



# Conference of European Churches Church & Society Commission

## Conference on Education for Democratic Citizenship

Organised by the Conference of European Churches, Church and Society Commission

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**“Learning and living democracy for all” - Council of Europe Programme**

**promoting citizenship and human rights education**

### Introduction

It is a great pleasure for me to address you today on behalf of the Council of Europe. Throughout my career at the CoE I have always been convinced that the churches are an important partner of the CoE. We believe that churches play an important role in education for democratic citizenship, and we very much look forward to the outcomes of your conference on this topic.

In my presentation I would like to let you know about the Council of Europe work in citizenship and human rights education, to share some achievements, and to discuss a few challenges. I hope that in the discussion that will follow later on we will be able to identify some common objectives and areas for cooperation.

As many of you know, the Council of Europe is an inter-governmental organisation with 47 member states, created in the aftermath of SWW with a clear aim: the horrors of the war, never again in Europe. That is why the main objectives of the CoE are the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship was launched at the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg almost 14 years ago, on 10 and 11 October 1997.

“This decision to deal with Education for Democratic Citizenship reflected the growing awareness of the role of education in the promotion of the core values of the Council of Europe, and in the prevention of human rights violations. More generally, education was increasingly seen as a defence mechanism against the rise of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. It was also broadly acknowledged that education makes a major contribution to social cohesion and social justice. The decision of the 2nd Summit gave the Organisation a mandate to

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develop a broad range of co-operation programmes in the field of citizenship and human rights education, both in the field of formal and non-formal education”<sup>1</sup>.

Since 1997, the Council of Europe supported cooperation programmes in this field, which resulted in numerous multilateral, regional and bilateral initiatives, development of networks and partnerships and publication of guidelines and manuals.

The diversity of situations in European countries makes it impossible to apply a “one size fits all” approach, and the Council of Europe’s focus has been on developing a broad common framework, while completing it with country-specific programmes whenever possible, and by providing opportunities for sharing and co-operation. Close contacts with country interlocutors have been essential from this perspective, and the network of EDC/HRE coordinators – officially nominated member States’ representatives - has steadily gained in influence over the past decade.

### **The Charter**

An important stage in this work was marked with the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in the framework of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 as part of the decisions aimed to help implementing the Interlaken Declaration and Action Plan.

The Charter emphasises the importance of “not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”. Such empowerment requires in-depth change in educational policy and practice, based on concerted actions of many stakeholders, including decision makers, education professionals, civil society, youth organisations and religious leaders.

The objectives of the Charter include the following: providing every person with the opportunity of citizenship and human rights education; promoting democratic governance of educational institutions; ensuring ongoing development for education professionals and youth leaders in the principles and practices of citizenship and human rights education; and promoting partnerships and co-operation. The Charter outlines policies that are needed to achieve these objectives, and proposes approaches to evaluation and follow up activities.

The adoption of the Charter in 2010 builds on the common understanding and commitment that was developed by the member states, and provides a framework and spur for future action. In 2010-14, the main focus is on the development of sustainable mechanisms for the promotion and implementation of the Charter, including the following:

- 1) compilation of a report on the Charter implementation based on a questionnaire to be filled in by the member states
- 2) organisation of regular implementation conferences, to discuss the conclusions of the report and to propose priorities for future action (the first one is foreseen in 2012)

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<sup>1</sup> Explanatory memorandum to the Charter

- 3) pilot projects (based on exchange of experience between two partner countries)
- 4) website and other communication activities

### **Partnerships and cooperation**

The key Council of Europe partners for cooperation in this area are the ministries of education. However, many other people – such as education professionals, parliamentarians, local authorities, schoolchildren, parents and NGOs, media and church representatives – need to take action if EDC/HRE is to be effective. The Council of Europe helps to bring such groups of people together and, where appropriate, develops guidelines for action or facilitates exchange of good practice. For example, the “EDC/HRE Pack” is a set of practical manuals for various audiences, which covers topics from democratic governance of educational institutions to teacher training and quality assurance. Interestingly, the Network of European Foundations published a book “Schools for society: Learning democracy in Europe”, which complements the Council of Europe manual on democratic governance of schools, and is addressed to NGOs, foundations and other actors outside of school who might be interested in supporting democracy at school.

The Council of Europe also works in close cooperation with other international institutions in this field. In particular, it provides a secretariat to the International contact group on citizenship and human rights education (which consists at present of the OHCHR, UNESCO, OSCE/ODIHR, E.C., EU FRA and the Council of Europe). The aim of the contact group is to ensure complementarity and to promote synergies and cooperation.

### **Some challenges**

One of the major obstacles for the effective promotion of EDC/HRE is – like for many other forms of value education - that it is often seen as “optional” and at the margins of what is considered to be the “hard core” of school education. While curricula are overloaded with information, the value of EDC/HRE for young people’s success in life and for the well-being of society as a whole tends to be underestimated. Such lack of vision might sometimes result in policy declarations not being supported by practical measures. Awareness raising remains therefore an important priority for future action.

Scarce resources have been a challenge for the Programme, which has ambitious objectives (promoting democracy and human rights at school), broad geographical coverage (47 member States) and a modest budget. One way of dealing with this is through partnerships. Many member States contribute to specific projects and events. In particular, Norway is a major contributor, through its initiative to launch, in co-operation with the Council of Europe, a European Resource Centre on Education for Intercultural Understanding, Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship (“the European Wergeland Centre”). The European Commission co-funded a number of “Joint Programmes” with the Council of Europe (for example, a 6 million Euros programme with Turkey was launched in 2011). Foundations have also supported various initiatives.

To conclude, significant progress has been achieved in many areas, but a lot of hard work remains to be done. The Council of Europe will continue to support its member States in promoting its’ core

values – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – in all areas of life. The 14 years of experience in EDC/HRE provide us with many lessons, and help to get prepared for emerging challenges.

We believe that the churches play an important role in this respect, and we look forward to our future cooperation.

Thank you.

**White Paper** Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education

Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools (2007)