

As the other speakers have mentioned and in particular Mrs Christmann, the opening up of the system provides opportunities, as well as risks. I would like to focus for a minute or so on the example of Culham as this demonstrate well the kind of risks we experience. Some of these are related to the definition of European Education. While we the so called experts are well aware of what European Schools are, an easy to understand and accessible definition is wanting.

The Culham school, as you know, has been earmarked by the system for closure by 2017. This school is being "phased out" as for some years it has lacked the required "Category 1 customer base" to support it. However, this is at odds with the demand for a school of this kind in the area, with several children being turned away due to caps in place under the Type 1 schools regime. Currently Culham exists in a limbo, nestling in what is perhaps the most Europhobic country in the Union. There is little chance that a government funded, true European school, could ever raise from Culham's ashes. A direct UK intervention in favour of European education would be unthinkable, as it would be perceived by the media as akin to direct support for an EU activity. At best, the UK government could attempt to preserve the fabric of the school (as indeed it did) turning it into some sort of generic language education centre, mostly to stave off the deterioration of language teaching in England and Wales. Political expediency would therefore prevail over the European ethos, turning the school into yet an experiment on the teaching of modern and 'fashionable' languages such as Chinese, Arabic, and so on. Clearly, this would make the school an instrument that fulfilled the prevailing national ideology, rather than a true symbol of Europe and of its social makeup.

Back in 1953 the first European school was founded by parents, rather than by

a government. Its objectives were eminently practical and pragmatic, but its success was such that the model was adopted by the then emerging European Communities.

MEET now believes that the time has come for parents (and other stakeholders) to get together again and reconsider supporting directly European schools, either by funding specific projects, or simply by taking them over where, in instances like Culham, schools are simply jettisoned by the public administration. Some of these parental schemes needn't be large scale either, starting, for example, from taking over a maternal cycle, moving on to primary, and so on. Imaginative funding initiatives could be devised, with as little bureaucratic involvement as possible, except for the presence of clear pedagogical guidelines and common objectives.

In the current economic climate it's hard to identify visionary governments willing to set up long term ideological projects such as European schools, so it's simply "back to basics", back to the people that is, if these schools are to continue to exist and even eventually thrive.

The Citizens' Initiative has created a unique opportunity to achieve two key objectives. The first one is awareness of the immensely positive prospects that a common approach to Education in Europe might bring as well as knowledge of the current model. It is simply inconceivable that the European project has up to now failed to take education into account. A social and political union will never be achieved for as long as people remain suspicious of each other, are unable to communicate easily, or fail to understand and appreciate the cultural nuances at the heart of every linguistic group. The Europe of regions, is a Europe of linguistic cultural values, rather than a Europe of borders that were

for the most part drawn as a result of wars.

Therefore a model like the one envisioned by the existing European Schools, that creates common values, yet respecting and treasuring linguistic differences, must be safeguarded at all costs and should be made to fit within local models (though perhaps not so easily in Anglo Saxon ones....).

The second objective would be the creation of a greater network of schools of this kind working in close co-operation around the Union - a mini community of European students would be the ideal outcome. I am of course aware that many educational schemes have been created by the Community over the last 20 years or so, but these have for the most part failed to "hit the spot", so to speak. Ask anyone on the Clapham (or the Lisbon) omnibus (if you prefer), if they have ever heard of Comenius, and you will get the picture...

Many of the existing schemes have therefore been too specialised and too far removed from the daily experiences of ordinary EU citizens. In education especially a citizen's main interest is firmly linked to Primary and Secondary, rather than Tertiary or teachers' training. As every statesman knows, citizenship starts early in life and definitely not at university, or in research institutions, when it may at best become an academic interest.

At MEET we know how incredibly ambitious the task of promoting European Education will be, partly due to what I have just mentioned, but also because the actual implementation of the Citizens' Initiative across the Union is still a little way off, as the recent amendments proposed by the the European Parliament have highlighted. I sincerely hope these regulations do not become even more complex, as this would obviously defeat the purpose of opening

up the democratic process. But even the sheer task of gathering 1 million validated signatures across Europe is a logistic nightmare. However, I am certain that with the support of likely minded organisations and people we will make good progress and put European Education firmly back in the European Agenda.

Right now, when the European dream appears to be at its lowest ebb, when countries are becoming more entrenched in their own individual perspectives and real cracks are beginning to appear, a project like “a new education for Europe” could provide a fresh impetus, especially if accompanied by a new European narrative.

This is a new narrative that must go beyond the two initial E’s of Europe, the E of geographical Entity, followed by Economy, and must now incorporate and integrate two more E’s: Environment and Education.

A new Europe, a truly relevant one to meet the challenges of the 21st century, can only be founded on these 4 Es, or cardinal points. Anything less would remain mere rhetoric.

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