

Human Rights and Democracy in Action – Looking Ahead

General Rapporteur's initial summary

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It is customary to say it has been an honour to be trusted with such a responsibility as writing the report of an important conference such as we have participating in over the past two days. In this case **it has genuinely been an honour and a privilege**, as I have observed a **genuine creativity** in the way you have worked and I have learned a great deal from the discussions that have taken place in our working groups and from particular inputs in our plenary sessions. The various groups represented in this room, international organisations, member-states and civil society make up the elements of a democratic society. We often present various groups as pillars – but pillars stand upright and separate, holding up the roof, - you have interacted, discussed, questioned and argued – in other words, **you have modelled the processes of democratic life** and of **education for democracy and human rights**.

Our aim was to **take stock of the results** achieved to date in the **implementation of the Charter** and to **plan future co-operation and strategies for promotion and development** of Education for Democratic Citizenship and **Human Rights Education**. Yesterday we discussed the implementation of the Charter and the feedback from various perspectives: from youth organisations, from NGOs and from member states. We were presented in plenary by a number of examples of good practice, as in the Summer Academies and in the very interesting pilot project between Swiss and Ukrainian colleagues. We also considered proposals for evaluating progress over the coming years, and follow-up. Today we have focused on **recommendations, action points and targets**, for the **Council of Europe; for States–Parties to the European Cultural Convention**; and for **NGOs and civil society**.

How well have we met our objectives?

- ▶ To discuss challenges and opportunities in EDC and HRE;
- ▶ To exchange information on the impact and implementation of the Charter in member states by public institutions and NGOs;
- ▶ To discuss how to further enhance EDC/HRE through future use of the Charter and contribute to the development of sustainable mechanisms for its implementation both in member states and the Council of Europe;
- ▶ To develop concrete future co-operation initiatives among national and international institutions / organisations and between formal and non-formal education sectors.

How do you sum up such a conference as this? I would like to begin by **reflecting on the processes** of our conference.

In a relatively orderly and quiet way, you have been the **'boisterous, outspoken, and cantankerous citizens'** that Olöf Olafsdottir drew attention to in her introduction and which Canadian writer John Ralston Saul referred to as essential to democracy.

We often hear references to '**good citizens**' in discussions about EDC/HRE. What does this mean? I am assuming, from your lively behaviour, that you like me, **equate good citizenship with dialogue, questioning, challenging, and critique of established ways of doing things**. This is, as has been highlighted by some of our plenary speakers, especially important in a time such as this when we have seen an **economic crisis, and restricted resources for education and research on learning for citizenship and democracy**. At the same time, as we were reminded this morning in the video 'Hate Me' we face a direct **threat to human rights and democracy in Europe** from **hate speech** on line, and from **other expressions of anti-democratic and violent behaviour**. We heard that human rights educators are also human rights activists- and the implication that education for democracy and human rights is about inspiring action for justice and standing up for human rights. The organisers and sponsors of our meeting – at the Council of Europe, the Wergeland Centre and the European Commission - have brought together NGOs, government representatives, and youth organisations. As we have discovered through doing, this implies **new ways of working and learning together**.

As has been reinforced during the conference, the relationship between human rights educators and governments is not one in which NGOs simply enact governmental or inter-governmental policies such as the Charter, but one in which they **question and probe the meaning of those policies**. Here, we have the very excellent example of the **Swiss –Ukrainian pilot project**, which in working to put into practice the Charter colleagues have engaged in a process of **deep reflection** and in the **peer-learning and peer evaluation** which yesterday's working groups stressed as fundamental to progress in implementing the Charter and in strengthening education for democracy and human rights. They stressed the 'new thinking' inspired by the project. We also heard another impressive example of international peer-learning in the **Summer Academies in Poland and in Montenegro**.

Reflections on the implementation of the Charter

The **ethics** of the current process of **assessing and reporting progress** was questioned by some working groups.

Yesterday's working groups called for **government accountability** in reporting processes and for a wider involvement of **civil society and stakeholders** in the next evaluation of progress in implementing the Charter, to include **children's perspectives** and those of **parents** and NGOs.

You called for **greater transparency** in reporting, so that governmental reports, for example, should be available to see – since the aggregated report we have on the table does not reveal some of the challenges and difficulties faced by different societies.

You asked for **qualitative data** and case studies in future to complement the qualitative data we have before us, and for the engagement of universities in data analysis and interpretation. It was suggested that the Council of Europe should support the implementation process by encouraging national action plans.

Among other issues raised by a number of working groups was attention to the **language** of the evaluation questions, so that it is accessible to respondents, referring especially to technical language and, in some cases to availability in the national language.

Another proposal was **peer-review** by member states in their implementation and evaluation processes.

Bench-marking and capacity building were proposed through the development of **qualitative indicators** for assessment of progress in creating a culture of human rights and democracy through education.

And we had in our opening session a proposal for a **Rapporteur on human rights and democracy learning** by the Council of Europe Council of Ministers, to strengthen both the status and quality of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

Today we have worked to formulate some **Recommendations to the Council of Europe, to State-Parties, and to NGOs**. We have stressed in our recommendations the importance of **recognising the child as a citizen** and a stakeholder – whether the area of interest is formal education, democratic governance of schools, the work of NGOs, evaluation, or prompting diversity and social cohesion. Effectively we are calling for a reconceptualization of childhood.

In all our recommendations we have acknowledged the importance of **multi-stakeholder processes**, and in particular the contribution of youth and youth organisations to the planning, development and monitoring of EDC/HRE. The conference has reminded us that we are not starting from nowhere but that we have a great **wealth of material and expertise for EDC/HRE**, not least in the international organisations working in this field.

We recognise **the Charter as an important step forward in strengthening EDC/HRE in Europe**. And we have been reminded that we cannot afford to be complacent about human rights and democracy. Effectively Europe's democratic future depends on us. Political decision-makers, NGOs and youth organisations have a powerful tool in the Charter. We have been reminded too that **learning for human rights and democracy must engage the emotions as well as the intellect**. On the first day of the conference we were encouraged to **come with a vision and leave with an action plan!**

It is, perhaps, relatively easy to draw up recommendations to others. But in this final session, I would suggest that each one of us needs to ask: **what is added value of this meeting to me?** What have I got out of these two days together? And more importantly, **what can I take home with me to advance HRE/EDC** in my own professional environment? For my own part, I now draw not only on shared common definition of EDC/HRE but also leaving with **a deeper understanding of the Charter and of its potential as a tool for action**. In our recommendations to others, we have, hopefully a personal/ institutional checklist on which we can act over the coming months.

I believe we have much more to talk about than we have managed over these two days. For example, I believe we need to think more deeply about the rights of minorities within our vision of democracy and human rights and human rights education. We need, I would suggest, to give **deeper recognition to those groups who effectively lack rights in Europe**.

Importantly, we have together taken the first steps in realising **a vision of a quality education** which necessarily is **an education in which learners' right to a human rights education is assured**.