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**Conclusions from the Andorran Conference
Andorra la Vella, 7-8 February 2013**

High-Level Conference

“Competences for a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue: a political challenge and values”

Andorra la Vella, Andorra, 7 and 8 February 2013

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The Andorra Conference was attended by 21 Ambassadors or Permanent Representatives, 4 Deputy Permanent Representatives and other leading figures from 39 countries in total, and attracted the full attention of Andorra's highest authorities, including its Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Education and Youth, who opened the proceedings. This conference was an unprecedented event, not just because education was chosen for the first time as the theme for a conference by the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe but also because it focused on education in democracy and intercultural issues, neither of which had been selected as the central theme of a chairmanship or presidency at European level before. The conference sincerely welcomed Andorra's ground-breaking idea.

In choosing and discussing this theme, the conference was able to assert more forcefully than ever before that the very key to Europe's culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue, which Europe and Europeans hold so dear and yet all too frequently take for granted, lies in education and, in particular, in so-called quality education. It was also reiterated that quality education could not be secured without the full involvement of the member states and without the relevant authorities and civil society defining the notion of quality in relation to the policies they would adopt with regard to education and, over and above that, to the development of our societies.

The context

The speakers at the opening session, namely Mr Gilbert Saboya Sunyé, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Andorra, Ms Roser Suñé Pascuet, Minister of Education and Youth of Andorra, Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Carlos Costa Neves, representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and Mr Jean-Claude Frécon, representing the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, all agreed that we must keep a permanent track on developments in our countries and ensure that education, whose role as one of the key vehicles of our democratic, multicultural societies is all too frequently called into question today, is instead structurally and financially strengthened and regularly updated so that the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are preserved.

In recent years, the world has had to contend with crises of all types at all levels, including a food crisis, an institutional crisis, an economic crisis and a crisis of values, and it is precisely because of these that education has to be refashioned so that it meets our societies' needs as well as possible and promotes the values on which we would like our societies to be based.

We are seeing a shift in emphasis or even a complete reorganisation of all of education's institutions such as kindergartens, schools from nursery level to upper secondary level, universities and other higher education establishments. The main thrust of this reorganisation, however, is to use education as a means of accessing a certain type of employment, namely work in small to large-sized businesses whose goal above all else is to make profits. Unfortunately though, this shift in emphasis, though partly justified, is often combined with a simplistic view of what education should be promoting. Professionalisation goes hand in hand with a tendency to rationalise and narrow down school subjects and a reductionist reconsideration of the very role of the world of education. Preparing schoolchildren

or students for the world of work should not mean that we have to prepare them for the jobs and functions of today's societies. However efficient we think we may be at predicting the future, we cannot accurately forecast what tomorrow may bring, what world the young generations and generations of the future will be moving in, what jobs they may shape for themselves and what future they may be preparing for themselves. Will students still go to physical university buildings to receive their higher education? Or, instead, will everything be arranged through social media, MOOCs¹ or the Internet? Or will these concepts also be outmoded by then? What role should education play in preparing young people for the world of today and tomorrow, and how can education help our societies to progress while abiding by the values that provide the basis for the democratic societies we cherish?

In this context it is important for us to “nurture” and truly educate young and not so young people to prepare them as best we can and equip them with all the knowledge and know-how that we have. We have to pass on all the skills to them that we can so that they have a sound and positive basis on which to forge their own open-minded and critical intellect showing due respect for others and enabling them to create universes which we would probably only be able to create a sketchy outline of.

They need a range of tools enabling them to become active and responsible citizens; we have to give them the chance to find in education what will help them to develop fully as persons. As Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni emphasised in her opening address, a prerequisite for this is diverse studies enhanced by eminently multidisciplinary and transversal aspects.

The conference dwelt for a long time on the definition of the types of competences which present and future generations need, and will need, to be completely fulfilled. It stressed the importance of jointly devising descriptors of these competences which will make it possible to develop a common reference framework for an intercultural and democratic understanding for all.

The conference highlighted the importance of reinforcing these aspects within our education systems and reinforcing education systems themselves.

