

ELIANT AND CURATIVE EDUCATION

Human dignity, individual development and freedom of choice in a pluralist Europe

by Bernard Heldt

The European Union is becoming ever bigger and more influential. European institutions are responsible for an estimated 70% of national legislation. It is now important therefore to raise the profile of curative education and social therapy at European level, and ensure their good reputation. Since 1 January 2007, 27 member states belong to the EU, which means that the influence of individual countries is now comparatively smaller than ten years ago, when the EU still consisted of 15 countries. At the same time this also means that the influence of the whole European Union has grown. It is therefore only to be welcomed that efforts to draft a common European constitution are now coming to fruition. The common legal basis for EU citizens, the fundamental structure of European law, will then become more transparent. And the time is at hand to raise our voice in the EU!

The European Union's charter of fundamental rights

The preamble to this charter reads (excerpt):

Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice.

ELIANT wholeheartedly defends human dignity

The European Union is based on a tradition of human dignity, of individual development and freedom of choice in a pluralist society. This is clear from many articles of this charter. Areas of anthroposophic work such as Waldorf schools, anthroposophic healthcare, curative education and biodynamic agriculture are based on the legacy of European thinkers, and their principles are firmly rooted in this European tradition. In a European Union of increasing size and complexity, in which one invariably sees materialism, conservatism and diverse ideologies gaining the upper hand, we must wholeheartedly promote the values enshrined above!

That is why the international umbrella organisations have amalgamated to form ELIANT, a European alliance of initiatives for applied anthroposophy. The aim of ELIANT is to work to promote human dignity, personal development and freedom of choice in a pluralist European society, and to gain acknowledgement of these aims. For this purpose we need 1 million signatures, and have already collected 230,000.

Civil rights and de-institutionalisation

Article 26 of the European Union's Charter of fundamental rights speaks of integrating people with disabilities, and of acknowledging and respecting their rights.

Article 26, Integration of people with disabilities:

The Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community.

European institutions have been successful in establishing a new approach to disability policies which uphold human rights. Within the European Union this approach respects the civil rights of people with disability. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities adopted a memorandum on 30 July 1996 in which it presented a new European strategy relating to disabilities. This is based on the principles of rights rather than benevolence, and scope for difference instead of adaptation to artificial norms. The strategy strives for full civil rights for people with disability and their full integration, instead of isolation and exclusion. But some ideologues took this as an opportunity to preach a rigid and one-sided strategy of so-called de-institutionalisation, and called for the closing of "institutions"; as modern citizen, they said, one would not choose to live in such places! According to this view all disabled people would be condemned to fend for themselves in mainstream society. People point to Sweden as an example, where such a policy apparently works. But what exactly is meant by an "institution" remained unclear, and at some point a random number was cited: 30 people who live together in some way or other...

In 2004, at a congress on de-institutionalisation, the **ECCE**, or **European Co-operation in Anthroposophical Curative Education and Social Therapy** emphatically stressed that quality of life must come first and foremost rather than some random numerical norm. The latter, it said, would merely have an inhibiting effect on good projects and could also easily be bypassed. Fortunately the ECCE was not alone. EASPD, the European Association for Service providers for Persons with Disabilities, and UNAPEI, the French parents umbrella organisation, supported this demand for a focus on quality of life. ECCE was able to point out that the Swedish model does not function nearly as well as generally assumed. Peter Siebesma from Holland studied the effects of this model for twenty years, and published his findings in the very readable book "De droom van Grunewald" (The dream of Grunewald, Assen 2007). Karl Grunewald was the driving force behind the Swedish disability model. This book, in updated form, is due out in English, probably in October 2007. The ambition is great, Siebesma argues, but in practice it shows huge drawbacks.

Fortunately all these efforts calmed the storm which was driving the idea of de-institutionalisation through Europe. Healthy common sense has prevailed and brought things back to proper proportions. Now the focus is on freedom of choice: every person should be able to decide how and where he wants to live, including in sheltered and open communities, as we are familiar with in social therapy. Quality of life is now on the consultations agenda, and in the meantime the idea of civil rights and integration have entered common discourse. This is an invaluable step forward – above all in EU countries where, as we know, appalling circumstances still exist here and there. Participation is necessary for true integration. This is only possible, however, if people are generally prepared to develop awareness of this in society and to work to promote it.

Collaboration of anthroposophical NGOs

In other anthroposophical areas of work, too, people are active at European level. Besides the ECCE, the Waldorf school movement, biodynamic agriculture, doctors, manufacturers of anthroposophic medicines, patients etc. have also entered the fray.

On 29 June 2006 in Brussels, 10 European NGOs working on the basis of anthroposophy discussed and signed the Charter of the European Alliance of Initiatives for Applied Anthroposophy or ELIANT. This charter enshrines the fact that initiatives of applied anthroposophy, primarily in the fields of agriculture, education, special needs education and medicine, have made a noteworthy contribution to core values of European culture such as human dignity and individual development. The signatories to the charter – including the ECCE - state how they want to continue to contribute to such aims (see border).

The European Constitution states that the Commission is obliged to act if an organisation is able to submit one million signatures to it. The European Commission has given an assurance that it will abide by this obligation.

Treaty for a European Constitution

**ARTICLE 1-47 on the principle of participatory democracy:
Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of member states may take initiative of inviting the Commission, within the framework of its power, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Constitution. European laws shall determine the provisions for the procedures and conditions required for such a citizens' initiative, including the minimum number of Member States from which such citizens must come.**

To give political weight to the charter of the European Alliance of Initiatives for Applied Anthroposophy, it was therefore decided to mount a campaign to collect a million signatures and submit these to the European Commission. In recent months a whole range of anthroposophical organisations have participated in this. You can find further information at www.eliant.eu.

This campaign needs active support for it to become a serious factor in Europe. One million is a large number, but we should not forget that almost 500 million citizens live in Europe in 2007, and thus only 2% of these will be sufficient. Country-by-country this means 33,000 in Holland, 22,000 in Belgium or 120,000 people in the United Kingdom who, in some form or another, have contact with anthroposophical initiatives: parents at Waldorf schools or curative education and social therapy institutions, consumers of biodynamic produce, patients receiving anthroposophic remedies or treatment etc.

So far (October 2007), over 230,000 signatures have been collected. But we want to carry on – we must achieve 1 million. We have to show that we are a factor to be reckoned with.

Laws and regulations issued in Brussels are gaining ever more influence on the lives of people in member states. Those who fail to make their voice heard within European bodies – Council of Ministers, Commission and parliament – will be denied a say. This is why the international umbrella organisations have joined forces to form ELIANT, a European Alliance for Initiatives of Applied Anthroposophy.

We want to use this European alliance to show that anthroposophy and the initiatives, institutions and businesses developed from it are based on a European tradition of human dignity, individual freedom and freedom of choice in a pluralist society. This is why the joint charter was drawn up (see also www.eliant.nl and www.eliant.eu)

All who value applied anthroposophy, and wish to support it at European level, can give expression to this by signing this charter.

If you endorse biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf education, anthroposophical healthcare, psychiatry, disability support and other creative applications of anthroposophy, then this is the means and the moment to declare it with your vote.

By the end of 2007 ELIANT aims to have collected 1 million signatures. We already have 230,000. We also wish to play our part as European citizens.