

"The soul of Europe is culture"

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Speech by Mrs. Doris Pack, Chairperson of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament.

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(Extracts)

I will start by some comments on what has been already said at this conference.

I would like to point out, first of all, that the European Union would never become a state; there would be fury if it would. The EU is - so to say - a coalition of states and they are sharing a common border, common interests and the right to share the power into different fields where the power has to be shared. When these projects of globalization are evoked, what comes to my mind is that we all simply have to keep in mind what the real situation is.

When I started my political career I was a federalist on the European level. I wanted a European State – forget about the nations. Today it is different.

We should keep in mind that the EU is the only guarantee for preserving the different cultural identities and this means that there is not one European culture, there are thousands of European cultures and each deserves to be kept. And the only guarantee for this is the fact that EU doesn't have one culture, which is shadowing everything, but it is a pool in which all these cultures can live together and exchange – we exchange, we know each other. That's my conviction of EU and I think you should share it because this is something that the people will understand. You don't take anything away; I'm still what I have been and where I've been born, where I'm living: I'm coming from Saarland, close to the French border, I'm a German, and I'm a European. And I think everything is like a Russian puppet – everything is in.

And it is only kept like this thanks to the fact that the EU heads us to do so.

After the enlargement in 1997 I was invited to Sweden by the Saami people, living in the north. They invited us to tell us their "thank you" just because they had become members of the EU. New opportunities were opened for them, including financial, to get in touch with the rest of the countries and people and to preserve their rich cultural heritage.

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I think it shows that when you go deeper, you discover that the EU deserves really the respect of everybody because it keeps our future; it's not only my future, the future of my kids, my grandkids. It's the future of everybody living in the Union. Even outside. And therefore each politician should be, deeply in his heart, European – because without the EU, you can forget about the future of the kids and the grandkids.

So this should enter as a spirit, and it is not in.

The phenomenon of the EU is that we have suffered its creation and development ourselves. And we have achieved. I can remember when I started - I'm now an old-fashioned parliamentarian, I've been for 33 years in the Parliament: 20 in the European and the rest in the German body. In between are the facts – my kids, my grandkids, living in the European Union, do not know what this Union looked like before. They do not know what the luxury of this Union is; they do not know the reasons why they should keep it and if they don't keep it, what will happen.

So I think this is what we should do – restore the memory. Here I can see the necessary contribution of everybody in the Union: of all NGOs, of all politicians. I think we need institutes like the one you have – the European Institute. In addition, there exist a number of similar institutions such as the Europe Direct network, the European Commission delegations and representations, and many others. If these function effectively, these centers should be the place where you can really get some inputs and you can have people to organize a lot of things.

Now I come to my speech.

During this conference, you had a broad discussion I have just listened to about the future of the EU policies for the citizens – you have outlined different fields. I think that, in order to develop an EU education so that obviously the largest possible number of citizens could benefit from it, we have to make visible what we are doing.

And can you imagine what we are doing to help citizens to understand what is done for them? Most of the people of all of our countries do not know – well, perhaps not you here.

Although the EU action in the fields of culture, of education, of youth and citizenship is among the most popular, still these activities remain unknown in a sufficient degree. They are the most widely known, but nevertheless they are not as known as they should be. I don't need to mention the Erasmus programme but I do it. That is the best known programme. But it is only for one part of the citizens and we have now 2 million students; we have town-twinning supported by the EU, financed by the European Citizens' Programme; we have the European Voluntary Service, which was mentioned. Or we have the European Capital of Culture – I just met the minister of Culture because in the year 2019 Bulgaria has arrived to have a Capital of Culture. We have the Media programme which supports the European films to become successful throughout Europe. All these actions and programmes are designed with the objective to bring people together, to make Europe known to its citizens.

All the European programmes, including those which are less popular – and I will come back to

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them in a while – are proven for their efficiency and well established. Some of them are third generation of existence. They all have a clear added value, which is widely acknowledged.

Yes, some European citizens might be skeptical or raise many unpleasant questions when it comes to the European aid to farmers – and I can understand this. However they do not really criticize the usefulness of the Erasmus, of Comenius, of Erasmus Mundus, which is widening to go to East and towards third countries; neither do they criticize the Media Mundus, which is helping films to cross the borders of our European Union countries.