One of the major challenges that was identified was how to translate this consensus into a real commitment to democracy and human rights, a commitment to universal values and a commitment to recognising the fact that to live together in peace and respect for our differences we have to improve our education systems and open them up to incorporate the necessary competences to achieve these aims. The aim is to equip both our own children and present and future generations as a whole with the competences which will enable them to deal calmly and constructively with the problems they face and will face. These competences will provide them with the skills they will need to build up a sincere personal respect for others. It is not just schools, universities and other higher education establishments which are concerned by this; other stakeholders must be involved in the process if they are not already. For instance, local and regional authorities have an essential role to play because they are the key players in promoting intercultural dialogue and the culture of democracy². Several specific examples have shown the way in which these authorities contribute to the establishment of these principles, which have been taken up by the Council of Europe's working groups.

These discussions are not new. For the last fifteen years or so, there have been numerous discussions and debates investigating the issue. This has resulted in particular in the publication by the Council of Europe of the White Paper on the subject and other fundamental texts, and these publications and reference documents have become pieces in one and the same puzzle.³ Andorra's idea of focusing on education issues, particularly on those relating to education in democracy and intercultural dialogue, has helped to take these discussions and recommendations forward. While the conference partly succeeded in confirming a commitment to action and the adoption of a stance on

¹ Massive Open Online Courses.

² See the address by Mr Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe

³ Council of Europe (2008) *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – Living together as equals in dignity*, Council of Europe (2010), Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and its explanatory memorandum;

Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing (2011), *Living Together - Combining diversity and freedom in 21st Century Europe*, Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe;

Council of Europe Publishing, “Developing Intercultural Competence through Education”, Martyn Barrett et al, Directorate General II / Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation;

Council of Europe, January 2013, Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)13 on ensuring quality education. The definition of quality given in the recommendation includes employability but places particular emphasis on aspects of citizenship, democracy, respect for human rights and the development of an enquiring mind.

these issues by the member states attending the conference, it also showed how such a commitment could be translated into practice in the near future.

The examples of national projects given by Ms Carme Sala, former Andorran Minister of Education, Youth and Sports and Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Andorra to the Council of Europe, and Ms Caryn McTighe Musil of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, United States⁴, showed how Andorra and the United States have both devised and implemented specific action plans for education in democracy. In both countries a large number of activities have been set up at all levels of education to provide young and not so young people with the necessary competences to create cultures of democracy and intercultural dialogue.

The study conducted on the United States higher education system, the results of which were published in the report entitled *A Crucible Moment*, was a national appeal or a roadmap for action designed to promote understanding, consultation and exchange, transcending cultural barriers within that system. This national project helped to identify a whole series of successful educational projects and it could be taken up, adjusted and transposed into other specific national activities throughout the world.

To promote a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue and counter what Ignasi Boada calls the “corruption of basic democratic principles”⁵, it is necessary to promote knowledge sharing, develop skills and values, and foster commitment to collective action designed not only to validate theory but also to put it into practice. It is also important for the democratic project and, more particularly, the educational and political aspect thereof to take account of the fact that it is closely tied up with the notion of critical thinking, dialectics and hence language. Today the technological revolution is changing our view of reality and language is giving way to images. The author warns us about the corrosion of critical thinking that this shift is bringing about. There is clearly a need to pay special attention to this aspect.

The conference also insisted on the fact that all levels and types of education must be involved. Although much emphasis was put on the importance of non-formal and informal education, it is not just at this level that action is needed - quite the opposite in fact. This complementary system must certainly not be used by governments as a kind of pretext that would enable them to neglect all efforts to incorporate the right principles into formal education. It is in kindergartens and primary schools that the basic notions of competences for democracy and intercultural dialogue should first be instilled - and at secondary and higher level that they should be reinforced and formalised. This will allow us to create links between all the different levels and types of education and to generate the type of educators and citizens required to secure a better future. Success depends on establishing strong ties between these levels and types of education and involving all the stakeholders in the processes and practices devised.

