

POSITIONEN

13 | 2009

Peter R. Weilemann (Ed.)

Integration of
Adolescents with a
Migration Background
into European Society

ISBN 978-3-940955-63-0

www.kas.de

Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

*Speeches held by H.E. Archbishop Agostino Marchetto and Ján Figel'
at the Conference on Christian Values and Integration, 14 October
2008, Brussels*

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Layout: SWITSCH Kommunikationsdesign, Köln.

Printed in Germany.

*This publication was printed with financial support of the Federal Republic of
Germany.*

ISBN 978-3-940955-63-0

FOREWORD: CONFERENCE ON CHRISTIAN VALUES AND
INTEGRATION, 14 OCTOBER 2008, BRUSSELS

With more and more people wanting to find happiness, security and financial well-being in Europe, the subject of migration has moved into the spotlight of European politics. However, many of these people do not feel at home in Europe – either not wanting to or not being able to. At the same time many EU citizens are worried by the increasing numbers of immigrants. They are asking: What will our society look like in the future? What is holding us together? What will remain of our cultural identity?

If such negative tendencies are allowed to predominate and take root, migration can become a time-bomb. However if migration is handled properly, it can open up wide-ranging opportunities. This is the reason why the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has, for some time now, been focusing on migration and integration. Its educational and research work, together with its international work promoting dialogue between cultures and religions, all contribute to the proper handling of this challenge. The understanding of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is that “the cultural diversity that goes hand in hand with immigration should be seen as an opportunity, as untapped wealth needing to be exploited” (Anton Pfeifer).

However this positive view and openness calls for an awareness of one’s own values. Trust in integration policy can only be fostered when its ethical foundations are understandable and recognisable. As the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is deeply rooted in Christian-Democrat traditions, it is obvious that Christian values can and should provide such an orientation. This conviction gave rise to a seminar in Brussels where European experts debated questions associated with migration, with a special focus on the integration of teenage immigrants – like looking at integration problems through a looking glass, not just qualitatively but also quantitatively. Are not those kids, entering into a new culture in the tow of their parents, the weakest members of society? But at the same time they

are the future guarantors of our society. Latest surveys show that 50% of all 1 to 6 year-olds in German cities now have a migration background.

This was the reason behind our decision to round off the expert seminar with lectures open to the public, allowing a broader debate and giving the public access to the seminar results. We asked Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, to speak on his ideas and experiences. In his view, it was wrong to confront second and third generation teenage immigrants with a negative attitude. On the contrary, they had to be given a chance. This was backed up by the second speaker, Jan Figel, the European Commissioner responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism. Both lectures are documented below.

Dr. Peter R. Weilemann

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INTEGRATION OF ADOLESCENTS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND INTO EUROPEAN SOCIETY: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIANS

Agostino Marchetto

Lionello Puppi recently wrote an imaginary interview with Andrea Palladio, the great architect from my home town Vicenza, for the 500th anniversary of his birth. Puppi took inspiration from passages drawn from his writings and attributes the following words to Palladio: "My lesson was not in vain, never minding about praise or wealth, I only ever strived to be a man, who was not only born for himself but also to be useful for others. The gift that God bestowed me, the ability to create for universal benefit, was the only real prize for every sacrifice spent in investigating the relics of old buildings and in gaining experience from the works of others because, from those who know, it is easier to determine what is suitable and expedient for our needs... I sought beauty, and I pointed it out...". However, the endless youth of Palladio was spent cutting stone as a poor stonemason.

Why have I begun my speech with this quotation?

Undoubtedly, because I wish to honour a great man, Palladio; but also because I can discern within his answer some fundamental values for young people, for adolescents,

namely, the common usefulness of our actions, the sense of the common good – as we would say nowadays –, European and universal in our concrete “Sitz in Leben”: the spirit of sacrifice, the love of the past and the experiences of others. In a nutshell, the love of tradition, the quest for beauty, and, even the hard work of the “stonemason”, using this term metaphorically (therefore, a modest commitment), which prepared the great architect, the man of the future.

