

**Thomas Krüger, President of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Germany)**

**Opening address at the NECE Conference**

**Networking for the European Parliament Elections 09**

**Strasbourg, 11th – 13th June, 2008**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

*In one city in ancient Greece it was apparently the custom for those wishing to propose a new law to climb onto a table at a citizens' assembly - wearing a noose. This prospective lawmaker would argue for the necessity of the new law. If the assembly agreed with his reasoning, the noose was removed. If it didn't, the assembly removed the table instead.*

I have been unable to verify the truth or falsehood of this citation from an unknown source, but it certainly shows us how much our understanding of democracy has changed. Of course, it's also why the halls of democracy have grown large and impressive, usually with both benches and tables firmly attached to the floor.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank every one of you for joining us in Strasbourg. In the coming days, we will be looking at democracy and the structures that support it. The condition of both the system and the structures can be divined - above all - by the number of voters who are visiting polling stations to exercise their right. It has little to do with the number of nooses or tables that have been employed to bring the European Union to its present status. 2009 is set to be what we Germans call a 'Superwahljahr' – a 'super-election year', with several

national elections scheduled to take place along with the EU parliament election. Against that backdrop, these upcoming European elections assume a special importance, just as the importance of the European Union continues to grow in the lives of Europe's citizens. European democracy - as well as the many and varied effects it has on every area of both private life and politics - has become one of the central challenges and fields of competence for civic and citizenship education.

### **NECE Network**

With the "Networking European Citizenship Education" project, our goal at the German Federal Agency for Civic Education has been to support and encourage the "Europeanisation" of citizenship education. NECE programs and strategies are born out of the realisation that the framework requirements of civic education have changed dramatically in the last few years. Internationalisation and Europeanisation processes are also forcing professionals in the field of civic education to re-think their methods and curricular competencies, and no longer define them exclusively in national terms.

Within the framework of the NECE process, which began in 2004, we organise major annual conferences that are announced all over the continent. At these events – together with multipliers and experts from a wide range of disciplines – we examine current topics that are especially relevant to citizenship education in Europe.

At the end of the day, this is about giving institutions of civic education that often operate within strictly defined national limits something vital: the intellectual and organisational tools that will allow them – step-by-step – to internationalise and Europeanise their work. The political

context of this initiative is rooted in the desperately needed support for the project of European unification, both in civil society and in the area of education policy. The acceptance, legitimacy and stability of this project face new hurdles every day.

The NECE conferences present methods and approaches for civic education in Europe. The documentation for some of the most successful 'best-practice' approaches is also presented in the NECE database, and is available internationally. The NECE Network provides the means for the German Federal Agency for Civic Education - along with a number of partners and target groups in different countries in Europe – to promote the process of the Europeanisation of civic education in a continuous and long-term fashion.

The Network includes government institutions such as Austria's Education Ministry, foundations and associations such as the German "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" Foundation or the Allianz Cultural Foundation, as well as smaller NGOs like the Center for Citizenship Education in Warsaw. It can be viewed as a continuous, interactive programme for the supplement and support of existing initiatives.

We have come together in Strasbourg to continue to pursue these intentions and goals, and I invite you to use the coming days productively to continue your own preparations in the run-up to the 2009 European parliamentary elections. Among the things you will see and experience here are the many exciting projects aimed at mobilising and informing voters. It is our hope that these projects will help you to develop your

own ideas, and use the synergies offered by our network to cooperate and plan with other Europeans who are doing the same.

### **Looking forward**

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to our next conference in Sofia. Together with partners from Bulgaria, Austria and Germany, this event will be examining the topic of “Nationalism and Populism in Europe” as an aspect of civic education training opportunities. It would send very positive signals if you could also present your projects there, along with the first shared or collective initiatives.

I also want to express my most heartfelt thanks to Mr. Fritz for his warm welcome in these parliamentary halls, as well as the tremendous support given by his team during the preparations for this conference. Parliamentary President Pöttering was unfortunately unable to attend due to other duties, but of course my thanks also go to him – I know how strongly he feels about our initiative. The decision by the European Parliament to help sponsor our event provided a tremendous boost, and we look forward to possible future common projects.

Last but not least, I would like to thank our partners at the Dutch Centre for Political Participation and the Austrian Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, who contributed so much to this conference with their dedication and financial support. Jochum de Graaf...Sigrid Steininger...Sonja Ziegelwagner – thanks for your efforts.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you a stimulating, inspiring conference!