

MINUTES

of the round table „Europe in Dialogue with its Citizens” held on April 11th, 2008 at the French Institute from Bucharest, Romania

On April 11, 2008 there took place at the **French Institute from Bucharest** the round table organized within the Project **„Europe in Dialogue with its Citizens”**, developed by the European Commission – General Directorate for Education and Culture.

The project was financed through the **Program „Active citizenship” 2007** and aimed at the public participation promotion for the future construction of Europe, especially the public debates and workshops promotion to analyze – starting from real study cases – and contribute to methods and tools improving used by the European Institutions in order to interact with its citizens for strengthening and embetter their awareness and participation.

The project entitled „Europe in Dialogue with its Citizens” was initiated by the **Association of Local Democracy Agencies, ALDA**, elaborated and implemented in partnership together with the following organizations from 8 European countries:

Index (Cyprus)

Más Democracia (Spain)

Kommunernes Landsforening (Denmark)

YEN (France)

Balkan Assist Association for Partnership and Citizens' Activity Support (Bulgaria)

Open Society Institute Budapest (Hungary)

Aid Program Advisory Center (Poland)

Insieme (Italy)

Romania, as the **ninth** project participating country was represented by the **Romanian Municipalities Association, RMA**. The implementation was made possible with the support of some important local partners: French Embassy, French Institute from Bucharest and National Agency for Youth Initiatives Support, ANSIT.

At this event participated 55 people from central and local public administration, NGO-s and youth organizations, mass-media representatives. Representatives from Bucharest City Hall, Bucharest 2nd District, Călărași, Giurgiu and Pitești Municipalities actively participated at the round table works, as well.

The action aimed at facilitating and strengthening of the harmonization process between Europe and its citizens, especially through focusing on the multiplying role the civil society groups play in promoting European Institutions and their values.

The activities were implemented within the project partners EU Member State involving the citizens and civil society organizations belonging to the "old" and "new" Europe (countries which joined EU on May 1, 2004 as well as on January 1, 2007).

The activities foreseen in the project followed a three-steps process comprising nine workshops organized at local and international level. The international workshop will have as an outcome a DVD producing and distribution for interested people and organizations. During actions carrying on, a special attention was given to the „two-way“ process by offering information and listening to the people’s opinions about Europe.

Through this project, ALDA creates the interacting and direct participation opportunity for citizens and civil society groups to build a closer Europe and to develop the European identity feeling, by promoting workshops and debates, both locally and transnationally, with a focus on interaction and communication between citizens and European Union at local level.

The seminar was organized by the RMA, in Bucharest, on **three workshops** as follows:

- ❑ *Young people active participation in the European construction building process and the local public administration*
- ❑ *Young people and education*
- ❑ *Networks and informational society (improve the communication and interaction between Europe and its citizens – identifying and promoting new and innovative communication tools)*

In the opening of the works, **Mrs. Narcisa Muraru**, Executive Manager of RMA introduced the Association, its contribution to its members local partnerships developing, and also to initiatives and projects carried on at national and international level. RMA paid attention during its activities to strengthening the connections to civil society, for the citizens’ interest and their participation to the decision taking process concerning local communities. Mrs. Muraru appreciated the program and the present project considering its benefits coming from citizens’ voice and needs being heard and the importance of EU Institutions and values being known at all levels.

Mrs. Ileana Capitanu, on behalf of Patricia Lesage, Chief Decentralized Cooperation – NGO

Alliances Françaises Mission, French Embassy, Cooperation and Cultural Action Service, stressed the Embassy permanent support for initiatives and actions developed by RMA and expressed the special interest for the present project as it is focused on citizens involvement and participation regarding the EU integration communication issues.

Mrs. Stefania Toriello, Programs Coordinator at ALDA, in charge with the development of this project in Romania, said that our country demonstrates it actively participates at European day-by-day life: „To be an EU member means

to actively participate in the European life, to criticize, to express opinions, to make proposals". She explained that the organization she represents envisages the strengthening of the awareness process related to the results obtained by the European policies applying, concluding that the major project objectives is to closer bring Europe to its citizens by communication improving.

Furthermore, ALDA seeks for an active and permanent information exchange between the European Institutions and its citizens.

The event was moderated as follows:

- ❖ Andrei TARANU - Conf. univ. dr., National School of Political and Administrative Studies – SNSPA, Bucharest – moderator;
- ❖ Claudia PAMFIL – Director, Local Development Group, Bucharest – facilitator;
- ❖ Constantin STOENESCU - Conf. univ dr., Prodean Philosophy University, Bucharest – facilitator;
- ❖ Eduard TRIC, President - Internet Society, Romania – facilitator.

In the opening session, **Mr. Taranu** appreciated the project well enframed in the EU objectives, addressing the old and new EU countries' needs and especially upon the communication matters, leading to new public policies for a better interaction between EU Institutions and organizations, local public administration and the citizens on the specific issues.