The extent of political resolve and the remaining challenges

However, although the conference revealed a relatively strong political will to address this issue and work to devise and implement an action plan, it also highlighted major political problems which are impeding progress on the issue – in political debates and in the reform process itself.

The first problem is the appeal that has been launched to education establishments, particularly higher education establishments, to seek solutions to Europe’s unemployment problem. Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni emphasised the point when opening the conference, other contributors reiterated it and Caryn McTighe Musil summed it up in these terms: “there is currently a dangerous shift in calling for workforce training instead of a comprehensive college education: some quarters outside of higher education insist that colleges’ purpose should be to fill job vacancies in their states, using short sighted, narrow, instrumental thinking that will constrict dramatically many students lifelong options. Governors as a whole are taking the lead on this bandwagon. Some even recommend tying state funding to the rate at which different institutions fill currently unfilled jobs in the state. Others want to charge a higher tuition to students who choose majors that lead to lower paying jobs. Yet – and this should be exploited further - this thinking is directly counter to what business leaders themselves are saying. They are proving to be allies for educational reform in general and specifically allies in education for democracy.” Although Caryn McTighe Musil’s words refer specifically to the situation in the United States, they will be familiar to many European countries as something that currently

⁴ And author of *A Crucible Moment – College Learning & Democracy’s Future ; A National Call for Action*, and member of the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy.

⁵ Ignasi Boada (2013), “Democràcia sense pensament (auto)crític : una paradoxa sense futur”.

preoccupies them as well. However, dialogue with the business community has not yet been sufficiently developed or placed on any formal footing. The world of education is taking a tentative approach and refocusing on relatively limited notions of employability whereas, as Etienne Gilliard and others point out, “Education’s role is to create new possibilities, not just to prepare an over-specialised workforce”. It is time for European and other conferences to focus on these issues of employability and for genuine representatives of the business world to be invited to speak. If they were, Caryn McTighe Musil’s claim that they are the best allies for a constructive educational reform and for education for democracy would be borne out.

The second major problem has to do with the transformation of the higher education landscape as a result of the myriad challenges and pressures to which the various levels of education must respond today. This is a by-product of the economic crisis. As Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni points out “austerity budgets have never been favourable to education” and the challenges and pressures to which they give rise, of which everyone is aware, include the pressure by the authorities to reduce costs while improving access, in other words improving the return on the investment. Among the main outcomes of such pressures are the rationalisation of funding and finances and a reduction throughout practically the whole of Europe in the actual study time allocated per subject, module or course taught. This is leading in turn to limited opportunities for learners and students to engage in multi- and cross-disciplinary studies, which are so vital for them to gain the necessary skills to become fulfilled and versatile citizens able to deal properly with the social, economic, and environmental changes which they must contend with, now and in the future. The reforms that have been devised seem to set too little store by this requirement, which Sjur Bergan, Head of the Council of Europe Education Department, quite rightly drew attention to, pointing that before we know what to teach or even how to teach it, we must decide what type of society we wish to live in and what type of education we need to achieve this goal. If we do not put this question every time we reform, our reforms of the education system will ultimately satisfy no-one.

Another problem is the growing competition between institutions. This does not help in any respect, quite the opposite in fact, because the competition to attract funding from the same sources or to attract the best students poses a threat to co-operation and plunges universities and other higher education establishments into a market-based mindset which is not always compatible with the societal needs which they are also asked to fulfil.

Another problem, which was highlighted in particular, is that raised by the wide-scale admission into schools and then higher education establishments of so-called first-generation students. Studies have shown that these “new learners” without any immediate experience of higher education in their family or their entourage often seek a more direct return on their investment, hoping to find a good job and secure a substantial income. Often, though not always, democratic citizenship and an intercultural education only become priorities in their school or university careers much later. This problem was singled out as being something specific to the United States but it is also relevant to Europe and other parts of the world.

A final problem worth noting is that many countries assume that everything is in place and functioning well already. However, the debates showed clearly that nothing should ever be taken for granted. Values must be constantly reaffirmed, and policies and practices must be developed to support this effort.