This evening too we face the prospect of building the Europe we love, and the contribution of young people, of European adolescents with a migration background. In the light of a great man, Palladio, a builder, we look at these young people, with a kindly regard, on what we receive from common humanity, the fact that they are also our hope – and from our Christian point of view – of pastors too, in the widest sense of the term.

Moreover, this evening I would like to pay particular attention to the category of young people defined as adolescents, with an adolescence that now lasts longer, to the extent that an eternal adolescent slumber within all of us, as someone said.

Adolescence undoubtedly refers to the phase of human development that tends towards the mature formation of the individual. However, it is a transitional phase marked by particular requirements and opportunities.

Psychologists and educationalists recognise that this age is characterised by aspirations towards autonomy, namely the will to assert one’s own identity as distinct and separate from adults (including parents and teachers). However, this will is unstable. It expects great things, makes efforts, but is inconstant, namely it is subject to ups and downs. Adolescents fling themselves into “great ideals”, but these are “partial” and cannot be included in a complete and balanced *Weltanschauung*.

Adults should not dampen these aspirations; they should tolerate the inconsistencies and provide adolescents with wider and more objectively sustainable knowledge.

Scholars have only recently begun to take adolescents’ feelings into account. This has already enabled entering a dialogue that is not at the height of “rationality”. Feelings should be respected, and if they meet

with incomprehension from adults, they should be accepted and respected. Later, with more experience of life, the adolescent will have been brought down to earth and will even be able to smile about his or her feelings.

Whilst all this is generally true for adolescents, it should be borne in mind that adolescent migrants are not necessarily like the peers they encounter. They arrive with their culture, which should be well known and respected. Moreover, contact with peers may be a source of uneasiness, even for the second and third generations. Adolescent migrants may wish to associate with their peers, but may also suffer stress due to their cultural origins. Schools in particular should support training in citizenship (European in this case). This project, from a political point of view, should be implemented gradually, both for the native population and for those with a migration background. The motive should be included in considering the “method”, which should be adapted to the needs and capacities of individuals, and therefore cannot not be built on the basis of an “objective” culture.

Adolescents with migration backgrounds do not appear reluctant to be integrated within European culture. However, this should not constitute a burdensome and inflexible obstacle. An encounter between different cultures is at stake here. Regarding adolescents, rather than speaking about integration within European policy, we should talk about the policy’s acceptance of their culture of origin, to be developed towards the new European horizon. Politics should be adapted to the possible gradual development of adolescents. They will integrate themselves within European policy when the latter allows them not to lose their personal and cultural identity and perhaps already their dual loyalty regarding culture.

Therefore, a wise policy bases its actions on welcoming adolescents as they are. They did not come to Europe on their own initiative, but rather, in most cases, as members of a family. Schools and youth associations should promote their human development, whilst also safeguarding their culture of origin. They will be good European citizens when, and to the extent to which, the development of their personalities has been promoted. Therefore, their attendance at schools that are of and for everyone, which appraises personal resources, should be supported.

EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FORMATION

The European Parliament's resolution 2013/2005 on the subject of immigrant integration in Europe through the schools and a teaching in various languages, included among the basic points, the fact that "the migratory movements have brought new challenges in terms of identity, and upgraded the integration policies to a priority for the E. U., for the Members Countries, and the regional and local institutions". From this follows that "the education carried out in various languages contributes to the understanding of the differences in a multicultural perspective, at a time when it is in the increase the number of young immigrants of second and third generation with difficulties in the management of the multiple dimensions making up the structure of their identity". Here can be found the reason that pushed the European Parliament to deem necessary that "even when the children and/or the descendents of immigrants (second or third generation) possess the language of the host country, it is opportune to allow them an access to their maternal language and to the culture of their country of origin" thus introducing also the idea of "means of pedagogical support for the children of immigrants, most of all when they don't have sufficient command of the language of the host country, in order to make their insertion easier, and avoiding that they find themselves in a situation of disadvantage compared to the other students".¹

