



**“Understanding and valuing diversity:
Council of Europe activities in the field of
intercultural education”**

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Summary

Over the last decade, in a new context of European migration and following the events that took place on 11 September 2001, a number of developments have taken place at the Council of Europe in the field of intercultural education.

After referring briefly to the political and conceptual framework, in particular the declarations made by the European Ministers of Education and the recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe over the past ten years, the text describes the holistic approach taken by the Council of Europe to foster diversity and promote intercultural dialogue through education in its member states. Such an approach includes the development of intercultural competencies in education and defines the objectives and the expected results in terms of knowledge, attitudes and values. The subjects to which the Council of Europe has given priority include the teaching of history from various standpoints, language learning for successful integration, and interfaith education. Both basic and further teacher training are at the centre of the intercultural education activities.

The text refers to a number of instruments prepared by the Council of Europe in the fields of education and intercultural understanding. It also describes the obstacles to the establishment and success of intercultural education programmes. Finally, the prospects for the coming years are also considered.

“Let us find what unites us,
appreciate what differentiates us
and avoid what separates us”,
Boutros Boutros-Ghali 2002

The aim of this text is to present some aspects of Council of Europe (CoE) activities in the field of intercultural education – or education for intercultural understanding as we also say in the Council of Europe. I will use the term **intercultural education**.

Since it was first founded in 1949, and particularly since the adoption of the European Cultural Convention in Paris in 1955, the Council of Europe has been working on intercultural education. The European Cultural Convention is a seminal text attaching great importance to diversity and the need to be familiar with the culture of other peoples in order to live together harmoniously. It constitutes the framework for co-operation between Council of Europe member states in the fields of culture and education. To give an idea of the frequency with which this issue is addressed at the Council of Europe, a few years ago we counted some 14 official Council of Europe texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers since 1970 which are directly linked to intercultural education or designed to promote cultural diversity and protect cultures with a view to ensuring a democratic and peaceful Europe.

The subject-matter is vast and this article will therefore focus mainly on the last ten years. Our work has expanded to some extent since the beginning of the 21st century. Since 2002, official Council of Europe texts increasingly frequently refer to a “new context” or “times of change” to underline the urgent need for active intercultural dialogue. The fall of the Berlin wall, followed by the reunification of Europe, highlighted the need to protect the cultures of European ethnic minorities. The events of 11 September 2001 placed the spotlight on the issue of religious diversity and, by extension, on the issue of migrant communities and their interaction with the host community. Globalisation and migration movements, and the recent events in neighbouring countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, have further increased the need to react. Manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination have become more frequent and political parties advocating extremist ideas have gained fresh momentum. These developments, along with the increasing globalisation of the economy, have made us increasingly aware of the interrelatedness of our lives and experiences across all kinds of cultural and national divides. It is no longer enough for Europeans to acknowledge each other’s existence and to show mutual respect, we must communicate if we are not only to learn to live together and co-operate, but also to preserve the unity – and diversity - of Europe. This is the

basis on which the concept of intercultural education has developed considerably over the last few years.

Legal references

In Europe, there are two binding legal instruments which protect national minorities, their cultures and their languages: the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages (opened for signature in 1992) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (opened for signature in 1995). These two instruments clearly underline the fact that a “climate of tolerance and dialogue is necessary to enable cultural diversity to be a source and a factor, not of division, but of enrichment for each society¹”. Article 6 of the Framework Convention stipulates that: “The Parties shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media”.

These two instruments are of prime importance for intercultural dialogue, as their implementation requires active co-operation between majorities and minorities. Both contain articles concerning education, aimed at protecting and promoting the minority culture and the obligation to provide quality education to members of these minorities – in their minority language, or at least in part. They therefore formed a starting point for a new political approach to intercultural education, rejecting assimilation with the majority and advocating an approach that asserts the equality of the two parties involved in the dialogue. They also place the issue clearly within the framework of human rights.

