

Europe of Rights Community College (ERCC) 2004

Fundamental Rights, Citizenships and Identities in Changing Societies

Final Document

Preamble

A group of young Europeans, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, coming from seventeen countries, met for a two-week community college on human rights at Casa Cares, Reggello (Florence), Italy. This event, named the Europe of Rights Community College, was organized within the framework of the European NGO Association for Community Colleges. This document is an expression of the ideas shared by the participants.

The aim of this declaration is to clarify concepts and themes discussed during the lectures, workshops and debates. These topics were European identity, the role of religions in human rights and new rights, specifically focusing on sexual identity and bioethics.

The participants worked in three groups and each took one chapter to express, in the form of articles, the principles they considered most important.

The articles were then exchanged and discussed in the groups and proposals for amendments were presented by group representatives at a plenary session. Each proposal was discussed by all participants and a compromise was reached using the consensus method. In the end the whole document was one by which every participant could feel represented.

Chapter 1: European Identity

The following articles concern the vision of an identity of the citizens of the EU. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that citizens of other non-EU countries can share this identity.

Article 1

For democratic participation within the EU to function effectively it is essential to foster an identity shared by the citizens as well as a vibrant public sphere.

This identity should take its starting point from common values and principles, i.e. human dignity, freedom, equality in front of the law and solidarity based on the European Convention on Human Rights.

Article 2

European identity should be strengthened through a democratic system with common rights and adherence to the rule of law.

Article 3

The concept of European identity is emerging and in the process of creation. This vision should be fulfilled and should bring its fruits to future generations.

The identity of a future citizen should not be reserved to a small group of privileged individuals, but available and spread to everyone, including those who are on the margins of society.

Article 4

The idea of European identity is not based on a Europe as a unit in conflict with other units; there shall be no place for xenophobia or arrogant attitudes that we are more worthy or civilized than others.

The goal of European identity is not to define who is excluded, rather it aims to inspire others and thus include them in our community of values.

Article 5

In order to make this vision real European identity should be encouraged by:

- the creation of a space where citizens coming from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to meet each other, and
- the establishment of a framework for the communication of common concerns through multimedia and interpersonal communication among the peoples of Europe.

This policy should be carried out cautiously and with due regard to the dangers that are present in European society, i.e. the risk of instigating negative emotions towards the concept of European democracy and the possible harm that can be suffered by the diversity of the national identities present in the EU.

Article 6

It should be stressed that the concept of a European identity is dynamic and flexible. The ideas expressed above shall therefore serve as a framework for future debate.

Chapter 2: Religion and Rights

Article 7

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right involves the freedom to change religion or belief.

Article 8

Everyone has the duty to respect other religions and those who practise no religion.

Article 9

No one has the right to impose a religion or belief on another individual against his or her own will.

Article 10

Everyone has the right to practise their religion alone or in communities, in private and public spheres, as long as it does not violate public safety, health, morals, or the rights of individuals and does not inflict unnecessary suffering upon living creatures.

Article 11

State and religious institutions shall be separated. All states should be constitutionally secular.

However, all religions, beliefs and symbols shall be respected in state institutions without discrimination.

Article 12

All states shall take the necessary steps to eliminate discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of religion or belief.

Article 13

Multi-denominational education should form an essential component of all national curricula.

Chapter 3: New Rights

Sexual Orientation

Article 14

Each person has the right to freely express his or her sexual orientation and gender without being persecuted or discriminated against in public and social life.

Article 15

Civil and social rights shall be provided to each citizen on an equal basis.

Article 16

Each person has the right to marry and found a family on the basis of social equality.

Disabled People

Article 17

Each person shall have the right to be actively involved in public, professional and social life to the best of his or her abilities.

Article 18

The state shall guarantee full accessibility and mobility for all individuals in the public sphere and promote these principles in the private sphere.

Article 19

It is the responsibility of the state to encourage and ensure educational, political and social integration.

Bioethics

Article 20

Each person shall have the right to exert control over his or her own body except where this encroaches on the right of other people. The dignity and autonomy of each individual should always be respected even by the holder of these rights.

Article 21

Each person has the right not to be subject to medical experiments without his or her knowledge and consent.

Article 22

Each person who accepts to be a subject in an experiment has the right to be informed about all known consequences and protected from negative side effects.

Article 23

The state should regulate biotechnological research. Qualified ethics councils should be established and consulted for this purpose.

Article 24

Each person participating in biotechnological research has the right to anonymity.

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