A very important indicator of the degree of adjustment of youth is, in fact, their integration in the educational system of the country of residence, which translates into success at school and, consequently, in the development of their personal talents, of their self esteem which are essential conditions for entering into the professional world of employment. In this field the Churches can offer a contribution of high quality too, imparting important values and motivations through their educational institutions from the elementary level up to the highest degrees of the academic formation. Today, the Catholic Church, in particular, manages throughout the world 196,000 elementary and secondary schools attended by more than 51 million children and young people. There also exist almost one thousand Catholic entities between universities, colleges and other institutions that educate more than four million young people. With these figures, it is evident, that the young people in general, but also those with migratory background, are helped to receive the education they deserve, and are in turn encouraged to provide it to others. It is not infrequent in fact that among the young people, those with migra-

tory background find education considerably more challenging. Many children encounter a great deal of difficulties in their studies not only because they do not speak or understand the local language, but also because of their use of dialect and of grammatically incorrect forms of speech to the point that, not frequently, they are in need of extra classes to make up for their deficiencies.

Now, while the public/state schools in general have a more selective set up, Christian schools, usually, pay more attention even to those who cannot keep up with the rest, in a way that all may take advantage of the full potential offered in the field of specific preparation, even making available initiatives of support and encouraging all to obtain a final qualified diploma².

At any rate, integration into the social and institutional fabric of the Country of residence does not signify refusal of the country of origin: young people with migratory background well integrated into the receiving society are ideal bridges to facilitate exchanges at all levels between the Country of origin and the host country. It would be important for this, that public institutions, businesses, small and medium size industries, would introduce into professional circles young people educated in the countries of emigration. They could contribute a further and different input of professional cultures and linguistic experiences, the lack of which weighs negatively on the international level in the various sectors of public life and of the private industries.

The message that would result from such a policy would be that integration does not equal negation of ones' identity, nor would it signify the severing of all ties with the country of origin but rather a wealth of useful elements and of experiences to use for oneself and for others. It would mean also, in a world that is becoming ever smaller, to establish with the Country of origin a relationship based on a more mature and evolved level³.

It follows that Christian institutions, in particular, request the set up of activities to aid these young people in cooperation with the local school authorities, because a positive outcome in the field of education effects the entire society and the welfare of all. Part of this effort obviously should be the parents of the young people, beginning with the pre-schools to provide them with the necessary linguistic means to attend

the mandatory schools with an adequate preparation. But it is also necessary to help children to preserve the linguistic heritage of their countries of origin. In fact, in this context, the mother tongue helps them to better learn the foreign language and constitutes the foundation stone for personal identity that, in turn, in the context of the globalization of modern society, will necessarily be intercultural.

Without any doubt, integration in the receiving country presupposes new networks of friends, neighbourhood relationships, and new acquaintances, that will exist side by side with family relationships and ethnic connections, basic elements for the construction of a society, that has been often the subject of particular care on the part of the ecclesiastical structures that were set up specifically for the pastoral care of immigrants. For the second generation, in any case, school integration may make easier the creation of friendships with those who native born, but it can also create a distance with their ethnic groups: for this reason, and rightly so, the Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* insists that the pastoral care for the migrants must be "guidance along the way to authentic integration, avoiding a cultural ghetto and at the same time opposing the pure and simple assimilation of migrants into the local culture" (n. 78).⁴

Recent surveys report increasing difficulties for educators in their work, insofar as they paint a picture of rebellious adolescents who, rather than opposing educators (parents, teachers), ignore and despise them. Indeed, we are faced with a rejection of society. What can be done to open up an educational dialogue? What are the attractive ways and content for creating a starting point for educational proposals? At the moment, we do not have a great amount of useful information. Nevertheless, I believe that schools, associations and society should offer understanding, patience and love. Schools that help their students to avoid "failing" (there are too many cases of students being failed!), by offering special assistance with language and learning, and also in overcoming socio-economic weaknesses⁵. It should not be forgotten that adolescents are part of families. Therefore, rather than speaking about the integration of adolescents within European society, we should refer to the whole family. It is difficult to consider adolescent immigrants as detached from their families, due to the common culture they have experienced at home. It is the family that establishes the relationship with the culture of origin, on which – in personal development – the security provided by a solid sense of belonging depends. Parents and relatives are the ones who teach the

vision of the cultural heritage built up by the individual and collective contribution of their ethnic group, which serves as a starting point for appreciation of all other cultures. One moves from a local culture to the culture of humanity, namely to the universal one as a universe of culture. Is that utopia, in the less beautiful sense of the term?

