

**Statement by Ambassador Daryal BATIBAY,
Permanent Representative of Turkey to the Council of Europe
Representative of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of
Europe**

Inauguration Event of the European Wergeland Centre,

Oslo, 29 May 2009

Your Royal Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me, as representative of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, to participate in the inauguration ceremony of the European Wergeland Centre. I wish to express my warmest thanks to the Norwegian authorities for their invitation to this significant event and commitment to intercultural dialogue.

In the year of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the setting up of the European Wergeland Centre is a welcome initiative in the field of intercultural dialogue. Its objectives and mission have direct relevance to the commitments entered into by the Third Summit of the Council of Europe held in Warsaw in 2005.

In Warsaw, our Heads of State and Governments reaffirmed the three pillars of our Organisation: the universal values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Based on these values, they have defined the Council of Europe's duty towards 800 million European citizens for the years to come; in other words, the need to build on diversity as a source of mutual enrichment and on intercultural dialogue to develop understanding and trust among Europeans.

Building a knowledge-based society and promoting a democratic culture require targeted efforts in the field of education. The Council of Europe has been a leader in this area. Its main asset is its expertise in standard-setting. An important compilation of recommendations setting out principles and guidelines has been established as a complement to the European Convention of Human Rights, our Organisation's backbone where protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is concerned. I would like to mention just a few of them, which I believe are of particular relevance in this connection.

The first one is Recommendation (2001)¹⁵ on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe. It points out to the role of history teaching in the development of a responsible, active citizen, respectful of differences in the framework of the rule of law and the fundamental values of human rights and democracy.

I would also like to mention Recommendation (2002)¹² on education for democratic citizenship, which underlines the central role of education for democratic citizenship in the educational reforms and its key position in international co-operation for peace and stability in Europe. Education, in all its forms plays the most important role in promoting intercultural dialogue and prepares individuals for living in a multicultural society. The action programmes of the Council of Europe focusing on democratic citizenship, on history teaching – especially the new project on the “Image of the Other”, will certainly contribute to the realisation of our goals in the field of education.

I would like particularly to refer to the Council of Europe White Paper on intercultural dialogue which the Committee of Ministers launched a year ago, in May 2008. It was based on wide-ranging consultations and negotiations. It therefore reflects the European approach to cultural diversity; a forward-looking model setting out how we can live together “as equals in dignity”.

The White Paper does not believe that we want to respond to diversity by accepting the coexistence of segregated communities, separated by mutual ignorance and stereotypes. On the contrary, it emphasizes that European identity is based on shared fundamental values, on the respect for common heritage and cultural diversity as well as the respect for the equal dignity of every individual.

In the framework of the Council of Europe’s work in the field of intercultural dialogue, the Committee of Minister is organising this year, in June, the second Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Like last year the Exchange will bring together representatives of the religions and non-religious convictions, as well as other actors of civil society, in open, transparent dialogue on the theme “Teaching religious and convictional facts”. The European Wergeland Centre will also be invited to contribute to the 2009 Exchange.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While legal standards and policy making are essential, it is their effective implementation that will ultimately make the difference. A major effort needs to be done to build capacity for intercultural dialogue and

understanding, to develop intercultural competences among our populations.

This is where we see the role of the European Wergeland Centre. Indeed, such competences are not automatically acquired. We need to work on many fronts and target many groups. Creation of institutions such as the European Wergeland Centre, where representatives of these groups can meet, dialogue, be trained and learn from each other is crucial. The European Wergeland Centre has the strong support of the Committee of Ministers.

In co-operation with the Council of Europe, I am convinced that the European Wergeland Centre will become a key player in bringing about a Europe proud of its diversities, built on the values of human rights and pluralist democracy.

I wish the Center success in its laudable task.