Potential solutions

Regrettably, these problems in particular impede the development of political ambitions which would enable an impetus to be created and specific programmes of activity to be set up to foster a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue. The competences linked to the establishment of this culture are also needed more than ever before in the working world and without them it will not be possible to preserve the open democratic societies which we have become used to in today’s Europe.

The conference made an appeal for improved dissemination of the documents and tools produced by the Council of Europe so that all the work done so far can be used to implement concerted, structured strategies to create a better future for everyone.

The conference was divided into three workshops and this made it possible to address the following issues: (1) the definition of the competences needed to develop intercultural dialogue of a high

standard⁶; (2) competences for a culture of democracy⁷; (3) the definition of a quality education for all based on the above competences⁸.

To introduce the debates, Martyn Barrett, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Surrey and co-author of the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, presented the results of his research, as summarised in the document entitled “Developing intercultural competence through education”, which highlights the importance of the three levels of education – non-formal, informal and formal – for equipping individuals with intercultural competences and the competences needed to establish a democratic culture, as well as defining the concept of intercultural competence and discussing its meaning. The document proposes practical steps for planning, devising methods of learning and teaching, evaluation and assessment and, lastly, approaches and activities that help to develop these competences among learners.

Pascale Mompoin-Gaillard, Independent Consultant for Educational Projects and General Rapporteur for the Pestalozzi Programme, discussed the very notion of competence for a culture of democracy, putting the question: “What are the components of the relevant aptitudes in terms of attitudes, knowledge and understanding and how can these aptitudes and competences be transposed into the appropriate context?” She also stressed the importance of the vexed question of evaluation.

Etienne Gilliard, member of the Bureau of the CDPPE and Chair of the ad hoc working group which worked on the draft recommendation on quality education, called for mechanisms to be set up which would make it possible to secure quality education for all and for all learners, and warned against any form of two-track education, particularly in the light of its high cost. He also stressed that despite the genuine progress referred to above, the implementation of the competences that have been identified is either advancing very slowly or still in its very earliest stages. He pointed out that there was still a need today to do more than just pronounce fine ideas and succeed in narrowing down more precisely the role or roles that governments might play in the implementation of a coherent, holistic programme that can be adopted by and geared to all levels and types of education.

These presentations gave rise to high-quality political discussions which will make it possible to complete the work which the Council of Europe may be prompted to carry out if the recommendations are endorsed by the Conference of Ministers in Helsinki in April 2013 on the theme of governance and quality education.

The purpose of these discussions was to question the very definition of the competences concerned and the applicability of the approaches and practices described. In each of the working groups, the participants stressed the importance of concerted efforts between the different levels and types of education while insisting on the need for life-long training both for learners and for educators and teachers so that they will always have access to innovative educational approaches. Education methods should be constantly evolving to update content and approaches and gear them to the latest circumstances of the education system and of pupils and students. New methods also aim to involve all the stakeholders in the process such as national and local authorities, media and parents.

Involving students of all ages and backgrounds in the education process is essential for the improved transmission and adoption of the values and competences to be fostered. The debates also focused on the need to set up mechanisms for the recognition and assessment of knowledge and skills acquired, particularly through the allocation of ECTS credits⁹.

The last point to be raised was the complex question of the definition and above all the application of a quality education. If we take it as read that quality education will be based on values, the question is not what competences should be taught – as this debate has been going on for over a decade – but how they should be taught. Excellent examples of good practices were provided by countries including Ireland, Albania, France, Estonia, Germany, the Holy See, Andorra, the United Kingdom, and Finland and by the European Students' Union (ESU). The aim now should be to map out these practices, and

⁶ Chaired by Ms Alexandra Veleva, International Organisation of la Francophonie; rapporteur: Mr Alain Mouchoux, Vice-President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

⁷ Chaired by Ambassador Urszula Gacek, Permanent Representative of Poland to the Council of Europe; rapporteur: Ms Ana Perona-Fjeldstad, Executive Director of the European Wergeland Centre.

