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**Tuarascáil Taistil, Cruinniú Coiste Idirpharlaiminteach: Oideachas
Saoránachta Eorpaí, an Bhruiséil, 26-28 Samhain 2023**

Feabhra 2024

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

**Travel Report, Interparliamentary Committee Meeting: European
Citizenship Education, Brussels, 26th – 28th November 2023**

February 2024

MEMBERSHIP



Sorca Clarke TD
Sinn Féin



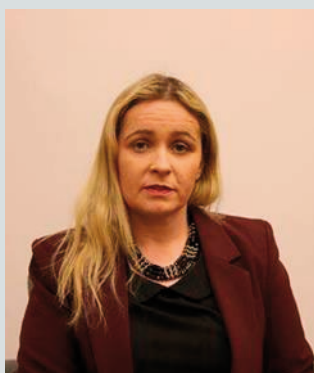
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Fianna Fáil



Mairéad Farrell TD
Sinn Féin



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Jim O'Callaghan TD
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Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD
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Labour Party



Senator Aisling Dolan
Fine Gael



Senator Eileen Flynn
Independent



Senator Rónán Mullen
Independent



Senator Fiona O'Loughlin
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Cathaoirleach)



Senator Pauline O'Reilly
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Introduction

In a private session of the Joint Committee on the 17th of October the *Cathaoirleach* informed Members that the Committee had received an invitation from the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education to attend an Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meeting (ICM). The ICM on European Citizenship Education was held in the European Parliament, Brussels from Monday 27th to Tuesday 28th November.

The aim of the Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meetings are to foster debate and share experiences at both a national and European level regarding European Citizenship Education and to explore future actions regarding this topic.

It was agreed that four Members would attend the conference. The Committee was represented on the visit by Deputy Paul Kehoe TD (*Cathaoirleach*), Deputy Sorca Clarke TD, Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD, and Senator Ronan Mullen. The delegation was also accompanied by Tara Kelly (Committee Clerk) and Julian Power Foley (Policy Advisor).

Sanction was granted for the Committee to travel under the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee, whereby it is outlined that the Committee has the

“(10) power to—

(a) engage the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and

(b) undertake travel;

Provided that the powers under this paragraph are subject to such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Chairmen under Standing Order 120(4)(a).”

European Citizenship Education

The Committee on Culture and Education held an interparliamentary committee meeting (ICM) on 27-28 November 2023, in order to discuss the important subject of 'European Citizenship Education'. This was an opportunity to exchange views on the central role of citizenship education actions in policies and budgets of Member States, in the context of the next European elections in June 2024. MEPs, Members of National Parliaments, and invited guests, contributed to the debate. The attendance of National Parliaments was particularly high, with 36 Members present from 17 National Parliaments.

Monday, 27 November 2023

Session 1: Plenary Session

Ms Sabine Verheyen, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, opened the plenary session, welcoming all of the delegations.

Thereafter, Ms Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, outlined the importance European Citizenship Education to the European Commission.

Mr José Manuel Bar Cendón, Secretary of State of Education, Spanish Presidency, outlined the main elements of their Council Conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship which were adopted on 22 November 2023.¹

There followed a debate amongst MEPs, Members of National Parliaments, and invited guests, including European Commission, UNESCO and Council of Europe representatives regarding the central role of education and culture in shaping future European citizens. Included among the topics discussed were the role of teachers, the

¹ The Council conclusions adopted can be accessed [here](#).

relevance of EU funded programmes (such as Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and CERV) to consolidate the opportunities for active citizenship and education, and the importance of highlighting the European project to a wider audience to prevent democratic disengagement. It was also discussed how the European Commission will ensure the follow-up on the Council Conclusions to develop more data and studies on citizenship education.

