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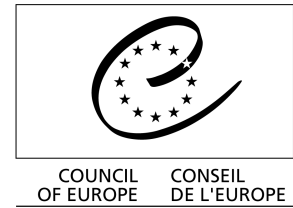
Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education

“Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies: the Role of Teachers”

23rd session

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010

Introduction to the main theme: Education and Society:
The Role of Teachers



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Pavel Zgaga

I. Introduction: education and society, crisis and sustainability

Understanding that education is not only an element of family life but can be an exceptionally strong tool for steering various social processes has been a popular idea for quite a long time: it was born as one of those Enlightenment notions which paved the road to modernity and, indirectly, to our post-modern times. In this light, education is not only a path to achieve personal perfection and happiness but a path towards ‘a better society’ in general. A number of scholars, educators and political activists of the time could be referred to here but let us quote only one – Condorcet, the French philosopher and mathematician, who in 1792 in the capacity of President of the Legislative Assembly drafted an outline of ‘national education’. Two years later, in his hiding place – and just a few months before a violent death – he wrote about his hopes in “*The Future Progress of the Human Mind*”:

“*We shall point out how more universal education in each country can add to such hopes*” and how these hopes “*increase even more, if a more general prosperity permits a greater number of individuals to pursue studies, since at present, in the most enlightened countries, hardly a fiftieth part of those men to whom nature has given talent receive the education necessary to make use of their talents*”. And more: “*We shall show how this equality of education, and the equality that will arise between nations, will speed up the advances of [...] sciences*” (Condorcet, 1794).¹

As inheritors of these ideas and beliefs we live in an unrecognisably different period. Education is no longer limited to “a fiftieth part of those men to whom nature has given talent” ; today, education systems give access not only to ‘talented men’ but literally to everyone regardless of his or her gender, class, age etc. Education is no longer a matter of a ‘given talent’ but a *human right*.² “Equality in education”, as Condorcet presumed, definitely contributes to the “advancement of sciences” as well as to “equality between nations”. However, this does not mean that our period can be seen as the ‘final station’ of historical human endeavours. On the contrary! We are also challenged by a number of difficult dilemmas – like our predecessors. Similarly to our predecessors, we try to engage these dilemmas by means of education and knowledge.

Today, when addressing the challenges of our time we more and more frequently use the notion of a *crisis*. We increasingly care about an *environmental crisis*, there are ever more fears about a *security crisis*, and in the last year or two our societies have encountered a serious *financial and economic crisis*. Originally, in ancient Greek, this word referred to decision-making [Gr. *krísis*; *krínein*]; therefore, ‘to enter a crisis’ should be understood as ‘to enter the decisive instant’. A good decision needs good knowledge – and education is the best way we have available to obtain good knowledge.

These days we not only expect good decisions from decision-makers; we expect these good decisions to be sustainable. The idea of *sustainability* seems to be a genuine product of our own age and not a heritage of some previous period. However, if we had time to make a thorough analysis it could be proven that the contemporary concept of sustainability also owes a lot to the wisdom of the past and ancient languages [e.g., Lat. *sustentatio*].

¹ English translation; see <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/condorcet-progress.html> (accessed 23/01/2010).

² The right to education is a fundamental human right guaranteed under Article 2 of the first Protocol to the *European Convention on Human Rights*.

The idea of sustainability is opposed to threats of a breakdown, decay or an end – that is, threats which humans have encountered through the ages and reflected in religious, philosophical and scientific discourses. Speaking in affirmative terms, it refers to the potential for the long-term maintenance of human well-being. It refers to personal happiness as well as to ‘a better society’.

What seems to be definitely new in the idea of sustainability today is that the danger of a breakdown, decay or an end is not caused by wrathful gods or a blindly-cruel nature any more but by humans themselves, humans of so-called ‘knowledge-based’ societies. Something has gone wrong perhaps; what could it be?

Let us postpone the search for an answer till later. What looks to be the most urgent issue in discussing the relationship between education and society – with a particular focus on teachers – today, is the fact that schools and teachers are challenged by budget cuts and a reduction of funds and, therefore, they share a certain scepticism about ‘sustainable development’.

II. The substance of education lies in its long-term effects

Nowadays, education too often finds itself in a dichotomy of investment and spending. It is too often recognised as mere spending and not as a vital investment. Particularly in times of an economic crisis, it is not very popular to dispute the claim that education has to share the (mis)fortune of other social subsystems and society at large. Nevertheless, a (mis)fortune is not always shared equally in society and especially in times of an economic crisis education is more likely to be observed as spending only. As we can learn from responses to the recent financial crisis, when comparing the possible collapse of a financial system with that of an education system, it often happens that the latter is either not seen as a serious danger or its collapse is simply not regarded as feasible at all.

There have been important discussions on the consequences of the global financial crisis. In this context, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly emphasised in *Resolution 1651* (2009) “that member states must also invest in people in order to face economic and social challenges resulting from the financial crisis” and, therefore, it “calls on the Standing Conference of European Ministers for Education to develop educational policies in view of these challenges and invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to strengthen education in the Organisation's work programme”.³

Any attempt to develop a consistent education policy should start from a position that there is a *critical level* of financial reductions in education which should not be exceeded. In what measurable terms it should be defined is an open question which depends very much on a concrete constellation within a concrete society. What is really important at this point is more a matter of principle: if that critical level is exceeded then the very *substance of education* is endangered. What is this substance?

