

Speech on The Home education conference in Germany 27. – 29. of April:

### **Salutations from the EFFE**

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I have the honour of opening this colloquium as a representative of the European Forum for Freedom in Education and also as one of the organisers of last year's first international colloquium in France.

The first international colloquium last year was inspired by several different events: The first was probably the home education conference in London in 1999, which apart from being attended by a huge English public, was a meeting place for a few European home educators who wanted to exchange views on what was happening in home education in their different countries. France had just passed some very stiff legislation on home education and Leslie Safran Barson, who had also attended the conference, phoned us in France, with the idea of creating a European network, which became Learning Unlimited, and we also discussed the idea of having a European conference in Paris. Finally, our French home education organisation, Les Enfants d'Abord, became interested in the EFFE, a German-based organisation which promotes educational pluralism in Europe. We sent representatives to several colloquia organised by the EFFE and we insisted on the importance of supporting home education as an educational choice. Robert Bell, Vice President of the EFFE, suggested that a regional colloquium on the theme of home education could be held with this EFFE's support. So it became inevitable that this colloquium took place and it was held in Reims last April.

I would like to read a few excerpts of Vice President Robert Bell's speech at last year's colloquium on the position of the EFFE in relation to home education:

"(...) it would be true to say that the Forum was very school centred and had little interest in home-schooling or de-schooling. This was partly because most of its founders had been Germans and Germany is still a country that largely assumes that children must go to school.

However, as the organisation developed there came to be more emphasis on the basic principles of educational freedom and on the United Nations and Council of Europe declarations on the subject. These tended to emphasise the right of parents to decide what kind of education their children should have and this clearly had a great relevance to the issue of home education. If parents choose to educate their children away from schools then they should be allowed to do so.

This new emphasis also meant that the Forum took a keen interest in the views of minorities – ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities, religious minorities and educational minorities.- and the right of parents to choose an education that reflected their own

culture. (...)

It seems to me that we should be equally involved in defending the right of parents to educate their children at home or in conjunction with other parents. This seems a logical result of obeying the various educational declarations of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union which our countries have accepted.

(...)

I think that it is healthy that you should challenge the hegemony of schooling. In England we are now told by the government that children can only be taught to read successfully if they are taught by trained teachers in a certain way. My own son and his Finnish cousins taught themselves to read before they started school and are none the worse for it. I don't believe any form of education is absolutely perfect and I believe we can all learn something from each other. And if you need our help in dealing with government we are willing to give it. (...)"

At the Reims colloquium, we agreed that it would be a good idea to start a tradition of holding an annual international colloquium in different countries, and Germany, with its growing population of home educators and its struggle for recognition, was an obvious choice.

So it is now a great pleasure to officially declare the opening of the second international colloquium on home education.