One of the great fathers of utopia, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality", already identified ignorance of cultures as one of the reasons for potential conflict: "The entire earth is covered with nations of whom we know only their names, and we are meddling with judging the human race!" Perhaps nowadays we know more, partly thanks to immigration, but the statement is still true, and also gives rise to our fears – fears about immigration.

C. Levi Strauss, commenting on Rousseau, recalls the concept of freedom and, rescuing it from abstractionism, lists its specific contents: freedom consists of balances between small belongings and tiny gestures of solidarity. Do we want to enter into such delicate situations like a bull in a china shop?

Undoubtedly, European policy should make itself palatable and sustainable for immigrants. A policy for immigrant families, and for the adolescents who live with their families, should offer more than it asks for. Adolescents will cost the government. But if we consider them as a resource, they should be evaluated for what they are, for their culture, and it should be borne in mind that the resources comprised by adolescents do not lie immediately in the economy or in their employment contribution.

I would like to conclude by referring to certain statements made by Pope Benedict XVI in Lourdes, on 14 September of this year, regarding young people. However, I will limit myself to mentioning what regards their "being at the centre of your and our concerns" and "the need to devote a great deal of time to them". But we are poor when it comes to time, are we not? Yet we must be generous in our poverty. In our thoughts, and in our efforts that derive from this concern for young people, for adolescents, we are sustained by the conviction that Europe will come about thanks to young people, and that without them it cannot happen. The building of Europe is a long-term task, begun more than half a century ago, but it is still a long way from being finished.

Perhaps those who will be able to guide the realisation of our dream are now under twenty, which is why the current disaffection of young people for Europe reported in polls is worrying. This concern is in addition to those expressed by the Holy Father. Yet we also wish to gather from him, from his speech at Lourdes, a supplement of hope. In human terms, he bases this on the "freshness of soul" that young people maintain and the sense of responsibility that many of them reveal.

In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the Church does not claim the position held by the State, and does not wish to replace it. Therefore, a healthy collaboration between European policy and the Church is possible, thus providing a service to humanity, including young people, to the "generation of suffering" – as second-generation immigrants are called. These are considered by some as almost "strangers in their own house" and should not be seen as "immigrants for life" or, as others have remarked, as a "suspended generation", yet perhaps as those with a "reactionary identity". Not everything should be extremely complicated for the sons and daughters of immigrants in Europe, which is why we are joining forces. Thank you!

- 1| Cf. <http://governo.it/Presidenza/USRI/confessioni/normativaeuropea/PERisoluzione2013.20ottobre2005:pdf>
- 2| Cf. D. Demetrio – G. Favaro, *Bambini stranieri a scuola. Accoglienza e didattica interculturale nella scuola dell'infanzia e nella scuola elementare*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1997.
- 3| Cf. G. Favaro – M. Napoli, *Come un pesce fuor d'acqua. Il disagio nascosto dei bambini e dei ragazzi stranieri*, Edizione Angelo Guerini e Associati SpA, Milano 2002.
- 4| Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale per i Migranti e gli Itineranti, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi: People on the Move XXXVI (95, 2004) 82*.
- 5| Cf. *Europe Infos no.108, Sept. 2008, p. 3*.
- 6| Cf. *Europe Infos no.108, Sept. 2008, p. 2*.

INTEGRATION OF ADOLESCENTS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND INTO EUROPEAN SOCIETY: THE CHALLENGE FOR EUROPE

Ján Figel'

*Sehr geehrter Herr Vize-Präsident, Eccellenza Arcivescovo,
lieber Peter Weilemann,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Representatives of the European Institutions,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The topic of migration brings first of all an invitation to cooperate, to share the best practices, open minds and hearts and look for the ways ahead. To speak about the responsibility of Christians and Christian values as a basis for long-term policy of integration is a call to get inspiration from the founding fathers and decades of cooperation which brought this legacy. Because, a common Europe, freedom, democracy and rule of law are not granted. It's a result of difficult struggle and it will not function automatically. It must be responsibly developed further, generation by generation.