³ See <http://assembly.coe.int:80/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta09/ERES1651.htm> (accessed 23/01/2010).

There are huge expectations about education and its roles in modern societies. Parents wish for the best education to provide the best future possible to their children; business requires the best qualified labour force, academia requires excellent and broadly educated young talents while the public in general often believes that the chief task of education is to cultivate young generations, thereby contributing to fighting negative phenomena in everyday social life.

All of these expectations have certain grounds; however, they may contradict each another and even be controversial within themselves. The more our societies depend on education and knowledge the bigger these expectations are and the greater are the demands put on schools, teachers and decision-makers.

These expectations are relatively recent. As already mentioned, the birth of the age of modernity raised hopes for the future progress of the human mind through national education. On the one hand, established education systems started to fulfil individual interests within ever larger segments of society, e.g. helping parents to 'mould' kids according to their ambitions, wishes and beliefs. On the other hand, another idea has been broadly disseminated that education is an important if not the most important instrument to fulfil the interests of influential social groups – and to 'mould' society.

Since the late 19th century the school has often been considered as a 'miniature' or 'mirror' of society. Not only in politics but also in the social sciences has an understanding been spread that education should always be of the kind that society is. Thinkers and educators who have developed alternative educational ideas have been criticised for utopianism and irresponsibility toward their societies. Nevertheless, criticisms of that understanding have occurred through time. While it has been clearly recognised that education is not an abstract and eternal entity but has to constantly adapt to changes in society, it also has been pointed out that its adaptations cannot be mechanistic. Education as a simple mechanical transmission of the present to the future cannot bring positive effects to society; it would hibernate rather than develop society, economy and culture. Education is not just a mechanical 'mirror'; it has its own dynamic. Its real strength lies in its limitations.

Thus, step by step, we have learned the lesson that *education is neither a universal mechanic passe-partout nor a panacea*. On the contrary; gentle expectations or arrogant requirements to change schools and teachers into pure instruments of a versatile 'social engineering' have historically always failed. Education in modern societies brings better results the more it is focused on its genuine – and yet limited – purposes only and the more closely it is connected to other social subsystems: employment, health and social security, cultural and scientific development etc. Also, it brings better results the more families and civil society play *their* genuine roles in upbringing and working with young generations.

Today, it seems that a consensus has been achieved that the limited set of *key purposes of education* comprises: (a) *personal development*; (b) *preparation for employment*; and (c) *preparation for active citizenship* in democratic society. If we bear in mind the advanced levels of education systems, then (d) the *development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base* should be added as the fourth key purpose.

These four key purposes already establish a broad and demanding educational agenda. Without adding a fifth or sixth one there is more than enough work for educational decision-makers as well as individual schools and teachers. Different social groups – 'stakeholders' as

we like to say today – weight these purposes differently. The diverse weighting of the key educational purposes reflects a number of interests: not only different but also conflicting interests. In the eyes of an individual ‘stakeholder’, the four sides which establish our ‘quadrant of purposes’ may look longer or shorter, more or less important than in others’ eyes. However, a basic consensus on the education system is necessary if it is truly expected to bring enduring, sustainable results and if there is a true interest to avoid destructive conflicts and contribute to a sustainable society. It is in this perspective that we can read the warning from Jacques Delors’ well-known Report to UNESCO that “*choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society*”. At this point, the Report also stresses the importance of extensive public debates “based on an accurate evaluation of education systems”.⁴

Therefore, choosing a type of education – not forgetting that this act includes choosing a type of teacher education – is an extremely important, far-reaching but also vulnerable operation. At this point, tensions within society could be easily transmitted into education. This is what can seriously endanger the substance of education. For example, a series of educational reforms and counter-reforms combined with an oscillation in financing and legislation could lead to serious lethargy in education and cause the serious social, economic and cultural regression of a society. On the other hand, an appropriate decision could lead to strengthening social cohesion in the long run. This point proves why *democratic society* is a necessary basis for developing *quality education for all* and why a true knowledge-based society cannot be an undemocratic society. Choosing a type of education therefore has a lot to do with the enhancement or endangerment of the substance of education.

The *substance of education* lies, first of all, in its *positive, long-term effects on society*. It provides vitality to social life, similar to how a stable economy provides ‘fuel’ for its stable running. In other words, *long-term societal effects of education are essential for a sustainable society*. National education systems as developed over the last two centuries by nation-states have established necessary legal and organisational frameworks for enhancing the substance of education in modern societies. National education systems will continue to play an important role in our societies. However, education by its very nature exceeds national boundaries; it is widely known that the potential of teaching, research and artistic creativity has always been dangerously reduced when a country has decided to close its borders. It is similar – though not identical – to the economy: commerce remaining closed within the nation-state would lead to an autarchic economy and autocratic society. In other words, sustainable societies cannot be autarchic, closed and divorced from each other: also in this case the substance of education would be seriously threatened.

At this point, we come to the necessity of today’s international and global co-operation. The process of globalisation – we strongly distinguish the globalisation process from the ideology of globalism suggested 10 years ago by German sociologist Ulrich Beck – has made our societies increasingly interconnected and interdependent but also more vulnerable. In this world, sustainability can therefore be understood and also achieved only as *global sustainability*. In this respect, threats of an environmental crisis – in particular global warming today – are perhaps the most convincing argument. Education has important tasks in this context.

