



ESCWE NEWSLETTER

No. 43 | December 2014

The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

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Report on the ECSWE Conference in Belgium

19th – 21st September 2014, Brussels and Court-Saint-Étienne

Marinka Špodnak



A late summer morning. It was going to be a sunny day. A fresh breeze was blowing, and the early birds were waiting for the other colleagues in front of the Willy Brandt Building, which is located in Brussels' European quarter. Straight lines, surfaces of stone and glass. Everything was huge.

Many representatives to ECSWE were visiting the EU capital for the first time. The first day offered a variety of EU-related activities inside several buildings of the European Parliament. After an impressive multimedia exhibition on the history, the variety of EU members and the functioning of the European Institutions, we

entered the main building, where we saw many halls, stairs and beautiful sculptures.

During our visit to the Plenary chamber, our Lithuanian guide Ringaile Razauskiene gave us a good overview on the work of the European Parliament, the ongoing business after the recent European elections and the upcoming hearings of the Commissioners designate. Later, Katharina Rieke, Assistant to Sabine Verheyen, EPP, Germany and Dániel Fehér, assistant to Tamás Meszerics, Greens/EFA, Hungary, briefly introduced the day-to-day routine in an MEP's office and their perspective on the Commission hearings.



Our first official Council session was held in one of the hundreds of EU meeting halls. We also visited the new ECSWE office in Rue du Trône 194, led by our friendly and organized new colleague, Georg Jürgens, a former Parliamentary assistant to Gerald Häfner, Greens/EFA, Germany. Great!

In the afternoon we saw the old part of Brussels: it waited for us as an old good friend with all its restaurants, chocolate shops, Belgian

waffles, delicious food, famous Cupid fountains, its Music Museum, and the beautiful St. Michael and Gudula Cathedral. We were told that on the other side of Brussels there are ghettos populated by different nationalities of the world and it is sometimes dangerous to cross their borders. Not too far from Brussels are the plains of Waterloo, which are still echoing nearly five hundred years of history from the big split in this European region after Charles V's abdication, as well as the years of struggle known as the age of William of Orange. Today, northern Flanders and southern Wallonia are part of Belgium and they are trying to find ways to prevent the division of the country. The German part is in the shadow of this contemporary split. Isn't it surprising that the idea of the EU-community took its roots just in this region!?

On Saturday and Sunday ECSWE was warmly welcomed by the Steiner School in Court-Saint-Étienne and our sweet, strong colleague Senta. This well settled school is in the Wallonian part of Belgium, some 30 kilometers south of Brussels. The Waldorf schools in this part haven't got a federation yet and thus no representatives and financial and political rights in the educational domain, which are specific for the French part of Belgium. Flanders' Waldorf community by contrast is organized in a federation; they participate in many formal and informal associations. For more interesting details contact [Senta](#), [Margareta](#) and [Hans](#), and visit the link <http://www.steinerscholen.be>

The ECSWE Project on School readiness was discussed. This project aims at collecting information about the standards in ECSWE countries/regions concerning the early childhood settings and elementary school education, with the emphasis on the school entrance regulations. A survey for ECSWE members has been prepared, so, the plan is to develop a database for the next meeting in January. Furthermore, the mandate of the Diploma project group up to the next Council meeting was defined. As usual, two national associations presented the current situation of the Waldorf

movement in their countries: Ukraine and the UK. The varieties of the Waldorf movement worldwide created a fresh and supportive mood once again.

ECSWE conferences are usually adorned by reports of important permanent guests in the Council: various institutions who work in similar directions and aspirations. This time, Walter Hiller presented the latest developments in the Software AG Stiftung.



Apart from this, Clara Aerts, the representative of our partner IASWECE, pointed out the importance of informing people about and preparing them for the forthcoming International Conference "Transitions in Childhood" (Dornach, March 30 to April 3, 2015; see link http://www.iaswece.org/news/upcoming_conferences_and_events.aspx). This conference will give insights and inspirations for more co-work of Waldorf kindergarten and school teachers who surround child's naturally non-segmented development.

Furthermore, Tonnie Brounts, the representative of the European Network for Academic Steiner Teacher Education (ENASTE) informed us about their work: supporting “collaboration of all European universities and educational institutes offering academic accreditation for their Waldorf teacher education programs “ (www.enaste.com). ENASTE supports others who aim toward accreditations, as well as research of Waldorf Education. The next ENASTE-Congress: “Transformations. Education in a Rapidly-Changing World” will take place in Vienna from May 14th -16th 2015.

