

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AT THE CONFERENCE
“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”.

Strasbourg, 28-30 November 2012

Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Director General,

Presidents,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be speaking today in Strasbourg at this Conference on **“the impact of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education”**.

Background

On 10 November 1994 the Principality of Andorra became a full member of the Council of Europe, and in 1996 it ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The adoption of this Convention means that our country has to comply with certain international obligations, responsibilities vis-à-vis our citizens, and monitoring the proper enforcement of these rules is a priority for our state.

Beyond our legislation and legal system, common European standards have thus been introduced, which must be respected in order to continue to improve the protection of human dignity in Europe.

Learning about democratic citizenship and human rights necessitates a reference framework, serving as an anchor point and an aid to learning.

Chairmanship

Eighteen years after the accession of the Principality of Andorra to the Council of Europe, having “come of age”, so to speak, the **Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe** is a tremendous opportunity for our country to make a practical contribution to the cause of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, the values which are represented and resolutely defended by the Council of Europe.

The theme chosen by Andorra should provide food for thought on **education as the means of acquiring the requisite competencies for harmonious living in society, drawing on the culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue.**

The fact that we have agreed on our priorities with Armenia and Austria, the next states in line for the Chairmanship, will guarantee that the themes chosen will be followed up, allowing us to consolidate the different ideas and changes to be proposed throughout this whole period.

The priorities thus established will provide an opportunity for collective discussion of the importance of education as a tool/resource capable of supplying the requisite common cultural references for social and multicultural progress.

Education being chosen the central theme for this first Andorran Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, which began this month, November 2012, and will run until 16 May 2013, is a special honour for me as the Andorran Minister for Education and Youth.

I realise that our children's education plays a decisive role in the day-to-day practice of democracy, the defence of human rights and intercultural dialogue.

I fully back the content of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Formal, non-formal and informal education undeniably plays a vital role in the life of both the younger and older generations. We must bear in mind that the competencies acquired at school are there for a lifetime, like foreign languages. The values of democracy and human rights must be understood, internalised and constantly practised in order not to be forgotten.

Despite all the progress in the field of democratic citizenship and human rights, which are Council of Europe flagship activities, reality shows us not only that the road ahead is long and fraught with pitfalls, but also that none of the successive generations ever actually get to the end of this road. The need to reinforce western democracies, injustices, lack of equality, antidemocratic and xenophobic movements, poverty and countless other factors inherent in our societies prove, if proof were ever needed, the importance of educating our young students in democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue.

The work of developing education for democratic citizenship, respect for human rights and intercultural dialogue will be presented, analysed and debated at the Conference in Andorra on 7 and 8 February next. For two days you will be able to visit our country and get to know its specific features. In an area of 464 km² three education systems, Andorran, French and Spanish, are run side-by-side, all of them public and free of charge, apart from one private school. I believe that this broad choice is one of the keys to Andorra's success in integrating migrants, by ensuring a merger of cultures rather than mere cohabitation.

Let me just outline the **main principles of education in my country**.

These principles are set out in the 1993 Constitution, the Organic Law on Education, the Law organising the Andorran Education System, the Law on Universities and the educational agreements signed with France, Spain and Portugal.

Education in Andorra is based on the rights, freedoms and principles of Article 20 of the Constitution : *"All persons have the right to education, which*

shall be oriented towards the dignity and full development of the human personality, thus strengthening the respect for freedom and the fundamental rights”, which ensures freedom of education.

Parents are free to decide which type of education their children should receive.

The 1993 Organic Law on Education organises education on the basis of Andorran realities, namely the coexistence of three free public education systems within one single educational structure, which is as useful as it is unique.

All three education systems are based on the principle of ensuring access by all individuals regardless of origin, religion, sex and political or ideological views.

The Organic Law on Education stipulates that the educational activity must train children and young people in respect for diversity, rights and freedoms and the exercise of tolerance. This Law provides for free compulsory schooling from the age of 6 to 16, specifying that all children are entitled to attend school from the age of 3 onwards. It guarantees the right of adults to basic training, equal access to higher education, freedom of expression for teachers and also the rights of students' parents.

The Andorran School was established in 1982 as an education system peculiar to the country, aspiring to a plurilingual and multicultural approach without ignoring cultural specificities.

The Andorran School was designed as an open, active and inclusive system. It has secured the active participation of the students and the whole educational community in all schools. The same applies to the other (French and Spanish) education systems. We are working together to promote Article 8 (“Democratic governance”) of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

Thirty years after the inauguration of the education system, we are determined to continue improving it. To that end, a strategic plan has been launched to renew and enhance the Andorran education system. This strategic plan

provides for renewing the compulsory schooling programme, using a competency-based approach. The competencies relating to democratic citizenship and human rights will be grouped together under one heading, namely citizenship and life, under a pluridisciplinary approach.

Nowadays, education systems in western countries, and Andorra is no exception here, are increasingly emphasising immediate employability, often overlooking the holistic development of the individual, of which the civic and social dimension is an integral part. The citizen must be free and responsible and possess critical faculties.

In order to develop these competencies, we must emphasise education in its entirety and the concepts of citizenship and interculturalism, all of which must be included in the curricula.

Our young people and adults must be able to link up the knowledge areas acquired and to set up, at school and later on in society, the requisite networks to put their knowledge into practice. Teacher training is crucial in achieving this, enabling teachers to deepen this approach.

The school setting is conducive to learning about democracy provided the students also participate, at a variety of levels. One example is allowing them to elect their own representatives, another being the primary school system of setting up School Councils where students can play the role of local authority representatives and participate in decision-making in their schools. At middle school level, Youth Councils allow them to act as parliamentarians for a day.

The wide variety of languages and cultures at school provides a fruitful training ground for working on diversity, cultural dialogue, tolerance and the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

Lastly, we must emphasise knowledge of and respect for our language as a basis for learning other languages and cultures, again using a plural approach.

The world of education to which we all belong must continue actively to ensure that the declarations, recommendations and agreements adopted in recent years and decades, and others still at the preparatory stage, are respected and implemented. The future of our societies is at stake.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a quotation from “Wind, Sand and Stars” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:

“To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible. It is to feel shame at the sight of what seems to be unmerited misery. It is to take pride in a victory won by one's comrades. It is to feel, when setting one's stone, that one is contributing to the building of the world”.

I wish you every success in your work and thank you for your attention.