

February 8th 1999

Dear 1997'ers, 1998'ers and others interested

Most of you received during christmas a letter including some few words about a new idea of Elly and me. We have received many letters and e-mails with comments on the idea, and we would like to thank you for it.

It wasn't really elaborated at that time, but now the idea begins to take shape.

As many of you know, I have been travelling around Europe for some time visiting a lot of you. The idea of these visits was to present our idea, as it is right now, and to try to find out, if you think it is an idea to make our network of contacts into something more permanent -an association.

I did not finish my travelling yet, so I still hope to see some of you in the following months.

I will try to write here, what I have presented until now in the Netherlands, the Basque country, France, Italy, Hungary, Transsylvania, Czechia and Slovakia:

Basically we think that you should not be the only one in Europe having the chance to meet citizens of all our neighbouring countries discussing some topic of common character. It would be an ideal to see every European some time in his/her life having a chance like you had. Now, we are of course not the only one thinking this. The very European political situation almost invites us to work on the realization of this dream. Why? Because we have in Europe a political and economical integration as our large political context. It is becoming more and more obvious, that the very lack in this context is that common Europeans do not know each other. The famous "man on the street" do not know the "men on the street" in his neighbouring countries. This is ok as long as every country is on its own in a political/economical sense. But we have another situation! East as well as west, north as well as south, we depend on each other, because our economies/policies are intertwined. The political life for example in the European Council, the OSCE, the EU etc. The economies simply because of commerce across borders and because of the Euro-construction.

It is important to avoid a situation of simultaneous interdependency and a public European life with no connections between the nations, cultures, language-groups, economical entities etc. Why? Because dialogue across state- and mental borders is the only civilized mean we have to avoid misunderstandings and to remove prejudices. The worse-case scenario being of course a situation, where politicians and medias can earn votes and sell papers on repeting commonly accepted myths and prejudices, and where they find themselves suddenly in a situation where they are obliged to their words, obliged to act in accordance with these words.

There is also a much more profane aim of learning to know each other better. At least in the EU-part of Europe, politicians have tried to create a more common labour-market. Apart from language-barriers the experiences are, the Europeans have some mental borders also, which prevents them from taking jobs in other countries. Demystification of

one another is necessary also to contribute to the solving of the unemployment problem and then a lot of other problems.

We think we could do our small contribution to establish more dialogue between the people of this continent. The very aim would be simply to establish more dialogue. The Europeanness should be the belonging to some common discussion, not the feeling of being European with exclusion of nowadays identities. Europeanness should not be established like the nationstates established themselves. You know, how it was done, through wars, through the covering of the landscapes with statues of national heroes, through the pursuing of those happening to be different and by assimilation tasks.

The lack of dialogue is not necessarily a problem to be dealt with by politicians. It can as well be dealt with by us, by the citizens of this continent, as many of you also have said during the courses. There is no reason for top-down solutions. Why not just practice the principle of subsidiarity instead of talking about it wondering what it is.

The first step to help establishing this common dialogue would be to found a more formal network. The nucleus of such an association could as well be the networks already existing between the 1997'ers, the 1998'ers and also the 1999'ers of the minority courses. This would be a strong beginning, since you and we know, what it means to join a common discussion and we are representing something close to all European countries. It would be very strong, because of representing all countries and because of the experiences in the groups.

So far we have called the association ETS, standing for Education Time Society. This is only an idea. Would you have a better one?

This is also why we would like to invite you this summer to take part in a founding general meeting. It will take place from 17-19th of July at a folk high school in Denmark called Askov Højskole. The minority course of this year will end at July 17th, so the participants of this 1999-course are also to be invited. Sometime just after this meeting, Siebren (1998'er) intends to organize a more social event in Frisia, so you can continue to Frisia just after the meeting. There is of course still lots of unsolved questions. First of all we are short of money, but we are working on it.

What would now be the more concrete aims of an association like this. We have until now at least four suggestions:

- 1) To take the most long-perspective and wild one first: As it is today, there is no permanent subsidies for a boarding-school system like the folk high schools on a common level. Why not try to convince the EU-system or the European Council that they need a Law on European Folk High Schools. The Danish Law or maybe the Swedish or Norwegian Laws could serve as models (As an inspiration I can send you an English translation of the Danish Law on Folk High Schools if you like).
- 2) The EU-commission is elaborating a new support-programme for adult education. We have reason to believe that the commission would like to have some discussion-partners in civil society when elaborating such programmes. We could offer ourselves as cooperational partners in such processes.

3) This would be a more short term and a more realistic ambition: The association could have the ambition of organizing more international courses dealing with questions of some common character. There would be many possibilities: environmental troubles, security policy, human rights questions (and minority/majority relations), economical relations etc.etc.

4) An aim would also be to secure the bonds established between you already, by securing an opportunity to meet sometimes.

Well, these were the words so far. There is still some work to be done, when it comes to the organizational structure, the elaboration of statutes etc.etc. This work is not done yet, and we would still like you to comment this very idea and to give us suggestions on everything.

We would also like to say that many things can change. In some weeks we will have a "inspirational" meeting with some journalists, historians, politicians and folk high school people. They might give us new inspirations and ideas on what is possible and what is not possible.

In the next newsletter I will tell you how these ideas were received at my journey around Europe and in the letters some have sent to us.

Best wishes
John

PS: Would you please give me a message back, that you did see this message. I would like to know, to whom I need to send this by common mail.