

BELGIUM-Senator Pol Van Den Driessche

Dear colleagues,

I am very fortunate to have been born in a country that has free quality education as one its main commodities. The education in Belgium fits the description of the concept note of this debate almost perfectly. Education regarding democracy and citizenship is an integral part of the final attainment levels of the three Communities in Belgium, who are responsible. This is an important achievement that we have to protect by all means. Nevertheless there is an issue that exists in a lot of countries about which I'm concerned as an historian and as a member of parliament, which is history education and the way in which history is being dealt with in politics and in general.

Fake news is an issue that is often being discussed in our national and international parliaments, but *fake history* – or rather partial, one-sided, repressed, or twisted history – receives a lot less attention. Concerning repressed history, in various countries it took quite a while until they had excused for their role in the persecution of the Jewish people during World War II and maybe some still even didn't. My own country still didn't excuse for its colonial past in Congo by the way.

Coming to terms with one's own past and one's own role in conflicts is an important condition for the future development of the relations of a person and a country. Many countries struggle with this sort of issues and not discussing them doesn't solve anything. Thanks to my work in this global organization, I realized even more that a one-sided, partial or even twisted version of history is still at the very basis of deep-rooted, long-standing conflicts and still hinders their solution. As a facilitator for Cyprus, I noticed that children sometimes learn a different version of the same facts, according to the part of the region in which they go to school...

As parliamentarians we have to warrant quality history education, which supposes great attention for the development of critical thinking about different versions of history, alternative facts, etcetera. But our responsibility doesn't stop there. As MP's we often receive a big stage to spread our views. Regardless of our ideologies and the solutions that we stand for, I would like to

advocate here for not messing with history or hiding historical facts while we receive this stage.

Getting the basic facts straight, seeing things in the right historic perspective and helping people to do the same, is one of the most important ways to prevent it happens again. History is never history.

Let this be my plea for this 140th Assembly.

Thank you very much for your attention.