¹ Preamble to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (entered into force in 1998).

Political framework

The European ministers of education responded rapidly to the “new context”. In 2003, in Athens, they adopted a declaration on **intercultural education** and the Council of Europe’s role in preserving and fostering the unity and diversity of European societies. In particular the ministers asked the Council “to focus its work programme on enhancing the quality of education as a response to the challenges posed by the diversity of our societies by ensuring that learning about democracy and intercultural education was a key component of educational reform².”

In 2005 the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe adopted the Warsaw Plan. In a chapter on the **role of education in building a more human and inclusive Europe**, the Heads of State placed emphasis on education for democratic citizenship based on universal human rights and **intercultural education** aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and exchanges and preserving cultural diversity. Educators were considered to be among the most important target groups³.

In 2007, in Istanbul, in a declaration intended as a follow-up to the Action Plan of the Heads of State adopted in Warsaw, the European ministers of education placed emphasis on **inclusive education**. They underlined the importance of measures to improve understanding between cultural and/or religious communities through *school education*. In their declaration it is pointed out that, whatever a state’s system of religious education, “taking account of religious diversity in intercultural education is not incompatible with certain forms of secularism and the partial

² Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, 21st session “Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy”, Athens, Greece, 10-12 November 2003, *Declaration by the European ministers of education on intercultural education in the new European context*, paragraph 10. On line:

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=320464&SecMode=1&DocId=863266&Usage=2>

³ Action Plan adopted at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005) – on line:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=ActionPlan2005&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

secularisation of several present-day societies⁴”. The Declaration invites the Council of Europe “to pay attention to analysing and developing key competences for democratic culture and social cohesion, such as citizenship competence, intercultural competence, multilingual competence, social commitment, a solidarity-based outlook and multiperspectivity”.

In 2008, *the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: Living Together As Equals in Dignity* was drawn up and approved by the Committee of Ministers. The White Paper makes numerous references to education, in particular education for democratic citizenship and human rights, language learning and history teaching, and also intercultural education with its religious dimension. **The White Paper identifies education as one of the five key areas for the success of intercultural dialogue. The White Paper constitutes an important stage as it offers a new conceptual framework for intercultural education⁵.**

The Report of the **Group of Eminent Persons appointed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe *Living Together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe*** was published on 11 May 2011⁶. This report also gives pride of place to education and invites Council of Europe member states to prepare to develop “intercultural competencies” as a core element of school curricula, to facilitate the mobility of pupils, students and teaching staff and suggests several steps that the Council of Europe might take to support the implementation of intercultural education in its member states. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is to discuss these recommendations in the coming months with a view to deciding to what extent they might be taken into account.

⁴ Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, 22nd session “Building a more human and inclusive Europe: role of education policies Istanbul”, Turkey, 4-5 May 2007, *Resolution on the results and conclusions of completed projects 2003-2006. In the field of intercultural education, religious diversity and dialogue in Europe –* online:http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/historyteaching/Source/Results/AdoptedTexts/IstanbulResolution1_en.pdf

⁵ On line: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub_White_Paper/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf

⁶Online:<http://www.coe.int/lportal/web/coe-portal/event-files/our-events/the-group-of-eminent-persons?dynLink=true&layoutId=581&dgroupId=10226&fromArticleId=>

An examination of these political texts shows that they all include a number of key ideas, in particular that:

a) intercultural education concerns each and everyone of us. Not only migrants and minorities need to adapt and make efforts to fit into “our” societies; we all need to make efforts to live together;

b) we are not born with the intercultural competencies which allow us to live together harmoniously in today’s world, which is a world of diversity and individual freedom. Education systems must help to develop such competencies;

c) teachers, and by extension all educators, are the most directly concerned and it is first and foremost they who need to develop such competencies.

Conceptual framework

How do we define intercultural education today? How does it interact with other educational approaches?