Deputy Paul Kehoe TD spoke following the opening remarks and referenced the progress that had been made in relation to diversity in the Irish Education system. Deputy Kehoe outlined the huge importance of ensuring that the voice of young students should be listened to, and their voice should be reflected in education committee's work. Deputy Kehoe cited examples of when young people had come before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. He noted that their contributions were of huge value to the work of the Committee and were reflected in the Committee's recommendations.

Deputy Kehoe also stressed the importance of the availability of teachers and remarked that the EU Parliament should examine the issue of teacher recruitment and retention.

Deputy Sorca Clarke TD also spoke following the opening remarks. Deputy Clarke referred to the importance of shared values across Europe, and how external and internal societal pressures are threatening those shared values. In this context, Deputy Clarke referenced the horrific attack on school children outside Coláiste Mhuire and the subsequent riots that followed in Dublin in November. Deputy Clarke outlined how the Government and the Opposition were united both in their condemnation of the attack and subsequent riot, and in their defence of shared European values. Deputy Clarke noted the importance of fostering a deep sense of active citizenship at a local, national, and European level.

Deputy Clarke outlined how diversity and inclusion should be reflected across all educational curricula and how all cultures and all traditions must be respected. Deputy Clarke also stressed the importance of youth work programmes supporting students

who have fallen out of formal education and how the views of representative voices, such as student unions, should be listened to when formulating education policy.

Session 2: European Citizenship Education: Best Practices (National and European Context)

Mr Michaela Šojdrová, CULT MEP, began session 2 by outlining the importance of exchanging best practices, in terms of European Citizenship Education, across European states.

This was followed by a short presentation by Mr Hans Scheltema on citizenship education. Mr Scheltema presented a short overview on a Dutch initiative called the 'The Peaceable School', targeted, coherent, systematic, and long-lasting programme for democratic citizenship education.

Thereafter National Parliamentarians shared examples of good practices in their countries at all levels of education and training. They stressed the aspects of lifelong learning concerning citizenship and civic education in the Member States, and how this should be part of a learning cycle from primary school all the way up to adult education. Parliamentarians also highlighted the need for more robust and better-resourced teacher training. Finally, parliamentarians raised the connection of citizenship education with defence programmes, as well as the role of informal education to help young people gain relevant skills. To this end, the European Solidarity Corps and other volunteering activities were mentioned in relation to helping young people develop a sense of European belonging.

Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD spoke on this topic and referenced the juxtaposition of Ireland's relative geographical distance from Europe and yet the centrality of the European Union to the lives of all people in Ireland. Deputy Ó Cathasaigh stressed the importance of understanding Europe and how its institutions operate.

In relation to this, Deputy Ó Cathasaigh outlined how throughout the Irish education system young people are taught about citizenship in a local, national and European context. Deputy Ó Cathasaigh made specific reference to the Blue Star Programme which teaches primary school pupils about European cultures and the EU through creative activities and projects which complement the national primary curriculum. The programme aims to foster a better understanding and knowledge of Europe and how it affects the lives of Irish citizens among Irish primary pupils in a curriculum-friendly manner.

Deputy Ó Cathasaigh also outlined the need for education systems to develop youth citizenship that encouraged *'well-rounded, creative and critical thinkers'*. He noted the importance of teaching young people media literacy is especially critical in the era of deep fakes and Artificial Intelligence.

Session 3: The Importance of European Citizenship Education for Young People

Ms Ilana Cicurel, CULT MEP, began session 3, outlining the legacy of the European Year of Youth (EYY) 2022.

A debate with MEPs, Members of National Parliaments, and invited guests, including European Commission, UNESCO and Council of Europe representatives closed the discussions for the evening. Throughout the debate, participants outlined the importance of civic and citizenship education for young people from an early age. It was noted that investment in education had to be increased to achieve enhanced cooperation amongst Member States.

Participants also recommended a greater emphasis on ensuring that the Council Conclusions are implemented. Members noted the need to support the role of parents and families as primary educators in democratic values and citizenship. It was also noted that it is vital to recognise the role of the local community and civic-society organisations in assisting young people become more involved and be active participants in the decision-making processes.