One of the best answers is to participate and share responsibility. There is European Union summit tomorrow that really will give answers and not only comments or laments over the problems of the time. Our fathers would love to have

these problems. They couldn't come to this point, at least many in Central - Eastern European former communist countries. We have a totally different agenda than they had. I'm happy that today we can be a kind of attractive space for many in the world. The more developed Europe is, the more attractive it becomes. It is something we have to share not just by simplistic approach but by transposing universal values, European experiences, inspiring methods and ways for cooperation and elimination of the temptations of the past: from Europe as a problem yesterday to Europe as a solution today.

The European Union is the most important geo-political innovation since the Westphalian system of international relations was established more than three centuries ago: shared sovereignty, cooperation based on law and not on dominance of powers, common values starting with universal human dignity. The best narrative for such cooperation is *unity in diversity*. I'm saying that because this is not only about a small space. This is about the global principles that we are all different, even in this "Salle des Glacés" in Brussels. Everybody is original and unique. But we are all equal in dignity. This is the pattern not only for intra-European but also for the global universal relations. If this prevails then we are on the track towards respect and dialog, towards inclusion and not exclusion or exclusivity, not closeness but openness.

Within the European Commission I am responsible for the Youth policy. But main competences have the EU Member States. We help the Member States; we assist, support and sometime coordinate. An Open Method of Coordination is the instrument established under the EU youth policy. The previous program was called 'Youth', the current one is called 'Youth in Action'. You can see the difference as more action, more access and more dynamic approach is foreseen in current program.

In my portfolio, which besides the youth includes education and training, culture, sport and citizenship, youth is explicitly mentioned for the first time. Since the beginning of my mandate, I have emphasised youth issues giving more recognition to the Youth Policy aspects, which are linked to Article 149 of the EC Treaty, "Education, Training and Youth". Hopefully, in the coming time there will be also sport in the Article 149. This is the proposal introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon.

All these areas are 'soft' policies, not powerful, but very meaningful for integration. In this way, because they are meaningful, they are powerful. *Education unites, Bildung verbindet, l'enseignement unis, vzdelanie spája...* This is true locally and globally. Educated people are more prepared for integration - to live in diversity. Not only to exist in diversity.

Access and quality of education are the factors and catalysers of integration. As the Archbishop Marchetto mentioned, the integration is not negation or negative expression of someone's identity. Integration means first of all *participation* as equals, and not absorption or assimilation. In European policies the youth aspects are getting a higher profile. It's not a total and definite answer, but it's a beginning or more coherent approach. We need to see youth as a space of responsibility for many actors.

The first ever legislation in the youth field is to be adopted in November at the Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting. It's the soft legislation, but I'm not claiming that we need directives. We are to adopt Recommendation on youth volunteering in Europe allowing better conditions for more voluntary youth work. This will be very beneficial to young people as a form of participation and exchange, social inclusion, social work and non-formal education.

The world and Europe are changing - creating new opportunities and new challenges. Our societies are ageing, people live longer, but birth rates in many European countries are declining. In this changing environment young people are more equipped with energy and enthusiasm for the future, but also many of them are marginalized. Many of them are simply more vulnerable because of realities like unemployment, which is in the youth age interval twice as high as the overall unemployment rates. We have in the European Union of today up to close to 15% early drop outs in the schools. It's close to six million young people who leave school early. You can imagine, the six million annual numbers means further consequences in life, further problems in their individual or family or community lives. Close to 20% 15-year olds are achieving very low results in reading literacy. This is one of the first competencies to participate further in education and lifelong learning. These are exclamation marks for our education and training systems.

There are many young people with fewer opportunities, sort of marginalized. There are many causes of exclusion: poverty, difficult family con-

text, physical and mental health problems, disabilities, life in disadvantaged urban or rural areas, ethnic background, etc.

Migration is a growing phenomenon. It is one of the key issues for the future of Europe. We discuss it frequently: Is there a future and what kind of future? Is it foggy? Is it positive, constructive and perspective? Migration was defined in Hampton Court under the British Presidency as one of the strategic areas of EU policies together with energy, security and other important issues.