In her opening address at the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education in Athens in 2003, Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, said “Our common reference when speaking about diversity and dialogue should always be the notion that no one is superior or inferior to another, no one has less dignity and no one is worth more or less than another”. She spoke in favour of intercultural education: “Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, there is an urgent need to develop a holistic approach in order to deal with the recognition, reconciliation and management of diversities within European societies. The better their intercultural knowledge, skills and competencies, the more capable Europeans will be of managing their diversity and building efficient, advanced democracies”.

Since the Athens Conference the role of intercultural education has been increasingly recognised as a powerful means of countering stereotypes, managing situations of poverty,

providing a high standard of education, combating social exclusion and solving conflicts in a non-violent manner. Intercultural education can be seen as a fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of democratic societies. It would support the establishment of social consensus and help to solve a large number of the problems currently facing our societies.

Several definitions and guidelines for intercultural education exist. Other international organisations such as UNESCO have shown an interest in the subject⁷. As far as the Council of Europe is concerned, intercultural education is the vision of a world where human rights are protected and promoted and where democratic participation and the rule of law are recognised and upheld in everyone's interest. These Council of Europe values are conveyed by the "Education for democratic citizenship and human rights" project, which has been running since 1997⁸, as intercultural competencies are among those required for democratic citizenship. The Council of Europe has not adopted an "official" definition of intercultural education. To explain what we mean by this concept, I would like to use the explanation given by one of our experts, Professor Micheline Rey (Geneva, Switzerland), who has been working with the Council of Europe for many years on this subject. She underlines the fact that the intercultural perspective first requires us to recognise that reality is plural, complex, dynamic and changing, and that interaction is an integral part of all lives and cultures.

There are two dimensions that should be taken into account in all intercultural debate and practice, namely:

a) The intercultural perspective seeks to understand how interaction works and to record examples objectively;

⁷ UNESCO *Guidelines on intercultural education*, 2006: "Intercultural Education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups".

⁸ On line: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/default_EN.asp

b) It asks us to ensure that such interaction fosters mutual respect and the enrichment of mutually supporting communities and individuals, rather than the strengthening of relationships based on domination and rejection. The aim is therefore to search for truth through dialogue and to work towards mutual understanding. These two aspects are reflected in education where two interlinking factors need to be taken into account: on the one hand knowledge of many cultures and empathy; and, on the other, experience of “living together”⁹.

Finally, we are all concerned for we are all living in a multicultural context. All cultures that have contact with one another, and not only minority or immigrant cultures, are changed and enriched by such contact. The result is complex identities.

At the Council of Europe, we are still trying to identify the competencies and attitudes which will be required of both teachers and learners. These competencies take account of not only knowledge, but also *savoir faire* and *savoir être*, as defined in the well-known Delors Report¹⁰. I propose a definition which draws on the above: “Intercultural education consists in developing the knowledge, skills and *savoir être* necessary to be able to understand, accept and integrate the diversity of which we are part and the ability to communicate across all borders, be they real, virtual or imagined and/or conceptualised”.

In the course of our work, we have defined a number of rules to ensure successful intercultural communication:

- a) do not make automatic interpretations, assumptions and judgments;
- b) think “outside the box”;
- c) be prepared to explain what seems to be evident;
- d) listen and ask questions;

⁹ Micheline Rey, Council of Europe expert, addressing the Copenhagen Conference on Education for International Understanding and Dialogue, held by UNESCO in Denmark on 21-22 October 2008

¹⁰ *Learning, the treasure within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century

- e) use one's capacities to think critically;
- f) question value judgments;
- g) focus on solutions, not problems.