The budget of the Erasmus programme is the highest known one, is very much limited. There was a difficult choice to make between giving smaller grants to more students or sending fewer students abroad with higher grants. Similarly, agencies managing the European voluntary services, financed by the “Youth in Action” programme are often unable to satisfy the high demand on participation. So, we need money, as somebody said at your conference.

But the money doesn’t come from me, it doesn’t come from the Parliament, it doesn’t come from the Commission. It comes from the different Member States – from Mr. Borisssov, Ms Merkel, Mr. Sarkozy, etc.; and we are just waiting for the next financial perspective.

You see how it is – everybody speaks of the Lisbon Process, they all speak on knowledge; they all speak on education on Sunday and on Monday they don’t find the money. Therefore everybody, wherever he or she is working should encourage the national government to give more money in the financial perspective for the next programmes.

The European Commission has also launched some new initiatives – we have a Green paper on learning ability for all young people or the youth on the move, we have the learning ability not only for young people, but also for elderly ones. The new Strategy 2020 needs to continue strongly on this way. The reinforcement of mobility should not be limited to the younger generation only. This week there was a meeting in Brussels for the opening of the Adult learning activities and I think we need to have mobility also under the Grundtvig programme. It means that elderly people – adults – who can’t go on should go on, because they have to see what actually means to be a European – in order to give it back to the kids and the grandkids. Well, at least I think so. This would also contribute to their own social inclusion.

In this field, it is the European Parliament who takes the decisions – we have the legislative power over the European programmes, concretely when it comes to culture and education, media, youth and citizenship.

From next year on, however, we need to struggle hard to get some money we need for all this.

Therefore I hope very much that we will have a lot of collaborators and supporters in this battle – to achieve the goal of instrumentalizing the possibilities through the national parliaments and national governments, who are the donors. For this, the success of the programmes is a good argument.

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I was here, in Sofia two years ago. There was a meeting on the eTwinning activities. There were thousands of young people coming from all over Europe, working together in eTwinning and new tools of computers, which give a lot of chances for school classes to work together. They have become friends and different schools from Finland, Estonia to Portugal and Bulgaria have established good relations.

We have to empower people to include themselves into societies. And this is hard work, especially for adults. You know that we have 50% of pupils to leave the school only without any skill. That's a problem and we should tackle it. It is a problem for the actual situation but for the further generations as well, having in mind the demographic situation. So, we have really to make it possible that everybody has a good education because education system and the labour market must be linked in one way or another.

It is absolutely crucial to invest into knowledge, in competences, in skills and in the creativity of the European citizens. Once again, for this there should be a higher budget. I can only tell you that we have per year, listen – EUR 880 million per year on subsidies only for fruit and vegetables. And 1 400 million are dedicated to all – education, youth, culture and citizenship. It is incredible. 800 for food and vegetables and 1 400 for all these programmes, which are not the original policy of the EU but where the EU can give a lot of input to strengthen the mobility, the cross-bordering coming together, to strengthen the European identity.

Now we have, as I said, to make it clear that the national level has to be much more included and under the Lisbon Treaty the national parliaments have to do their work. They can no longer say, "So Brussels did". No. They have to say, "Yes, we have worked with it", and if not, they should say, "We can't blame them". They can no longer hold anybody guilty for anything that is happening in the EU. The national parliaments are involved thanks to the Lisbon Treaty and I think that now we have the chance to make them even more European than they have ever been – through pushing on them; because they have to do their work.

It is true – the Member States are cooperating in education very intensively because they have an open cooperation policy, which means that they are working on a voluntary basis on different projects. I have nothing against this but sometimes it would be better to involve the parliaments – the European Parliament or another one. Let us look at the Bologna process – yes, it has been done without any parliamentary involvement and you can see the result. Crazy. Especially the German.

Now I come to the future generation of programmes.

I would like to mention some ideas for further development. I will give an example with the situation of teachers, that's one of our recent problems – I mean the barriers to participating into teacher mobility activities. These obstacles stem from organizational problems or because of the reluctance from the part of their home school. My Committee has recently commissioned a research to look deeper into the reason for non-participation and to find solutions for reducing this kind of barriers.

