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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Promoting citizenship and fundamental values through education (Follow-up to the Paris Declaration)
- Presidency discussion paper

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for an exchange of views at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on 24 February 2016.

Draft discussion paper
for an exchange of views at the EYCS Council of 24 February 2016 on
Promoting citizenship and fundamental values through education
(Follow-up to the Paris Declaration)

Introduction

At an informal meeting in Paris in March 2015, the EU Education Ministers and Commissioner Navracsics unanimously adopted the “*Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*”.

The Declaration reaffirms the mobilisation of education in favour of safeguarding the shared fundamental values in our societies. It identifies priority areas in which proactive and considered action is needed, both at national, regional and local level as well as at European level. Bearing in mind that our societies are characterised by diversity, we must ensure that education is able to motivate and meet the needs of all pupils and students. This requires, amongst other things, investing in inclusive high quality education and training, preventing early school leaving, promoting active citizenship as well as integration into the labour market, combating discrimination and forging links with other sectors, such as the youth sector, often in a local context.

EU Education Ministers re-emphasised their commitment to the Paris Declaration at their meetings within the Council on 18 May 2015 and 23 November 2015. On this last occasion, which took place shortly after Paris was hit by a new series of terrorist attacks, the Council noted the Commission's intention to follow up the Paris Declaration at European level, i.a. by the launch of a specific call for proposals in 2016 under Erasmus+ and the setting-up of a dedicated ET2020 working group.

The February Council (Education)

Now, almost one year after its adoption, the Presidency wishes to invite the Council to take stock of the follow-up provided at national, regional and local level by showcasing some of the concrete policies and projects undertaken in Member States.

The overriding aim of the exchange of view is to ensure that the Paris Declaration remains a dynamic and living document. Also, it should boost peer learning on specific elements of the Declaration at a more strategic, political level, and prepare the ground for possible future steps to be taken at the EYCS Council of May 2016 and beyond.

The Presidency has accordingly invited the Ministers from three Member States to present briefly a concrete example of a policy or project linked to one specific key topic of the Declaration. The exchange of views will be structured in three rounds. After each short presentation, the other Member States will be invited to respond with comments or questions.

Due to time constraints, the Presidency invites Member States to select **one** of the three brief presentations to which it wants to react. To ensure a dynamic exchange of views, it would be appreciated if responses and active contributions to the dialogue were as spontaneous and concise as possible.

Three key topics

The Presidency has selected three key topics in order to focus the discussion. Each key topic represents one of the major challenges Member States are facing with regard to the actions set out in the Declaration.

1. **Citizenship education:** Education is more than the transfer of knowledge and the development of skills. Education institutions also have a role in ensuring inclusiveness, by helping young people develop their personalities and open their minds to diversity. This open mind will help them to put themselves in the place of people with different gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, (dis)ability, age or sexual orientation. Mutual understanding will lead to building bridges between different groups and as a consequence will diminish the risk of certain groups becoming isolated. Citizenship education can strongly contribute to creating open mindsets if taught with sound pedagogical methods. The challenge for citizenship education is not only that it requires a solid position in the curriculum, but also that the intended learning outcomes are formulated clearly (2nd pillar of the Paris Declaration).

Introductory statement by Minister Valachová, Czech Republic

2. **Empowering teachers:** Teachers face the challenge of positively handling increasingly diverse groups of pupils. Creating inclusive classroom environments and instilling a sense of belonging that is underpinned by common fundamental values and civic and social competences is a major challenge. It notably requires that teachers have the skills to guide conversations on difficult topics, such as discrimination and radicalisation. In some cases, pupils and students have ideas and opinions that diverge so much from what we consider as our fundamental values, that they entirely avoid conversations on difficult topics. The empowerment of teachers, also to detect and respond to extremist/violent behavior, could be an integral part of curricula in the initial training and continuous professional development of teachers. Schools must become a safe place where controversial issues can be openly discussed with the support of teachers. (6th pillar of the Paris Declaration).

Introductory statement by Minister Heinisch-Hosek, Austria

3. **Media literacy:** Our societies have changed in many ways through the influence of media. Media channels offer many opportunities, but equally many threats. Information on social media tends to have an increasingly strong influence on how people, particularly teenagers, view the world. Critical thinking – which implies, amongst other things, being media literate - is essential in life. In order to become media literate, students need to be well equipped with critical and open mindsets, as well as with the necessary facts-based knowledge (historical, societal, etc), so as not to simply take information spread via social media at face value. Students should be able to ask themselves questions such as ‘who is spreading this information and what is the source?’, ‘how reliable is this information?’, ‘who is this information aimed at?’ and ‘what do I do with this information?’ (3rd pillar of the Paris Declaration).

Introductory statement by Minister Vallaud-Belkacem, France