Our work has shown that the intercultural approach in education must be holistic. That means that schools must be governed in a democratic and participative manner and that they must foster intercultural communication and avoid discrimination between pupils. Schools must offer a safe atmosphere in which it is possible for everyone to manifest and explore their beliefs and pupils should be encouraged to develop their critical faculties through dialogue. Intercultural education must be an integral part of all the subjects on school curricula. Some subjects lend themselves naturally to intercultural dialogue (the teaching of languages, history and geography and social sciences), but in fact all subjects can contribute to intercultural openness. Classes should be multicultural and heterogeneous. As regards pedagogy and teaching methods, it has been proved that active and participative pedagogy is the most effective, that team or group work fosters intercultural communication more than teaching from the front of the classroom. Finally, in an intercultural context, the openness of the school to the outside world, and co-operation with parents, the local community and the local authorities is of the highest importance. Cultural voyages and linguistic exchanges are also part of successful intercultural education.

Council of Europe projects

Through its numerous projects, the Council of Europe has studied a number of specific areas or subjects which foster or contribute to the success of intercultural education. These include education for democratic citizenship and human rights; history teaching; language teaching and the importance of multilingualism; socio-cultural and religious diversity. Teacher training plays a vital role in all these activities.

Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE) has been one of our flagship projects since 1997. A network of co-ordinators made up of representatives of all member states is working permanently on this project. A holistic approach has been adopted to identify the policies required for its implementation in education systems by offering:

- guidelines for policy-makers;
- handbooks on the democratic governance of schools;
- training manuals for teachers; and
- a handbook on the development of EDC/HRE competencies for teachers. These also include intercultural competencies¹¹.

There have been numerous EDC/HRE publications in recent years. All of this work is currently being carried out in the context of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2010¹². **The EDC/HRE project has undeniably had a major impact on the new approach to intercultural education.**

With regard to **history teaching**, Council of Europe programmes have over the past few years helped to strengthen key concepts such as “multi-perspectivity”, also referred to as “the plural view” of history, and the development of active and interactive educational approaches to history teaching. Specific intercultural competencies have been identified in the field of history and

¹¹ See in particular:

- Competence No. 10: The learning environment that enables students to analyse topical political, ethical, social and cultural issues or events in a critical way, using information from different sources, including the media, statistics and ICT-based resources
- Competence No. 11: Collaborative work with appropriate partners (such as families, civil society organisations, community and political representatives) to plan and implement a range of opportunities for students to engage with democratic citizenship issues in their communities

Competence No. 12: Strategies to challenge all forms of prejudice and discrimination, and promotion of anti-racism. These competencies can be found in the handbook *How all teachers can support citizenship and human rights education: a framework for the development of competencies* – See bibliography at the end of the text – On line:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Source/Pdf/Documents/6555_How_all_Teachers_A4_assemble.pdf

¹² In the context of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7. On line:

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec\(2010\)7&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2010)7&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

more particularly with regard to the training of history teachers. A project entitled “*The Image of the Other in History Teaching*” has just come to an end and another on “*Shared Histories for a Europe without Dividing Lines*” was launched this year¹³.

Since 1960, the Council of Europe has been working on **multilingualism to foster intercultural exchanges and understanding**. It encourages member states to make the necessary efforts in the field of education and training so that all persons on their territory can acquire a knowledge of the languages of other member states or of communities within their own country. In recent years efforts in this field have focused on the need for adult migrants to learn the language of their host country and on the need for children in general and in particular learners suffering from language or socio-cultural handicaps (which often include children from migrant families) to learn the language used to teach in schools. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *European Language Portfolio* are very widely recognised instruments that are used throughout Europe, including by the European Union, as guidelines for language policies. The current project on languages of schooling draws on the experience acquired in the field of foreign or second languages; the aim is to describe the competencies in the language of schooling required for success in all school subjects. It highlights the fact that each subject has its own “culture” and points out that intercultural competence is also useful and necessary between people who belong to the same language community. The Council of Europe has also set up a European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria. Its mission is to encourage effective language policies, excellence and innovation in member states¹⁴. The work on language policies also gave rise to the *Autobiography of*

¹³ With regard to the Council of Europe’s work on history teaching, see in particular:

- Recommendation CM/Rec(2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states history teaching in twenty-first century Europe. Online:

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2001\)15&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2001)15&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

- and Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching. On line:

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec\(2011\)6&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2011)6&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

¹⁴ Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe, 34 states are currently members of this Partial Agreement.