Through the participation of such diverse, responsible and active representatives of public administration and institutions, NGO's and youth organizations the ambitious targets of the projects could be easily achieved. The more active participation in the round table and workshops, more easily the envisaged objectives can be fulfilled and interesting conclusions can be reached on the project topics.

Mr. Taranu presented the audience a short history of the citizenship concept in the EU member states. Mr. Taranu mentioned that presently one can notice the gap between EU organizations and institutions and implicitly one part of the local public administration in relation to EU institutions regarding their connection to the citizens at the local level. Following discussions and debates, new ideas could appear and new solutions could be implemented regarding public policies for the benefit of the locals.

The new EU circumstances offer us new perceptions on the EU citizens' statute which should become more active and address the challenges of the new enlarged Europe. Finally, though different methods of communication (debates, experience exchange, means of information etc.) and new attitude, a new concept of European citizenship identity will be re-defined.

Knowing that the EU is considered a peace territory, having among its main objectives the conflicts solving through peaceful solutions, a new concept of citizenship is to be built.

Brussels, Belgium already well known as the center of the EU is recognized for the European values issues as solidarity and tolerance but also as a place where the future for Europe is designed in relation with various difficulties and challenges.

No matter the EU problems are, there is still a high level of confidence (more than 60%) of the citizens in the EU construction, which should be reinforced in order to produce welfare to its citizens.

New forms of interrelationship should be found so that EU should become a strong partnership to help and support more its citizens and finally make them feel secure within the EU borders.

Mrs. Adina Valean – Europarlamentarian, Vice-president of a Political Group in the European Parliament introduced to the audience the principles and problems encountered in free circulation of the people as European citizens. Mrs. Valean pointed out the importance of human rights observing and made known some of the important issues on the agenda of the European Parliament. She also presented as a premiere the documentary movie „The way back home” having as subject the migration in Europe and the European citizens rights on the labor market in EU, the right to free circulation, staying, settling, studying in other members states of the EU; the right to participate in the elections and to be elected in the residence state while complying with the same regulations valid for the natives from respective states, access rights to EU institutions documents, the right to address themselves to EU Institutions in one of the official languages of the EU, nondiscrimination right based on nationality, gender, religion, disability, equal access right to community public position occupying. Mrs. Valean underlined the differences existing between the life of the Romanian communities working and living in Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Germany and their representation and perception in our country through different means of communication.

Mrs. Adina Valean answered to a couple of questions coming from the participants. She was asked for example what are the specific problems the europarlamentarians are responsible for and their relation with the Romanians from Romania. Another question was regarding their connection to the civil society.

After the short introduction of the panelists the three workshops started to develop as planned in the agenda with interventions from the participants, remarks, comments, questions and answers.

*The workshops focussed on youth, education and networking issues. **Mr. Bogdan Radulescu** expressed the opinion regarding the citizens in relation with the administration levels to become a part of the participatory democratic process and also the interdependence between all these and the “LOCAL” level.*

Further on **Mrs. Claudia Pamfil**, facilitator of the first workshop “Young people active participation in the European construction building process and the local public administration”, brought into discussion the human rights issues and the corresponding obligations of the local public administration. She considered the citizen as a client who is a public service consumer.

Mrs. Anca Calugaru - Project Assistant, National Association of Counselling Bureau for Citizens – ANBCC, Bucharest had a presentation about the public information services in Romania. She pointed out the importance of this network having 50 branches in the urban and rural area counseling the young people in 12 domains out of which the most important are health, social services and legislation.

Mrs. Anca Calugaru showed the results of a study carried out about the citizens' needs to be informed and some proposals regarding this study to better understand the citizens needs and easily respond to them. The presentation showed the behavior regarding the information process, some evaluation and identification of the needs, channels and methods for the communication. One of the conclusions was that the young people choose to inform themselves by the use of other information means and especially through Internet instead of informing through a Counseling Bureau for Citizens.

An intervention was made by **Mrs. Daniela Stanculescu** from the Bucharest City Hall with some best practices examples – EU information dissemination, large young initiatives in relation to EU subjects promoted through media, as "The Youngsters in dialogue with Europe" - a contest of poems. The participants drew the conclusion that the Youth in Romania is really very active and one has to find the right way to work with them.

With the appropriate information and better knowing regarding the project proposals that can be financed, the municipalities can and will print their specific information materials as their bulletins through external sources drawing.

Mr. Ioan Oltean from the Center for NGO-s Assistance, CENTRAS, pointed out the importance of „European revised Chart regarding young people participation to local and regional communities life" and informed the audience about the existence of the Youth Local Councils Network. He stressed the importance of the connection administration-citizen giving as example the *Youth EUROCARAVAN* initiative.

Mr. drd. Nicolae Toderas, Associated Researcher at the Institute of Educational Sciences – ISE, made a presentation on lessons and practices for the other Europeans also introducing some ideas about the active citizenship.

