

Program Brussels CONSIDERATION 2018 – Notes by Paul Madsen

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Introductions and opening comments

Devotional by Pieter. Matt. 5, opening and closing verses. Our personal responsibility as Christians: to pray for others, do good to those that hate you, be an example as salt and light in the place where God has placed you to be a blessing.

Ignasi Grau with OIDEL and the situation of Christian Education from the perspective of the right to freedom of education and the Council of Europe. He also presented this research and information in the Swedish Parliament in 2016 (Freedom of Education Index, 2016). The context of the research is the debate over freedom of education in the EU and how this impacts funding and policy of education within the member states.

Policy: Parents have a legal right to choose the educational philosophy and methodology that aligns with their views as long as these educational solutions meet minimum public standards for education. This right extends to the public funding and support of educational settings in line with those views. UNESCO has published a document titled “Rethinking Education”, which states that education is a common good, not only a state good. So this demands that all interested parties participate in this process of education, not just the State. These rights are also supported in the foundational documents of the European Union. How can we discuss democracy and plurality for any society but limit the types and philosophies of education that are available to our populations?

Research methodology: see the ppt presentation **(Ignasi will send these by email)**

Results: Europe and North America had the highest ratings. Only 3 countries completely ban the freedom of education: Gambia, Cuba and North Korea. Those countries that tend to trust their citizens also promote and support the freedom of education and, as a result, have a higher level of democracy, social cohesion and human rights. The results also showed that the index for freedom of education is not dependant on government funding of education. It is a philosophical and policy related decision to ‘support’ non-government schools, independent of the funding available for this process. In other words the ‘lack of financial means’ cannot be used as an excuse for not supporting freedom of education because government policy determines the climate for its support or not.

Future: a new edition of the freedom of education index will be published possibly by April 2018 related to: Democracy, human rights, social cohesion and the quality of education.

Update on the situation in Sweden from Sven: Ignasi also attended and supported this initiative in 2016, but now the threat on private education is increasing from the Social Democrat party and tries to ban all private education. New policies may

be established soon but elections are also coming that may indicate a political shift. The probability is that the Free Schools will have tighter restrictions, even though the standard of education is higher in these schools and the social impact is very positive for Sweden.

See website on the European freedom of education initiative:

<http://freinet.international>

Mr. Skripek on the situation in Slovakia. There is a current attack on the private and specifically Christian schools, but the level of education in these schools is much higher. There is much educational content in place that has been impacted by Christian values but has not been labeled as Christian and currently guides parts of the educational program. A historical perspective from the communist period has had a negative impact on current society. The working class was elevated and the specialized job market such as doctors or teachers were underpaid to decrease their status and influence. At the close of communism, doctors commonly made money by accepting bribes. This has heavily damaged society and there is little interest in becoming a teacher or a specialized worker because it is viewed as a sacrifice both financially and socially, even though these people are desperately needed for societal advancement.

Graham notes that a correct response to our society involves a positive response, joining with those who might be against us, setting their fears to rest and demonstrating love and acceptance in the spirit of reconciliation. We also have heavenly authority to be ambassadors of love and truth to those who are not aware of the good intentions and strong foundation we have for benefiting and blessing our communities through the message of the Gospel.

European Evangelical Alliance, Mr. Arie de Pater. This is an alliance that is represented in about 120 countries and supports a variety of political parties, voicing global and local concerns of the evangelical Christian population. Our calling: to connect, represent and equip through this network of the evangelical community.

The "Issachar Project" is a response to the Populist movement in our society and equipping people to participate in public debate. How can we live out our faith in the public square and appeal to a secular audience in a compelling manner? What questions can we ask to encourage positive debate regarding our Christian heritage? How can we disagree well but still come to profitable and beneficial solutions in our communities or in our families?

- Lunch and move to another meeting room -

Mr. Arne Gericke, from Germany, addresses the history of the Christian education movement in Germany. All schools were originally confessional schools and this has continued to exist in some form since that time. Except now, from WWII, East Germany had broken from this history even though many children may still be connected to the church through the elderly members of their families. He also told

a bit of his personal history and the need for local education that serves the needs of local families and matches their philosophical perspectives and values. The German state supports this foundation of religious education at many levels, providing funds for development and sustainability, allowing for religious education classes in many environments and now a search for traditional values in these settings. His current political party is committed to support this system and the rights of parents in the educational process, including parents in the discussion of materials, methodology and educational content.

Mr. Alojz Peterle, from Slovenia, is disappointed in the direction his country is taking regarding private education. Only 6 private elementary schools were opened in 25 years and then were not able to publically fund those schools in accordance with their law. Instead, the government wanted to change the Constitution to excuse their actions. Because they were not successful, they then tried to change the law. This law failed and now they are working to develop a new tactic. Their goal is to keep all faith based schools, even if it is only 1 school, out from the public support of education. Mr. Peterle connects this to a “Christo-phobia” that has pervaded his country’s politics. The other central European countries define marriage as a union of man and woman in their Constitutions. The identity of these countries has been defined by this perspective and a (somewhat) healthy view of the church. This perspective of the Church is not pervasive in Western Europe and may be completely ignored in Brussels. If the EU policy leading us toward a complete secularization of society with an absence of Christian values and traditional human rights, then Central European countries will have little interest in following the direction of the EU. This is a new ‘colonialism of ideas’ and a desire of the political left to export a new system of values globally. Everyone loses in the end because there is no standard and no manner to establish understanding between those of differing opinions.

This has a huge impact on the daily life of a population. For example, the Communist experiment had the goal of moving ‘religion’ completely to the private sphere so that no one would have any reason or right to express their faith or religious values in the work or the social environment. Religion would be limited to the person’s private thoughts and 1 hour each week at church. Of course this is impossible and a complete misunderstanding of religion, the role of values and the responsibility to live out those values in the community and the workplace.

Laszlo Tokes is a Hungarian Romanian representing Romania. His presentation was also shared as a printed document and provides a perspective that the church and the religious schools serve a valuable foundation for society as well as a needed element of “salt” and “light” even in the face of fierce opposition. The opposition to religious values is leading us toward self-abandonment and the dissolution of society to the extent that outside forces and other religions or worldviews are not posing as big a threat as our very own moral decay. We must set an example, as Joshua did, and proclaim, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Mr. Csaba Sógor shared a few stories about Romania with the historical and current trends of politics in his region. There is always mistrust and fighting between the parties and each party tries to establish their own tradition and educational system.

Closing thoughts. Bas Belder shared the paramount importance of the Bible and a dependence upon the whole of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to guide us in our teaching and in our interactions. Many people in society and the political arena are filling their spiritual void with “spiritual” figures from other faiths but have no respect for the foundation of truth, justice and equity that come from our Creator God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Laci Demeter closed with prayer and especially mentioned the hope that we have in Christ and the responsibility we have to continue to encourage each other and lift each other up in prayer and we work together to build God’s Kingdom through Christ-centered education in Europe.