



NECE 2019 Glasgow

Concluding Panel: European Citizenship beyond Brexit: An Agenda for Times of Trouble

Introduction by **Thomas Krüger**, Director of the Federal Agency for Civic Education

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Dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for the opportunity and honour to address you with a few introductory words before this upcoming panel.

I am delighted to be in Glasgow – the city that stands not just for famous football teams CELTIC and RANGERS – Glasgow is the city which mirrors the European and British conquest of the world, with all its great and dark moments. And, if I'm not mistaken, Glasgow's class differences, social struggles and upheavals still shape the city today.

Today I see Glasgow as a large, globally networked laboratory in which many civic initiatives, a vibrant civil society and scientific lighthouses – such as the Technology and Innovation Centre – are working to find ways how to address the challenges the city is facing.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our partners and citizens here in Glasgow, who have enabled us – not just over the last few days – to learn more about their city, have opened many doors, and have impressed us with great hospitality. Please stay with us and on the map of NECE in the future!

Now to our panel. Just two brief remarks and reflections:

Firstly, how do we see the future of European citizenship after Brexit?

And secondly, what can citizenship education ultimately achieve when it comes to the major transformations of our societies which will inevitably lead to 'times of trouble'?

As you all know, the elephant in the room is getting bigger every day.

The writer and British historian Timothy Garton Ash is surely right when he suggests that – I quote –

“we Brits owe all our European friends a sincere apology, a bottle of whisky and complimentary tickets to a Royal Shakespeare Company performance of Hamlet. For Britain is now Hamlet, forever agonising over whether Brexit is to be or not to be.”

The UK, and thus also this city and Scotland as part of the UK, will leave the EU in a few days' time. We are facing a scandal that affects quite a few people in this room as well: 65 million UK citizens will lose their EU citizenship that day, without accurate information, let alone, rights of appeal. And more than 3 million EU citizens living in the UK will also lose some of their rights and status.





Dear Colleagues, this is clearly not a case of 'keep calm and carry on', however attractive this slogan may be.

This will be a serious setback for all those for whom the European project, with its core ideas of equal and free European citizens, has been a fixed point in their lives in recent decades. And on another level, it is also bad news: Europe's weight in a power-driven and insecure world of authoritarian superpowers, the age of insecurity, is being weakened.

For me, European citizenship, the first transnational citizenship of modernity, stands in clear contrast to the scenarios of retreat to identity politics and nationalism. Our networking platform NECE was founded in 2004, based on the inspiration we took from a younger generation across Europe to become true European citizens, living and studying or working anywhere they choose.

For us, European citizenship is not only about personal fulfilment, it also keeps Europe together because it provides a space for networks and collective values beyond the nation state.

NECE and its platforms connect educators and active citizens in Europe and its neighbouring regions, regardless of their legal status.

We are, if you like, enacting transnational citizenship – for Europeans as well as for people outside of Europe. More than ever, these formats and spaces should be protected and if possible expanded.

What can we do?

'Keep calm and carry on' is not an option, as I said before.

In the upcoming years, we need to find ways of working around Brexit to keep these spaces and networks that I just mentioned open for British citizens, regardless of their legal status. The issue of 'European citizenship' should take a more prominent and visible role in our work. This transnational entitlement of European citizens, anchored in the European treaties, must be strengthened and become part and parcel of our educational activities.

Above all, access in practice must be improved, and I stress, for EU as well as for our friends and colleagues from non-EU countries: we need equal access to information, to civic education and to practical opportunities to enjoy the advantages Europe can offer.

How can EU citizenship become a citizenship for all and not only for the privileged and educated sections of the population?

When it comes to disseminating the message, we need partners on the NGO level such as the ECIT foundation and other transnational initiatives. And we hope for the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe to take an active role in that journey.

Finally: what can citizenship education, our profession or working field, ultimately achieve? What are the lessons we should draw from Brexit and the fundamental challenges our democracies are facing?





Here we come full circle on our subject of 'inequalities' which has been at the centre of this conference. The link between rising inequalities and threats to the long-term viability of our democracies are, I think, quite obvious.

It is almost like climate change: there are hardly any serious experts now who deny that inequality has reached historic proportions in most countries of the world, over the past 40 years. And – as Branko Milankovic shows in his new book 'Capitalism, alone – inequalities are deeply political.

On a global scale – be it in China with its version of 'political capitalism' or in the Western world with its version of liberal capitalism – more and more wealth and power are concentrated in fewer hands, re-enforcing the polarisation between the elites and the rest and a tendency toward the creation of a self-perpetuating upper-class.

Essentially, economic power gets conflated with political power.

It remains the case that Brexit was unquestionably strongest in a more economically marginal and left-behind Britain. For many people, as the saying goes, the concern is not the end of the world, but the end of the month.

That's why I firmly believe: the social divide and inequalities in our societies have to become a permanent and prominent topic of citizenship education – on the local, national and global levels.

For our 'times of trouble' we need to move out of our comfort zones and open up new areas for action. New approaches and a new attention for people in structurally weak regions, outside metropolitan areas, are needed. Too many people are living behind the invisible but quite hard borders in our cities. As educators and activists with a noble mission we have to check carefully if we are not preaching to the converted way too often and if we are not too complacent about the moral high ground we are occupying.

For this we need new actors who do not necessarily always follow the textbooks of citizenship education.

And – you surely have discussed this before in this conference – we should avoid the impression that enlightenment and education for the 'hard to reach' comes from above. Instead of talking about 'target groups' (a term from advertising), we should think about co-producers of citizenship education.

Many of the initiatives coordinated and networked by NECE have already opened up new avenues and spaces in that field.

I am convinced: NECE with its many partners all over Europe can create the powerful antidote to the toxic forces and dynamics in our societies. NECE is here to stay – together with you. Thank you for your attention.