Mr. Daniel Spoiala from the National Alliance of the Students Organizations from Romania –ANOSR, showed the importance of youth policies and the need for consultation at the local level as the general perception shows there is not enough communication with the young people regarding the EU topics. The students are numerous and their community should have a stronger voice to be heard at all levels. He referred to the Clubs set up within their campus-thought to be as their residential district.

Ms. Oana Pop as a voluntary in Master Forum organization made some comments about the young people concerns and suggested them to be seen as valuable human resources for future and local public youth policies adopting.

Mr. Manuel Avramescu, the General Director from National Agency for Youth Initiatives Support – ANSIT, made a presentation on the ANSIT Programs which represent a Romanian solution for a new generation of European young people.

Mr. Constantin Stoenescu - Conf. univ dr., Pro-dean at Philosophy University, Bucharest, was the facilitator coordinating the second Workshop "Youth and Education". He revealed to the audience information on education as a continuous change and adapting process, about the needs to lead the young generation to the performance and some alternatives presentation to permanent learning issues. He underlined the importance of equal chances in

education for all the young people. The Lisbon Strategy stipulates the common European space for the teaching and learning process in the Society of KNOWLEDGE, which make the difference among the societies.

Mr. Bogdan Radulescu's intervention at this point showed that information stimulates the participation. Radio should become a PUBLIC TRIBUNE in relation to EU matters dissemination to the large public. Also he stressed the importance of being active including on the Voluntary basis.

Mr. Eduard Tric, President of Internet Society, Romania, facilitator of the last Workshop made a presentation on „Networks and informational society (improve the communication and interaction between Europe and its citizens – identifying and promoting new and innovative communication tools“. He underlined the two parts which compose the network – technical one and the human resources one, the existing differences between the rural and urban areas and outlined the idea that initiatives should go further on beyond any borders.

During her short intervention, **Mrs. Daniela Stanculescu** showed again some successful youngsters initiatives in Bucharest, their very special participation to the School Olympics, to revues elaboration and trainings as new apprentices in Journalism.

At this point **Mrs. Rodica Ciobanu**, the President of Education for the third Millennium NGO from Giurgiu, brought into the participants attention a good project example „Me and EU Romanian-Bulgarian Club in Giurgiu“, interesting cross-border initiative, now in the second financing period, under implementation with people and children from Giurgiu/Romania and Rousse/Bulgaria, on European topics with great participation, information and dissemination campaign.

At the end of the seminar some financing opportunities were presented to the audience for youth projects and initiatives that could be accessed through European Funds by **Mrs. Fagarasanu Florina**, person in charge with the Youth in Action Dept. from the National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Professional Formation and by **Ms. Nicovescu Anca Daniela** as the Team Leader from Civil Society Development Foundation FDSC, Bucharest.

The seminar last part included interventions and conclusions made by the contribution of the present participants.

As a whole, the debates were focused on communication ways between the public local authorities and the citizens by their direct implication and an active NGO-s contribution in relation to the European integration. The discussions finalized with some improvement measures proposals.

At the end of the debates we can mention the following main ideas and conclusions:

- resuming the radio and TV broadcasts regarding EU integration, including mass-media in the information and public policies adapting process, in order to involve youngsters in local administration;

- over 50 people from central and local public administration and NGOs participated in the workshops and pointed out, among others, the low level of information about EU, especially within rural communities from Romania;
- after EU integration, the number of broadcasts about the EU (public TV and radio) decreased and it is necessary to resume them, considering the fact that a lot of the Romanian citizens don't know their rights and obligations as EU citizens;
- the young people involvement should be improved in the communication process established among EU institutions, in order to increase the transparency between institutions and citizens;
- a great need to improve the organizational capacity and to develop civil society representatives lobbying activities.

Other conclusions:

The project entitled „Europe in dialogue with its citizens” sustains civil society participation in building the Europe future, especially by organizing public debates and workshops that lead to improving the methods and instruments through which EU institutions communicate with its citizens.

- this project can bring Europe closer to its citizens by better communication ways implementation;
- as an important partner in this part of Europe the Romanian Municipalities Association essentially can contribute to the present project objectives achieving for further consultancy and development in relation to its targets;
- the need to adopt public policies targeting the youth at the local level;
- a better reflecting of the provisions of the „European revised Chart regarding young people participation to local and regional communities life” in the actions aiming at intensifying the public participation and transparency within the relation between the administration and the citizen;
- the need to involve more mass-media in the process of information and citizen participation.

The roundtable „Europe in Dialogue with its Citizens” ended with the presentation of the artistic movie entitled ROMING, a story about values much appreciated within EU borders such as: human solidarity, tolerance and searching for identity, watched/played in the „Elvira Popescu” Cinema Hall by young people invited from Bucharest and the seminar participants.

The presented materials and the conclusions formulated during the seminar works are posted on the RMA site section: **cetatenieeuropeana.amr.ro**, in order to make the consultation possible and the conclusions from the debates available to the public.