When there are difficulties then for the migrant children usually they are even more acute and serious. Reality shows that they have more troubles. They do less well in school than their native peers, they leave school earlier and they enrol in fewer numbers to higher education. Many children from disadvantaged minorities, like Roma (Gypsies), experience the same problems. There was the first Roma summit on September 16 with a fruitful discussion and a lot of new elements for education and social policies. Director Peter Weilemann mentioned examples and problems of Germany. There is a diversity of examples of inclusion or integration in Germany.

Migration is a real challenge for education. Once again, the access and quality of education are decisive factors for the success of integration. In some countries we observe very negative phenomena: the second-generation children in migrant families or communities have worse results than the first generation. So the divergence and gap are growing. We saw it in the last PISA study. This was quite a negative tendency from the last study. The next PISA study will be built up in 2009 and published later on.

What is the EU response? I already mentioned we need to focus on youth and on the related policies around. One of the contributions is to get cultural aspects more into the domain of cooperation. This year is the European Year of Intercultural Dialog. It shouldn't finish by December 31st. What we need is more intercultural respect, dialog, skills and competencies in schools. When youths are taught in these competencies, they are better prepared to live in diverse communities.

I also would like to remind what Archbishop Agostino Marchetto quoted from Jean-Jacques Rousseau about the ignorance of cultures leading to

potential conflicts. It is always true. Ignorance breeds intolerance, and then we face further problems. We need to promote the intercultural approach. This is important contribution and we want to achieve a long-term strategy, long-term orientation towards intercultural approach. We need a stronger culture of dialog in our societies. Dialog as a daily issue and not as ceremonial, eventual issue, sometimes or somewhere... Dialog must be a part of our daily communication and culture.

I would like to mention one great example of integration, as a model for schools. We all know the Schengen system which was enlarged since last December to new Member States. There is Schengen Lyceum in a border region of Germany in Perl, in the neighbourhood with Luxembourg. Since last September children from different countries study together in this multilingual lyceum with multi-national staff applying modern methods. This is about real integration! Not only elimination of borders but *living together*, knowing each other from early childhood. An inspirational example for all of us!

As the EU response to the needs of young people, "Youth in Action" is a good programme, significantly stronger than the previous one, with budget of 815 million euro for seven years period. It has the full integration of young people as an objective. It promotes young people's active citizenship, European citizenship in particular. It promotes solidarity and tolerance among young people, foster social cohesion and mutual understanding between young people in different countries.

This is only one of the EU responses and there are many other programs encouraging young people's participation. The most popular is Erasmus program with some cousins or relatives like Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig, which help students, teachers and scholars to study abroad and to get better prepared for living in multicultural Europe. Mobility becomes a part of the preparation for career, for social inclusion and for European integration.

Just last year we supported more than 300.000 young students and trainees and more than 110 000 teachers participating in programs like Lifelong Learning, Tempus and Comenius. I also strongly encourage Member States and their ministers to use European Social Fund resources more for education and through education for social inclusion. Because, education is one of the best equalizers in life and society. Life-

long learning has become a necessity! If we want to improve social situation, the education is indispensable. How to develop flexicurity if not through education? How to achieve the Lisbon Strategy goal for more and better jobs if not through more and better education? These are very important principles for the support of access, relevance and quality of education for all.

Next month together with Doris Pack from the European Parliament we will launch "Comenius Regio". This is a programme for regional cooperation of schools across borders, promoting exchange of experiences and good practices between the regions and municipalities in Europe and promoting mobility of secondary schools students. I hope it will bring as similar fruits as we got in Erasmus. Erasmus started with 3.000 young people in 1987. Just to mention: Today in Milan I met the vice-rector of Bocconi University. He was the pioneer in the first year of Erasmus. Now there are kids of Erasmus students. After 20 years we've got numbers like 160 000 annually and close to two million altogether. There is a new generation and I hope with Comenius we can bring more social inclusion in Europe.

