

Initiative of the ACC:

Project Description

The working title of the project is: "Development/EU Community College Course"

Summary.

The ACC (Association for Community Colleges) is going to carry through four-week community college courses each for 65 young Europeans engaged in NGO's. The aim of the courses is to create an awareness of the EU/European policies towards the developing countries in general and towards the ACP countries in specific. The first course will take place at a folk high school in Denmark from July 7th - August 4th 2002. It is our expectation that through the informal atmosphere at the school and the close personal contacts, which a stay at the school promotes, participants will obtain a unique understanding that goes beyond cultural, political, religious and linguistic barriers. The interpersonal relations created between young people from East and West, North and South are of utmost interest and importance of the events.

Background in general

Europeans have realized the existence of questions, which cannot be solved inside a system of states that all have sovereignty in all questions.

A certain development has characterised the history after the Second World War, which has meant that the sovereignty of each nation state has become looser and that discussions now take place in super-nation-states forums as well as in the nation-states forums. More and more people can now imagine a system of states less defined in accordance with national borders. The European capitals, former the centres of major decisions and discussions, now have to realize that they are both centres and peripheries. The discussions have not only moved horizontally (to Brussels, Strasbourg and in many other directions), but also vertically. Most of us are not participants in the definite discussions, since they are mostly run by professionals and officials that are not elected as our representatives and whose names we do not even know. Moreover, we do not know the parties discussing or the parties that our state-politicians meet in discussions. We do not know their viewpoints and we do not know the contexts of these viewpoints.

Those in power in this system (all the citizens entitled to vote) do not know, with whom they are actually talking. In such a system it is a permanent temptation for those in decision and for those giving voice to public opinion to make these mysterious unknown dialogue-partners into scapegoats and culprits in problems belonging in reality to domestic affairs. It is a necessity that the Europeans get to know much more about each other, that we understand the contexts of the viewpoints presented in the different forums and the backgrounds of the representatives of the different states. Furthermore it is very important that we understand what cultural values the populations of Europe want to preserve and to be respected. At the same time it is of big importance to discuss what values should be considered common among Europeans.

In short, a common European public and permanent discussion is needed. This "community" based on common questions should not only be a professional one. This is the general outlook of the ACC.

Background in specific:

The general outlook of the ACC is also highly relevant in relation to the European Union, its political system and its institutional management.

To a lot of Europeans, whether they are living inside or outside the European Union, the EU, its institutions, its offices and its bureaucracy seems like something very distant and confusing. As a common European you very easily get the feeling that EU is reserved for politicians and highly educated people who discuss and make decisions in closed forums. Getting knowledge about the EU, its policies and institutions is not a simple thing. The great mass of treaties, regulations, declarations etc. that form the foundations of the EU policies can easily discourage even the most committed non-professional student on EU. The general lack of knowledge about the EU constitutes a tremendous problem for the democratic development both in the union as a whole, in the present member states and in the candidate countries. Democracy implies public, common debates and discussions about values, goals, ideas etc. but these are to a considerably extent impeded by the fact that most people do not know what the debate is about or with whom they are discussing.

A special case in this wider context is the relationship between EU and the developing countries, the policy on which it is built and the institutions connected with it. Among many common people there is an alarming lack of knowledge when it comes to the role of the EU in the field of development. Most people do not know anything about the development funds within the EU, they do not know what countries, NGO's or institutions the EU supports or under which criteria.

This general lack of insight in the development policy of the EU is not only common among the population as a whole but also among many of the NGOs working within this field, with whom the EU states that it wants to cooperate. This means that many NGOs are not able to engage themselves in any debate about the EU policy on development. They get no appreciable influence, no share in funds and no chance to cooperate with the EU.

One of the aims of the Development/EU Community College Course is to start changing this state of affairs by putting the EU development policy and the related institutions and regulations on the agenda for discussions.

The object of the Development/EU Community College Course:

In order to let young people active in NGOs from all Europe become familiar with the EU policy on developing countries and with the possibilities of influencing these policies and of using related instruments (funds, programmes etc.), the ACC Development/EU Committee wishes to put these issues on the agenda of the Development/EU Community College Course, which will take place in the summer of 2002 at a Folk High School in Denmark.

The object of the course is not only to give each individual participant an understanding of and knowledge about the EU development policy and the related institutions and instruments but also to raise awareness of the fact that this is a common European topic. Development policies, whether related to the EU or to any other actor on the international scene, should not be discussed in closed forums in nation states or in offices in Brussels. The ACC Development/EU Committee hopes that through the strong personal contacts that participants will create during the course they will start cooperating on a common European level and not let their discussions be stopped by the old borders between nation states.

We expect this course to be the first of its kind. But we see it as an experiment, and aim at organizing similar courses in the future at different locations or at more institutions cooperating.

Target group.