Awareness of the need to consider this and similar challenges seriously has progressed in the last decades and education has been playing an important role in such awareness-raising. These challenges require us to think about the future and in this sense the *Brundtland Commission* (UN, 1987), more than 20 years ago, defined sustainable development as

⁴ Delors, J. (1996), *The treasure within*, Paris: UNESCO, p. 176.

“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.⁵ Thus, the issue of equity is gaining a diachronic, inter-generational dimension. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened and the UN *Millennium Declaration* (2000)⁶ warned in sharp words that the “current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed”. After the Copenhagen climate change conference (2009),⁷ this warning only seems to be more urgent than ever.

Education and public discussions on environmental problems have made an important contribution to wider dissemination of the idea of sustainability; however, the potential of this idea far exceeds the environmental dimension alone. The concept of sustainable development can be applied in a similar way as it is to the environment to democracy, the economy and culture. If we have to oppose various threats of a breakdown, decay or an end – be it in an environmental, societal, economic or cultural sense – we must strive for environmental health, social equity, economic prosperity and cultural diversity. Even in our post-modern times we still strive for individual happiness and a better society. Using words taken from our introduction: we have to enhance our potential for the long-term maintenance of human well-being. On a general level, the best vehicle to enhance our potential is education: *education for sustainable development*. Therefore, we have to preserve and enhance the substance of education in the challenging circumstances of our times.

III. Education in change and the changing role of teachers and schools

The problem is that the substance of education, understood as educational *long-term positive effects on societal life* cannot be taken as fixed, unchangeable or simply linear; it has the same dynamic character as society as a whole. It is not possible to choose one type of education – i.e. the supposed ‘best education’ – and to believe that the world is now salvaged forever, that the ‘millennium’ has finally been realised. National education systems have been changing substantially in recent decades and within them the role of teachers has also been changing significantly. Without a prior reconsideration of changes and developments in education in recent decades it would be impossible to draw any recommendations for the future; it would even be difficult to discuss which policies, schools and teachers we really need for tomorrow.

The history of modern education can largely be observed as a complex and very complicated process of *democratisation of knowledge and competencies*: a process leading from elite to mass education. In many parts of Europe, compulsory primary education was the great achievement of the 19th century, while secondary education for all – or at least the overwhelming majority of the (young) population – can be hailed as an achievement of the 20th century. With a dose of historical optimism, it could perhaps be forecast that we are on a good path to achieving the general participation of the population in tertiary education during this century which has only started.

The democratisation of knowledge and competencies has led to education becoming even more important in the life of an individual. Today it is not only our professional careers but also our active roles in society and whole personal development that depend more than ever on good schools and good teachers. Individuals enter the education system earlier and stay in it for a

⁵ See <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm> (accessed 23/01/2010).

⁶ See <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm> (accessed 23/01/2010).

⁷ See <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/l07.pdf> (accessed 23/01/2010).

longer time than before – actually, for the duration of their lives. In principle, no one is excluded from education and everyone, in principle, profits from it. In our societies it is very difficult and even risky to live without education. However, as opposed to in the past, it seems unimaginable today that education could be a voluntary activity, run by a pure intrinsic motivation. Education has become a true necessity and an obligation for all people: an obligation with a lifelong perspective. This is what brings forward numerous problems and a lot of headaches for everyone but especially schools and teachers and, of course, educational decision-makers. How can we bring ‘voluntary learning’ back into education; how can we respond to social and cultural prejudices which either push or keep individuals outside education?

On the surface, it seems there has been no substantial change in teaching and learning. Teachers still teach reading and writing etc. Basic literacy and numeracy for all – a foundation of modern civilisation and an ambitious aim of education systems of the 19th and 20th centuries – today remain among the ‘key competencies’, yet their scope has expanded extremely. Taking this expansion into account teaching and learning have changed a lot. Now, competence in a second or third language is almost as important as in one’s mother tongue; only 20 or 30 years ago this situation was hardly imaginable. A certain competence in science and technology is not limited to technicians and engineers any more but is necessary for everyone; digital competence, for example, is simply a must in our digitalised world. Social, cultural and civic competencies are also becoming increasingly important in our ever more complex and ever more multicultural societies. Lastly, there is a wide consensus that learning to learn should be regarded as one of the key competencies. In short, these changes establish a new agenda in education and bring a lot of new work for teachers and schools, but not just for them. On the one hand, teacher education institutions should be responsive to these changes while, on the other, policy-makers should be aware of the need to constantly adapt the education system.

Today, education is a necessity and obligation yet not every individual can realise it. School absenteeism has changed its phenomenology over the decades but in several new forms it remains a tough problem even in an era of mass education. There is still a lot to be done to widen access for various social groups to different parts of the education system, in particular for so-called ‘non-traditional learners’. Several recent reports warn that problems with access to education will rise as a result of the present economic crisis. We also strive a lot to act against *school failure*; yet, school failure seems to be quite a ‘normal’ result of mass and compulsory education. Dropouts from schools have in certain social contexts started to represent a problem previously almost unimaginable. Numerous strategies have been invented to help learners progress from failure to success: special education for those with learning disabilities, for learners with all kinds of special needs, for those belonging to disadvantaged and marginal social groups, minorities, immigrants and refugees, etc.

