



February 2016

Chamber of Deputies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Meeting of the Secretaries General of the European Union Parliaments

Luxembourg, 14 and 15 February 2016

Background Notes

Session III : Role of Parliaments in citizenship education

In order to enhance fundamental democratic values and to foster social cohesion in a context of increasing and social diversity, citizens of European countries need to engage in social and political life. However, to get involved and participate more, citizens must have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude. Citizenship education is essential to any democratic society and contributes to strengthen the democratic values and the rule of law. Civic competences equip citizens to fully participate in the life of society and their development should be a priority of Parliaments of the European Union. In 2010, member states of the European Union unanimously adopted the **Charter of the Council of Europe on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**¹.

Parliaments, being the place in which the system of **representative democracy** plays its full task, have a **key role in citizenship education**. Parliaments are the link between voters and the political world, and they have all interest to participate in citizenship education by explaining and contributing to a better understanding of the political system. Indeed, by opening themselves to the outside, Parliaments can help prevent indifference and disinterest.

Citizenship education should lay out the issues, the motivations of various actors and the multiple stages of the decision-making process. However, it is essential that citizens have **equal opportunities** to inform themselves and to participate in political and public life. Therefore, the information and communication issued by Parliaments should be **easily accessible to all citizens**. Furthermore, Parliaments' efforts in this domain need to be continuous. In this connection, it would also be relevant if Parliaments would inform citizens about the different means at their disposal to participate in political debates: paper and online petitions, discussion forum on the website, the European citizens' initiative etc. Parliaments have a vested interest in promoting general knowledge of citizens and their abilities to interact in politics because they will gain on legitimacy.

Citizenship education provided by Parliaments should be **complementary** to the one provided by school, family, political parties, trade unions, media or other informal training

¹<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016803034e3>



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bodies. It is important to emphasize that, even if Parliaments have a major role regarding citizenship education, they are only one actor among others. Through **guided tours/open days** of Parliaments or **debate-meetings** with parliamentarians, citizens have the opportunity to better understand the functioning of Parliament and get the chance to discuss and debate directly with the elected representatives of the people.

Concerning citizenship education for **young citizens**, Parliaments must find ways to better cooperate with schools or youth organisations, in order to foster youth engagement in society and to bring young people closer to politics. Indeed, the **practice of democracy within the school context** leads to a better comprehension of democracy and, later, greater participation in political life. **Youth organisations** and other **forms of discussion forums**, like for example Youth Parliaments, are a widespread tool and a classic way of citizenship education and youth participation. The added value of these youth organisations in citizenship education is important, since it can teach young people how to better articulate and express themselves, how to find consensus, how to reach collective decisions and how to develop concrete proposals. Moreover, it is essential that Parliaments take into account the demands and proposals elaborated by young citizens during these kind of exercises.

Citizenship education also uses modern means of communication (facebook, twitter, etc.). In today's digital world, Parliaments must keep up with the **new information technologies** in order to improve their communication and interaction with citizens.

Some points for discussion:

- By what means may Parliaments improve citizenship education?
- How can Parliaments better collaborate with the education system in order to further involve young citizens in political life?
- By what means may cooperation with other stakeholders (Ministries, youth organisations, etc.) be improved?
- How could Parliaments better use the new information technologies (facebook, twitter, website) to deepen their interaction and communication with citizens?