



## INTERVIEW: CESI YOUTH MEMBERS SPEAK UP ON THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

After its ambitious November 2017 Communication on 'Strengthening European identity through education and culture', the European Commission released a so-called 'Education Package', of which a [first part](#) was published in early 2018 and a [second set](#) of initiatives was presented earlier this week on 22 May. In the framework of the European Commission's vision to create a [European Education Area by 2025](#), first set out in the November 2017 Communication, CESI conducted an interview on this topic with two young teachers, representing two of its member organisations active in the education sector, namely Grégory Corps from France and Katarzyna Pawlaczyk from Poland. Grégory and Katarzyna are both teachers and both members, since November 30 2017, of the [Board of the CESI Youth](#).

***In a first reaction, what does or should a “European Education Area” mean? In your view, what could the EU do or provide as tools, to help teachers on the ground to implement or take part in this “common area”?***

**Gregory:** The European Union is legitimate to deal with all education-related issues. I will not address the Sorbonne process neither the Commission's definition. However, it seems important to me to take into account all know-how and methods from all EU countries in order to share good teaching practices. This idea of a forum for dialogue should be implemented. The framework of a European area of education and of exchange of good practices would enable all education actors to elaborate common tools.

For example, we could elaborate tools to strengthen European identity (democracy, law, peace) to fight against radicalism and Euro-skepticism.

The pooling of tools or good practices on the shaping of the European identity of young people should serve both the improvement of working conditions of teachers and the success of students.

**Katarzyna:** The European Area should mean a kind of web consisting of European systems of education. Although each system is different, they should be connected by certain common values and aims of the whole European education.

It is said that young people are our future, so the European Union should do its best to help those young people find themselves in the European area. Today's world is changing very fast, and very often national systems of education are outdated, adjusted to reforms implemented 10 or more years ago. Even if it is not the role of the EU to interfere in national systems of education, it should make it easier and possible for students to make their own decisions about their educational goals, both in their countries of origin and abroad. As a result, the European Education Area should create a kind of “European system of education” in which every young man or woman could find their own place.



When speaking about teachers, what is the most important is that they should be given the feeling of appreciation from their national government and the society for the whole responsibility of their job. What is more and goes after this, remuneration of teachers should be higher (at least in many EU countries) and national governments should spend more money on education, didactic material and classroom equipment.

***Lately we hear and speak so much about values and new (digital) skills. Looking at the future, and based on your experience, in how far are these so fundamentally important?***

**Gregory:** School's main objective is to shape critical citizens, therefore it must not meet the needs of the private sector. I am not against private funding but I am convinced that the School should not be subject to market rules. The EU has to intervene towards Education Ministers from Member States with a proposal for a program on European values (such as democracy, human rights, solidarity and peace principles). In addition, it is important to address the problems of tomorrow issues as there are disparities in digitization education in Europe. As shown by the Commission at the Social Summit in Goteborg in 2017, uses and mastering of digitalization differs from one country to another.

It would be interesting to share experiences on the process of digitization of teaching and on digital education between Member States. Important debates are arising in Western Europe on youth addiction to screens and digital tools. It is likely that European norms will be developed in the near future in this field.

**Katarzyna:** New digital skills and values are very important and can be visible in every aspect of our everyday lives. Rich children and students are more often up-to-date to new technology and new digital possibilities. On the contrary to those less wealthy who cannot afford it. For example, new models of mobile phones are being invented every day, each time with new functions, applications etc. and they are no more only mobiles, they are used e.g. as digital cameras, laptops, MP3 players, DVD players, GPSs. The whole world becomes digitalized, with the use of a computer and the internet we are able to do almost everything without going out of our homes. Also, labor market and new jobs require new skills, including those digital ones. If education lags behind, most students may get lost in the jungle of innovations and needs of the market when graduated. That is why it is in schools and universities where they can be made aware of the situation, they can get in touch, "be in touch" with what is new and may be expected from them in the future.

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***Some fear that the digitalization of schools and education may also imply that teachers (like any other professions) may become increasingly redundant. Do you share this view? If not, why does the role of teacher remain of fundamental importance?***

**Gregory:** Automatization, robotization and software will not replace teachers even if it is a legitimate concern in the world of work. Instead of opposing the digitalization of professions, we should use it as a tool to improve our working conditions while protecting ourselves from the threats it poses. The teaching profession has different forms and meanings. Teachers from primary education will not be replaced as they play an important role in education, cognitive stimulation and child safety. Across Europe, digital practices are emerging in the secondary education phase (IT projects, video classes).



The teacher remains of particular importance because he assumes the role of mediator between the digitization and the students who still lack autonomy.

In higher education, we are observing a rise in MOOCs classes and this kind of initiatives allows better access to knowledge for all. I think it is the future. The European Commission has published extensively on the field of higher education and most of European education projects cover this field.