Intercultural Encounters. This is a practical tool for use in the classroom, which is designed to encourage pupils to form critical opinions, including of their own reactions and attitudes to other cultures, so as to turn such encounters into positive attitudes and to strengthen their intercultural competence. There is also a version for adults and a new model is currently being prepared to encourage the use of visual media to foster intercultural encounters.¹⁵

Since 2002, the Council of Europe has taken account of ***religious diversity and beliefs in intercultural education***. A specific project was carried out for this purpose, which led to publications on good practices in this field and to the adoption of a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states in 2008¹⁶. The Recommendation underlines the need to promote knowledge and understanding of specific religious or philosophical phenomena. Learners should be able to interpret religious practices and manifestations, to understand the diversity of religions and the diversity within religions, and relations and interactions between religions and cultures. They should study the different ways of approaching religion, ethics and philosophy. Québec researchers gave us very valuable assistance in carrying out this work.

This project was followed by another, from 2006 to 2009: “***Policies and Practices for Teaching Socio-Cultural Diversity***”, whose results are aimed mainly at teachers. They include a framework of teacher competencies for managing diversity in schools and school-classes and guidelines on teaching methods¹⁷.

The Council of Europe possesses a unique tool, ***the Pestalozzi Programme for the Training of Education Professionals***. All Council of Europe member states are taking part in this programme by holding training seminars for teachers and other education professionals. For the teachers taking part, the Pestalozzi Programme is an intercultural exercise in itself, for the

¹⁵ *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* – On line: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_EN.asp

¹⁶ Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. On line: [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec\(2008\)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2008)12&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

¹⁷ Several studies have been published in the context of this project, see bibliography at the end of the article.

training places emphasis on interaction, collaborative knowledge building and the comparison of experiences between people in the same profession from all over Europe. In June 2010, the European ministers of education, meeting in Ljubljana, discussed the subject *Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies: the Role of Teachers*¹⁸ and adopted a special resolution¹⁸ on the importance of the Pestalozzi Programme. The theme of intercultural education is often dealt with at training seminars, as is education for democratic citizenship and human rights. The Pestalozzi Programme has its own Internet forum where teachers and teacher trainers share their impressions, teaching material and the tangible results of training.

Our activities in the field of *higher education* have underlined the role of universities as actors of intercultural dialogue. This dialogue takes place on the university campus between students and teachers of various origins¹⁹. However, universities must also actively promote intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue within society. Indeed, universities are not – and have never been – ivory towers. It is now easier to cross frontiers between countries than it was two or three generations ago. Who, better than universities, can help to also overcome the frontiers in our minds and our imagination? A university education cannot consist only of learning a profession – even at a high level –. Education must include the development of both general and specific competencies. In not only their teaching but also in their educational practices and their institutional policy, universities must develop in all their students the willingness and ability to understand and communicate with people from radically different cultural backgrounds. They must seek to ensure, through their activities in the local community and through their example, that all of society shares these values.

¹⁸ Resolution on the enhancement of teachers' professional development through the Pestalozzi Programme – On line :

<http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/EDUCATION/STANDINGCONF/MED-23-13%20E%20Resolution%20Pestalozzi.pdf>

¹⁹ Bergan S. and van't Land H. (eds) (2010), *Speaking across borders: the role of higher education in furthering intercultural dialogue*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, No. 16 in the Council of Europe "Higher Education" series – only available in English

Finally, reference should also be made to our *Education of Roma children* activity, which clearly underlined the need for genuine intercultural education, not only providing quality education for Roma children but also making all Europeans aware of the culture and the tragic history of the Roma²⁰.

