

Results

Birgit Müller

The Council of Europe after enlargement is characterised by the tension between the pursuit of geopolitical or pragmatic interests on the one side and the defence of supranational humanitarian values on the other. This tension runs through all the sections of the Council dividing the employees into idealists and pragmatists - into those who wish to work towards a greater understanding among the people of Europe and those who want to get on with their job and make sure that they keep it. The political representatives of the member states are split into those who claim a certain moral supremacy because the countries they represent have been democracies for some time and those who claim an egalitarian status in the Council because their countries as new democracies and members of the Council are entitled to it. The main controversy which is hardly openly discussed, is about who should learn and who should teach in the Council of Europe.

A clear difference in attitude can be seen between the political bodies of the Council and the administrative bodies charged with educational programs. In the political bodies where all countries are theoretically exercising their influence on an egalitarian basis, the discourse about values becomes part of the strive for power and influence. The idea, that representatives from post-communist countries have to learn democracy from the representatives of Western European countries, has been present in many interviews with ambassadors and delegates from Western Europe. Among Eastern European representatives emphasis is put on the fact, that they are already democracies, which is proved by the fact that they have become members of the Council. Their main concern now is how to make their voices heard in the Council. In spite of formal equality, proposals of Eastern European representatives do not carry the same weight. They are not listened to in the same way. This could be observed, for instance, when East European suggestions for conflict solution in Kosovo were ignored in the Committee of Ministers in the summer of 1998.

Special divisions for cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries, created to assist new member countries in the transition to a democratic system have been renamed since the Strasbourg Summit in 1997 at the request of these countries. The new members refused openly the concept of assistance and assumed that the transfer of democratic values towards their societies was entirely unnecessary. Indeed the certainty of European values, such as democracy, plurality and the rule of law, as advertised by official representatives of the Council, can be observed to dissolve when confronted with concrete social practice. The sections of the Council most prominently involved in educational programmes also towards Eastern European societies, such as the Section for the Education in Democratic Citizenship and the Youth Centre, have been losing track of the model that they are supposed to

promote. The section for the Education in Democratic Citizenship tries to avoid the dilemma by encouraging examples for good democratic practice that already exist in the member countries. Employees of the Youth Centre who organise training courses for the youth elite from Eastern and Western Europe try to do so without imposing any model. The people they train, however, are keen on finding out how these Western European societies function and happily hear about their models in order to use them in their own dealings with European institutions.

In spite of the efforts of the most idealistic sections of the Council to replace the transfer of values and practices from West to East, by dialogue and communication between Eastern and Western European citizens the educational practice of the Council clearly addresses an elite that can use the know-how about the West acquired in the Council to reinforce its position back home. Similarly, a certain concept of diversity advocated by the Council, for instance in the Roma Network fixes and simplifies images of the Others, whose reality is far more complex. An elite of young Roma leaders from all over Europe is brought together under the auspices of the Council, thereby creating a European Roma discourse that has never previously existed and that covers up the heterogeneity of the Roma societies.

The Council of Europe still has a long way to go before becoming a forum in which communication on an egalitarian basis can take place and before daring to confront itself with the complex social and economic reality of its post-communist member states. To name only one of the taboo subjects of the Council: a thorough debate without prejudice is needed on the socialist past of the new member states, its values, achievements and shortcomings. Another taboo subject of the Council - the critical evaluation of liberal market economy - has recently been broken by delegates of the Parliamentary Assembly¹ who came to the conclusion that democratic social control cannot stop short from the economy and that a thoroughly new debate on democracy and economy is needed in post-communist Europe, in the East and in the West.

¹ at a conference organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg 30-31st of May 1999