Success in one’s schooling is today, together with good health and a happy family life, one of the most highly prized individual wishes as well as the broadly advertised means for achieving individual happiness. By contrast, *popular culture* which ranks success in schooling among its highest values can apply extreme external pressure on an individual which may result in perverting the expected happiness into its opposite. It is no surprise that failure at school is

reported in statistics or media so frequently today that it is often experienced as a trauma at the individual level and that a complex 'industry' has grown up in order to service it, often for good money. This is only one of the horizons within which education has been moving closer and closer to the world of commercialisation. This process brings more pressure on schools and teachers – pressure which establishes unprecedented circumstances.

However, the culturally produced dictate of school success is more an effect but not the agent of the *progressing commercialisation in education*; it is an effect of agents which are external to education. Today, schools and teachers are confronted by a request to teach and help in developing competencies necessary for living in a 'knowledge-based society' and working in a 'knowledge-based economy'. In principle, nothing is wrong with adapting education systems to changes in society. But what do we actually understand by a 'knowledge-based society' and a 'knowledge-based economy'? It often seems that different semantics are engaged in popular discussions and that terms are used in a vague way.

It would be rough, violent and groundless if we said that societies and economies prior to today were 'ignorance-based'. No, they were not. Forgetting the notorious truth that we are not the first – and the only possible – civilisation would mean that we are 'barbarously' ignoring all the wisdom of the past.

On the other hand, there is ample evidence that knowledge as bases for social and economic development is ever more increasing today. And it should increase. Indeed, we need more knowledge and new competencies to respond to the more complex reality of today. This calls for the adaptation of education systems and requires changes in teaching and learning in schools. But, besides technological innovation, we also need a *deeper understanding of the paths our civilisation has taken and will take*. Apart from new knowledge and new competencies, we need to connect to the wisdom of the past and upgrade it accordingly in order to deal successfully with new challenges to humanity and to contribute to sustainable development. We should also aim for a *'wisdom-based' society and economy*.

An extremely broad discussion on the knowledge-based society and economy is going on today among experts and decision-makers as well as among the public in general. In this discussion, a paradigm has been created which seems to be more and more widely spread and shared and which *reduces the concept of knowledge to its 'usefulness'*, understood mainly as it is materialised in direct technological applications and economic effects. This shift has a huge impact on schools, teachers and education systems at large. Besides, the one-dimensional stressing of the 'useful' side of education might also seriously harm what we described above as the substance of education.

Ten years ago, American journalist Thomas Friedman published the book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* which has become one of the most popular readings on globalisation. The title of the book is full of symbolism: the 'Lexus' – i.e. Toyota's luxury vehicle division – symbolises the drive for economic *prosperity and development* while the 'olive tree' symbolises the desire to retain *identity and traditions*. This dichotomy governs contemporary discussions on social and economic development to a great degree and also has a lot to do with education. As education has always had to serve both – prosperity and development as well as identity and tradition – it finds itself here in a situation of uneasiness. Today, education encounters a tough but artificial dilemma: *either prosperity or tradition?* To provide an answer (albeit not within a discussion of education) Friedman borrowed the term *glocalisation*; yet, it seems more rhetoric than an effective remedy to this painful trouble.

Education is also part of the globalisation process and – as we briefly mentioned earlier referring to Ulrich Beck’s critical terminological differentiation – it is also exposed to the ideology of globalism and its central principle: a belief in the spontaneous character of societal development. According to this ideology, the slogan ‘*laisser faire laisser passer*’ rules the world and leads it to a ‘better world’; therefore, it also affects education. However, in our everyday understanding schools and teachers are not expected to fulfil their mission this way. With regard to schools and teachers, the ‘*laisser faire laisser passer*’ principle seems to be rejected: the public expects them to work hard with kids and youngsters, not just give them ‘*laisser faire*’.

A belief that the ‘invisible hand’ co-ordinates human actions best and that free enterprise will make a life better for everyone, even for those who now look disadvantaged, has been critically assessed many times. The ongoing financial and economic crisis has brought them again to the fore of public discussions. What seems to be the key criticism today it is that the ‘invisible hand’ theory, when applied to every corner of social life, last but not least education, makes such things as *polity* and *public spaces* or *public care* and *public good* totally redundant. The state school may become part of this redundancy and may, on the micro level, substantially change the role of teachers. It may have a substantial macro-impact on education systems as well.

Parallel to the growth of the power of the world market we are witnessing a decrease in the power of the nation-state. The role of the nation-state concerning education has changed. On the one hand, it is increasingly stressed that education should be governed more closely to local communities or – as in the case of universities – with full respect for institutional autonomy. On the other hand, education was almost jealously kept as an absolute national responsibility for many decades but in recent decades it has entered – at least ‘softly’ – not only the European Union (EU) Treaty but also international agreements and international law.

Let us remind ourselves, on the one hand, of the Council of Europe and UNESCO Convention on the recognition of qualifications which is so important not only for migrants and mobile students but which is at least indirectly contributing to strengthening mutual trust, to quality enhancement, to the transparency of education systems and provision and, last but not least, to the convergence of systems. Conversely, we note an initiative to enhance global trade in educational services through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which has led to many disputes in Europe and around the world. The internationalisation and globalisation of education is a fact; both processes are changing national education systems and their educational structures and, of course, also influence teachers’ work in schools. However, there can be no simple equating of the internationalisation and globalisation of education.

