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We are a South Tyrolean based group of students and academics that meet at least annually at the „European Forum of Alpbach“ in the dreamy mountain village of Alpbach in order to discuss on current issues and to formulate interdisciplinary solutions.

We are interested in the public consultation "Schools for the 21st century" because we want to offer our fellows the possibility to come in contact with the European Institutions and Policies and to unveil the myth that Europe happens elsewhere but not in our backyard. Indeed, one of the institutional aims of the *Club Alpbach Südtirol/ Alto Adige* is to promote active European citizenship.

Due to our common experience from education in a bicultural region with a bilingual schooling system the members of our focus group want to contribute to Europe on the way to meet the goals of the Lisbon strategy.

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1. KEY COMPETENCES FOR ALL

We believe that there are basically three sets of skills that should be at the heart of every European educational system - three sets of skills that would allow people to find their way through an ever more globalised world, to identify with the common European cultural heritage and to interact with people from around the globe, thus improving their personal life and the competitiveness of the European Union.

First of all we strongly believe in the value of certain cultural skills, i.e. a thorough understanding of one's own cultural background and the ability to engage critically and analytically with other cultures. This set of skills, following the classic/humanistic *Bildungsideal* (which, by the way, has already been invaluable for the development of a paneuropean sense of unity in the past, e.g. the Enlightenment), enables people to identify with a particular cultural background, giving a sense of security and *Heimat* in the fast-changing world, while at the same time allowing them to engage with and appreciate different cultures. From birth onward, humans in their healthiest states, are active, inquisitive, curious, and playful creatures, displaying a ubiquitous readiness to learn and explore, and on acting on one's interests an individual can grow in knowledge and skills. In this context, we define "humanistic *Bildungsideal*" the way Wilhelm von Humboldt intended it: an educational system that promotes the cognitive, social, and physical development. The individualism of the resulting morality is enhanced by the fact that interests are incommensurable, and thus that the assessment of priorities among them is inescapably a matter of individual judgment. Education following this ideal is not vocational training and therefore unfettered by political or economic interests.

Secondly, we believe in the prime importance of language skills. Although English is more and more the language of the world-wide business community, speaking foreign languages gives people the possibility to engage with their counterpart in a more personal way (which may also bring along a competitive advantage). Furthermore, learning languages is not only important in itself, but it also enhances the development of cultural skills as well as the third set of skills we believe to be essential.

Which brings us to our last point: the much acclaimed soft skills. While we agree with the notion that these skills (e.g. personal responsibility, the ability to work in a team, communication skills) are important, we do not think they can be either taught or learnt directly. Instead, they will automatically develop indirectly when the way teaching is conducted fosters them. Students who are asked to present a work of literature in class gain for instance team working and rhetoric skills.

What is now the role of the European Union, what that of the individual states in the process that eventually leads to the development of these skills? Both with the cultural and the language skills, the EU's role is to set guidelines and ensure that they are implemented. For example could students be forced to learn at least two foreign languages.

With regard to the soft skills, finally, they can be fostered by the European Union directly (more on this at question six) and indirectly, again through Europe-wide guidelines (it is possible, for instance, to imagine that students were asked to write a short thesis, 20-30 pages long, at the end of secondary school, to enable them to develop analytical and independent thinking).

6. PREPARING YOUNG EUROPEANS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Preparing young people to be responsible citizens starts with widening their education, as previously shown. Although not being a guarantee, the three emphasized set of skills will enable young peoples' participation within their local community and political structures like the European Union. Ensuring the pre-conditions is an important task for schools in Europe, but they should – supported by the European Union – also facilitate participation in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity.

Indirectly, again through Europe-wide guidelines, the European Union should be concerned with the following tasks: We believe that such initiatives like the implementation of democratic – student-including – institutions and of the right to have a say in a matter (*Mitspracherecht*¹) should be extended.

Furthermore, a subject teaching the history, the logic, the basic function and the basic institutions of democracy, explaining the role of the European Union and introducing the basic concepts of legal certainty, the emergence of power and ways to restrict it and the foundations of equality of all men (e.g. anthropological¹, philosophical, sociological, political explanations) must be introduced in every school.

The best way to prevent intolerance, violence and radicalism and to encourage confidence in and help to develop a sense of democracy, integration and peace, is – in our opinion – enabling encounters and active cooperation between young people with different backgrounds. This seems very obvious and evident. Therefore, we suggest a

¹ As shown in scores of researches e.g. by Jean Piaget et al men are as a matter of fact equal. Young Europeans should know that from the beginnings of homo sapiens until now, across times, nations and cultures, humans are fully equal. To be aware of this fact would contribute to liberal and tolerant attitude.

very practical and implementable purpose. The European Union should (directly) establish a program of European Cooperation. Every class of every secondary school should be enabled to participate once in this program. The program could consist of two parts: First the students develop in cooperation with their teachers a specific project, choosing between one of the yearly general themes given by the European Parliament. Evolving the idea and their contribution in the context of a weekly lesson they will finally participate on theme-related specific workshops with other classes working on that issue and European Union officials in relevant locations (e.g. Parma, if the issue is food safety).

The project should consist of different phases, including the application for the project formulated in two European languages and the presentation of the outcome of the workshop in their home-school. The project-responsible party should be the students, supported by their teachers and encouraged by their school and the local school authorities. Furthermore, the European Union should find ways to acknowledge and use the outcomes of the different workshops. We cannot support active citizenship without valuating it.

This program, although being connected with some expenses and some degree of organizational change, provides a great opportunity for young Europeans to work and be concerned with European Issues and to experience the great value of European organizations other than the European Commission and the European Parliament and – with an emphasis on the workshops – collaborate with other young Europeans from different cultural backgrounds.

It is a fact that children today are exposed to intolerance, violence and radicalism and therefore already enter schools with a certain ideological baggage, which might result in such phenomena as bullying or xenophobia. Bearing this in mind, the role of schools ought to be to educate young Europeans, enable equality-practicing activities and to let them feel that they are to all effects real young Europeans.