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**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level

WORKING LUNCH FOR MINISTERS: EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Lead Speaker (the Netherlands) - Speaking Notes

18-19 March 2004, Dublin Castle, Ireland

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Until recently, 'citizenship' was a concept understood by everyone in society. The word 'citizen' called up associations with the eighteenth century, when Europe was made up of the aristocracy and common citizens, or commoners. Citizenship was a concept of the past.

That has now changed. Today, politicians consider citizenship, or rather the lack of a *sense* of citizenship among people, to be the largest social problem we are facing. Citizens lack a sense of civic responsibility. Immigrants have to be naturalised or made "true citizens" of a country. If we do nothing to ensure this, our societies will slowly disintegrate. Developments such as globalisation and immigration are raising questions and sometimes even fear among citizens: questions such as 'what is the identity of the country in which I live, how much pluralism can a society take, what values should all citizens hold in common? These questions are leading to a sharp political discussion in many countries. There is a sense of urgency to reinvent the concept of citizenship. And, of course, people look to education and government ministers to take up the challenge. Education is seen as by far the best way to make young people into good citizens.

This is why the role of education in developing good citizens plays a key part in my policy. I will give this area considerable attention in the second half of this year during the Dutch presidency of the European Union.

For me, citizenship is one of the core values of society. But the *content* of citizenship can vary with *time* and *place*. It is very clear to me that *current* political and social circumstances call for a re-evaluation of the *old* concept of 'citizenship', *and* a re-evaluation of the contribution that education can make to meeting this new challenge. Let us examine these two points further.

When we speak of citizenship, what are we actually talking about?

Citizenship is about the *participation* of people in public life. It is about sharing the rights and obligations that ensue from this participation. And it is about the personal skills that are necessary for this participation in public life. The classic idea of citizenship primarily focuses on the relationship between the state and its citizens. But with a view to the future, *our* concept of citizenship must entail more than this. Citizenship is also just as much about the relationships between individual citizens *without* the involvement of government. The common idea of citizenship in the Netherlands, with its extensive civil society, reveals a range of possibilities that is broader than only participation in a political democracy. We have many social institutions that fulfil a public role: schools, universities, hospitals, housing associations. As a result, citizenship also means participating in forms of shared input and management at such institutions. Because

of this understanding of citizenship, parents are indispensable on school boards, pupils and students are indispensable in student councils and *businesspeople* are indispensable on the school boards of vocational education institutions.

We cannot achieve this social participation on our own. So it is a part of the social education we give to young people. Of course, in a *perfect* world all parents would rear their children to be just such socially involved adults simply by way of example. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in the *real* world. Some parents are not familiar enough with the *how's* and *why's* of our highly developed society to pass these values on to their children. This is all the more true in the families of immigrants.

This social problem has been reinforced further because the place in society of *other* potential teachers of this knowledge has been weakened. Many children, in the Netherlands at least, now miss the good council or the good example set by the parish priest or the football coach because churches and sports associations have seen their membership numbers drop. Considering the social changes I have described, it is not strange that politicians are now knocking on the doors of education ministers. And neither is it strange that schools are reinforcing their efforts in the area of citizenship development and perhaps becoming the most important socialising factor in society today.

My first proposition is, therefore, that the *teaching of citizenship* in education has to be strengthened.

We have now established the fact that education is facing a challenge in this area. The question is '*what* contribution to achieving this goal should we expect from schools'.

To begin: learning modern citizenship is not only about acquiring knowledge and cognitive skills. It is also about the development of a particular attitude, learning through the example of others, and learning by doing something yourself.

This is why in the Netherlands we have changed our direction (in primary and secondary education). We have been inspired by the recommendation titled "Education and Citizenship" given by the Education Council, the Dutch government's leading advisory board in this area. My proposal, in practical terms, means that education will receive the explicit instruction, through legislation, to contribute to the development of a sense of citizenship among young people and thus to their social integration. The school must achieve this contribution on three levels: at the level of the school itself; at the level of the school in relation to the local environment; and at the

level of the school in relation to society on the macro level. My second proposition is that the development of citizenship is necessary on all three levels.

How schools achieve this will rely on the skills and insight of teachers. This is why the teaching of *civics* – which is the study of the rights and duties of citizenship – must also be strengthened in the training and continuing education given to teachers.

Developing a sense of citizenship at the level of the school: school citizenship

The development of a sense of citizenship must start at the beginning: with the internal relationships formed at school. Pupils should learn to be good ‘*school citizens*’. This requires socially acceptable behaviour, such as showing respect for others, conducting themselves according to generally accepted values and norms, and respecting differences in world views. The school has to develop a plan for accomplishing this. Head teachers are expected to *direct* the process, in a *moral* sense as well. In the Netherlands, this challenge was taken up by the head teachers in primary education themselves, by way of the Netherlands Academy of School Leaders.

Schools are putting their vision in this area down on paper in a document that each school must periodically draw up and publish: the school plan. The Inspectorate of Education then sees to it that the school realises this vision.

Developing a sense of citizenship at the level of the school environment: social citizenship

A school is not an island. A school is located in a neighbourhood, in a city district that can only flourish if there is some social connection between its residents. During their years at school, pupils become aware of the necessity for this.

An example: I introduced the community service internship in secondary education. This student internship requires students to perform work in nursing homes, at day nurseries, at a public library or similar institution. It is not an internship that has training in a profession as its goal. It is more akin to volunteer work, an experience in serving other people.

These types of activities are a form of learning outside the school. They also change the role of the school in society: this is all about broadening the learning experiences of young people.

Developing a sense of citizenship at the level of society: civic responsibility

In addition to school citizenship and community-based citizenship, a sense of civic responsibility is also relevant. This means learning about the democratic form of government, about one's own country and about the larger international ties and relationships that exist. It requires explaining what the United Nations is, what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is, and what European citizenship means for some of us. This aspect of teaching citizenship is also not only about imparting knowledge. Education must also ensure that the idea and values of the democratic, constitutional state are accepted and internalised by students who are reared with other world views outside of school.

In evaluating the policy for strengthening a sense of citizenship, I would like to point out a possible pitfall. We have a tendency to place many educational outcomes into the mould of results that can easily be measured in quantitative terms. In doing so, we run the risk that schools will neglect other important matters, such as the development of certain attitudes among students, simply because they cannot be quantified. This is why we have decided to follow up the strengthening of citizenship development with more quality-focused reports from the Inspectorate of Education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our world relies on a democratically oriented sense of citizenship. That is to say: we rely on citizens who not only obey the law and regulations, but who are also socially involved. Citizens who collectively take responsibility for solving the problems they face in their immediate environment – whether that be at work, in their schools, or in their neighbourhoods. This is essential for ensuring the social cohesion in a modern society such as ours.

This is why I have focused today on the importance of strengthening *the teaching of citizenship* in the education we provide to our children.

This must happen at the level of the school itself, at the level of the school's local environment – through a community-based internship, for example – and at the level of society. **Moving from being good school citizens to being good national and world citizens:** this should be our motto.

Thank you