It is crucial for us to find representatives of many European identities. We want the group constituting the "The Development/EU community college course" to be an international one and no parties should be no dominating. To ensure as broad an effect as possible, we will aim at getting a balanced representation from both genders, from many different nations and from North and South as well as from East, West and Central Europe.

Since the benefits of insight, influence and networking should not be limited to the present EU outer borders; it is of utmost importance to involve both EU- and NON-EU citizens in this project.

The participants will be selected in close cooperation with the local branches and members of the ACC, who together represent more than 25 different countries in Europe.

To participate English must be understood and spoken. We aim at receiving 65 participants.

The contents of the course.

The course will last for four weeks. Participation includes room and board at a Danish Folk High School.

Each participant will make a representation of his/her own NGO in order to ensure networking in the future

1) First week: General introduction to the EU-policy on Development

- Global political context of aims and tasks
- the Lomé Conventions, EU policy in relation to the ACP-countries and the history behind
- the Economical-political incentives and motives. Why is the EU engaged in development?
- EU-institutions active in the field/ EU structures and regulations in relation to development
- the European Development Fund
- Special priority areas for the EU: Poverty reduction, human rights, democracy, good governance etc.
- Relevant statistics

Different resource persons in this field will be invited to give lectures, among others the former Danish Minister for Development, Helle Degn.

In specific we will focus on the special opportunities that NGOs from all over Europe have in this field and how they can become catalysts in international cooperation across all borders.

2) Second week: Project and case related discussions

- Discussions about how European NGOs can benefit from networking on EU/development issues
- Development of guidelines on project management and fundraising
- Study of specific cases relevant to the participants
- Presentations of different project-experiences made both by participants and by resource persons.
- Introduction to instruments that can be used in the practical work with fundraising, public relations, communication with relevant authorities, participation in public discussions about EU and development etc.

Different resource persons will be invited to give instructions

The focus of this week will be practical and specifically related to NGOs.

3) Third week: Excursions

- visits will be made to relevant institutions (e.g. to the office of the EU Commission in Copenhagen and to DANIDA under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)
- visits will also be made to major NGOs in Denmark who will present their experiences with working with the EU (e.g. IBIS, MS, Folkekirkens Nødhjælp, AWE)
- if possible, visits will be made to relevant NGOs or institutions in the closest neighbouring countries of Denmark, i.e. Sweden or Germany.

4) Fourth week: Multiplying and collecting experiences

The participants will be divided into groups and work on different issues related to multiplying.

Group 1: The work will concentrate on collecting all the experiences made during the previous three weeks and put them in written form on the ACC homepage on the Internet. This will make it possible for other NGOs who did not participate to get an insight into the knowledge and experiences accumulated during the course.

Group 2: The work will concentrate on making contacts to the public media in Europe, i.e. writing articles for newspapers, contacting TV or radio stations etc.

Group 3: Here the work will concentrate on making specific guidelines for NGOs that want to work with development issues in relation to the EU: Which institutions are there in this field, which funds can be used etc. These guidelines will also be uploaded on the Internet.

Generally about the program:

It is our expectation that through the informal atmosphere at the school and the close personal contacts, which a stay at the school promotes, participants will obtain an understanding that goes beyond cultural, political, religious and linguistic barriers.

Timetable.

The first course is going to last for four weeks and will take place from July 7th – August 4th, 2002. We expect the course to be repeated in the following years.

Organizational elements.

One co-ordinator, Jette Nielsen, will be responsible for the carrying out and the planning of the course. Together with John Petersen, chairperson of the ACC, she and other resource persons constitute the *Development/EU committee* (in accordance with § 14 of the ACC statutes). The enterprise and the economical responsibility belong to the ACC.

The language of the course will be English

Financing.

We expect the project to be supported by Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke (Association for International cooperation), the EU Youth-programme, the Demokratifonden (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and ACC (Association for Community Colleges). Participants are expected to pay a fee themselves.

Multiplying effect.

As described above, the intention is that the participants will work specifically with issues related to multiplying in the last week of the course. As a result of this work, descriptions of the experiences obtained during the course as well as a specific guideline for all NGOs working with development in relation to the EU will be uploaded on the ACC homepage on the Internet. At the same time a group of participants will contact the public media of Europe and try to create an interest in the conclusions of the course.

In addition, the participants of the course are invited to be members of the ACC.

It is a main vision of ACC-members, most of which have already taken part in Community College Courses, that many more Europeans should have the chance of participating in an international/European course some time in her/his life. This is going to make it easier to establish another course in the following years and to take up new initiatives in the future.

Co-operators.

The course is carried through on ACC initiative. The ACC is a European organisation with members in many different European states. The ACC is cooperating with Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke, IBIS, FFD and AWE on this project.

The main recruitment of participants will be carried out in a close co-operation with the local branches of the ACC. We have representatives in more than 25 European countries.

ACC International programme office, November 2000

Jette Nielsen, project leader
ACC Development/EU-committee

John Petersen, chairperson of ACC