

Conference of European Education Ministers Brussels, 11-12 April 2016

Key points

- Education ministers and representatives of the 50 countries covered by the [European Cultural Convention](#) – the [47 Council of Europe member states](#) plus Belarus, the Holy See and Kazakhstan – will meet in Brussels on 11-12 April 2016
- In the face of many important challenges – including terrorism, migration and growing levels of intolerance – ministers will discuss how best to safeguard democracy through education
- At the conference, ministers are expected to give their backing to a new Council of Europe tool for teaching democracy and democratic values in schools and other settings, as part of broader efforts to counter radicalisation and violent extremism

Questions and answers

What is happening, and why?

The European Cultural Convention, which dates back to 1954, provides a basis for countries to work together to tackle common challenges in areas such as culture, education and sport.

Relevant ministers from countries covered by the convention regularly meet to discuss current issues and set the priorities for Council of Europe work in these areas. This will be the 25th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education.

Europe is currently facing several major challenges, including those linked to terrorism and migration. There is widespread agreement that education is crucial to safeguarding democratic security by helping to reinforce Europe's core values and promote inclusive societies.

What exactly is being discussed?

A new educational tool – developed by the Council of Europe to help people teach, learn and measure democratic values – will be launched at the conference. Ministers are expected to give their formal backing to the tool and agree to test it out in various different countries and settings.

Participants will also consider how to strengthen education for democratic citizenship more generally, as a way of helping to tackle radicalisation and prevent terrorism. They will also discuss the role that the Council of Europe can play in promoting citizenship education internationally.

This work forms part of the [Council of Europe Action Plan on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”](#) as well as the organisation's work, together with its member states, on [building inclusive societies](#).

What does the new tool look like, and how can it be used?

The tool, officially called a “Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture”, sets out a number of key attributes – whether values, attitudes, skills or knowledge/understanding – and explains how these can be defined and measured.

The framework is primarily designed for use in schools, but it can also be applied in both higher education and vocational education. It can also be used in non-formal or adult education, as well as in police training courses, for example, or integration programmes for migrants or refugees.

The framework has been designed and tested by teachers and educational experts from 50 countries, primarily in Europe. The hope is that, after an initial testing phase and further fine-tuning where necessary, it could ultimately be used across the continent and beyond.

How will this benefit ordinary people?

Democracy is crucial to maintaining security, but people are not born with the competences needed to live in a democratic society – they need to be learnt. People arriving from elsewhere also need to understand and adhere to key European values if their integration is to be successful.

Schools and other places of learning have a key role to play in this process. Having a robust European framework in place will help national authorities to introduce education for democratic citizenship into their curricula, as well as ensuring coherence and consistency across European borders.

Ideally, being able to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in democratic culture would become a standard part of children’s education across the continent. As well as the many benefits to be gained from promoting inclusive societies, it could also boost people’s job prospects in many fields.

Why is the Council of Europe involved?

The Council of Europe is the continent’s primary international organisation for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It draws up common standards in many areas, based on those core European values, and helps countries to put them into practice.

Many of the Council of Europe’s 200 or so international treaties – including the European Cultural Convention – are also open to states outside Europe. This allows a wide range of countries to work together, sharing ideas, experiences and best practice.

The Council of Europe has extensive expertise in promoting cross-border cooperation in education. The [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#) – which sets standards for language learning, teaching and assessment – is one widely-used example.

Further information

More information on the conference is available [here](#), and an opinion article on the Council of Europe’s pioneering work on democratic competences can be found [here](#).

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