

Launch of Education Campaign
Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All

Wednesday 14 November 2018
Opening Ceremony

Director General of Democracy, Snežana Samardžić-Marković

Prime Minister, ministers, ambassadors, educators, ladies and gentlemen – welcome.

People involved in school life at every level are represented here today. This is as it should be. Because, today we are launching a new education campaign with our partner the European Wergeland Centre, to work together to ensure that Europe's schools are truly democratic. And of course we cannot have democracy without participation.

I would like to thank you, Prime Minister, and the Norwegian Government for your ongoing commitment to and support for the Council of Europe's work.

There are too many successful projects and initiatives to list, but let me thank you for your contribution to our work on education and, in particular, for the establishment of the European Wergeland Centre.

The work of the Council of Europe, the European Wergeland Centre and, in particular, this campaign all feed into the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which the Prime Minister has mentioned.

The Council of Europe is proud to have hosted the European and North American Regional Consultation, to review progress towards the regional development goal on quality education, in Strasbourg just a few weeks ago, on 24 October.

The campaign – *Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All* – is first and foremost for schools. It aims to help schools give all children a quality education. To us,

inclusion and democracy are part and parcel of a quality education.

Schools are so much part of our everyday lives that we often take them for granted, without stopping to think about their role.

In many ways their role seems clear. They are a place for children to learn to read and write, to learn maths and science, history, geography and foreign languages, as well as sport and hopefully also music, theatre and art – if they are lucky, with teachers like Andria Zafirakou, our next speaker, the art and textiles teacher who won this year's Global Teacher Prize.

Schools prepare young people for employment, maybe following further study at university.

But this is not enough. Schools must also prepare young people for life as active citizens in democratic societies. And they must foster their students' personal development.

Schools must be places which provide a 'safe space' for children to learn and practice their democratic competences, to

help them find, not just a job, but also a meaningful role in life.

And many schools already do. As we can see around us, in this room, there are many such successful democratic projects taking place in schools right across Europe, in Ukraine, Germany, Romania and Ireland, to name just a few.

Safety is more than just the absence of physical danger. There is safety in democracy.

Children in school need to value human dignity, human rights and cultural diversity. They need to learn civic-mindedness, as well as empathy and conflict resolution, and have a critical understanding of themselves and the world.

These are just some of the 20 competences in the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, which will be implemented during this campaign.

The term 'democratic culture' is important. We cannot have democracy without institutions, laws, and elections. But they

will not ensure democracy by themselves. They will work only if our attitudes and behaviour allow them to. They will work only in societies imbued with democratic culture.

This Framework sets out, for the first time, the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understanding that everyone needs in order to be an active citizen in a democratic society.

It is a comprehensive package and, ultimately, the work of a lifetime. But the competences must first be taught and practised in schools – and also ideally in homes – because they are not innate.

The campaign will focus on six problem areas in particular, providing materials and ideas for schools.

It will deal with:

- One – Preventing violence and bullying,
- Two – Tackling discrimination,
- Three – Making children's and student's voices heard –
Being able to discuss and debate helps young people

develop their ideas and to challenge and be challenged by others within the context of a school with a democratic and human rights culture. It will prevent controversial opinions from being driven into the dark corners of cyberspace, where they will live a life of their own unencumbered by facts and the realities of life.

This links to a 4th theme – addressing controversial issues.

Controversial issues cannot be ignored in the classroom. Those that create the highest tensions may involve strongly held beliefs or personal identity. Differences in outlook, culture, experience and belief systems can lead to conflict more easily than we believe.

Without the safety net provided by experienced and well-trained teachers, strong views and fear of difference can lead to aggression.

For example, a recent challenge for schools, in France, where the Council of Europe is based, was how to manage discussions about terrorist attacks.

The teaching materials we have developed for tackling such controversial subjects will be widely disseminated during the campaign.

Another very current theme taken up by the campaign is dealing with fake news, propaganda and misinformation.

The truth has never been more difficult to determine from the deluge of information, disinformation and fake news that comes to us through the Internet and social media.

Children need analytical and critical thinking skills to see through manipulation and to be able to question information sources and work out what is valuable and genuine.

Improving well-being in school is the last campaign theme, reflecting a complex area of growing concern.

The pressures on children and young people to be beautiful, famous and cool and to focus on outward appearances are at the root of many health problems and unhappiness on a massive scale, which find their reflection in schools.

This is the antithesis of inclusive societies, which require people to live together peacefully and respectfully and to find values in common.

Value must be reclaimed. It is not about money. People should not be judged on what they have or on external appearances, but as Martin Luther King famously put it, on 'the content of their character'.

Many schools are already doing important work on the campaign themes and the development of democratic culture.

In particular, I invite you to speak to the teachers and pupils in this room about their school projects, which have been selected as among the best examples in European schools.

Indeed, the campaign works from the grassroots, helping to share good practices like these and to develop new ones, to bring on board as many schools as possible.

The Council of Europe and our partner the European Wergeland Centre will be facilitating this transfer of knowledge throughout the campaign.

This brings me to the event we are celebrating today, the 10th anniversary of the European Wergeland Centre, which is also the 10th anniversary of our partnership with the Centre.

It has been an exemplary decade. For ten years the European Wergeland Centre has supported the implementation of the Council of Europe's values and policies through capacity building projects across Europe and helped develop important resources – such as the book *Signposts* – and this very campaign.

It translates and disseminates Council of Europe learning resources throughout Europe, on: building inclusive societies, teaching controversial issues, media literacy, integrating refugee and Roma children, religious diversity and preventing hate speech, among others.

Last year, the European Wergeland Centre projects involved some 65,000 people from across the education spectrum in 29 Council of Europe member states.

To give you three impressive examples:

- The *Practicing Citizenship* programme has been running in the 26 federal regions of the Russian Federation since 2013.
- Since 2012, the Regional Summer Academy in the Balkans has been training school leaders, teachers, parents and civil society activists on education for democratic citizenship and human rights.
- In Poland, the Centre is working with civil society representatives and museums to provide educational opportunities for young people, which address hate speech and intolerance.

The European Wergeland Centre is truly living up to the spirit of Henrik Wergeland. He not only underlined the importance of

the rule of law, by instituting the celebration of the Constitution and by having school children – rather than soldiers – parade on Constitution Day. He also fought to improve the rule of law by making his own society more democratic and more inclusive, in his case, by leading the fight to remove the paragraph in the Constitution that prohibited Jews from entering his country.

This conference will launch a campaign that aims to carry the existing wave of democratic and quality education to new schools.

You will not be surprised to hear me say that an important part of the solution to today's problems lies in democracy. We must have strong democratic security in our countries. And this involves people. So we must be preparing our schoolchildren accordingly.

We must have a vision of what society can and should be and build that among our citizens from the youngest age.

The Council of Europe's mission is to uphold a Europe built on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Democracy cannot be built on ignorance. Democracy cannot be built without education. We must be preparing our children at school to take active roles in realising just such a vision of Europe. With your help, this campaign will do just that.

Thank you.