And “Zucker kommt zuletzt” in this EU-Mood Conference, former MEP Gerald Häfner, Greens/EFA, visited us to address ECSWE. He brilliantly inspired everyone to undertake focused work and activities on EU level in order to proactively assure better public understanding of Waldorf Education, especially the right to freedom in the educational sphere, lobby work and co-work with various organizations which are interested in the children’s well-being.

Many thanks to the Board, which had meetings before, during and after the conference, and to our Belgian colleagues, who hosted the Conference in Brussels. Well done!

We left this European region where Rhine, Scheldt, and Meuse meet so closely, with so many challenging and inspiring experiences and tasks. What will be different in Oslo in January?

Gerald Häfner's address to ECSWE

21st September 2014, Court-Saint-Étienne

Summary: Georg Jürgens



ECSWE was honoured to welcome former MEP Gerald Häfner at the last Council meeting in Brussels and Court-Saint-Etienne. Häfner, a former Waldorf teacher and founding Member of the German Greens, was invited to speak on decision -making in Brussels. His presentation consisted of a general part covering European Integration and the European law-making process and a more specific input covering Educational Policy and potential fields of activity for ECSWE.

His initial analysis of European Integration and EU decision-making gave a critical account of the European political sphere. Although the European Parliament gained considerable strength throughout the past few decades, European Integration was mainly driven by governments and economy. The executive branch negotiated agreements, while parliaments had no real say on the content. Even nowadays, the European Parliament depends largely on the European Commission's right to initiate the legislative process.

And even the regular involvement of the European Parliaments does not necessarily ensure a transparent and democratic procedure. The ordinary legislative procedure is often bypassed by the popular fast-track procedure, which aims at quicker and more efficient decision-making in so-called first-reading agreements. Häfner expressed his deep concern about this trend which comes at the price of negotiations behind closed doors in which only few MEPs are involved.

He raised the question, how to organise policy-making in a polity consisting of 28 countries without serious if unintended side effects. Looking at the enormous output of new EU-policies, he suggests less legislation at the EU level. The EU's role should more often consist of setting goals while allowing for different and individual ways to reach them nationally. Häfner labels this idea as a "polyphonic Europe", which "profits from its variety". The goal should be compatibility of legal systems as opposed to unified legal systems.

In Educational Policy, harmonization was of course never the case. However, the EU still has augmented rights and possibilities to intervene through different instruments. The approach is to evaluate what works and what does not work and to offer a framework allowing learning from each other. Even this very gentle and cautious mode of politics has imminent dangers, as there is the tendency of creating a variety of expert groups without a political

mandate. The people involved tend to long for more power and to get more grip on national education through the European sphere.

According to Häfner, the first phase of the policy making process offers the biggest potential for influence and makes it crucial for stakeholders to be present in Brussels and to take part in the stakeholder hearings and consultation organised by the European Commission. To be involved, it is crucial to create and work with a network of partners, which disseminates information and formulates and implements common strategies.

In the European Parliament, the CULT committee is a potential access point, but, apart from European funding schemes, it rarely decides on educational matters. The Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee offer more arenas for civil society to get involved, although their political influence is even more limited.

However, most of the relevant arenas are not located in the spotlight: The European Commission outsources many activities to agencies and networks such as the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) or the EURIDYCE Network, which provides valuable information and analyses European education systems and policies. Apart from this the Commission also creates thematic working groups, on important topics like Early Childhood Education and Care, Early School Leaving and the Professional Development of Teachers.

The Commission also tries to encourage change and activities by funding relevant projects. EU programmes such as ERASMUS+, and the Europe for Citizens programme provide a variety of funding options. Apart from the Commission, the Parliament is involved in defining and implementing the programmes and is therefore an important access-point for advocacy in this special field.

Looking at the variety of possible arenas, projects and access points

the necessity of being present in Brussels became more than obvious. Gerald Häfner considered it as imperative to build strong links, partnerships and friendships with people in the European Institutions, other NGOs and expert groups. This could best be achieved by working with the various well-connected platforms in Brussels such as EUCIS-LLL, Eurochild, and the QoC Working Group in the European Parliament.