Tangible results with an impact in member states

It would be wrong to believe that everything that is done at the Council of Europe in the field of education immediately results in the reform of member states' education systems. Intergovernmental co-operation between 50 states is a very long and very complicated process. The negotiation of the content of the *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, adopted in the context of CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states, lasted several years. Some countries introduced this type of teaching a long time ago, whereas others have not yet done so. Whatever the case, it is increasingly accepted and recognised in member states that education for democratic citizenship and human rights must be part of formal education and that this must include the *transversal competencies and attitudes* which are at the centre of intercultural education.

²⁰ Recommendation No R(2000)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2000\)4&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorIntranet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2000)4&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorIntranet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

Recommendation Rec(2001)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec\(2001\)17&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorIntranet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2001)17&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorIntranet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

Recently, a large number of states have taken steps to introduce this type education or to develop it further. The following are some examples:

1) In the field of EDC/HRE and intercultural education

- EDC/HRE has been introduced in school curricula in numerous countries (in particular Spain and Finland)²¹;
- Council of Europe handbooks and instruments have been used in several countries, in particular new member states, and have been adapted to the national context;
- There is now very active co-operation between some member states, in European and regional networks (South-East Europe networks; the Baltic Sea and Black Sea networks; the Nordic countries network);
- Joint programmes with the European Union have been successfully carried out in a number of countries and regions: for example the “Joint Programme on fostering a culture of human rights in South Caucasus and Ukraine” and the “Interculturalism and the Bologna Process” Joint Programme in Kosovo*²²;
- A new and very wide-ranging programme concerning education for democratic citizenship and human rights in Turkey – which has an intercultural slant - will commence in summer 2011.

2) In the field of history teaching

- Black Sea Initiative: with the backing of international experts, historians from the countries concerned took part in the successful joint preparation of teaching material, on which agreement was reached. This material is widely used in the region;
- Activities carried out in Cyprus, in a context of conflict, have provided the opportunity to establish contacts between all the communities concerned across existing divisions. As a result teaching material, most of which was produced by teachers from all the communities concerned, is now widely used in schools with the authorities’ approval;

²¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/2_edc_hre_in_member_states/country_profiles/default_EN.asp

²² *All reference to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

- In Bosnia and Herzegovina a basic programme has been adopted for the teaching of the shared history of the Serb, Croat and Bosniac communities. As a result a new generation of history schoolbooks has been prepared;
- In the Russian Federation, a long-term programme, lasting over ten years, assisted and guided the history reaching reform, which concerned school curricula, initial teacher training and the preparation of teaching tools.

Among the greatest successes of the last few years, I should mention the establishment of the European Wergeland Centre in Oslo in 2009. The Centre, whose aim is to foster education for democratic citizenship, human rights education and intercultural education, is financed by the Norwegian government but open to co-operation with all Council of Europe member states and works in close co-operation with the Directorate of Education and Languages. The European Wergeland Centre is a very valuable partner for the Council of Europe, particularly with regard to improving the dissemination of our activities, research on specific subjects and the training of educators.

Obstacles, tensions and difficulties encountered

In order to introduce intercultural education or even simply the intercultural perspective into education systems and school curricula in Europe, we must overcome numerous obstacles, difficulties and tensions. The latter are frequently the result of a narrow understanding of what education is all about. Let us first take a look at the Council of Europe's definition of the aims of education:

- preparation for the labour market;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

First, in Europe, schools are primarily interested in preparing pupils for the labour market. They do not spend enough time developing *savoir être* and transversal *savoir faire* and

knowledge; time is fully taken up by the teaching of academic subjects. School curricula already cover too many subjects; teachers are often insufficiently prepared to give lessons with an intercultural content or lessons that are designed to foster *savoir être*.

