

THE EDUCATION FOR AN ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract: *This study aims at researching the problematic of European citizenship, from the concept to the practice by the European citizen, in a conscious and responsible manner, its metamorphosis in an active European citizenship that leads to the development of the feeling of belonging to the European Union, to the increase in the mutual tolerance and understanding between the European citizens, to the respect and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity to the more connected involvement of citizens and civil society in the construction of the European future.*

We have underlined the important role of the educational institutions in formal education but also the special contribution of the European institutions' actions in the non formal education for an active European citizenship.

Key words: *citizenship, European Union, education*

1. INTRODUCTION

European citizenship, concept that has an innovative political and judicial content that attracted a lot of interest even from the beginning of this idea, marks an essential stage in the creation of the European Union and still generates significant issues for its future, in which the citizens have to have a central role. We researched this subject using as a methodological, scientific and theoretical basis papers of specialists in this field but also modern concepts of the theory of knowledge of social processes and judicial phenomena. The problematic was approached gradually, from general to particular, from establishing a conceptual frame underlined by normative and doctrine dispositions to the significance of education for an active European citizenship.

2. EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

The creation of the European Union represents a long and difficult process that has evolved from establishing an economic community to an original and innovative creation with deep political values in which the interests of the member states converge towards the affirmation and consolidation of fundamental values in the center of which lie the rights of the European citizen. The delineation of the concept of European citizenship has known such an evolving process that determined many debates, controversy and critics materialized with the inclusion in the Maastricht Treaty of article 8 that stipulated that the citizen of the European Union is any citizen of its member states. (Kent, 2008, p. 195). It was necessary to clarify this notion that, by its dynamic nature, led to the addition in the Amsterdam Treaty of the next thesis: "the citizenship of the Union completes but not replaces the national citizenship" This provision became after that article 20, paragraph 1 of the Lisbon Treaty. The establishment of the European citizenship was a very important event, with a preponderant political character founded on the consolidation of protecting the rights of the member states' citizens.

One of the objectives of establishing this concept, considered to be a very important constitutional innovation, was the

consolidation of the image and identity of the European Union by involving the citizen in the integration process as a member of this community (O'Leary, 2009, p. 10). The status of European citizen confers an inherent judicial status to the belonging to this community, made by formally established rights and obligations that consist in the frame necessary to practice the citizenship (O'Leary, 1996, p.13).

In the wording of the Lisbon Treaty, the European citizens enjoy:

- (a) the right to free movement and stay on the territory of the member states;
- (b) the right to chose and be elected in the European parliament as well as in the local elections in the member state they have their residence, in the same conditions as the citizens of that state;
- (c) the right to enjoy, on the territory of a third country in which the member state if not represented, the protection of the diplomatic and consular authorities, in the same conditions as the citizens of that state;
- (d) the right to petition to the European parliament and address to the European ombudsman, as well as the right to address to institutions and consultative organs of the union in any of the languages of the treaties and receive an answer in the same language

These four categories are completed by the ones included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights that acquired a judicial statute by the Lisbon Treaty's coming into force on December 1st 2009. The judicial content of the European citizenship is made of the combination between the regulations regarding the national judicial order of the member states on the European citizenship and dispositions in this matter. We have to mention that the acquirement of the European citizenship and the statute of European citizen are conditioned by the existence of national citizenship (Guild, 2004, p.6). In other words, only the persons that have the citizenship of one of the member states have the European one as well, ensuring the practical significance of the European citizenship.

In essence, the main characteristic of the European citizenship, as defined in the abovementioned documents, is that it doesn't replace the national citizenship but completes and overlaps it. From here we can conclude that it is a value subordinated to the quality of citizen of a member state of the European Union, without being qualified as a double citizenship in the definition accepted in the doctrine and international practice. The hierarchy changes in what concerns the application of the European law, the national citizenship coming before the national one (Williams & Humphrys, 2003, pp. 233-230). All the debates at a conceptual and normative level are lacking substance if the practice of the European citizenship is not considered. The citizenship is more than a statute, being necessary that the people, through education, are encouraged to practice the citizenship, supported by information, skills and resources, made responsible by promoting the obligations that citizenship involves so that they are capable and contribute to its practice. (Youniss & Levine, 2009, pp. 13-28).

