

Presentation to CULT Commission of the European Parliament on Thursday, 2 April 2009 by Frank Elbers (DARE Network)

Dear Members of the Education and Culture Commission,

First, let me thank you on behalf of the DARE Network for giving us the opportunity to speak today.

DARE stands for **Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe**. The DARE Network currently consists of 44 member organisations from 28 countries in Europe. DARE is a Europe-wide network of NGOs and other organisations devoted to raise the profile of democracy and human rights education, to promote transcultural and transnational cooperation, and enhance the quality of education within these fields.

DARE promotes the values of Europe: **democracy, human rights** and the **rule of law**.

The **current economic crisis** threatens these values. Historically dire economic times have had a negative impact on social cohesion in societies often leading to increased xenophobia and violence. During the economic crisis, the EU's **Lisbon agenda** becomes even more important as a tool to (re-)train citizens for the knowledge society. The European response through the Lisbon agenda has overnight become even more pertinent. Investing in knowledge and social cohesion is strategic and with the current economic climate can be stepped up. **However**, we must not neglect the part of the Lisbon agenda which focuses on social and civic competences of European citizens.

Education for democratic citizenship and human rights can help to **address ills in society like mistrust and violence**. In short, enhancing social and civic competences through education are critical to fight the negative effects of the current economic crisis.

Having said that, let me share some examples of DARE programmes with you in order to give you an idea what successful education democratic citizenship and human rights in Europe looks like.

Minority Leadership Institute: Embracing Diversity Programme

The **first example** comes from Bulgaria. The Minority Leadership Institute is an initiative of the DARE member Partners Bulgaria Foundation. Through this programme leaders of minority groups develop basic knowledge and active citizenship attitudes; the programme also promotes the tolerance, diversity and participation. We believe this is very relevant to a Europe that is ever growing more multi-cultural and diverse, facing the challenges of successfully integrating different minorities who would otherwise be vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. In a course of one year, ten intensive 3-day trainings are held on topics like: communication and negotiation skills; models for effective leadership; team building and development; problem-solving through civil dialogue; development of intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral relations; training of trainers; etcetera.

Between 2000 and 2006, over 150 people have successfully completed the Leadership Institute programme in Bulgaria, and more than 700 community representatives have taken part in the Embracing Diversity training programme.

Training course for young people and teachers in HRE and EDC for preventing and combating violence at school, in formal and non-formal education

The **second example** I would like to share with you comes from Italy. DARE member EIP, Education as an Instrument for Peace, offers training courses for youth and teachers in order to prevent and combat violence in schools. The focus of the training is on the content and methods that provide schools with resources to prevent youth violence, so the first step is developing competences of educators working with students through interactive methods, discussion and non-violent resolution of conflicts. The training applies the peer education method as a key method in the educational process. In the peer education method students are learning themselves and teaching others at the same time. As protagonists of the whole process, they help teachers/tutors to realise an interactive approach in didactic and educational practices. As a result of the trainings students and teachers perceive and observe many improvements in the classroom atmosphere, in the students' motivation and in the learning process as well. This programme reduces the risk of young people leaving school and promotes positive behavioural choices. By creating positive peer relationships, peer education reduces high-risk behaviours, as teens find peer educators more credible than adult educators.

The training course is part of EIP-Italy's violence prevention programme in 1063 schools throughout Italy.

Domestic violence - victims and perpetrators - the role of police, judiciary and social work

The **final example** comes from the non-formal sector; it concerns the training of professional groups at government agencies who have a responsibility to prevent and respond to domestic violence. 44 police officers and social workers from 8 different European countries participated in a five-day training seminar in 2005. The training seminar was part of an EU AGIS project on child abuse organised by the Informations- und Bildungszentrum Schloß Gimborn (IBZ-Gimborn), a DARE member, in collaboration with the International Police Association. Primary purpose of the training seminar was to raise awareness about domestic violence; impart knowledge about women's human rights and international human rights standards regarding policing and victims assistance; and share experiences and good practices.

The seminar was part of a long-term professional development programme by IBZ-Gimborn for the police in human rights and criminal justice through which annually more than 300 German law enforcement officials are trained.

Europe has shown unique, regional leadership in promoting **active citizenship and human rights**. Through the EU's life long learning and other education and training programmes, for example. And through the promotion of research on active citizenship. Through its active role in promoting human rights through its bilateral relations and with the UN; and through the establishment of the of the European Fundamental Rights Agency, among other things. Europe also has the **most advanced human rights system** in the world. The European Court of Human Rights and the Charter on Fundamental Rights of the EU provide protection to European citizens.

Now is the time for the European Union to take on an even greater leadership role in education for democracy citizenship and human rights!

In this light I would like to conclude with a **number of recommendations** for you to consider:

First, we would like to suggest to increase the priority of democratic citizenship within the Life Long Learning agenda and within the Lisbon strategy on education and training as a whole.

Our **second recommendation** is to include reference to **gender equality, social cohesion, diversity, democracy and human rights** in quality assessments of proposals submitted to **EU funding programmes** in education and training. This will not only ensure that gender equality, social cohesion, diversity, democracy and human rights are better integrated into education and training programmes but will also demonstrate a commitment to the fundamental values of the European Union as incorporated in the Amsterdam Treaty.

Third, in order to ensure sustainability of efforts to promote active citizenship with the Union we propose the EU stimulates more research, specifically by including **indicators** on active citizenship in EU commissioned studies as part of a monitoring mechanism as called for in the Lisbon Strategy. The EU is currently already funding the European module of the IEA study, the international research study on citizenship. Funding inclusion of indicators of active citizenship in ongoing EU research would be a logical extension of this support.

Our **fourth and final recommendation** is for the European Union to actively support a number of regional and international efforts aimed at promoting citizenship and human rights.

First, we ask you to endorse the **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education** that will be adopted by the Council of Europe later this year. This Charter provides a framework policy for European states on how to equip citizens with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for life in democratic societies.

We also ask your active support for the implementation of the **World Programme for Human Rights Education**, which is an ongoing effort by the UN Member States to forward active citizenship and human rights, particularly in the formal schooling system.

Finally, we ask you to endorse the **United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training**, which is currently being developed by the Human Rights Council, and which will be a landmark for the international recognition of the importance education and training in human rights and active citizenship. There is a precedence for such support -- of cooperation between the EU and civil society organisations -- to forward the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights and its Programme of Action back in 1993, which have been crucial instruments in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide.

Let me conclude by emphasising that we offer the **partnership, expertise and capacity** of the DARE network to the European Parliament in all matters related to education for democratic citizenship and human rights.

On behalf of the 44 members organisations of DARE, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.

Thank you very much for your attention.