

Ministry of
Education
and Culture



Ministère de
l'Éducation et
de la culture



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“Governance and Quality Education”

24th session

Helsinki, Finland, 26-27 April 2013

Final Declaration on the Conference Theme

We, the European Ministers of Education, meeting in Helsinki on the occasion of the 24th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference, hereby adopt the present declaration:

1. Bearing in mind the priorities of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe;
2. Considering the Action Plan of the Third Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005), which provides that “the tasks of building a knowledge-based society and promoting a democratic culture among our citizens require increased efforts of the Council of Europe in the field of education”;
3. Referring to the Declaration of the 22nd Session of our Conference in Istanbul (4-5 May 2007) recognising that “the full enjoyment of the right to education is essential to sustainable, cohesive and democratic societies” and in which we identified certain competences for fostering democratic culture and social cohesion, including intercultural, social and language skills;
4. Referring to the Declaration of the 23rd Session of our Conference in Ljubljana and Brdo (4-5 June 2010), where we reaffirmed “our commitment to continued action to maintain and improve the quality of education for all and to prevent exclusion, so as to increase the competitiveness of Europe’s citizens in the knowledge economy, while ensuring social cohesion”;
5. Recalling the establishment as of 2010, of the European Higher Education Area, as well as the important contribution of the Council of Europe to this Area and to the Bologna Process having led to its establishment;
6. Recalling the four main purposes of education, namely:
 - Preparation for sustainable employment;
 - Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
 - Personal development;
 - The development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base;¹
7. Referring to the Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education, in which the Committee of Ministers considers that the right to education can only be fully exercised if the education is of adequate quality and if learning opportunities and arrangements enable pupils and students to complete their education in reasonable time and under conditions conducive to quality education;
8. Bearing in mind the decisions of the Committee of Ministers’ thematic debate in their 1147th meeting on 4 July 2012, in which the Deputies reaffirmed the importance of education in the values of the Council of Europe for the promotion of cohesive democratic societies, respectful of human rights, equal opportunity and diversity and invited the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) to take account, in the implementation of its terms of reference, of the orientations and priorities identified in the debate and to prepare concrete proposals;
9. Bearing in mind the conclusions of the Conference organised by the Andorran Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers on “Competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue” in Andorra la Vella on 7 and 8 February 2013;
10. Recognising that, in times of global economic crisis, European societies are facing many challenges such as increasing unemployment especially among young people as well as inequality and social exclusion, which threaten the fundamental principles of socially sustainable societies including equal opportunities and social justice;

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 on the public responsibility for higher education and research.

11. Underlining the role and contribution of education in taking up these challenges and, more particularly, the role of teachers at all levels, from pre-primary through higher education to lifelong learning, as professionals and agents of change with an educational and social mission;
12. Underlining the fact that good governance is instrumental for quality education and stressing that it implies the development of instruments to steer the educational system, as much as it relies on the participatory effort required to define and design those same instruments;
13. Underlining that education is indispensable to developing social inclusion, for recognising, respecting and valuing differences and creating equality;
- 13.bis Noting that the participation of parents of disadvantaged backgrounds in the life of the school also has positive consequences for their integration into society in general;
14. Stressing the fact that diversity is a source of richness to draw on and not an obstacle, while being conscious at the same time that it may constitute a challenge for a successful integration of all pupils and students alike;
15. Bearing in mind that a common set of shared values, made up of human rights, are a prerequisite for achieving quality education and quality teaching;
16. Expressing our determination to implement educational actions geared specifically to Europe's culturally diverse societies with a view to reducing social tensions, especially in societies at risk, and furthering our societies' democratic culture and their cohesion in general;
17. Reaffirming our commitment to continued action to maintain and improve the quality of education for all and to prevent all kinds of exclusion and discrimination, so as to increase the competitiveness of Europe's citizens in the knowledge economy, while ensuring social cohesion and furthering democratic culture;
18. Identifying, through the discussions at our Conference and in order to implement the "Helsinki agenda for quality education", as our common goals for future action in the field of governance and quality education:
 - 18.1. Developing an education system that aims for excellence and recognises that for a system to be excellent as a whole, it must among other things develop a series of concrete measures to ensure social inclusion and provide all learners with adequate and appropriate education opportunities for their lives as active citizens and their employability;
 - 18.2. Developing a culture of shared responsibilities, solidarity and integrity throughout the education system, be it in terms of content (education for democratic citizenship and human rights), or be it in terms of structure (legal measures warranting fairness and transparency), and involving all the actors;
 - 18.3. Fostering a sense of mutual trust and cooperation among all actors of education (public authorities, teachers, pupils/students, parents and civil society in the education sector);
19. Agree that the achievement of these goals requires our governments to take a series of measures and undertake:
 - 19.1. as participation in the education process and quality of education are inter-related, to found the development of our education systems on the participation of all actors and thereby foster the role of parents as partners in ensuring quality education for all;

19.2. to develop policies and practice allowing the participation of pupils and students in all aspects of the life of their schools and institutions, including, as appropriate, governance and adapted to their age and level of education;

19.3. to provide the necessary means for students to be able to participate and thereby creating a meaningful, inclusive and real participation of students at higher education level;

19.4. to reinforce the autonomy of the institutions, through the creation of adequate structures which enable schools, as appropriate, and higher education institutions to improve students' achievements by setting objectives, achieving results, solving problems and adapting procedures within the framework of public responsibility for education;

19.5. to support, through appropriate public policies, the education of professionals (including teachers, school principals and administrators) at all levels and throughout their career, thereby ensuring that they are fully capable of meeting their educational and societal responsibilities;

20. Wish the above measures to lead principally to:

20.1. developing an inclusive, successful and sustainable education system, respectful of all its participants and its different levels;

20.2. providing all pupils and students with the necessary knowledge, competences and skills so that they are able to live their lives as active citizens in democratic and increasingly diverse societies and to integrate into the complex and continuously changing world of work;

20.3. developing our education systems as a public good with access to quality education for all pupils and students, adapted to their needs as appropriate, and ensuring that public responsibility for higher education, including provision for quality assurance, extends to private providers thereby guaranteeing that students can fully participate in higher education.

21. Call on the Committee of Ministers to instruct the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE), on the basis of the results achieved under their programme of activities and with a view to maintaining their long-term impact at pan-European level:

21.1. to establish a pan-European platform of exchange of information and best practices on ethics and integrity in education with special attention to the fight against corruption and fraud in education and research with a view to furthering the "Helsinki agenda for quality education in Europe".

More specifically, such a platform would focus on:

- a. positive codes of conduct as a complement to anti-corruption and anti-fraud legislation for professionals who are active in education and research;
- b. Capacity-building for all actors;
- c. Support structures (agencies for accreditation or quality assurance);
- d. Sharing of best practices concerning fairness and transparency;
- e. Developing a culture of democracy and participation based on transparency, fairness and equity.

21.2. to explore possibilities to develop indicators for measuring participation of major stakeholders in education in Europe (pupils, parents, education professionals, civil society and decision-makers at different levels);

21.3. to study the possibility of developing a framework instrument on the ethical principles of good conduct and professionalism for teachers. Such an instrument would as a consequence also higher the status of the teaching profession;

21.4. to consider developing descriptors and a reference framework to assist member States in implementing a competence-based education for democracy and intercultural dialogue;

21.5. to assist member States in developing specific policy measures favoring access to learning to all pupils and students, particularly for those who do not complete their schooling and are for that reason at higher risk for possible unemployment and poverty.

22. Warmly thank Finland for having organised this session.