

**Council of Europe Conference  
of the Cyprus Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers  
“SECURING DEMOCRACY THROUGH EDUCATION”**

**22-23 March 2017**  
Filoxenia Conference Centre  
Nicosia, Cyprus

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**CONCEPT NOTE**



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**Chairmanship of Cyprus**  
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



At the end of the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education held in Brussels from 11 to 12 April 2016, Ministers of Education asked the Committee of Ministers to mandate the CDPPE, among other things, to:

- ensure that the strategic objectives of this 25th session are reflected in the future programmes of activities of the Council of Europe (2018-2021);
- assist member States in examining and implementing the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in their national education systems, in particular by piloting descriptors and offering guidance for curriculum development, teaching and learning strategies and adequate assessments tools as appropriate and in dialogue with the educational community;

At the same time, Ministers took note of proposals made by the Ministers of Education of Cyprus and the Czech Republic to organise, in order to fulfil these commitments, two follow-up events within the current programme of activities in 2017 and under their respective Chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

The first event is organised at the invitation of the Minister of Education of Cyprus, Mr Costas Kadis, from 22 to 23 March 2017 in Nicosia. Ministers of Education from States parties to the European Cultural Convention are invited to participate. Ministers of Education from South Mediterranean countries are invited as well.

In consultation with the Cyprus authorities the theme of the Conference is “**Securing Democracy through Education**”. Three sub-themes, representing some of the major challenges that Education systems are currently facing are proposed for discussion:

- Fighting violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism – implementation of the Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture
- Building Inclusive Societies – valuing diversity and dialogue
- Education provision for refugees – from short term solutions to long term integration

In addition, the Conference will allow a broader evaluation of the progress made on the implementation of the Brussels Declaration of Council of Europe Ministers of Education since 12 April 2016 and of the Action Plans adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2015 and 2016. It should also identify implications for further action to be introduced in the new programme of activities of the Council of Europe for the years 2018-2019.

## **Introduction to Plenary sessions' themes:**

### **Plenary Session 1: Competences for democratic culture**

In his address to Ministers in Brussels the Secretary General emphasized the need to empower educators to meet the challenges European societies face today. He called on Ministers to provide more support to enable education professionals to teach students not only about democratic processes but also develop democratic culture, mind-sets and attitudes. He underlined that all schools in Europe should explicitly teach children what it means to be a democratic citizen. He therefore invited Ministers to endorse the Council of Europe flagship Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) model and to actively support its testing phase in their national education institutions and schools. Ministers underlined the role of knowledge transmitted by schools, the development of critical understanding and the teaching of democratic and humanist values in the fight against terrorism. They considered that an integrated approach throughout the curriculum would be one of the favoured ways for the implementation of the CDC Framework and that public authorities should closely involve teacher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders such as parents associations, youth associations etc., in this process.

The piloting phase of the CDC Framework is now being carried out in 17 European countries. At the same time the CDPPE *ad hoc* expert group in charge of the completion of the Framework is developing a series of thematic documents related to assessment, teachers' education, curriculum design, and prevention of violent extremism. The Conference will provide these countries with an opportunity to share the lessons learned from these initiatives and propose recommendations for further action.

Ministers should furthermore discuss the effectiveness of other national policy measures applied in the Education sector with regard to the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation and the role that integrated policies might play by bringing together formal, non-formal and informal education sectors in a coordinated and coherent action.

## **Plenary Session 2: Valuing diversity and dialogue in a safe learning environment**

The Action Plan Building Inclusive Societies<sup>1</sup> (BIS), which was accepted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in March 2016, underlines that few fields of action are as important as education in our mission to build more inclusive societies. Dialogue, intercultural awareness and valuing of diversity are key elements of inclusive education. The Council of Europe has been promoting such education for several decades through its programme of activities in History Education, Language Education and Education about Religions and other Worldviews.

Over recent months, however, it has become increasingly apparent that education professionals in a number of member States consider themselves ill-equipped to engage in dialogue and navigate difficult discussions among young people relating to issues and events, among others, such as the terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere, the Syrian conflict, the refugee crisis and, as a consequence, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of racism and discrimination. A possible consequence is the suppression of open debate in classrooms, removing the opportunity to challenge conspiracy theories, mistaken assumptions and misinformation. Another possible consequence may be the break of trust and dialogue between school stakeholders and the local community.

The conference will provide Ministers with an opportunity to discuss the Secretary General's project on developing 'safe spaces' for teaching controversial issues, with a view to drawing up guidelines for use in schools and other formal education settings that allow teachers and pupils to address difficult and controversial issues relating to faith, culture and foreign affairs, while respecting each other's rights and upholding freedom of expression, as set out in the "proposed actions and recommendations" of the Secretary General's 3rd Annual Report<sup>2</sup>.

### **Roundtable debate/panel: Dialogue with our neighbours**

More broadly European Ministers will discuss with their counterparts from South Mediterranean countries the policy implications that dialogue with other regions of the world and more specifically with the South Mediterranean region might have for the development of inclusion, tolerance, dialogue and intercultural understanding in education. This may generate proposals for new cooperation pathways in the field of Education and Higher Education with the South Mediterranean.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c1a1f](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c1a1f)

<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680646af8>

### **Plenary session 3: The refugee crisis – from short term solutions to long term integration**

Since summer 2015, the number of people fleeing their home countries and seeking shelter in Europe has increased dramatically. This situation has given rise to highly diverse policies in different Council of Europe member states as well as very diverse reactions from citizens and civil society. As an organization whose membership covers the whole continent, the Council of Europe is concerned with the various aspects of what has come to be called the “refugee crisis”. The Secretary General has reminded Member States that under the European Convention on Human Rights member states guarantee the rights set forth in the Convention not only to their own citizens but to everybody within their jurisdiction, regardless of their nationality or status. Measures in favour of refugees are included in the draft Action Plan Building Inclusive Societies (BIS). Providing education is an essential element in this Action Plan and in the measures European countries need to take in order to receive refugees.

The Education sector of the Council of Europe, drawing on the long standing experience and previous achievements in Higher education and Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants programmes, has applied its efforts in two areas:

- Language skills as an engine for integration;
- Recognizing qualifications held by refugees and migrants.

Ministers will have the opportunity to take stock of the results of this work and discuss further implications for action in their national contexts and/or European level. Ministers will also be invited to consider ways to move from emergency situations policies and practices to long-term integration policies and practices for refugees and migrants in and through education.

### **From Nicosia to Prague - Czech Chairmanship event**

The Czech Republic has indicated that its Chairmanship will include a high level Prague Forum focusing on the Competences for Democratic Culture Framework, to be held from 26 to 27 October 2017. This event is intended to take stock of the broad testing phase launched in autumn 2016 and of the entire first phase of the development of the CDC Framework. More importantly, it will provide an opportunity to look ahead to the second phase of this flagship project (2018 – 19), which will include dissemination as well as continuing development of the Framework, not least through the publication of supporting documents.