

## **“Citizenship education and equal opportunities”**

*The Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture contributed to a large conference in Warsaw, pointing out the role of citizenship education regarding disadvantaged groups.*

Praga – that’s the name of a quarter of Warsaw, which is neither rich nor touristic. The authentic atmosphere though attracts numerous investors, artists. A carty nightlife came into existence and the former disadvantaged region became a social and cultural center. No other place would be more adequate to host the NECE-Conference 2011 than the „Fabryka Trzciny“, an ancient factory located in the district, which is now used as a convention center.

## **NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education**

The NECE Network consists of stakeholders from different European countries, representing civil society, administration and science, dealing with citizenship education, curricular and extracurricular. Current challenges can be discussed, respecting different approaches and practical experiences, so well-grounded results can be achieved, inciting further activities. The ministry is represented by its department for citizenship education, which highly appreciates the exchange with the international network, which contributes to a further development and assures the quality of teaching aids and other products offered to Austrian teachers and schools. An intense cooperation evolved in this context with the Federal Agency of Civic Education. The common language allows using same materials very often. The concept of „Aktionstage Politische Bildung“, which is an Austrian invention, was exported to Germany and to the German-speaking communities in Belgium and Italy.

## **“No one is apolitical”**

The program of the conference taking place between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of November perfectly met the interests of the target group. Recent developments on a political level, regional and international have been pointed out, as well as their consequences for educators working in the area of citizenship education. Several proposals for solutions and examples of best-practice have been presented.

The theoretical background was delivered by Benjamin Barber from USA and Jean-Marc Ferry from France. Both are political scientists. Barber warned, that possibilities of democratic participation are about to decrease, because decisions are influenced mainly by developments on financial markets. Ferry referred to the European Union as a key player, which has to represent the interests of its citizens more efficiently and to keep a sense of internal solidarity in order to get over the crisis. Erik Flügge presented a study which concluded, that young people with lower educational level are interested in political topic, though they never would call them “political”, which is the reason why they aren’t interested in traditional forms of participation. Concerning the examples of best practice, one of the contributions of the federal agency of citizenship education had a very promising content. Through the concept of peer-education, access should be found to students that have and/or cause problems in school. Primarily the individual situation of those concerned has to be understood and new strategies to find solutions have to be developed in respecting everyone involved.

In general, the program of the conference, which included the presentation of various methodological and theoretical concepts, discussions in the working groups and during the breaks was appreciated by the participants, which obtained many new ideas for upcoming activities.

By *Jan Sisko*, representative of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture at the NECE-Conference 2011, recruited into the ministry's department of citizenship education directed by *Manfred Wirtitsch* in July 2011.