Sport is also an important way for young people's inclusion and integration. It is a great and popular instrument. It generates the same values that we need for a sound citizenship: tolerance, participation, fairness, sense for the rules, solidarity... But we see also negative actions around: doping, violence, racism... We have to promote sport for all and its great social function.

In the political sense the Commission proposed in recent years very important messages. Some of them were accepted and adopted in the conclusions of ministers, for example, on equity and efficiency in our education and training systems: not as a kind of contradiction or trade-off but as a dual objective. Efficiency and equity are very important because we have to look at how we spend money and also whether we allow access for all. A dual objective, because if only one is promoted, it leads to egalitarian results or if only the quality is followed, it leads rather to an elitist approach. Both, access for all and quality in education as a shared objective are needed!

We have some important messages also for the pre-school education. This is the most influential part of the educational chain. There is a well

known book of Robert Fulghum with a very telling name "*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*". And for children from economically and socially disadvantaged communities or families this has even more decisive role. If we want to make a difference in, let's say, Roma or other migrant communities, early age education is the most efficient time and part. It is easier to say and more difficult to achieve, but this is about equity and efficiency. It's very important to see the system as a whole and to look how we can achieve better results with a more integrated approach.

We have adopted and approved key competencies for lifelong learning. It starts with mother tongue literacy, knowledge of foreign languages, MSTs (mathematics, science, and technology) and digital literacy (to be able to use new technologies and not excluding from modern, fast communication). Of course, to command technology is not enough. It was Martin Heidegger who said "Technology has overcome all distances but didn't bring any closeness". For closeness we need other skills, such as learning to learn, initiative-taking, interpersonal, societal and social, intercultural competencies. After approval it should become part of further curricular reforms in our schools and especially in relation to migrants' children.

School is a key place for integrating young people. This year we have proposed school communication on the competencies for 21st century, kind of agenda for European cooperation on schools. It should lead to a more central role, recognition and support for schools in our societies because the value of schools is much higher than usually recognised.

Commission also proposed a Green Paper on migration and education to discuss how the challenges may be best addressed in Member States and through European action. It is opened for the consultations until the end of this year and is a kind of signal for all of you to bring some answers to the European Community, how we can improve policies and cooperation in this framework. The last legal instruments on education of migrants and their children were adopted in the EC in the 1970s. Since then we have moved a lot, and the situation has significantly changed.

I want to conclude by saying that tendency to cooperate and to share is growing. I am really glad because it was not so easy to share, for example, data and benchmarking. Today we are looking where we are trying to improve, not only commenting but really moving on. There are many

good examples of the changes that are coming. For example, the Bologna Process became pan-continental. Other countries from non-European space have applied for membership like Israel and Kyrgyzstan. Recently we had the first Euroskills competition, a kind of championship in skills. We have championships in football or athletics and that is good. But general and vocational skills are necessary for the future labour force. Skills are so important. In times of financial crisis many people say "*remeslo má zlaté dno*": skills have value of gold. Money or accounts may be lost and disappear, but skills and skilled people have a real fortune for the future literally in their hands.

Next year 2009 will be a very inspirational topic, the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. We should use it for promotion of talents, tolerance and access to education, which is so important to all and especially for the youth.

Last but not least, we should promote youth policies with young people, with youth together. Not *for* them only, but *with* them. This is a realistic and mature condition for implementation. Since the Finnish Presidency in 2006 we organize a regular structured dialog with young people. At the beginning of November we will have the European Youth Week in Brussels promoting dialogue between EU institutions and the European Youth Forum and young people from all program member countries. The main point on the agenda is further preparation on youth policy after 2010. We consult cooperation framework for future youth policy. It should be, as I said, with youth and not only for youth. Here we need all, not only European institutions but also Member States, public authorities, regions and municipalities, schools, families and also civic society. We need the support of NGOs, religious communities, churches and all who believe that youth is the future.

Here I would conclude. We are frequently saying that youth is our future. But we have to bear in mind that the future always starts today and not tomorrow. Tomorrow is the second best option, but today, now starts any future. So, youth is our present, too. In English there is nice etymological wordplay. Present means also 'gift'. Young people, our children, are our gifts. We should value it and care for the gifts we got!

Thank you very much.

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