3. EDUCATION FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

The European citizenship has to be learned. The education for European citizenship has to become an imperative in the meaning of understanding, awareness and value by the European citizens of their role, their rights and obligations, their accountability in relation to the values promoted by the European Union. We assert that the European dimension of education regarding the citizenship imposes the accomplishment of the following objectives: provision of knowledge and forming skills and competencies that would allow individuals to understand the content of the rights and obligations they have as European citizens and the limits of their exertion; promotion of values such as solidarity, mutual respect, tolerance towards aspects related to different identities forming the fund of values, beliefs and representations protected by the European norms; understanding the institutional relation of the European Union and the procedures that lead to its functioning; promoting the ideas of belonging and common patrimony at the same time with the cultivation of national diversity and regional identity. But who holds the responsibility of accomplishing education in European citizenship case and what are the instruments, methods and proceedings that can be used for the accomplishment of the abovementioned objectives?

The educational institutions are the main promoter of these desiderata having the essential role in developing corresponding curricula for different study levels that, by pre established tasks, contribute to the education of the young generation in the spirit of an active and aware European citizenship. But the first step is represented by the teachers' preparation and their motivation regarding the implementation of educational programs for the citizens and deploying actions meant to lead to the awareness by the subjects of the educational process of the elements that give meaning to the concept of European citizenship (Scott & Lawson, 2002, p. 4). There is no doubt that the establishment of the educational policy is an attribute recognized to each of the member states based on sovereignty but the European Union has the most important role in supporting them by ensuring an adequate frame, useful instruments for the active involvement of young and not only them in educational activities in different domains, but which ensure constitutive elements of the European identity and prosperity and encourages the mobility and cooperation between the member states. Among the initiatives of the European Union in this context we mention "The Europe Program for Citizens" for 2007-2013, adopted by the European Parliament and Council by Decision no.1904/2006/EC on December 12th 2006 and deployed by the General Directorate Education and Culture from the European Commission whose nucleus is represented by the concept of active European citizenship, development of the feeling of belonging to the European Union. On November 15th the European Parliament and Council adopted Decision no.1719/2006/EC on establishing the Program "Youth in Action", concentrating its entire attention of youth. The five actions promote mobility, initiative, intercultural learning meant to bring the European youth closer to the process of shaping the decision at the EU level by supporting activities that encourage the feeling active European citizenship but also solidarity and tolerance within and outside the borders of the European Union. Symbolic for the education and training within the European Union, Erasmus is part of the LLP – Life Long Learning Program (2007-2013) that sustains university mobility (students, master students, postgraduate students but also teachers) encouraging cooperation between universities in Europe in view of identifying and accomplishing a common direction, integrated in development because, as declared the Commissioner Ján Figel, „Education and training are the binding of societies facing the economic and demographic evolution“. Another

component of LLP is represented by the Jean Monnet Program, whose function resides in supporting teaching, research and reflection regarding European integration united under institutional, judicial, political, economical and social aspects. Cooperation in promoting linguistic diversity is encouraged by the development of actions of learning the foreign languages of the 27 member states within the Key Activity 2 listed in the transversal program aiming at cross domains. The European Union according to the Lisbon Treaty respects the diversity of cultures, customs and languages in view of reaching the main desiderata, which is ensuring the unity in diversity. The European Union is aware that the use of its citizens' languages is one of the factors contributing to the transparency, legitimacy and efficiency of European actions, economic progress, personal development and intercultural dialogue, a closer involvement of the citizens and the civil society in the construction of its future. Culture, as supreme value playing a vital role in defining the identity of the member states entered in the scope of the EUs legislative concerns recently, together with the Maastricht Treaty. The action of the European Union in this matter aims at valuing the common cultural space of Europeans and promoting the intercultural dialogue and by this encouraging the development of the European citizenship. By Decision no.1855/2006/EC the Culture Program (2007-2013) was established, a continuation of Culture Program 2000 ended in 2006. Among its objectives we can mention the impulse for cross national cooperation in culture aspects, encouraging the cross national movement of artistic, cultural works that would finally lead to the mutual enrichment of all cultures.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty by all the 27 member states could lead to the conclusion that the Union is based today on a strong feeling of European identity, in reality we can notice that many of the citizens of the member states are not aware of their connection with the European project, that the feeling of belonging to the national level is more powerful, while the one of solidarity and European identity is still shaping. At a European level, a priority of educational reforms is represented by the education for an active European citizenship, perceived as an instrument for social cohesion based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens to promote European diversity, solidarity and cooperation.

5. REFERENCES

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