond its borders. In my own experience working with European civil society organisations there has never been any sense that an association outside the EU should be treated any differently from one within the EU. This is however a commitment to be updated and renewed otherwise there is a risk of it falling into disuse and civil societies drifting apart like the official Europe of States. The open-looking civil society approach has been traditionally one not just of principle but also of self-interest. There is no reason for example for European associations to lose the support, creativity and international networks of UK charities, which in turn will need to keep their traditional continental links to maintain high standards of consumer, environmental standards and worker rights if the country leaves the EU. Within Scotland for example moves to maintain and develop European civil society links would have support at all levels. To an extent this wider European public sphere also has the support of EU funding programmes for youth , educational exchanges and research which should be kept up in the new multi-annual financial framework for 2021-2027, but must be actively advocated for by civil society and fought for in neighbouring countries, which have to buy in to the programmes.

iii)   What are the implications of Brexit for European citizenship education?

More is the answer, since the divisions in public opinion about Europe are by no means unique to one country or to one referendum or election result. Eurobarometer opinion polls have been warning that those who live in cities, are young and well-educated and have resources and language skills tend to buy into the European project whereas those in rural areas, older people, those with fewer resources and lower qualifications may well feel excluded. Access to the EU educational programmes is not universal and made more unequal by the need for Europe to compete with the rest of the world. At least there is more awareness among EU policymakers of the dangers -including to the EU itself- stemming from inequalities. The Erasmus budget should be trebled - that is the target-and the European Parliament has called for its agencies to develop national inclusion strategies to reach people with fewer opportunities, who not surprisingly benefit more from participation in European exchange programmes. NECE should campaign for citizenship education to be mentioned in the annual programme for Erasmus and for both formal and informal education not just to be about the EU Institutions but also to create a new generation of active European citizens. Brexit sheds light on different citizenship regimes across Europe as UK citizens in the EU apply for nationality in their member state of residence to keep their EU citizenship. What better way of explaining what we tend to take for granted: how are respective citizenships are shaped by our histories, colonial pasts and differences in attitude towards citizenship and identity itself. Europe needs to start conversations about citizenship, the common factor below the surface of several different crises which unite and divide us.

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