**Katarzyna:** In my opinion teachers will always play an important role in the process of education. Of course, digitization is important as our life becomes more and more digitalized. Students can obtain certain knowledge from books or digital sources such as the internet or mobile phone applications but it is only theoretical. Those sources cannot talk or explain anything misunderstood by a student. The teachers' role is to show students which new skills and competences are needed nowadays. Teachers' role is to teach them those skills and competences in practice. The role of a teacher is not only to teach knowledge, but also to bring them up, something like "parenting", helping in gaining social skills. Teachers are also there to help students in choosing their future job career, solving various problems, overcoming life obstacles. All these cannot be taught by any books or computers, but only a human being.

***Do you think a European initiative is needed or do you believe that the national competence and authority about education is sufficient? Is the EU interfering in national competence?***

**Gregory:** It is an exciting topic as it questions the meaning of the EU: is the EU only economic or fully political? Education is a regal field in most European countries even when education is way much affected by privatization. The issues of knowledge and of level of students often raise a lot of debates. The EU should work on these issues with national and social partners (representatives of professionals, families and students) to make legal proposals and to harmonize practices in order to improve education in all European countries.

The EU should be able to finance: education projects, teachers on specific positions, pilot institutions and exchange programs for high school students. Projects already exist, we must be able to implement them.

**Katarzyna:** As we are European Union citizens and our countries are European Union members, European initiative is especially needed: in my opinion EU should have the right and obligation to interfere in national competence about education. The question is how deep it should be allowed. Young people are Europeans, they feel Europeans and they want to live like any other European. That is why they also want to be European students and European workers. They expect to have access to education and labor market in all European countries. However most European countries' systems of education are not adjusted to such possibilities, national governments refrain from implementing "European" changes for fear of losing national identity or being criticized by old and too traditional and closed-minded society. In such situation, if we want to use the European possibilities, we should also give something to share and create such possibilities for others, e.g. by implementing the results of various common European initiatives.



***Based on your personal experience, is a specific training for teachers foreseen on how to teach democratic values to pupils, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on how to keep up with digitalization? If not, according to you as a (young) teacher, what kind of training would be needed/desirable?***

**Katarzyna:** Teaching democratic values is compulsory and is included in the curriculum of the Polish system of education. Democratic values very often are connected to each country's history and traditions. However, the problem may occur with the digitalization at European level. Not every European country is developed at the same level, so expectations from education and labor markets may differ for people, including teachers. As teachers should teach students certain skills and competences, they should be aware of all the needs and trends themselves. That is why trainings for teachers should be about digitalization, incoming or present changes that are happening at the European level, to give teachers a chance to pass the knowledge to their students and make them aware.

***What kind of initiatives/measures could be undertaken in schools to bring Europe closer to young people and to awaken young people's interest in the EU?***

**Gregory:** It is important to distinguish on one side the area of higher education, within which plenty of exchange programs exist, and on the other side the European identity. Indeed, many young people do not go to university therefore they not benefit from these programs. We should be able to implement exchange projects also during primary and secondary education such as "SAUZAY" between France and Germany. There are many projects that raise awareness of European identity such as the ambassador school of the European parliament project. Connecting young people from different European countries and allowing teachers to work abroad (from 6 months to one year) are a tremendous way to make people aware of the European common space and to reinforce the European project.

**Katarzyna:** First of all, the role of teachers should be raised within the government and the society. Wages for teachers should be higher and adjusted to their responsibilities; and more money should be invested in education as young people are our future and we cannot ignore it. What is more, national governments should be more open to European changes and trends in the sector of education such as new skills, digitalization, European labor markets challenges and possibilities. Certain regulations are also needed concerning recognition of certificates, job skills frameworks, bureaucracy when entering schools or universities abroad.

***What is your biggest concern when you look at the future (as a - young - teacher)?***

**Gregory:** As a young teacher, I feel deeply concerned by the growing commercialization of the knowledge economy. School should remain at the service of society and not at the service of private companies. Member States need to protect and to valorize teachers, by increasing their salaries and providing a quality initial training and continuous one in the framework of EU projects. Trade unions must convince of the European Commission's fundamental role in preserving and



improving the public service of education.

The teachers of the future will be the actors of digitization and of the strengthening of the European identity but they need appropriate means to fulfill their role.

The EU harmonized degrees by creating Bachelor-Masters-Doctorate (BMD)'s curricula. A harmonization of secondary education could be interesting but without intervening in school programs.

**Katarzyna:** The unemployment rate is so high among young people that they find it difficult to decide about their future. The education system are being changed/reformed by each government but in each case they were not asking or taking into consideration those the most involved and having the most to say about the needs: teachers, students and their parents. That is why teachers feel underestimated, ignored, as the students themselves. There are so many motivated students with various competences and skills, but they are not given the possibilities to develop, to live a better life, to find descent jobs.

**Grégory Corps** is a 32-year-old French teacher. He teaches History and Geography at a secondary school in Grenoble. He is also union leader at the academic level and a member of the social commission for CESI's French member [SNALC/CSEN](#).

**Katarzyna Pawlaczyk** is a 33-year-old Polish teacher. She has been teaching English in a resocialization institution (closed boarding school) for 10 years. This school is aimed at troublesome and difficult girls aged 13-18 who have got lost on their ways from adolescence to adulthood. Katarzyna is active within CESI Polish member [WZZ Solidarność – Oświata](#).