If necessary, it may be valuable to call on someone who is capable of negotiating on a higher level while in between it is important to have someone on the ground in the ECSWE office. A good starting point might be to evaluate, who in the European Commission and the Parliament might in any sense be connected to Waldorf schools or Anthroposophy. In the Parliament sometimes one person can change the whole direction of a policy initiative. We should make MEPs aware of and friends with ideas of anthroposophy and Waldorf education.

Häfner also suggested organising a congress or a big event on freedom in education. The aim would be to not only look into freedom from state intervention, but also the freedom from economic interests. Possible partners might be the European Forum for Freedom in Education (effe), the Alliance for Childhood and – in specific areas – the Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum.

Apart from this, he recommends defining two or three concrete goals to serve as guidelines for the Advocacy work of the next few years.

Domestic report Ukraine

20th September 2014, Court-Saint-Étienne

Julia Kolinichenko



Schools and kindergartens

In Ukraine there are 4 well-established Waldorf schools of which 3 are public and one is private. They cover all the grades from 1 – 11. Apart from this a new and small initiative exists since September 2014. There are around 15 kindergartens, 5 of them are within the schools, while the others are separate.

The biggest school is located in the capital, Kiev. They have 14 classes with 308 students. The fullest one is located in Dnepropetrovsk: 348 students in 12 classes (2 classes 3). Odessa has the smallest school, which is private and currently counts 102 students in 10 classes. Both the schools in Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk

are very popular among parents, but due to insufficient space, they cannot accept all the incoming applications.

The State and the Waldorf schools

Ukrainian students have to pass the state exams at the end of class 9 and class 11. The content of the examination papers is defined by the state, but there is a little room for adaptations to the Waldorf curriculum in order to relieve some of the pressure on the pupils. The schools and kindergartens are approved by the Ministry; they have successfully finished the experiment to legalize the features of the Waldorf curriculum, such as main lesson, a class teacher from class 1 to 8, no grades until class 9 and no textbooks, as well as more art and crafts

The financial situation of Steiner Waldorf schools

The public schools get funding from the government, but have to ask parents for a surcharge for special stationery, craft materials, equipping and keeping the school building. From time to time they also receive additional donations from parents, which help the school to support teachers and families in need. This does not solve the problem of low wages for teachers, who often have to rely on side jobs. The only private school is in severe difficulties because of lack of money and students.

Teacher training

The first teacher training was organized in Odessa about 17 years ago. It was a seminar for class-teachers. Then the seminar for subject teachers was established in Dnepropetrovsk. After some years the two courses held joint sessions in Dnepropetrovsk. Similar trainings were organized in Kiev and, now and then, trainings for upper school are offered. 5 years ago it became impossible to get funding for all of them from IAO. In order to adapt to the situation,

class-teacher seminars were united and during 3 years students have 4 sessions. Each school keeps the first year school-based bringing together motivated and students. Afterwards the sessions migrate from one city to another. Thus, while studying, the students visit every working school twice and meet the college in work. The seminar has a non-official status and its diploma is only accepted in Waldorf circles.

There are about 40 students at each seminar course; up to 25 of them receive diploma-certificates. The problem of lacking remains however, for only a few people start their career at schools after their studies.

Association of Waldorf Initiatives in Ukraine

The AWIU was initially established by the authorities to administer the schools. Now it consists of working teachers who work voluntarily and gratuitously and perform the following functions:

- Communication and support between the schools
 - Interschool projects (Olympic Games, Middle-ages Ball, Theatre Fest)
 - Subject teacher-trainings
 - Class-teacher seminars
 - Anthroposophy meetings
- Supporting of new initiatives
- Collaboration with educational authorities
 - Curriculum writing (even Eurythmy, Gardening and Forms drawing)
 - Maintenance of the status 'experimental schools' in Waldorf institutions
 - Accompanying the class-teacher seminars
 - Anthroposophy meetings
 - Collaboration with pedagogical University
- Representation in international organizations

- Publications

Political situation

It is very difficult for the ordinary people to define the cause of the conflict, for there was no antagonism between the folks either inside the country or outside it until this great flow of propaganda started its influence. Now the seeds of enmity planted by media grow and people are getting involved in the political games. Confrontation sometimes takes place even inside the families.