In the contemporary world, we encounter issues and problems of a global nature and have to invent tools and approaches which may effectively address global problems. National and local problems still exist and education will certainly remain to serve the specific needs of specific social, cultural and economic contexts (i.e., identities, cultures, professions etc.), yet we also encounter issues which exceed local or national importance and can and should be addressed globally (i.e., education for democratic citizenship and human rights, intercultural education, education for environmental protection etc.).

This dual task is again a new task for today's teachers and schools and a new issue for national education systems. New modules, content or activities which enter the curriculum seem to be well grounded and necessary; on the other hand, they may produce a headache as the curriculum becomes more and more fragmented.

Education for democratic culture is a particularly important issue in schools' curricula. Remembering the past, there are still hesitations that teaching democratic culture may be invaded by ideologies. On the other hand, the process of teaching democratic culture in a specific school cannot be divorced from the processes, problems and even conflicts of the local community or society at large. Troubles with democracy cannot be hidden from young people and democracy should not be presented to them uncritically as a 'haven'; this is the best way to make young people turn their back on political participation and active citizenship. At the Istanbul 2007 Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education it was critically noted in one of the contributions "that the commitment of citizens to the public sphere seems to be decreasing in line with their increasing concentration on their private sphere".⁸ This trend also influences the role of teachers and gives at least some grounds to explain why their public role is decreasing.

Education is today no longer a 'scarce commodity' and we know that a 'commodity in abundance' is usually held in low esteem. The combination of pressures on schools and teachers we briefly described above have significantly contributed to a drop in teachers' esteem.

This is another paradox of democratised education: *expanding rights* to and in education are connected to the *lost authority of the teacher*. It comes to the fore particularly clearly when a lack of teachers is discussed. This paradox also requires that teacher education and teacher development become a prioritised theme of policy development.

The role of education has changed significantly in our societies; the roles of decision-makers on the one hand and teachers and schools on the other, have also profoundly changed. Teaching cannot be simplified any more – and should not be simplified for members of any deprived social group – merely to reading, writing and the provision of some other basic information written on a blackboard with a piece of chalk. Not only should we carefully plan the education and training of future teachers, but current teachers also require stronger support to be able to respond to the challenges of today. It should not be a surprise that in the last few years ever more attention has been given to developing new policies for teachers' preparation – at both national and international levels.

IV. Which teachers for today and tomorrow?

Teacher education and training forms part of national education systems although it is a very distinctive part of them. It is a 'reproductive unit' of education systems: when student teachers finish their studies they remain as current teachers in education – hopefully – for three to four decades. The education and training of teachers today has a substantial but indirect impact on the education of many future generations.

⁸ *Educating for a sustainable society: the role of higher education. Contribution of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR).* – Council of Europe. Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, 22nd Session, Istanbul, 4-5 May 2007. – See <http://istanbul2007.meb.gov.tr/> and http://www.coe.int/t/dc/files/ministerial_conferences/2007_education/programme_en.pdf (accessed 23/01/2010).

Therefore, the initial or pre-service preparation of future teachers and their continuous development through in-service education and training seem to be linked as closely as possible to one of our guiding questions: *which teachers for today and tomorrow?*

When trying to answer this question we have to again step back a little into the past. Teachers are an *old, perennial profession – but quite heterogeneous and split*. Their workloads, salaries, social status etc. differ across the different levels of education as well as institutions where they have been teaching, supporting learners etc. These differences correspond to their own educational achievements which have also been different: not only regarding their profile but also their level. For example, in the past teachers of primary education received their credentials at specialised ‘collegiums’ which could be classified at the level of upper secondary education or ‘short cycle higher education’; on the other hand, in some subject areas teachers of upper secondary education received university degrees. Yet, academic qualifications were almost as a rule just a ‘side-product’ of a subject area without many specialised modules in teaching skills and even not in educational sciences. A special department of *teacher education* as a ‘mainstream’ option of study and/or research was for a long time an exception and not a rule at universities. On the other hand, teachers who undertook their education in ‘collegiums’ usually developed teaching skills quite well but there have always been complaints that they lack subject knowledge.

The gap between these two basic modes of teacher education and training – one organised at ‘collegiums’ and the other organised within universities or other recognised institutions of higher education – only started to close during the second half of last century. Teacher education and training have gradually become an integral part of higher education and in many countries it has been recognised as a particular study area within universities. In the last two or three decades we have been witnessing gradual but important changes in teachers’ education and professional development and there are strong signs that these changes are still going on. Today, for example, more and more countries are deciding to upgrade teachers’ preparations to graduate studies (i.e., master’s level as well as PhD studies). With advances in their educational achievements teachers are slowly becoming a more homogenous profession. On the other hand, they represent an extremely strong profession with potential which is not yet fully expressed and recognised. According to a recent study, in OECD countries teaching is, on average, the biggest single employer of graduate labour.⁹

Changes have occurred not only with regard to teachers’ level of education but to the very concept of education. Traditionally, the term teacher *training* was widely used – and not teacher *education*. Even today ‘training’ seems to be far more common in broad public use (not just in English). However, a discussion which has lasted for two or three decades offers important arguments in favour of teacher *education*. Last but not least, higher education is not simply about ‘higher training’. Talking about teacher ‘training’ still makes sense but the term should be used *parallel to* and not *instead of* ‘education’. When the term ‘teacher education’ is used today, ‘training’ is often understood as already subsumed. On the other hand, the changes in society and in education which we discussed earlier have also had an impact on teacher education and training.