Senator Ronan Mullen spoke on this topic. In his contribution he alluded to the Politics and Society course students can take for their Leaving Certificate in Ireland. Senator Mullen also referred to the success of the National Oireachtas Essay writing competition and the support that has been offered by the *Ceann Comhairle*. Senator Mullen outlined how the competition is intended to encourage young people to reflect on how democracy works in their own society.

Senator Mullen also stressed the importance of building a sense of citizenship among young people beginning at a local level and noted the value of parents, family, and community in terms of building a young person's sense of citizenship and democracy. Senator Mullen outlined how family, followed by community, followed by civil society and schools were crucial in terms of encouraging a sense of citizenship among young people.

Senator Mullen also remarked how emotional, spiritual, and intellectual intelligence as well as critical thinking ought to be taught to young people from an early age in schools. Senator Mullen also expressed his belief that there ought to be a higher vision in society which encourages people to serve others.

Tuesday, 28 November 2023

Session 1: Plenary Session

On the second day of the conference, Ms Sabine Verheyen, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, opened the plenary session, welcoming all of the delegation.

Session 2: Role of European Parliament in the Implementation of European Citizenship Education Actions

Mr Marcos Ros Sempre, CULT MEP, began session 2 by outlining the work of the European Parliament in the implementation of citizenship education actions.

CULT and National Parliamentarians stressed the need to raise awareness of the history of Europe, and how the teaching of this subject contributes to the diversity of the Union. The need to reach rural areas and smaller towns, and the involvement of local NGOs was also addressed.

Session 3: Importance of European Citizenship in view of the 2024 European Parliament Elections

Mr Jaume Duch Guillot, Director General for Communication, European Parliament, began the final session by outlining the importance of European Citizenship in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections. Mr Duch Guillot also outlined the opportunities provided by the European Parliament to engage with young people, such as the EP Ambassadors' school programme, Euroscola, and the European Youth Event (EYE). Members voiced their support for these initiatives. Members also added that the Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship validated the idea of having a module on citizenship education for everyone who takes part in the Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps programme. Members called on the Commission to design and implement such a module.

It was further underlined that the dissemination and exchange of good practices should be enhanced, by gathering and exchanging guidelines, materials and resources in an EU Toolbox, including teaching materials. It was also outlined that further discussions should take place on how the EU's competence on education might be expanded, as requested by citizens taking part in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Conclusion

The Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), with the support of the Legislative Dialogue Unit of the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, hosted an

Interparliamentary Committee Meeting (ICM) on “European Citizenship Education” on the 27th and 28th of November 2023.

The ICM provided an opportunity for Members to discuss the current state of play regarding Citizenship Education across Europe. The ICM facilitated a lively discussion and debate amongst Members of the European Parliament, Members of National Parliaments and invited guests, which include European Commission, UNESCO and Council of Europe representatives.

The first day of the event was dedicated to discussing best practices of European Citizenship Education within both the national and European context and its significance for young people. The second day of the ICM facilitated in-depth debates on the role of the European Parliament in the implementation of actions related to European Citizenship Education and the importance of European Citizenship Education in view of the 2024 European Parliament elections.

Members of the Joint Committee in attendance each outlined the importance of educating young people in the values of citizenship. The Members all noted the importance of shared and common values to a healthy, functioning democracy and outlined the variety of ways in which the Irish education system helps to foster a sense of citizenship in young people from an early age. Members also noted the challenges in terms of lack of resources, availability of teachers, and teacher training – it was acknowledged that European institutions ought to do more to provide resources to Member states. It was particularly noted how the Ambassador Schools Programme and Erasmus+ ought to be expanded. Members also outlined the importance of hearing the voices of young people regarding issues that affect them. To this end, the Joint Committee will continue to actively seek to engage with young people.

APPENDIX 1 – Members of the Delegation from the Joint Committee



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