Trying to keep the students from feelings of opposition we, in Dnepropetrovsk, in the Russian-speaking area of Ukraine, continue preparing concerts for the partner school in Germany, with Russian folk songs and dances, within the framework of cultural exchange.

We do hope our children will be peaceful, proud of their country and able to bring it to the worthy level of development to become a respectable member of the European community.

Brief report on the latest QoC sessions in the European Parliament

9th September and 18th November 2014

Margareta van Raemdonck / Georg Jürgens



The Alliance for Childhood frequently organises Working Groups on the Quality of Childhood (QoC) in the European Parliament, bringing together MEPs, researchers and stakeholders. These meetings aim at a better understanding of the Quality of Childhood in the EU member states. Apart from merely getting to grips with the values, principles and approaches that could lead to improvements for children, they also intend to get a sense of how to move on. ECSWE regularly attends the meetings of the QoC Working Group.

Currently the following Members of the newly elected Parliament have committed themselves to be part of the group: Anna Hedh, S&D, Sweden, Kostas Chrysogonos, GUE/NGL, Greece, Karin Kadenbach, S&D, Austria, József Nagy, EPP, Slovakia, Laurentiu Rebeaga, S&D, Romania, Evelyn Regner, S&D, Austria and Julie Ward, S&D, UK. Julie Wards was the host of the 48th and the 49th QoC Sessions, which took place 9th September and 18th November.

48th QoC Session, 9th September 2014

Developing inclusive systems across Education, Health and Social sectors for early school leaving prevention

Julie Wards, the host of this session, used to work as an artist and theatre worker before becoming an MEP. Her work in an artist cooperative confronted her with the problem of early school leaving even before youth unemployment became a large scale political issue. Her cooperative often "picked up" those dropping out of. The biographies she was confronted with triggered her personal interest in moments of transition in peoples life and in their implications for mental health. Since then, she is convinced that a holistic approach is necessary to tackle the problem of early school leaving and its mental health implications. Therefore she was honoured to host this session.

Before the main speaker Dr. Paul Downes from Dublin University presented his findings on *Developing inclusive systems across Education, Health and Social sectors for early school leaving prevention*, Christopher Clouder, briefly presented alarming figures from the new UNICEF report "[hidden in plain sight](#)" on the problem of violence against children. He sees a significant correlation of domestic violence and early school leaving. His speech ended with an appeal to all participants to not look away, reminding them: "we are all activists."

Paul Downes' research focuses on systemic blockages leading to early school leaving and tries to develop strategies to overcome these problems in order to prevent students from leaving school. His findings suggest that the main reasons for early school leaving observed on the systemic level are communication problems, mental health issues, suspension and exclusion, fragmentation, and lacking parental involvement.



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At best, early school leavers are interviewed, when it is too late, while hearing their voices at an earlier stage would be necessary to tackle the problem. They often refer to problems with teachers such

as violence, offensive language, a punitive approach to classroom management and unfair treatment. According to Downes, the EP could support a better communication process through developing a “quality mark” for listening to students’ voices.

Mental health issues also tend to have a negative impact on school success and general well-being, which often coincides with living in low-income families. Parental involvement with their children’s education is also clearly lacking. In these cases, interventions targeting the cause of the problems are crucial, such as bullying prevention, offers of therapy or home visits.

Suspension rates are also predictive of school dropout rates. To tackle early school leaving, preventive measures should be taken instead. This can be achieved by offering special care and support for students with a high-risk of exclusion or suspension.

Considerable progress may also be achieved by addressing local rivalries and conflicts among schools, involved agencies and municipalities. Community services should therefore operate in neutral spaces and offer multidisciplinary teams to minimise fragmentation. They should engage in early intervention to tackle nonattendance, trauma and bullying Partnerships between schools may however significantly increase learning motivation. This also means democratization of school as opposed to school as exercise of the state’s power over subjects.

The ensuing discussion looked into several of the proposed measures. As for the operation of the multidisciplinary teams, the subsidiarity principle should be applied in order to tackle the problem on the lowest level possible.

Christopher Clouder focused on the importance of a holistic approach to education, allowing for self-expression of the child through arts. He described schools as a network of relationships and as “learning societies” and stated that standardised approaches

are likely to fail because each school is different. He believes in leading by example, exchange of experiences and mutual inspiration.

