

# **DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION PROJECT**

## **LAUNCHING EVENT, ANKARA, APRIL 12, 2012**

**Speech by Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department, Council of Europe**

### **Introductory remarks**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

I am very pleased and honored to welcome you, on behalf of the Council of Europe, to the launching event of the Council of Europe/European Union Joint Project on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

I would like to thank you personally, Minister Dinçer, for being with us today. Your presence gives a strong signal as to the importance that the Ministry of Education attaches to this project. I would also like to thank Board of Education for their commitment to the project by taking the lead in the implementation of activities and hospitality in hosting the working groups of 40 teachers acting as working group members.

Let me also extend our welcome to provincial directors of pilot provinces and principals of the pilot schools in which the redesigned elective secondary course and democratic school culture framework will be applied: they are the "pioneers" of the new course and the framework which will be piloted for the first time in September this year.

Not least, I would like to thank our Turkish and international experts who have helped shape the project and are starting to make it come alive.

We also greatly appreciate your presence, Prof.Dr.Hasan Nuri Yaşar on behalf of Minister Bağış.

Special thanks go to the European Union, through the EU Delegation to Ankara. They have generously agreed to fund this Project and are closely following its progress. I welcome the presence of Ambassador Ripert here today.

Finally, I welcome the involvement of the Central Finance and Contracts Unit, which is the contracting authority of the project.

I cannot end this part of my speech without also thanking the project team. Even if this is a launching conference the project team has been working very hard for some time already to ensure the success of the project.

## Context

The Council of Europe is the oldest European organization, established just after the Second World War. With 47 member states – including, of course, Turkey as a founding member - it covers almost the whole of Europe and touches the lives of over 800 million people. It is *European* in the true sense of the word. The Council is our continent's main human rights body and a guardian of democracy and the rule of law. We believe it is the best structure to promote democratic citizenship and human rights education in Europe.

At the moment, the Council of Europe Programme Office in Turkey implements five Joint Projects in the areas of justice and education with a total budget of almost 22 million Euros, the majority of it from the EU. Joint programs between the EU and the Council of Europe are running in many member states of the Council of Europe and are a way to support countries in implementing European values and standards, in close consultation and agreement of course with political priorities of the EU and the country concerned.

## The project

The legal framework we rely on for this project is the *Council of Europe Charter for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*. The Charter was adopted by all Council of Europe member states in May 2010 and we now focus on its implementation. Turkey is among the countries in Europe working toward fulfilling the recommendations of the *Charter* – for instance for schools to be managed more democratically in order not only to *teach* students what democracy is, but to help them *experience* democracy as a living reality.

The approach of democratic citizenship and human rights education can foster *better quality schools* by using methods of promoting active citizenship and democratic school governance that equip students with the competences required in the 21st century. Democratic citizenship and human rights education cannot be reduced to a subject but should be considered as a whole school approach. Therefore, the aim of this project is not only preparing for an elective course on democratic citizenship and human rights education but also helping to facilitate democratic culture in Turkish schools and in the wider school community.

Democracy and human rights are not a subject you learn 2 hours a week and then put aside. They are values and attitudes you carry with you 24 hours a day.

Currently, we witness one of the biggest changes in the education reform process in Turkey. More and more curriculum space is offered to elective courses. The course on democratic citizenship and human rights education can and should play an important role in the reform process and serve as a pillar of values promoted through the system.

On a more global level, the citizenship and human rights approach in the education modernization process is one way to address the issues that the democratic societies face. The tragic incidents in Norway last July 22, as well as many more, call for a more focused approach in seeking to find methods to live *together* and to live *better*. This project is a practical tool to address these issues.

## The role of education

The project fits into the Council of Europe's broader view of education and its role in modern societies. Our message is clear: **education has several purposes**. It is not a single purpose endeavor. This sounds simple enough but if we look at European public debate, we could be misled to believe that education has a single purpose: prepare for the labor market.

I would like to be emphatic here: the Council of Europe's message is *not* that preparation for the labor market is not an important purpose of education – it obviously is. Our message is, rather, that preparation for the labor market is one of several purposes of education. The Council of Europe has defined three further purposes that are equally important:

- Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- Personal development;
- The development and maintenance of a broad and advanced knowledge base.

The good news is that these missions are not *contradictory* – they are *complementary*. Many of the competences that make you suitable for employment also make you well prepared to play an active role in democratic society and they further your personal development. The Council of Europe is one of the strongest voices in Europe today speaking in favor of the proposition that education needs to serve a broad range of purposes and the project we are launching here today testifies to this.

Democracy will only become a reality if our democratic institutions and our democratic legislation are supported by democratic *culture*. This was a clear message already from the 2005 Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government in Warszawa and it bears repeating.

Democratic culture is the set of values, attitudes and behaviors that makes our societies democratic not only in structure but also in practice. Democratic culture implies the ability to weigh different concerns against each other. It implies the ability and the will to take a holistic view of the way in which we would like our societies to develop. It implies the will and ability to suffer short term inconveniences in order to obtain long term benefits. It implies the ability and will to participate actively in the public arena, to argue our case but also to listen to others when they argue theirs. It implies the ability and will to practice a key concept of our history teaching program, namely multiperspectivity.

Multiperspectivity means that we need to meet others with an open mind.. Multiperspectivity means that we need to understand the views and opinions of others but it does not mean we need to accept them unless we are convinced by them. There are clearly view and attitudes that are unacceptable in open, democratic societies building on European values defined, among other things, through the European Convention on Human Rights. Multiperspectivity requires an *open* mind – it cannot function with a *blank* one.

Democratic culture is not something our societies acquire once and for all. It is not like riding a bike: once you know it you will not forget it. Democratic culture is like a language: it needs to be learned anew by each generation and anyone who does not practice it risks forgetting it.

In this perspective, no activity is of greater importance to the future of our societies than education. Our societies cannot be democratic, just and prosperous unless each generation and each individual develops and maintains the ability and the will to use their talents to the full and put them at the service of our societies. We cannot be accepting of diversity and fluent in intercultural dialogue unless our education policy and practice make this possible. Again, the project that we are launching here today aims to help develop democratic culture and an understanding of human rights among those who study in Turkish schools *today* and who will be active citizens of Turkey *tomorrow*.

The idea of democracy knows no borders. In addition to its own intrinsic value, Turkey is of course of great importance at regional as well as at European level. Turkey is a bridge between Europe and the Middle East and it is the ancestral country of many who today live in other European countries.

It has been said that democracy cannot be built on empty stomachs. Democracy, however, also cannot be built on empty *minds*. Education is about conveying knowledge, understanding and the ability to act – the classic definition of learning outcomes. But education is also about developing attitudes. I may be able to do things that I should not do, and because I realize that these actions may be unethical or otherwise indefensible, I refrain from these actions. I may find it difficult to do things that I know I should do, but because I am convinced it would be right to do those things, I persevere and try to find a way to do them.

Education should help us find a *way* but it should also help us find a *why*.

### **Send off**

Ultimately, education is about our understanding of *ourselves* – about who we would like to be. I would like to end with the words of the Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi, who says that the answer to the question “What kind of education do we need?” is to be found in the answer to another question: “What kind of society do we want?”

Because we believe in democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the project we are launching here today is so important. It will help make the society we leave to the next generation of Turkish citizens, who are also part of the next generation of Europeans, the kind of society that our generation will be proud to leave them.

Thank you very much and welcome to three years of working hard together.