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*Human Rights and Democracy in Action – Looking Ahead:
The impact of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic
Citizenship and Human Rights Education*

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Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you at this first Conference on the CoE Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education adopted by the member states in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.

My experience within the Organisation includes many years in the fields that deal with violation of human rights.

It also includes many years of experience in the area that aims at the **prevention** of such violations - and that is education.

I have a very personal and a very deep conviction that it is at least as important to invest time and resources in prevention, in other words, in addressing human rights violation before they happen.

And that is why the adoption of the **Charter** in 2010 has been a very important step forward for the Council of Europe, for its 47 member states, and for all those committed to the values of democracy and human rights.

With the adoption of the Charter we have a very strong **working tool** that can help us to do this.

Added value of Charter

What has been the **added value** of the Charter so far?

- First of all, we now have a **common definition** – Article 2. And the important thing is that it is now broadly accepted that citizenship and human rights education is **not just about a specific subject** in the curriculum. This approach has been used for example in Finland in their education reform already in 2010.
- The Charter has paved the way to a **global consensus**, and the UN Declaration that was adopted at the end of 2010 was in many respects inspired and supported by the adoption of the Charter.
- We now have a clear **framework** for action and a very practical **checklist** for educational reforms. The Council of Europe work is not about imposing a vision of some country on the others. It is about agreeing on a common vision, and on practical steps leading to this vision, as well as helping each other to make progress in this direction. The Charter is already being used in Turkey, including inspiring a new elective course on human rights and democracy for secondary schools.
- The Charter has also encouraged **rethinking of education and training** of teachers and youth leaders. For instance in Andorra, the current education reform is focused on Article 13 of the Charter, namely identifying skills to promote social cohesion and to value diversity.

Clearly, the effectiveness of the Charter depends on the willingness of many partners, and most importantly – on the **willingness of the governments** on how effectively we can use this tool.

It is therefore very reassuring for us today to see the member states so well represented at this conference today. It is also reassuring that 40 out of 50 states party to the European Cultural Convention contributed to the **report** on the implementation of the Charter. This is a clear signal that there is strong **commitment** in the countries to make this Charter an effective instrument for change.

It is proposed to repeat the Charter report and the conference on a regular basis – every 5 years. We need to discuss today and tomorrow how this proposal can be further reinforced and supported by other **actions to be taken** by the governments, by the Council of Europe and other international institutions, and by civil society organisations.

And in this respect I would like to share with you my personal “wish list” for the 5 years to come:

- I would like education reforms to be driven by the values and principles of democracy and human rights as enshrined in the Charter;
- I would like education for democracy and human rights to be given a stronger status in the member states and in the Council of Europe;
- I would like lifelong learning for democracy and human rights to become a philosophy and a mainstream approach to education;
- I would like any future definition of *quality* education to include democracy and human rights – for there can be no quality education without these values.
- And more specifically, perhaps we could consider a special rapporteur for education for democracy and human rights to be nominated by the Committee of Ministers? The Croatian Ambassador is acting as such a rapporteur for Children’s rights

and she has been a strong voice for this topic within the Organisation and beyond.

Partners

Of course we can try to support member states more effectively but we cannot do it alone. Our member states have called for a strong cooperation with the European Commission for many years, and we are delighted that this conference is organised in very close cooperation with the EC.

The European Wergeland Centre is becoming an increasingly important partner in connecting policy and practice, and we are grateful for their support and cooperation.

And there is also the International Contact Group that was set up last year to co-ordinate our efforts and brings together eight major international institutions who are represented here today.

Indeed, we are very fortunate to have so many **partners and supporters** represented at this conference. The EDC/HRE coordinators are longstanding counterparts in the member states. Youth NGOs also have valuable experience, a lot of energy and many creative ideas and it was not by coincidence they are specifically mentioned in Article 10 in the Charter. Education professionals have first-hand experience of what works best and how things could be improved. Permanent Representations play a crucial role in connecting Strasbourg with the European capitals

We hope that our discussions will be most fruitful and will lead to very practical actions to promote democracy and human rights through education.

As one of the participants of a Council of Europe Summer Academy commented: “I came here with a vision, and I left with a **plan of action**”.

We are hoping that every one of you will leave with an action plan at the end of this conference. We owe this to generations to come. For as the Polish educationalist Janusz Korczak said, “children are not people-to-be, not people of tomorrow, but people now, right now—today”. We therefore all need to act now.

Thank you very much.