

Informal on-line conference of Ministers of Education of the State parties to the European Cultural Convention under the Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers

29 October 2020

Address by Dr Mikheil Chkhenkeli, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia

Honorable Colleagues and Participants,

It is my pleasure and honor to participate in Informal On-line Meeting of Ministers of Education of the Member States to the European Cultural Convention. Let me extend my sincere gratitude to the Greek Chairmanship for the invitation to this excellent event.

Covid-19 outbreak has brought us face to face to unprecedented challenges. The new reality has given us even stronger impetus to recommit to education - one of the fundamental rights of a human being and a powerful driving force for sustainable development of any country. With this in mind, the Government of Georgia has declared Education a top priority, which was translated into the governmental pledge to increase gradually the public funding of education, reaching up to 6% of GDP. The legislative change ensures that the commitment to fund education is upheld by the future governments.

Challenges brought along with the spread of Covid-19 required mobilization of all available resources, rapid, targeted and brave decisions. I'm proud to say that guided by the overarching obligation to provide uninterrupted and quality educational services throughout the country, the Ministry has developed a wide range of response mechanisms and tools and applied innovative solutions to ease the negative impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the education system. In addition to online lessons and resources, the Ministry launched a large-scale educational project titled – “TV-School” (“Teleskola”), which started

on March 30, 2020 and is still ongoing. In addition to Georgian language, TV lessons are broadcast in the ethnic minority languages and sign language interpretation of lessons is provided, our aim being to adhere to the universal principle of leaving no one behind.

Today, in response to the enduring epidemiological situation, we maintain hybrid method of teaching, thus ensuring that the right to education is enjoyed at its maximum and at all levels. The Ministry, in close collaboration with Ministry of Health and epidemiologists, effectively manages the process by means of targeted response. Moreover, with the aim to create accessible and safe opportunities of education in schools, we offer the option of shifting to distance learning, if parents deem it more acceptable.

I'm proud to emphasize, that Georgia's efforts and success in introducing distance learning was acknowledged by the international community. Here, I would like to use this opportunity and express my gratitude to our international partners, Council of Europe, for invaluable support in the light of the crisis. Making education system stronger, more resilient, innovative and taking steps towards improving inclusiveness has always been pivotal for education leaders. The pandemic has revealed, with even more clarity, the importance of Education as a safeguard of democracy and the importance of international collaboration to help build back more resilient education systems, thus shaping democratic societies in the long run.

I am strongly convinced that, collaboration, coordination, building on good practices and exchanges of innovative policies will play a major role in shaping our better future.

Thank you!