⁹ OECD (2005), *Teachers matter*, Paris: OECD, p. 27.

The discussions of recent decades have argued that a teacher as a professional in a modern democratic society cannot be treated any more as 'a technician' – i.e., as a simple 'transmitter of official knowledge and values' – but as a 'reflective practitioner'. A teacher in modern societies needs a much more advanced level and content of studies, a much *broader range of competencies*.

The process of the modernisation of teacher education has not proceeded in a linear way, nor been without problems. On the contrary, since the 1980s there have been many dilemmas and criticisms concerning changes and developments in teacher education. Indeed, there have been ups and downs and several questions remain unanswered and still cause some confusion today. Nevertheless, *initial teacher education* has undergone substantial reforms practically everywhere in Europe and they have been recognised as successful; at the same time, *in-service programmes* have also been renewed and extended. By the end of last century, teacher education had substantially changed its traditional profile, first of all due to its full integration into higher education institutions. Within this context and that of the present decade, the Bologna Process has posed a new and particular challenge. The idea of establishing a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should not only be observed as being addressed to general higher education policy issues; on the contrary, it addresses individual study fields and hence teacher education as well.

Today, when we have already officially entered the European Higher Education Area, there are two particularly important challenges to teacher education: (a) *further modernisation of the area*; and (b) *catching up with the most advanced wagons of the 'Bologna train'*. The task of developing teacher education systems as well as institutions and their programmes is, therefore, more and not less demanding than before. The Bologna Process has too often been observed only as a structural change of higher education systems and governance; however, its implications for individual disciplines and study fields are enormous.

The European Higher Education Area would remain as rhetoric if the key points of the Bologna Process were formal changes – changes with no impact on content, processes and outcomes. Reforms on the macro level are connected to and should be appropriately reflected at the micro level. There are no ready-made 'recipes' in the Bologna communiqués which could be simply copy-pasted to institutional practices. Each particular discipline and each study area has its own particular logic and should strive for its genuine solutions at the micro level.

The key question at the micro level is *how to modernise teaching, learning and assessment in concrete terms of an individual study area*. This question is linked to a discussion of *competencies* and *learning outcomes*: a discussion of two concepts which are not only employed in policy documents but also in academic discussions. In today's documents and discussions the term *competencies* is common and familiar; however, this does not mean that its meaning and use are beyond dispute – in particular when a discussion takes place at academic institutions. Like all academic discussions, the contemporary international debate on *competencies* is far from a full consensus.

There are several criticisms and oppositions we should be aware of before applying the term: e.g., a criticism that the competencies paradigm is based either explicitly or implicitly on 'misleading behaviourist theoretical backgrounds' which reduce the term to an *instrumental concept*, that is, a concept which fits and supports the ideology of economic globalism, endangers inner values of traditional knowledge, broader educational purposes, teachers' status etc.

Some of these criticisms are based on quite convincing arguments, yet they do not suffice to abolish the concept of competencies and throw it away for good. Keeping with the traditional 'passive teaching' is not an alternative. On the other hand, behaviourism is not the only option and not an exclusive foundation of the concept of competencies but can also be cogently interpreted on quite different theoretical grounds. It is not an appropriate place here to argue about this in detail, but to put it briefly: the concept of competencies can be also established in relation to the *dichotomy of knowledge and acting* which has been known at least since the times of Socrates. Knowledge and acting or, using more modern terms, theory and practice are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are essentially coupled. It was again Socrates who made it clear that *our acting in 'the right direction' desperately needs appropriate knowledge*. Therefore, in the education process it is decisive to empower a student with *knowledge to act*. We should not forget, of course, that we are urged to acquire knowledge to act in several aspects: in an instrumental or vocational aspect, in a societal and political aspect (e.g., acting as a citizen) etc.¹⁰

The ongoing processes of reforming European higher education could not avoid a debate on these aspects and this has also been productive with respect to the concept of competencies. Thus, within the *Tuning project*, the European "Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process"¹¹, as it is has been broadly presented, the following definition of competencies was agreed:

"Competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. Fostering these competences is the object of all educational programmes which build on the patrimony of knowledge and understanding developed over a period of many centuries."

The *Tuning* project had a Europe-wide and broader impact but it is even more important that it was performed at the level of sample study areas, ranging from chemistry to history and also including teacher education. A special group formed of representatives of about 20 teacher education institutions from all parts of Europe was working for several years on the basis of a commonly agreed *Tuning* methodology to identify *generic as well as subject-specific competencies relevant to the teacher education area*. The methodology included research in

¹⁰ There are, of course, more aspects and Jacques Delors' reference to "learning to know", "learning to do", "learning to live together" and "learning to be" can also be read within this context. – See Delors, J. (1996), *The treasure within*. Paris: UNESCO, p. 86.

¹¹ See <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu> and <http://www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu>. –The *Tuning* project originally (since 2001) involved higher education institutions from countries which are members of the Erasmus programme; later it was gradually extended to the Tempus countries. Thus, *Tuning* had an impact in almost all Bologna countries; it was also implemented in countries of Central Asia and Latin America and, recently, in the USA (Indiana, Minnesota and Utah). In European countries, the project was accomplished in 2008.

literature and comparative studies as well as a consultation process with partners: previous students (i.e., today's current teachers), employers (mainly headmasters but also local and national education decision-makers) as well as academics and experts in the area.