If we don't have teachers who are real Europeans, how we have pupils that will become real Europeans?

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And what does it mean, to be European: some would say, "to love the European Union" and "to understand its institutional framework";.

No, the institution is not all. Yes, it is needed in Bulgaria, in France, in Germany but the content of the idea is not "institution". You cannot make the people love the institution. You cannot make the people love the Commission or the Council.

But you can make them involved and attracted by a vision.

Politicians without vision are not convincing. Pay attention: those who have no conviction will never convince you. So please keep in mind that you have to have a vision and this vision means to bring these European values forward and to base all our politics on these common values. And therefore I think we have to work on this.

In the next programmes we must provide opportunities for the teachers. As I said before, we need to have mobility in the Grundtvig programme, which is adult learning programme.

And then, as it was mentioned here during your conference, the bureaucratic workload on the application process is really something which is not good. I can understand those small NGOs, or even a small village, if it wants to take part in Comenius or in other programmes, it can not do it because it has to fill in a lot of papers like this, at least to get nothing or get perhaps 20 000 or 10 000 Euros. It is not correct. Bureaucrats and financial frame are very difficult. You know, these small NGOs, they are – how to say – they are put on the same level as – how to say – industry, which gets 200 million money as support. Same procedures apply regardless of the amount.

Coming back to what I started with, the EU programmes in the areas of education, culture, youth and citizenship are among the most successful and most widely accepted and I think we should really strengthen them - on the way to 2020 it becomes even more important.

Let tell you something which is very close to my heart because I am very much interested in film and culture. Perhaps you know about Wim Wenders – he is very European, he is often giving speeches and, on one occasion, I can remember him saying: "Listen, what did the Europeans do to make Europe visible? Americans promote their way of life via the films. You are watching them. And where are the European films, in which the European stories are told?"

The European films are not spread because they are not produced in a language which can be understood everywhere in the EU. The remedy here is the Media programme but its scope is not sufficient. I am proud that with two other colleagues, from the Left and from the Greens, we gave birth to an idea. Three years ago we created a film prize of the European Parliament. All our colleagues participate in the jury watching the films and awarding the winners. I was pushing my colleagues like a teacher, "Did you see the film, did you?" and bringing them to the special film-room in the Parliament to watch the three films, chosen by an outside jury and then give our votes for one of them. It was great. This is a contest for films with a European agenda.

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I will tell you the plots of the three films, presented this year – only to give you an idea of what I mean. One of the films was Bulgarian and Swedish, I think, and the second was a German co-production. The first film reveals the situation of young people today – with drugs, with racism, it's not a special Sofia-Bulgaria thing, not something typical but a common phenomenon everywhere. The other film was applauded, a French film, which shows the story of a young Afghan who came from Afghanistan via Iran, via Macedonia – I don't know, Bulgaria too perhaps – to join his girlfriend; a 17-year-old boy joining his girlfriend in London. And arrives in Calais and there he is. And the situation of Calais, of the migrants, of the asylum seekers, is incredible. And this film is very, very strong. And it is not only Calais. The same happens in Malta, it happens in Sicily, it happens in Spain – all the countries where people are coming in. It happens less in Germany because we do not have external borders. The problem of the asylum seekers and the story in it – it was a great movie.

The producers of the Bulgarian movie were also there. Everybody came to see the film in the Parliament.

And this film is subtitled in all the European languages. Can you imagine? This gives a huge distribution possibility – until Estonia, until Finland, Bulgaria; the film which was in French and English is now subtitled in 21 other languages. And this gives this film, this European story a widespread audience. This is the idea behind – only to show what helping Europe to be seen and listened to, would mean. The stories in these films are very European. Also I think that this is a little edition for the European Parliament itself, because it comes from our money, our daily money from the Parliament to organize this initiative.

Well, it was a little away from the actual discussion but I wanted to show you that the culture in Europe should play a bigger role. The soul of Europe is culture. And the vision has something to do with culture. Not with its internal market, not with the Euro; I think the other thing is much more, how to say – luxurious and you should keep it and you should find people to disseminate it.

Thanks you very much.