

# **International Association of Elder Professionals - 'Together in Europe' association (in course of formation)**

**Nemo solus satis sapit.** No man is wise enough by himself. (Plautus, 254-184 B.C.)

## **Who are we?**

We are an international association comprised of university tutors, scientists and elder professionals from countries on both sides of a divided and reunited Europe. Over the course of three generations, we have witnessed the cultural, economic, political and social changes of the 20th century first-hand. We see the current global crises in the political, economic and cultural spheres as the sign of an epochal shift. We intend to eliminate the mentalities and thought patterns that are preventing us from finding new answers to the questions of today. After all, as Einstein once said, "we cannot solve problems with the thought patterns that brought them about".

We believe in the relevance of European cultural and intellectual approaches for dealing with the key issues of modern civilisation. Democracy, the legal state and the welfare state, human rights, open-mindedness towards other religions, freedom and tolerance are key ideas that we believe should be under constant review. We believe that such ideas are being threatened by factors included, but not limited to, the increasing distance between political organisations and the way 'normal people' perceive the world; the economic mindset that prevails in all areas of life, even the cultural sphere, under the banner of profit-based growth; and the loss of privacy, in the interests of comprehensive surveillance, in the exploitation of new technological possibilities. We intend to deal with these threats in all areas of society, comparing different European countries.

Within our group of staff, various disciplines have come together; we are convinced that from our different perspectives, we will at least be able to formulate, and make people aware of, the questions that the current crises are asking of Europeans. We do not have ready-prepared answers on how to solve the problems of Europe and the increasingly globalised world. However, we do believe that we can contribute together to opening up new areas of thinking for science and society.

We have been influenced by our academic background and our experiences with the concept, the shortfalls and the crises of the European university. We carry scepticism and the unanswered questions of a long professional life. As we have been relieved of our previous professional duties, we can now ask ourselves the key questions which are currently being imposed upon us Europeans by the threats to our crisis-ridden continent, and attempt to unveil the opportunities that lie in store in the new arrangements.

## **What are our intentions?**

We want to lead Europe to speak and think. We want to show what free thinking and the ideal of the university can make possible, beyond the boundaries of disciplines or national cultures. We want to help each other and help others to get out of the well-worn ruts of traditional thinking. We want to promote intellectual co-operation between generations and cultures. We want to hear what others have to say.

To achieve this goal, we want to create a network of interdisciplinary forums in which critical questions can be asked of modern European culture, its claims, its presumptions and its reality. Questions regarding the universality of its claims to validity; regarding human rights as a philosophical aspiration and political slogan; regarding the Enlightenment conception of the state and the modern political reality; regarding social equity between rich and poor; regarding the ability of European cultures to communicate with other world cultures.

We certainly do not want to content ourselves with simply organising scholarly meetings for experts. Our intention is not to idealise the past. We are not simply a senior education association whose main concern is the further education of its members. Instead, in light of the current critical situation and the as yet undiscovered chances that it presents, we want to organise forums where senior scientists and experts can voice their questions, insights and experiences.

One of our points of departure lies in criticising the way in which the human and natural potential of both man and nature go to waste. By waste, we mean the production of losses that threaten our culture: the loss of the richness and variety of human cultures, due to their increasing uniformity and the growing divide between rich and poor; the related loss of innovation and the ability to use the richness and variety of nature in a creative way; the loss of

empathy within society due to the systemic functionalising of the individual, and the subsequent loss of the links formed by social solidarity, cohesion and creativity; the loss of the natural resources that are irreplaceable if we are to live together.

### **Who are we looking for?**

We are looking for other colleagues who will talk with us about the issues we are addressing – people who are prepared to help us set out the problems that need to be dealt with today. We are looking for people who are interested in tackling the key questions of our times, at the level of modern scientific knowledge.

We are interested in acquiring universities as partners for discussion, but also any other people or organisations who are interested in new ways of thinking about problems both old and new.

### **How do we intend to proceed?**

Our vision of an international association of senior academics and professionals is that of a European network of local interdisciplinary seminars where key questions can be formulated – those that need to be answered today. We want to organise events on a local, regional and national scale, where the shortcomings we face today could be described and analysed. These include:

- The shortcomings of our democratic system: why do citizens of democratic countries feel so powerless to change the irrational and unjust circumstances that affect them personally?
- Shortcomings in the relationships between different generations: what is preventing an intergenerational exchange of questions, insights and experiences between younger and older members of society?
- Shortcomings in the social organisation of work: how can we avoid more and more people, young people in particular, being forced to deal with uncertain working conditions?
- Shortcomings in our use of resources: what can be done about the obvious waste of natural and intellectual resources in our society?
- Shortcomings in relation to social justice: how can we counteract the danger of increasing disintegration resulting from unequal access to chances in life?-
- Shortcomings in the protection of the private sphere: how can the private sphere, which is necessary for personal development, be protected in the face of increasingly comprehensive monitoring by anonymous systems?
- Shortcomings in our thought: how can freedom of thought be won back within the terms and confines of the system? How can we counteract the loss of associative thinking skills? How can interdisciplinary communication in universities be promoted in the face of the increasingly extensive fragmentation of knowledge?

### **Approach and way of working**

In terms of its working methods, the network should orient itself according to the following principles:

- Mental freedom prevails, one that is independent of political constraints or financial concerns
- Teachers, researchers, learners and intellectuals can meet each other irrespective of professional interests and career ambitions
- The key issue of tradition, critically questioning generally accepted convictions, and discovering the productive potential of our European heritage
- Reasoned criticism, tolerance and vigilant observation of change
- Dealing with issues – through both thought and action – in all areas of economics, culture, politics, nature and technology, in which the contradictions and inconsistencies of our society can be uncovered and engaged with scientifically

### **Form of the organisation**

Our international and interdisciplinary association is intended as a private and self-regulatory organisation, i.e. organisationally and financially independent. It is constituted as a registered association that is open to anyone who is interested and identifies with its objectives. It will aim to set up forums in as many locations as possible so that scientifically-minded seniors can work together towards achieving the objectives of the organisation. It will strive to network with such people. All generations should have access to the events organised.

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