

3rd Informal Conference "Strengthening teaching profession as a driving force for development", Istanbul, Turkey, 24-25 April 2004

Declaration adopted during the 3rd informal Conference

1. The ministers of education of South-east Europe, meeting in Istanbul on 24 and 25 April 2004,
2. Recall the declaration which they adopted in Strasbourg at their second meeting (November 2001), recommending that the Council of Europe "give particular consideration, in the years ahead, to the training and status of teachers" and "continue fully to exercise its role as a political forum, promoting dialogue and co-operation in the region, which is recognised as an essential part of the European continent";
3. Recall the Declaration of the European Ministers of Education on intercultural education in the new European context (Athens, 10-12 November 2003), in which they stress the importance of devising and promoting "work methodologies that are suitable to integrate into states' own initial and in-service training programmes the principles of non-discrimination, pluralism and equity", and developing "educational strategies to prepare teachers to manage the new situations arising in our schools";
4. Welcome the numerous activities organised within the context of various programmes of the Council of Europe, the OECD, Unesco, Unesco-Cepes, Unicef and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe which respond to the needs of different countries in the region.
5. Reaffirm their conviction that a Europe of knowledge is an irreplaceable factor of social and human growth, which is indispensable to give citizens the competencies they need to face the challenges of the new millennium and strengthen the feeling that they truly belong to an open, intercultural society of common values.
6. Aware of the importance of modernising educational structures – within the process of transition towards stable democratic societies – through innovative ideas and new curricula which will strengthen the promotion of tolerance and ensure respect for human rights.
7. Acknowledge that the skill and professionalism of its teachers is a vital factor in a country's social and economic growth;
8. Conclude that it is important, when elaborating national policies to reform teacher training systems, to take into account:
 - 8.1. public and official support by involving all the parties concerned in the reform process;
 - 8.2. the development of a comprehensive and coherent reform policy for the teaching profession as part of an overall education reform strategy, in keeping with European standards, priorities and policies;
 - 8.3. the promotion of innovation in education, by involving all the parties concerned, especially by combining formal, informal and non-formal initiatives;

8.4. international and regional co-operation, dialogue and exchanges, by converging teacher training, qualification and recruitment practices in the different countries in the region.

9. Envisage a series of practical measures to enhance the status of teachers, as a condition for improving the quality of education, in particular by:

9.1. updating the initial and in-service training of teachers, which means:

9.1.1. reconsidering, when necessary, the selection criteria for admission to the indispensable initial training, while guaranteeing equality of opportunity and non-discrimination and respecting international and European standards

9.1.2. improving teachers' skills, including ICT-based skills, by modernising initial training programmes in order to strike a balance between academic knowledge and professional, administrative and management skills;

9.1.3. developing these programmes in line with goals and objectives laid down by the Bologna Process, and in particular by establishing quality assurance and introducing the European credit transfer system (ECTS) for in-service teacher training;

9.1.4. introducing flexible in-service training systems based on teachers' real needs;

9.1.5. developing in-service training systems on the basis of distance education and e-learning;

9.2. developing quality standards, indicators and comparative assessment systems in order to help schools to provide quality teaching and pupils and parents to make informed (appropriate) choices where education is concerned;

9.3. improving teachers' working conditions in order to give them recognised social standing, for example by:

9.3.1. promoting appropriate employment arrangements;

9.3.2. introducing support measures for young teachers;

9.3.3. redefining the rights and responsibilities of teachers by developing education codes and professional codes of ethics;

9.3.4. paying teachers well enough for them to be able to accomplish their task with dignity;

9.3.5. establishing a career system conducive to the individual and professional development of teachers.

9.4. promoting a strategy of innovation as a reality in the field, with the backing of central government, in each country and in a co-ordinated manner for the region of South-east Europe, in order to restore a proper balance between government and the other actors involved in the reforms;

9.5. implementing reliable national systems for the detailed, systematic collection of data concerning education in general and the teaching profession in particular.

10. Ask the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

10.1. to include the enhancement of teachers' standing in the Council of Europe's programme of activities as an aim of future co-operation in the field of education;

10.2. to develop co-operation activities in the region, in particular with a view to the renovation (modernisation) of initial and in-service teacher training and the development of quality standards and assessment systems;

10.3. to mobilise the Organisation's budgetary and human resources to implement an innovation strategy tailored to the cultural and material conditions of the various components of South-east Europe;

10.4. to strengthen the synergies between the Council of Europe's activities and those of other international or non-governmental organisations active in the region;

10.5. to foster, through its programmes, exchanges of teachers from different cultures, in the interests of European integration;

10.6. to continue fully to exercise its role as a political forum, promoting dialogue and co-operation in the region.