
Position paper of the Trade Council “Education”

“What could the European Union do to help its member states ensure that their education and training systems, and more specifically, their apprenticeship setups, help citizens understand and appropriate common European values as well as promote fair societies based on solidarity?”

CESI shares the opinion of the European Commission concerning the fact that extremism and radicalism are a scourge, which not only causes the loss of numerous human lives but also undermines the values of our society itself, such as freedom, equality and tolerance. National security services are limited to simply *reacting* to individuals who have already been radicalised. However, both upbringing and education play a key role in the shaping of values, through the teaching of knowledge and know-how to young people, allowing them to actively participate in the construction of their individuality and identity. Today, human beings need an identity, because anyone who opens up to the outside world, must be sure of him/herself.

Although CESI wishes to make the point that the transmission of values should be considered a responsibility that is shared by all the various players concerned (i.e. families, governments, municipalities, local players, personnel in the field of education, school heads, etc.) and that it is therefore important that the blame for issues resulting from the non-respect of European values should not exclusively be put on teaching staff, we believe that the world of education represents a favourable environment to guide people into becoming the responsible citizens of the future through its fundamental influence on their personality and individuality.

Moreover, CESI wishes to highlight the fact that training the workers of tomorrow as well as future citizens represents an investment in human capital. As a result, this requires significant investment in education, namely in human resources, which should be seen as a social investment.

We live in a society that really highlights human dignity as a fundamental pillar of its culture, including all related values thereto. In our daily lives – which may be somewhat dull at times –, it is important to remind ourselves of the fundamental values that have been acquired and defended throughout Europe’s history. CESI wishes to underscore the fact that the acceptance of diversity should not run against the respect and recognition of our European values. The unconditional defence of these values must be the basis of all our actions and thoughts. Otherwise, humanism becomes impossible despite the fact that Western ethics place each individual along with his/her innate dignity and right to freely blossom at the heart of their legal systems. Moreover, CESI believes that respecting our culture and way of life can be demanded of all those wishing to reside in EU member countries.

In order to promote social inclusion and common European values by means of education and informal learning, CESI is of the opinion that the following factors should be taken into account:

1. Action on the level of education and training systems

1.1. Theory and contents

Changes to the curricula in place should be considered. CESI believes that both the **European spirit as well as the discovery of other religions and their common values** should be placed on the agenda of every school system across the E.U., whether it be via a specific and in-depth subject matter taught in schools and that is the same in every country, or by means of the (compulsory) integration of these ideas into subject matters that are already on the curricula, such as history, philosophy, civic education, ethics, etc. Contents could focus on European history (e.g. history of the European Union, ideals and objectives of the founding fathers, etc.) as well as on fundamental religious, political and philosophical texts. Taking into account the increasing power of social media and networks in our societies, especially among young people, real schooling about media should be given from the youngest age possible, thus reinforcing the students' ability to think critically and preventing the uncontrolled dissemination of radical narratives.

1.2. Teaching and critical thinking

Clearly, a theoretical course alone will not suffice to help young people construct their values and identity. From a teaching point of view, for greater effectiveness, it is necessary to **confront young people face to face with certain values**. This teaching approach involving both ethical questions and concrete situations would grant students the **understanding that values are not isolated precepts**, but that they are an integral part of human activity. The role of the educational system should not only be to transmit values, **but to provide young people with the ability to think about them**.

For these reasons, CESI believes that it is crucial to:

- make changes to the period of time given to theoretical classes in order to make room for thought-provoking informal learning, teaching young people to think and put into practice the values in question (by means of extra-curricular activities, volunteering (social and civic engagement)) from the very beginning so that tolerance, mutual respect and civic responsibility become natural values from the youngest age possible;
- **give young people more opportunities to participate in certain decision-making processes** (student committees), organise school and cultural events as well as school exchanges and the like in order to bring the various school-related players together (i.e. families, students and school staff). This type of constructive approach that strives to create a pleasant atmosphere would permit **the practice some of the values taught**, and it would allow students to experience important moments for both their future social and professional lives.

2. Action on the level of teaching staff

The education and training sectors play a crucial role in the development of young people's critical thinking skills. Both families and teaching personnel share the difficult task of guiding the young when shaping their ideas and identity. Indeed, nowadays, in addition to their main mission, i.e. the transfer of knowledge and skills, an increasing number of teachers is expected to act as intermediaries, moderators in debates and in situations of conflict. The teaching of values can also take place via the teachers themselves and their human skills, i.e. their "narratives". Such skills require adequate training.

In this context, CESI believes that it is fundamental to:

- **ensure that both basic and continuous teacher training that focuses more on the history of religions and the values shared by the various religious communities present in the European Union be provided;**

- **support teaching staff by means of external experts in the teaching of some subject matters (e.g. civic education, ethics, history of the E.U., history of religions)**, so that these specialists may provide an “outsider’s viewpoint” and moderate debates with the students on specific subjects and topical issues. These could be national experts, speakers from other countries, or individuals who are active on the European stage (e.g. from the European institutions or specialised networks such as the “RAN – Radicalisation Awareness Network”);
- **ensure the institutional nature of schools is brought to the forefront once again**, by issuing clear and distinct regulations to be complied with by all partners in schools, thus making sure that mutual respect reigns within their realm and defending essential values such as equality and human dignity. Any effort to provide education about values shall be futile unless the State grants schools the necessary authority to fulfil their mission;
- **the more intensive promotion of experiences of foreign countries for teaching staff via the Erasmus+ programme**, by informing a larger public about the various possibilities provided and simplifying both access to the programme and the required procedures. Participation in this type of enriching experience on both a human and professional level should be encouraged nationally and on the level of school management.

3. Action directly related to the European Commission

CESI appreciates the fact that the issue of teaching values is currently the object of increasing attention from the European Union.

Within this framework, CESI recommends:

- **more communication on the European level concerning the tools that have already been developed and the more intensive promotion of successful events in place. This will also require an increase in investment in order to be able to disseminate and promote the use of certain practical tools for professionals in the member states.** In our view, important instruments such as the eTwinning platform (which was deservedly awarded the European Prize) or country-specific handbooks for teachers and educational staff published by the RAN¹ are insufficiently used, or not applied in a uniform or satisfactory fashion by the players in the field in certain countries;
- **greater ease of access (i.e. less complexity) to the actions and financing provided by Erasmus+.** Having recognised the importance of this funding, it is crucial to simplify or explain the administrative steps to follow in the case of Erasmus+ in more detail, which remain too complicated for some players in the field do not possess the resources required to make the best use of this option;
- **greater dissemination of information and promotion concerning the Erasmus+ programme for school-goers.** Indeed, the recognition of the positive impact the Erasmus exchange programme has in terms of improving open-mindedness and cultural exchanges, it is important that the Commission should continue to promote and/or increase students’ participation in this programme;
- **a recommendation issued by the European Commission on European and national values that must be promoted and applied in government-run schools**, mentioning the important impact of such action.

¹ A specific example: the translation into all official E.U. languages of certain practical tools, such as the report on teacher training of 2017 of the RAN EDU group would allow a larger number of professionals in the field to be reached, and thus increase its practical use and efficiency:

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-edu/docs/ran_edu_guide_training_programmes_helsinki_01-02_03_2017_en.pdf