

1st informal Conference on "Education for democratic development and stability in South-East Europe", Strasbourg, France, 2-3 décembre 1999

Declaration adopted at the Informal conference of the ministers of Education of South-East Europe

The Ministers of Education of south-east Europe¹, meeting in Strasbourg on 2 and 3 December 1999,

- Aware that co-operation in the field of education is the educational counterpart of the Council of Europe's political and legal activities to promote human rights, the rule of law and peaceful co-operation between European states;
- Convinced that education and educational co-operation have a fundamental role to play in the development of tolerance, mutual understanding and a common awareness both within and between the member States in the European context;
- Reiterating their belief that an education system based on common values and principles is a prerequisite for sustainable economic development and one of the cornerstones of social cohesion and democratic security;
- Recalling that the "Budapest Declaration for a Greater Europe without Dividing Lines", adopted at the 104th session of the Committee of Ministers on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Organisation, reaffirms in particular the primacy of the human person as achieved by the development of a new educational approach to democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens;
- Recalling that on the occasion of the 19th session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education (Kristiansand, Norway, 22-24 June 1997), the ministers had highlighted the specific contribution of the Council of Europe in the context of European co-operation on education deriving from the pan-European nature of the Organisation and its long-standing commitment to human rights, fundamental freedoms and pluralistic democracy;
- Recalling that in this same context, the European ministers had expressed their solidarity with the countries of south-east Europe and their desire for priority activities to be developed to meet the challenges they had to face;
- Having regard to the establishment of a Stability Pact for South-east Europe, and in particular the areas covered by Working Table 1 on democratisation and human rights which fall within the remit and the fields of activity of the Council of Europe, especially those relating to education, youth and sport;

¹. The following attended: the Ministers of Education of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Turkey; the Ministry of Education of Austria, which initiated the Graz Process; the Minister of Education of Hungary, in his capacity as co-chairman of Working Table 1 of the Stability Pact.

- Having held a broad exchange of views on the work of the “Enhanced Graz Process” the conclusions and the Action Plan adopted at the Conference on “Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy” held in Sofia (12-14 November 1999), which have created a broad and practical framework for education activities to meet the needs of the region’s States;
- Emphasising the specific role that the Council of Europe must play in the region in the context of its work programme and its contribution to the Stability Pact, in order to implement forward-looking education policies to promote European democratic construction based upon the fundamental values of the Organisation;
- Welcoming the fact that for some years already the south-east European states have been full partners in the programmes implemented by the Education Committee and the Higher Education and Research Committee, as well as in the programmes concerning youth and sport;
- Welcoming the fact that various activities responding to the needs of countries in the region are implemented under the auspices of the European Cultural Convention and other relevant Council of Europe programmes;
- Recommend to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:
 - that a differentiated and flexible regional approach to educational development be implemented, drawing on the co-operation and interaction of the various parties involved; this co-ordination is necessary not only to maximise available resources but also to create the conditions for rapid and effective work in the field;
 - that the Council of Europe take practical steps to continue the high-level dialogue between those responsible for education policies in the region, whilst also facilitating communication with their counterparts throughout Europe. This dialogue would promote the exchange of information and experience, and the development of tangible, practical links at all levels of education systems with a view to increased co-ordination: in this connection informal conferences such as this one could be held again when it is felt necessary;
 - that Council of Europe activities should focus on the following aspects of ongoing or planned reforms to the education systems of south-east Europe:
 - i. legislative and structural reforms linked to the organisation, infrastructure, and functioning of the education system, including: the evaluation of the impact of education policies, particularly those relating to cultural diversity and the needs of minority groups; institutional management; the improvement of quality and efficiency; the setting of educational standards; the role of universities as resource centres; the development of new information technologies in the spirit of the values endorsed by the Organisation;
 - ii. practical activities in the thematic areas in which the Council of Europe has long-standing and recognised expertise, namely: education for democratic citizenship, history teaching (including sensitive issues and periods of conflict), and the development of language teaching;
 - iii. the acquisition by young people, by means of appropriate training (in particularly vocational and further training including special activities for rural areas) of the necessary skills to contribute to all processes of social reconstruction;

iv. the implementation of programmes to promote the mobility of pupils, students, teachers and education system administrators, as well as initial and in-service training for teaching staff.

– that, as part of the Stability Pact and the “Enhanced Graz Process”, the Council of Europe should continue and reinforce its activities by seeking new partners and appropriate forms of interaction;

- Strongly urge the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take measures to ensure that the financial and human resources commensurate with the urgency of the situation and the political role it has to fulfil in the region are made available;
- Appeal also to donor countries within the Stability Pact to take due account of the priorities established under the Graz Process as to aid their realisation;
- Express the desire that the invaluable role of the “Enhanced Graz Process” as a unifying force, a catalyst for the implementation of educational activities, and a forum for co-ordination of the Action Plan and for the systematic exchange of information will be reinforced;
- Invite the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, at their 20th session to be held in Cracow, Poland (October 2000), to assess the results of the activities already under way or launched between now and then in south-east Europe, and take them into account when drawing up its future medium-term programme;
- Emphasise that the aforementioned activities must be implemented to encourage communication and interaction between the region’s countries, and also with a view to promoting dialogue and practical co-operation between the countries of the region and other European countries in a spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding.
- Thank the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina for their proposal to hold in Sarajevo the next Informal Conference of Ministers of Education from south east Europe.