⁸ Chaired by Ambassador Pekka Hyvönen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Council of Europe; rapporteur: Ms Milica Popović, education expert (Serbia).

⁹ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (see http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ects_en.htm)

exchange and promote them. Isolated action is no longer enough. Instead what we should be devising are strategies with a supra-national, European or even wider scope.

The member states agreed that today, over and above the more theoretical and philosophical challenges of arriving at a specific definition of the competences to be developed, there is a need to take concrete action, devise descriptors and list and develop the tools and good practices needed to establish a quality education based on competences.

In conclusion it was stated how urgent it was to involve all the stakeholders and to standardise practices through official recognition of the competences acquired.

It was suggested that the Council of Europe should set up a working group which would help the member states to organise their work and exchange ideas on the subject at events such as symposia, conferences and debates, where they could work on descriptors and evaluation tools. The Council of Europe's documents form the basis on which these discussions will be built and it was stressed by many that the descriptors should be more akin to a guide to good practice than a binding text. Germain Dondelinger drew attention to the substantial achievements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This was an approach that could also be considered in this context. Reinventing the wheel at this stage would be worse than counterproductive.

The round table held at the end of the conference¹⁰ enabled the participants to take the discussion further forward and focus on the following points in particular:

- The implementation of competences and their evaluation: the question was whether the member states would make a real commitment. How would they pass on the content of the debates to their ministries? And which ministries would they address? How did they plan to implement what the Council of Europe and hence its member states wanted, after a 15-year-long debate?
- It is essential for governments to understand that in no respect is an education based on competences at odds with the stated need to provide students with the skills they need to be employable, quite the opposite in fact. But how could the ministries in each country – and not just the Ministry of Education – be persuaded of the truth of this?
- The discussions centred on the issue of the descriptors of competences, referring to the major work done in 2007 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which seemed like an unattainable goal at the beginning but has now become an essential reference document. However, now that the importance of an education for democracy and intercultural dialogue has been so repeatedly stressed, it is urgent to go beyond this stage and have a proper discussion about what students are supposed to know, understand and be capable of doing – and what they are prepared to commit themselves to – at various levels of education and in different subject areas, whether in general or vocational education. This makes it necessary to address the issue of descriptors and give thought at least to the guidelines that will make it possible to help member states to implement an education based on competences.
- All forms of education are important and yet the importance of incorporating competences in democracy into higher education does not have the formal recognition it deserves. It is important for the authorities of the member states to insist on supporting the idea of a holistic approach to formal education, from kindergarten to university.
- Nor was the issue of the necessary funding for quality education overlooked; it was duly underlined.

Conclusion

As Snežana Samardžić-Marković, the Council of Europe's Director General of Democracy, pointed out in her conclusions, the participants in the conference agreed both that competences for a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue were fundamental to our societies today and that they should be described and put into practice in our formal education systems. This was the only way of sending out the message that students had to be prepared for democracy and cultural dialogue and hence also be

¹⁰ Chaired by Mr German Dondelinger, Vice-Chair of the CDPPE, and participated in by Ambassador Lus Filipe Castro Mendes, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the Council of Europe and Chair of the GR-C ; Mr Carlos Costa Neves, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; Ms Meritxell Mateu, head of the Andorran delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe ; Mr Jorma Kaupinnen, Chair of the CDPPE ; Ms Taina Moisander, Vice-Chair of the European Students' Union and Mr Sjur Bergan, Head of the Council of Europe Education Department.

better prepared for employment. It was agreed that work on guidelines and indicators for intercultural competences must be included in the Council of Europe's programme for 2014-2015.

The Ambassadors and all the other participants agreed to pass on the ideas presented at the conference to the Ministers of Education of their respective countries.

This report and these conclusions¹¹ will be presented at the 24th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education on the subject of "Governance and quality education", to be held in Helsinki on 26 and 27 April 2013, and will be included among the Organisation's future priorities.

¹¹ All the papers presented at the conference are available on line on the conference site at: <http://hub.coe.int/en/andorra-november-2012-to-may-2013>.