

**23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of  
Ministers of Education  
Education for a sustainable democratic society:  
the role of teachers  
(4-5 June 2010, Ljubljana, Slovenia)**

**Speech by Mr Nikola Todorov,  
Minister of Education and Science  
Representing the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers**

Distinguished colleagues,  
Respected participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special pleasure and a great honor for me to address you today, as a representative of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, just few weeks after my country took over this important role.

Macedonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe comes after 15 years of our membership in the organisation. Chairing the decision making body of the oldest political organization in Europe is a very challenging task that happens at a time which presents an important crossroad for Europe and for the Organisation. Republic of Macedonia approaches the Chairmanship with great commitment and determination.

Our priorities will focus on three pillars. The first is strengthening human rights protection, the second priority aims at fostering

integration while respecting diversity and our third priority is to promote youth participation.

Our efforts to strengthen human rights protection and make the human rights system more efficient are even more relevant in the year marking the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights, being one of the most recognizable legal instruments of the Council of Europe.

European societies are becoming more and more multicultural. In such an environment, integration of various diversities, regardless of the fact if they are ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic, strengthens our societies and enables economic and social prosperity in the Council of Europe member states.

Young generations should play an important role in the political and democratic processes, especially in the region of South East Europe, as it is taking a new and progressive course in shaping its future based on the Council of Europe's standards.

Regarding the main subject of our conference today, i.e. education for sustainable democratic society, I would like to point out that the Committee of Ministers has always been a proponent of the role of education in the field of democracy, recognizing its importance of promoting and respecting human rights and values.

We all know how education at all levels influences future attitudes and mentalities of our citizens. This is not a simple transmission of

academic knowledge on democracy or civic instruction, but even more, it encompasses promotion of values, ideas and attitudes. A certain vision of society based on respect, tolerance, understanding and dialogue.

Education is a tangible and efficient tool in moving towards that vision. It can help in understanding and addressing the challenges and complexities of today's society. It can open our minds to the richness of cultural diversity, can help fight inertia and lack of interest in political life by highlighting the crucial role of democratic institutions. It encourages young people to undertake an active role of democratic citizenship, rather than act just as passive bystanders.

It is also important to acknowledge that the global economic crisis and the many - sometimes very difficult – challenges, now faced by European societies can sometimes bring a threat to those fundamental principles, as a basis of democratic society. Efforts are therefore imperative to raise the individuals' awareness about their roles and responsibility in social life.

Teachers and other education professionals are an essential pillar in this process of building sustainable democratic societies. Their competences, knowledge and commitments are crucial. In transmitting that knowledge to young minds, they have the potential to impact the behavior of our future citizens. This is not always an easy task, and can indeed be considered as a tremendous responsibility, but on the other side as a privilege, too.

To enable the educators to completely fulfill their role, the competences required for promoting the culture of democracy and human rights in the classroom, have to be reflected in the curriculum for education of teachers. It is a transversal question which requires a transversal approach.

The Committee of Ministers recognizes the crucial role of teachers and other educational staff and, as outlined in the Warsaw Action Plan, remains committed to enhancing the opportunities for training the educators, particularly in the fields of education for democratic citizenship and human rights, but also in the field of history and intercultural education.

The Committee is therefore particularly interested in the theme of this Conference and will give due consideration to all the conclusions that will emerge.

I would also like to emphasize that the Organization's experience in promoting a culture of democracy and human rights through education is rich and extensive. The "Budapest Declaration: For a Greater Europe without dividing lines" signed in 1999, the subsequent Recommendation Rec(2002)12 on education for democratic citizenship, adopted in 2002, the Warsaw Action Plan as well as the Madrid Declaration adopted at the 119th Ministerial Session in May 2009 are some of the milestones which have reflected the longstanding commitment of the Committee of Ministers in this field.

The most recent benchmark however – and which certainly deserves particular attention - is the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. This Charter, which represents a non-binding recommendation, was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11<sup>th</sup> of May this year, in the framework of the 120th ministerial Session. I am convinced that it will prove to be an important reference text in this field to our 47 member states.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am looking forward to the discussions today and tomorrow, which I am sure will be innovative and creative. I do hope that each and every one of us will leave the Conference richer in ideas, which will be further implemented in our home countries. The Committee of Ministers is looking forward to the results of the Conference.

At the end, I would like to use this opportunity and express my sincere gratitude towards Slovenian authorities for organizing the conference and to wish all the participants a successful working day.

Thank you for your attention