On the one hand, the Tuning list of *generic competencies* encompasses a number of instrumental, interpersonal and systemic competencies which characterise learning at the higher education level in general: that is across all study areas (e.g. *an ability for analysis and synthesis, to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical situation, to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources* etc.). On the other hand, a number of *subject-specific competencies* focusing specifically on teacher education have been identified, starting with those which look like a *conditio sine qua non* of the teaching profession, e.g.:

- *knowledge of the subject/subjects to be taught; and*
- *competencies in a number of teaching and learning strategies*

and then proceeding to competencies which are definitely crucial if teachers are expected to efficiently address contemporary challenges in their schools, e.g.:

- *an ability to identify potential connections between aspects of educational theory and educational policies and contexts;*
- *an ability to provide education in values, citizenship and democracy and reflect on one's own value system;*
- *an ability to recognise and respond to the diversity of learners and the complexities of the learning process;*
- *an ability to understand processes of development and change in the community;*
- *an ability to recognise and respond to the diversity of learners and the complexities of the learning process;*
- *an ability to design and implement education which integrates people with specific needs etc.*¹²

The Tuning teacher education working group emphasised that the competencies that were identified in the subject area are indicative only, and can and will change over time; it also added that the list of identified competencies is not intended to be either exhaustive or definitive. It should be used as guidance and not as a recipe or straitjacket. In the relatively short period since these lists were agreed, they have already influenced the design process of new curricula at a number of institutions across Europe, particularly within the so-called 'Bologna curricular reform' when new 'competence-based' study programmes have been developed. At least in part, the Tuning project has also contributed to broader agendas of national and European higher education reforms.

One of the main issues on these agendas – if not the key issue – is *mobility*. Today, we cannot even imagine education systems as self-sufficient, autarchic systems, closed off from any influence from other countries. On the contrary, increased cross-border and international co-operation in politics, the economy, culture and similar areas requires greater co-operation in education. *European co-operation in education* is a particular case: it cannot be a surprise that

¹² Tuning (2009), *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Education*, Bilbao: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Deusto, pp. 42-44. See http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=59&task=view_category&catid=19&order=dmdate_published&ascdesc=DESC (accessed 23/01/2010).

one of the largest European co-operation initiatives – the Bologna Process, now encompassing 46 countries – has been launched in the area of (higher) education. This is not the only initiative of its kind though; education for sustainable democratic societies and the role of teachers, the theme of this conference, should be positioned in a similar context.

International co-operation in education coupled with the mobility of teachers, students and graduates can substantially enhance the free movement of people as well as ideas. In fact, various instruments, bilateral as well as multilateral, are today engaged in this direction. More and more students and teachers are mobile; more and more people who finished their education in one country may work with recognised qualifications in another country. This is a process which requires *greater comparability and compatibility between education systems*. This is precisely the point at which the Bologna Process started about 10 years ago. Despite criticisms and sometimes problematic implementation of the agreed principles, it is clear that *educational co-operation and mobility have been exceptionally improved* during these 10 years. However, is it equally the case in all study areas of higher education?

I put this question in the front of my recent research dealing with teacher education and the Bologna Process.¹³ Unfortunately, the findings are relatively disappointing. The average share of students in the area of education and teacher education is a little above 10% of all students in today's Europe. This figure will now serve as a benchmark. However, the share of international and mobile students in this area is less than the average share of students in general. In countries which perform best in this aspect, the share is around 7%; however, in most cases it is somewhat below 5%. In the Erasmus programme, the share of students in teacher education is about 4% and in the Tempus programme it is below 1%. These figures mean that mobile students in many other study areas are well above the respective share of students in national higher education.

On these bases we may conclude that today, *overall in European student mobility teacher education is a relatively disregarded field of study*. An increase in mobile and international students in teacher education is needed for several reasons: not only to move closer to other study areas and disciplinary fields (thus enhancing attractiveness, an academic critical mass etc.) but also to promote mobility in education in general and contribute to the 'soft' aims of education reforms. Teachers who have had an opportunity to experience the advantage of mobility already as students are much better prepared for their work with pupils and students in the context of European and international co-operation and intercultural dialogue; they can better approach human rights education, multicultural issues in education etc.

A number of reasons can be found to explain why teacher education is a disregarded field of study in international student mobility. We should not forget that it is still a young area in higher education but it seems that the crucial reason is that *teacher education is one of the least internationalised study areas in higher education*. In this regard, for example, medicine, the humanities and the natural sciences are the most international due to their long traditions. Teacher education has been limited, on the one hand, by the particularities of national

¹³ P. Zgaga (2008), "Mobility and the European dimension in teacher education"; in: B. Hudson and P. Zgaga (eds.). *Teacher education policy in Europe: a voice of higher education institutions*; Umeå: University of Umeå, pp. 17-41.

education systems (school curricula are very diverse from country to country) as well as by the particularities of national systems of teacher education. National contexts and diversity will also play important role in education in the future, but we have today nevertheless reached a milestone which requires us to open and connect education systems as well as systems of teacher education. Therefore, if we intend to connect our societies and education systems we also need to discuss and develop at least some 'common denominators' in teacher education.

