

## "Migration & Mobility": EU-Conference at Brussels

*At the end of October last year the European Commission held a conference on; "Migration & Mobility: Challenges and opportunities for EU education systems".*

About 140 experts were invited to discuss the Green Paper and the results of the consultation conducted on this issue. As ECSWE had participated in the EUCIS-LLL public hearing *addressing "Access, Equity and Diversity in lifelong learning"* in December 2008 we were invited to attend the conference. This 2008 conference referred to the Intercultural Waldorf School in Mannheim, Germany and their success in integration (see ECSWE News No.14, March 2009).

Mr. Adam Pokorny, Head of Unit *"School education; Comenius"* in the European Commission, presented the Green Paper and the results of the public consultation. He described the background of increasing migration and intra-EU mobility flows as both a challenge and opportunity for EU education systems. Immigration has become one of the main elements of demographic growth in the past years. Several international tests revealed significant educational difficulties for migrant pupils. This is a challenge for society because of perpetuating exclusion and undermining social cohesion. Diversity is a resource, but skills are needed to use it as such.

The aim of the Green Paper was to launch a broad consultation on the best ways of supporting the education of children from a migrant background in the education systems of the EU Member States. The consultation closed on 31 December 2008, 101 written contributions were received up to this date. A quarter of the contributions came from governmental organisations, each with about 20 percent from European associations, from regional organisations or NGOs (non-governmental organisations).

There is a strong consensus across all types of contributors that the crucial challenge consists in breaking the link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational disadvantage. An integrated policy response is needed. Avoiding school segregation is also considered a high priority for many contributors. To ensure equality of opportunity non-discriminatory access to education must be provided. The presence of migrant children requires adaptation on the part of schools and curricula: schools need to focus more on the individual needs of pupils, more intercultural education needs to be included in curricula, and teachers' competences for dealing with multicultural and multilingual environments have to be extended.

As appropriate policy responses to these challenges the acquisition of the language of instruction was

highlighted as a fundamental pre-requisite for integration into the mainstream education system. A majority of contributions emphasize the need for powerful and early intervention for the acquisition of the teaching language. There were also warnings about the risk of exclusion associated with language screening tests, separate classes for acquiring the host country language and for supporting mother tongue are suggested (as the ECSWE paper pointed out). As a good practice for intercultural education in Germany, the Intercultural Waldorf School in Mannheim is noted in the Green Paper (S.16), where lessons in the subject *"Cultural Encounter"* are provided and children from a migrant background act as experts on their language and culture, while native children learn to deal with other cultures.



"Migration and Mobility" Conference at Brussels, 20.10.09

There is also a consensus on the importance of recruiting teachers from migrant backgrounds who can provide much needed role models and can increase motivation and identification with the school for migrant children, while supporting respect for diversity within the teaching profession. The Intercultural Waldorf School Mannheim which has about 50 percent of teachers with a migrant background can also, in this regard, be considered as a good example.

A more contentious issue relates to permeability and selectivity of educational systems. Some Member State contributions identify early tracking, selectivity and low permeability as tending to place migrants at a disadvantage. Other contributors reject the link between selectivity and segregation. Overall a majority of contributions - as with the contribution of ECSWE - establish a direct link between segregation and early tracking, arguing that selective systems which track at early ages encourage school segregation. Policy responses include the transition to more comprehensive systems (as Waldorf Schools have always been). Beyond that, the conference contained a small number of lectures, i.e. from Prof. Friedrich Heckmann (University of Bamberg, Germany), who presented 16 recommendations as a result of the policy-relevant synthesis of research findings. Ms Karin Hendriksson (Swedish Permanent Representation) talked about Swedish policy for the integration of migrant children in schools and Ms. Isabelle de Coster (Eurydice European Unit) presented the reports on integrating immigrant children into schools in Europe. In the afternoon, three workshops took place; *"Measures for integrating newly-arrived immigrant children into schools"*, *"The role of intercultural education"* and *"The role of languages"* whose conclusions were presented within the final plenary discussion.

All in all, there are many aspects, embodied in the Green Paper, that are identical or similar to the key issues of the concept of the Intercultural Waldorf School Mannheim, such as the recommendation of all-day schools, extracurricular activities and involving the parents of children from a migrant background.

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## ELIANT NEWS

**One of the provisions within newly ratified Lisbon treaty is that one million European citizens from a "significant number" of countries will be able to ask the European Commission to put forward new draft laws in areas where it has competences.**

This citizens' initiative was inserted in order to bring about more direct democracy into the EU because of the democratic deficit that is plainly visible. It enables issues to be put on the agenda but does not actually oblige the Commission to do anything. However, it is a step towards creating a democratic debate that crosses borders and could influence future policies. How such initiatives will work in

practice is still a matter of debate and negotiation. Fortunately, ELIANT, as one of the first of such initiatives and because it is on the verge of gaining the required million signatures from EU citizens, is in a position to participate in the consultation and has made proposals at the invitation of the Commission regarding how these possibilities will be implemented in the future. The present number of such signatures as of 4/02/2010 is 907,412 so with only 92,588 to go our target will be reached.

ELIANT [www.eliant.eu](http://www.eliant.eu) is an alliance of ten European associations working with applied anthroposophy in the fields of agriculture, medicine, health, mainstream and special needs education. The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education is the member that represents the 650 European Steiner Waldorf schools in 23 countries. ELIANT calls for a legal framework in Europe which acknowledges and supports the citizen's rights for a diversity of lifestyle and cultural choices within the areas it represents.

Although the Commission's competences within the matters concerning of education are limited, compared to say agriculture and medicine, sharing a platform with our colleagues gives us a stronger voice and enables our schools to be more readily taken into account in forthcoming debates and consultations. If you have not signed up yet and also believe that the EU needs a human face that provides for the dignity of its citizens, respects fundamental rights and freedoms, and protects its minorities, then please sign up on the website. We have made excellent progress and already notice that we are taken more seriously in EU matters, so the sooner we achieve that million the better.

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