

COUNCIL OF EUROPE PLATFORM ON  
ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND  
INTEGRITY IN EDUCATION (ETINED)

INAUGURAL PLENARY SESSION

24-25 NOVEMBER 2016

OPENING REMARKS

MATTHEW JOHNSON

DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND  
PARTICIPATION

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Let me open by welcoming you to the Council of Europe on behalf of the Secretary General.

This is the inaugural meeting of the Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education, and I am therefore very pleased to see that so many delegates responded positively to our invitation.

As this meeting is the start of the process, it is important and welcome that so many member States are represented and part of this new initiative at this early stage.

The title of my job – Democratic Citizenship and Participation – and the reason that our Education Department sits within the Council of Europe's Directorate General for Democracy, illustrates the context for this plenary session – that there cannot be real democracy in a society engulfed by corruption.

Corruption, unethical behaviour, a lack of propriety, weak or the perception of weak integrity, are poisons that, at best, undermine confidence. In education, fraudulent diplomas for example, disrupt the trust that we place in democratic and accountable systems, the fundamental premise that rules apply equally to everyone.

Without this trust it is, in our view, impossible to build a genuine culture of democracy. And without this, we see reduced participation or alternative expressions of the democratic will.

The importance of education, both as a potential arena for such toxic behaviours and as a route towards re-establishing confidence, cannot be over-stated.

If we do not tackle corruption in and through education, we are effectively teaching children that those who get ahead are those who know how to defraud our societies, those who know how to play the system, avoid rules and set their own standards.

For the Council of Europe it is essential that democracy works in practice, not only through institutions and the mechanics of democracy, important as they are, but also by helping citizens to become active, committed and ready to speak out to defend human rights, the rule of law, and the democratic values upon which European society is based, and against which the Council of Europe sets its compass.

In many ways, this initiative is a reflection of the growing desire amongst our member States, over the last few years, to place our education programme more centrally, and more visibly, within efforts to support democracy.

It responds to a signal, from Education Ministers of European Cultural Convention states, of the need to think of education much more deliberately as a mean of addressing many of the political challenges faced by societies today, and foreseen for tomorrow.

The initiative therefore has strong political backing – it is concrete follow-up to a commitment made by Education Ministers at a Council of Europe Standing Conference in 2013.

It is, inevitably and reassuringly, in the interests of Ministers – politicians and parliamentarians – to want to protect the integrity of education systems, and thereby ensure that the public at large, but specifically young people, have confidence in democratic processes.

Education is the one public service that we can confidently say nearly 100% of all young people experience. It is, for many, their first and sometimes only, interaction with a public-funded service. It is essential therefore that we ensure that it at a minimum meets the expectations of young people in terms of demonstrating democratic values, and ideally that it sets a higher ambition to which they can aspire, setting them on a course towards effective and active participation in democracy.

Ministers' desire to see our work on education more explicitly linked to the wider political agenda is also reflected in the efforts we are making to use

this new project to connect with those parts of the Council of Europe which have traditionally, in the field of justice, sought to tackle corruption.

There are natural links with the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms such as GRECO, the anti-corruption mechanism based on standards agreed by and binding together all our member States and Belarus.

And unsurprisingly our Parliamentary Assembly regularly debates issues relating to corruption in public service, not least within parliamentary processes.

Indeed the Parliamentary Assembly has set up an anti-corruption platform of parliamentarians and is currently preparing a report on the role of young people in fighting corruption.

These are two examples of what is, just within this Organisation, a very wide subject. Beyond these walls, it is wider still, and any agenda that seeks to address corruption is ambitious.

And our resources are, for now, limited.

Hence our need to define priorities and to focus on the most important elements, those that lend themselves to a regional response, where the Council of Europe can have impact in its support to member States.

With your support, and the support of our Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice, this setting of priorities should lead to the development of a strategic action plan setting out our proposed activities, and intended outcomes, for the years to come.

We would hope to use this to help generate the necessary support from Education Ministries and other key actors for a properly-resourced programme.

We will need you, as national delegates of this new ETINED Platform, to be active and committed. We need you to quality check, and reality check, our proposals. We want to ensure that the Platform addresses your concerns and focuses its efforts where member States most need it.

In addition, as national representatives of your respective countries we want you to use this Platform to share information, good practices and successes from the national level, and, where relevant, bring forward what has not worked well.

We know, from other initiatives of this nature, that we do not need to re-invent the wheel, but identify what has worked elsewhere and is transferable or scale-able, and how to avoid any mis-steps that others have inadvertently taken.

We need to think in a multilateral way, embracing this form of European co-operation, prepared to address some of the challenges, such as diploma mills, that cross borders.

When you return to your countries, we need you to be Ambassadors for the Platform, so that you can promote and share what you learn, and the products the Platform generates – for example, in due course, policy guidelines, handbooks/toolkits for different actors, and other possible tools – raising awareness and acting as multipliers of our work.

One of the very supportive member States behind this Platform is the Czech Republic. I should therefore like to thank the Czech authorities for their deep commitment to ETINED since its inception and formal launch at the Prague Forum in October last year.

Let me therefore introduce **Jindřich Fryč**, State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, who chaired the working group charged with establishing the Platform, and which transformed the outline concept set out in the Helsinki Declaration into today's agenda.

I mentioned the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice as a reference point for the policy priorities for the Council of Europe's education programme and therefore this Platform. In a demonstration of how joined-up we are, one of **Jindřich's** other current responsibilities undertaken on behalf of the Council of Europe is chair of that Committee.

So he has a role and interest in ensuring that the Council of Europe offers a coherent package of support, in the education field, to our member States.

And with that introduction, let me wish you a very productive meeting, and hand over to Jindřich.

Thank you.

[1224 words]