Julia Wards finally wrapped up the meeting by thanking everyone for their contributions and expressing that she is very interested in the work of QoC. As she had trouble in school herself (“school failed me”), she is now very interested in ways of rethinking school and in successful practical examples.

49th QoC Session, 18th November 2014

The Mental Health Situation of Children and Young People in the European Union: What is the Current Situation and What could be done?”

On the European and International level several studies have been conducted¹ to look into the public health situation of children and young people, which also include the topic of mental health. The various stakeholders in these studies developed together the contours of a methodology to look into the subject. Surveys based on self-reporting about the mental well-being of boys and girls provided a certain insight into the situation in the various EU member states. It has been found that

- mental well-being is decreasing systematically for both boys and girls as they get older, from 11 to 13 and subsequently 15 years of age.
- social support is significantly associated with better mental well-being.

¹ Health Behavior in School-aged children by the WHO (<http://www.who.int/en>); The Kidscreen Study (<http://www.kidscreen.org/english>); Eurobarometer (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm); The Riche report: A Report on Roadmaps for the Future of Child Health Research in Europe. See for more information: www.childhealthresearch.eu.

- high family affluence is also significantly associated with higher rates of mental well-being.
- young people from wealthy countries are more likely to experience high level of mental well-being.
- higher levels of youth unemployment rates are associated with lower mental health.
- higher annual expenditures on public and private educational institutions per pupil / student are associated with higher levels of mental well-being.

The Riche Study concluded however that there is still a considerable knowledge gap in the area of wellbeing and mental health, as well-established indicators are lacking. The current focus is too much on illness instead of wellness and on physical instead of mental health. Instead of distress and mental health problems, future studies should focus on factors contributing to positive mental health in children and young people and developing indicators of well-being for all age groups, especially younger children. DG Research of the European Commission took up this proposal by launching the ROAMER project²

Professor Dr. Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer from the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany, gave some insight in the research findings stated above. Important to notice is that on the one side the health of children has generally improved in the last decades but on the other hand there's a dramatic shift towards more chronic conditions. At the same time somatic and mental health problems are increasing.

We then looked into disorders and ill mental health. We tend to forget the resources children have themselves to recover. Strengthening the children's well-being is very important to prevent lifelong damage. It is important to talk about the well-being of

² Please consult www.roamer-mh.org for further information.

children in a continuum. If the social status is low the individual well-being reported of the children is also low. Strong social support is very important for well-being. There are also studies around the effect of environmental factors such as air pollution, noise pollution etc. Children need especially to be loved and to live in security. How to change the policy in order to enable families to give the right things to their children?

The Post-QoC Sessions on Learning for Well-being

Each QoC session is followed by a closed session of a smaller group of dedicated participants. The last two sessions both focused on the [Learning for Wellbeing](#) project initiated by the [Universal Education Foundation](#). The current work on L4WB indicators is based on the content of the brochure [Learning for Well-being: The Essentials](#). Meta-indicators are derived from the principles of Learning for Well-being, thereby exploring 'What matters' before attempting to 'measure what matters' through indicators. Seven meta-indicators are presently being used:

- Processes matter as well as outcomes;
- Diverse perspectives and multiple expressions must be embraced;
- Engagement and participation should be as widespread as possible;
- Positive relationships between children and adults should reflect mutual respect between competent partners;
- People's individual gifts and distinctive life purposes deserve full recognition;
- Environments need to facilitate self-organization as well active working across sectors;
- Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual developments are lifelong processes and include the capacity to make decisions.

Currently there is the possibility that L4WB indicators can be added to investigations of the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children. Indicators provide means whereby a consensus can be developed with partners through a common language that allows issues to be raised in an open way.

ECSWE is exploring possible ways of cooperation with the Learning for Well-being project. Possible fields of activity might be new approaches to student assessment and research into the consequences of the increasing trend towards technology-based education.



ECSWE
Rue du Trône 194
1050 Brussels
Belgium

info@ecswe.net
www.ecswe.net

Registered in Brussels.
AISBL 898.707.869

*The views expressed are those of the writers
and are not necessarily those of ECSWE.*

ECSWE Newsletter is produced by [Georg Jürgens](#).
Design by Žiga Vuk - www.zzicg.net.