There have been several initiatives in these directions; some of them are ongoing. Let me refer briefly to one of them. A few years ago I was invited by the European Commission – DG for Education and Culture to join a 'focus group on teachers' and I had an excellent opportunity to start working on this issue with three distinguished colleagues: Hannele Niemi (Finland), Bernard Cornu (France) and Sonia Blandford (UK). Our task was ambitious: to draft a background document and to write papers for a Europe-wide consultation on the possible development of *common European principles for teacher competencies and qualifications*.¹⁴ The conference was positive about this idea and in the further process a political document on these issues was adopted by the highest EU bodies.¹⁵ On the other hand, conceptual work at teacher education institutions across Europe has intensified in the last few years, e.g. within the *Teacher Education Policy in Europe Network (TEPE)*,¹⁶ and more and more colleagues everywhere in Europe are active in this specific field.

In light of the ongoing discussions, arguments have been created in favour of a European perspective in teacher education and elements have been developed which can serve as guidance for further work. In concluding, I will try to recapitulate and adapt some key points from the document on common European principles for teacher competencies, which – in my understanding – also remain crucial and topical issues today. First, in reconsidering the role of teachers in today's societies, there are *four basic principles of the teaching profession*:

(1) *Teaching is a graduate profession*: high quality education systems require all teachers to be graduates from higher education institutions or their equivalents; every teacher should have the opportunity to continue studies to the highest level in order to develop their teaching competencies and increase their opportunities for progression within the profession.

¹⁴ *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*; A document presented at the "European testing conference" within the EU Education and Training 2010 programme, Brussels, 20-21 June 2005. Conference materials are no longer available on the Internet but a final report is available at http://www.helsinki.fi/vokke/dokumentit/Conference%20report_071005_common%20principle_%20pdfversion.pdf (accessed 23/01/2010).

¹⁵ See *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 15 November 2007, on improving the quality of teacher education (2007/C 300/07)*, Official Journal of the European Union, 12.12.2007.

¹⁶ See <http://tepe.wordpress.com/> (accessed 23/01/2010).

(2) *Teaching is a profession placed within the context of lifelong learning:* teachers' professional development should continue throughout their careers and should be supported and encouraged by coherent systems at the national, regional and/or local level; in addition, teachers should be able to contribute to the process by which young people and adult learners become more autonomous lifelong learners.

(3) *Teaching is a mobile profession:* teachers should be encouraged to exercise mobility in other European countries for professional development purposes; those who do so should have their status recognised in the host country and their participation recognised and valued in their home country. There should also be an opportunity to exercise mobility between different levels of education and towards different professions within education.

(4) *Teaching is a profession based on partnerships:* institutions providing teacher education should work collaboratively in partnership with schools, industry and work-based training providers. Teachers work in learning organisations that reflect their own and other's best practices, and which collaborate with a wide range of community groups and stakeholders.

On the basis of these four principles, no comprehensive list of competencies was developed but *three clusters of teacher competencies* were proposed as a starting point for concrete curricular development at different institutions in European countries. With due respect to European diversities, teacher education – pre-service as well as in-service – should aim at enabling the teachers of today and tomorrow to develop and foster the following abilities:

(1) *An ability to work with knowledge, teaching and information:* teachers' education should equip them to access, analyse, validate, reflect on and transmit knowledge, making effective use of technology where this is appropriate; on the other hand, their pedagogical skills should allow them to build and manage learning environments and retain the intellectual freedom to make choices concerning the delivery of education in an innovative and creative way.

(2) *An ability to work with fellow human beings:* teachers' professional work should be based on the values of social inclusion and nurturing the potential of every learner; they need to have knowledge of human growth and development, they need to demonstrate self-confidence when engaging with others and be able to work with learners as individuals and support them to develop into fully participating and active members of society.

(3) *An ability to work with and in society:* teachers help prepare learners for their role as citizens, promote mobility and co-operation in Europe, and encourage intercultural respect and understanding; they should have an understanding of the balance between respecting and being aware of the diversity of learners' cultures and identifying common values and need to understand the factors that create social cohesion and exclusion in society and be aware of the ethical dimensions of the knowledge society.

V. Conclusion

We started our reconsideration by addressing issues of the present crisis, sustainable societies and the role of education and we come back to them at the conclusion. Besides political, economic and similar responses, the challenges and problems of today's world definitely also require an educational response. At the beginning, we also asked "what has gone wrong?" and postponed answering it till later.

It is now the last instant for an answer. We will try to help ourselves with the words of two American social scientists, Hershey H. Friedman and Linda W. Friedman¹⁷ who stressed in their 2008 paper (that is, at the very beginning of the crisis): "this debacle could not have occurred if the parties involved had been socially responsible and not motivated by greed". In their opinion, "free markets do not work well unless there is accountability, responsibility, ethics, and transparency".

This is also a task for education, a task for schools and teachers, isn't it? Are we able to address and respond to this task? This conference should be an opportunity to prove that the answer is positive. Yes, education is of primary relevance for sustainable democratic societies; yet, it must be that kind of education which aims at fulfilling the whole array of educational purposes, education which is known for good teachers, and education in a society which is aware that its sustainability depends on good teachers.

¹⁷ See <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1356193> (accessed 23/01/2010).