Second, the teaching profession in Europe is still not very open to intercultural matters and does not attach sufficient value to diversity. Studies on student mobility show that would-be teachers are probably less mobile than any other students²³. This might be due to the fact that education systems are first and foremost national. Education is one of the prerogatives of each state and for the time being it is difficult to imagine that there might one day be a European education system, at least not at primary or secondary school level.

Third, it is still difficult to get policy-makers and educators as a whole to understand the new approach, which sees intercultural education as something which concerns all of us. Intercultural education is still often perceived as something which applies to others, as something we do for others, for immigrants or minorities, and which does not concern society as a whole.

Fourth, the initial training and the status of teachers in numerous countries do not always correspond to the role that they should play in communicating the values and attitudes we are talking about here.

Fifth, when the democratisation of schools, their openness and new subjects are mentioned, education authorities and heads of school are often alarmed. How can such schools be managed? Will it be possible to ensure discipline? How can traditional knowledge that is designed to prepare pupils for entering the labour market be taught if time is taken up by new subjects?

Sixth, if schools try to introduce this type of teaching, it may compete or be incompatible with the informal education that comes to us through the media, including new media, which have a very strong influence on children and young people. The media often send out very conservative

²³ Geo-Jaja M. A., Majhanovich S. (Eds) (2010). *Education, language, and economics: growing national and global dilemmas*, Publishers, Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei

and very stereotyped messages, which are incompatible with the ideas we are concerned with here. There is therefore increasing recognition of the need for media training.

Seventh, foreign (in particular language-based) exchanges are still seldom validated as part of a pupil's schooling. Pupils who choose to spend a year abroad may simply risk losing a year.

Eighth, intercultural education and other transversal approaches may – unintentionally – be thwarted by some of the OCDE approaches. Since the establishment of PISA²⁴, each European state closely follows the results of these studies and keeps an eager eye on its place in the rankings. Consequently the emphasis is on traditional subjects such as mathematics and reading. A recent study on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, carried out by the Nordic Council, concludes, for example, that PISA may restrict innovative thinking in education²⁵.

Challenges

The challenges are above all to overcome the obstacles I have listed above. By way of conclusion, I would stress a number of essential ideas, which should be considered over the coming months and years:

We must reconsider the role of schools in fostering knowledge by giving more importance to learning to live together in a democratic manner in a diverse society.

We must accept that diversity concerns us all, that the world is changing and that we, too change over time, as do cultures, and that people are the actors and not passive objects of change. In this context, it is essential to have proactive attitudes and to try to find solutions instead of maintaining the *status quo*.

²⁴ PISA: International Programme for Student Assessment

²⁵ <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/pisa-restricts-innovative-thinking-in-education>

The Council of Europe will have to think about how the recommendations set out in the *White Paper* and more recently in the Report of the Group of Eminent Personalities might be implemented and taken further. The Report makes the following proposals:

- it urges “educators and education authorities in all member states to develop “intercultural competencies” as a core element of school curricula, and to extend these beyond formal education to non-formal settings such as museums and cultural institutions, cultural events and festivals, and in particular the media; the Council of Europe should continue its work on a conceptual framework to assist this development”

- it recommends that “member states take the necessary measures to further facilitate the mobility of students and education staff at all levels as an important means of promoting intercultural education, for instance by reviewing their regulations and policies, particularly but not only in areas such as visa and immigration regulations, social-security regulations, and work permits for teaching staff (as well as for students who need to work part time to pay for their studies). The Council of Europe could consider launching a specific mobility scheme for this purpose and elaborating a normative text with provisions to facilitate school and academic mobility with a view to strengthening intercultural education”.

- it invites “the Council of Europe to establish pilot projects on intercultural dialogue with a limited number of primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions in member states, and to consider creating a Council of Europe prize to be awarded to education institutions for their work in this field”.

All these proposals are worth examining and possibly implementing. However, we must first and foremost think about what sort of society we want to build, and build education on the basis of this vision. Our future society must be the outcome of the action of the individuals who will have created it through their contributions to a constructive dialogue.

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