

# European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

## **CITIZENSHIP, EUROPE AND STEINER EDUCATION**

### **The EU should promote inter-operability of educational systems and horizontal subsidiarity in Europe**

**The 600 Steiner schools throughout Europe form part of a world-wide movement of some 875 schools.** Since 1919 Steiner Schools have been working with the principle that, from the very beginning of school, each child should be respected not only as a potential citizen of their own country and given a healthy grounding in their own national cultures, but also delve into the diversity of cultures around the world and through the ages. In Europe, children are also potential European citizens and should therefore develop due regard and understanding for the nascent European spirit. They should be enabled to respect and celebrate a wide diversity of cultures while perceiving the common humanity in all people.

Education's task is to assist children and young people in finding their own paths in freedom, giving them the tools to develop their own values and renewed social conditions within a framework of tolerance, trust and interest in the other. This should include teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age, as the European Council agreed, in principle, in Barcelona on March 15th and 16th 2002<sup>1</sup>. Since their inception, Steiner Schools around the world have piloted the practice of learning two foreign languages from class one, primarily and initially by listening and speaking. The seeds of our social relationships are sown in our younger years; how we experience the world and its wonders at that time has a deep impact on our later attitudes and behaviour. Education is about nurturing and freeing the potential in all of us. Any educational legislation or system is obliged to make this possible. Exclusive national formulae can be incompatible - and even work against - mobility and co-operation in thought and action.

The basic principle of universal access<sup>2</sup> is often difficult to accomplish due to inadequate funding for schools not directly run by the state. Genuine mobility should include geographical mobility as well as increased permeability between the teaching and other professions. This must include increased recognition for

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<sup>1</sup> Cp. Presidency Conclusions, doc. SN 100/02 ADD 1, paragraph 44

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Presidency Conclusions, doc. SN 100/02 ADD 1, paragraph 43

non-formal learning in gaining qualified teacher status. This development is

indispensable for an opening-up to the wider world<sup>3</sup>.

Schools imbued with a European ideal need to work across national boundaries and endeavour to foster a civil society that is truly trans-cultural, without discrimination or prejudice. Developing an open ethos is the task of politicians as social leaders in partnership with educators, parents, and professionals who look to them to reflect and encourage these ideals in public discourse and through any declaration of citizens' rights.

Children are the citizens of the future and deserve due regard in accordance with the vision of a Europe peopled by citizens able to live together in harmony and tolerance.

Public bodies in Europe have a duty to engender this attitude and ensure that all sectors of society are given their rightful opportunities without discrimination at all ages.

We call upon those concerned with these issues on a European level to recognise Steiner Waldorf schools as pioneers of this approach.

The task of education professionals should be recognised and supported beyond national interest and commercial gain. This includes the right to teach creative and integrated curricula, the right to schools' self-governance within agreed levels of accountability and provision of quality care, and the right to consistent and non-intrusive financial support. Within a policy of pluralism, financial support should also be available for schools which do not follow national curricula, if they are striving to accomplish the inter-operability of educational systems and methods at the European level and are genuinely inclusive.

In order to achieve these aims, we would welcome that the Community be invested with a limited but well balanced authority in the educational field. We support the proposals of the European Forum for Freedom in Education (EFFE) to this effect<sup>4</sup>. We also agree that horizontal subsidiarity in education (innovative education options and methods which are a result of private initiatives and civic involvement) should be an objective on the European level.

The ECSWE supports integrating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the constitutional treaty. Article 14 of the Charter stipulates the right "to receive free compulsory education". This right should extend to all schools of this kind, respecting "the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions", "with due respect for democratic principles".

Steiner schools are prepared to work with all educators and policy makers of good will in order to facilitate constructive dialogue. We can then learn from each other and thereby improve and develop schools that are real learning communities, giving all European children the educational opportunities they deserve.

Brussels, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2002

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<sup>3</sup> Cp. Presidency Conclusions, doc. SN 100/02 ADD 1, paragraph 33 and 43

<sup>4</sup> Cf. their contribution addressed to the European Convention entitled "In support of added European value in educational policy"

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