

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Wergeland Centre I would like to congratulate the Polish Ministry of National Education, represented by Ms. Anna Dakowicz-Navrocka and The Centre for Education Development, represented by Ms. Marlena Falkowska for their opening words and for organizing this Summer Academy together with their excellent and highly efficient team.

It is a great pleasure for me, representing The European Wergeland Centre, to take part in the opening ceremony for the Summer Academy in Poland on **Democracy at school**.

A year ago, in the inauguration event for The European Wergeland Centre, Mr. Krzysztof Stanowski, former State Secretary of Poland, proclaimed the idea of a Summer Academy in Poland to translate the CoE policy into practice and to implement the idea of Education for Intercultural Understanding, Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship into everyday life of schools. It was also an idea with this Summer Academy to strengthen the cooperation and ties between Northern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe and countries in the Caucasus area.

Today there are participants from seven countries!

It is a dream comes true!

Particularly it is a pleasure to be in Warsaw with our Polish friends. Poland and Norway have so much in common. We share a common history from the 2nd world war against the Nazis. Polish soldiers took part in the war in Northern Norway and fought in the battle that gave Hitler his first military defeat in 1940. Today, the relations between our two countries are excellent. Trade between Norway and Poland is increasing day by day.

1300 young Norwegian students get their education in Poland.

At the moment there are more than 100 000 Polish people living in Norway!

The Council of Europe was set up in 1949 by ten countries as a political forum for the new Europe based on democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. Today there are 47 member states in the CoE.

The European Wergeland Centre was established by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Council of Europe a year ago. Norway has always supported the Council of Europe, and when the CoE expressed the need for a centre to work for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship, the Norwegian Parliament unanimously approved the proposal and granted the money necessary to start.

The mission of the Wergeland Centre is to build bridges between policy, research and practice. To help translate CoE recommendations and conventions into practice.

The target groups are first and foremost teacher trainers and teachers

The EWC are closely linked to the COE`s Education Programme.

Education is of great importance to all countries. The French politician Jacques Delors said it in this way: *“Choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society “.*

If you want to have a democratic society, this must be reflected in the schools.

Human rights, democracy and intercultural understanding do not come automatically. The history of Europe clearly tells us so. You must work for those ideas every day. Once you have them, they must be protected. You cannot take them for granted!

The Council of Europe has done a good work for many years to raise the standard of education in the member states. We must, however, acknowledge that all the good work is not easily accessible to all target groups.

There is often a discrepancy between the commitments of the states and rules adopted in international fora, and the reality on the ground in terms of intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship. *“This is why the EWC is such an important institution”*, the former Secretary General of COE, Terry Davis, said in his greeting to The European Wergeland Centre in the inauguration event last year.

When it comes to bridging the gap between policy and practice with regards to preparing pupils and teachers for living together in diverse societies, a resource centre like The European Wergeland Centre is set up to work towards and with the grass root level – head masters, teachers and NGO representatives like all of you.

Intercultural dialogue begins, for many children, at school where they learn to respect other people, democratic values and democratic behavior. In an inclusive society, deconstructing stereotypes is central to promote real intercultural behavior. It is crucial that we have competent and dedicated teachers working to teach these values. We sincerely hope the Summer Academy will be a great learning experience for you, a chance to share your experiences and learn from others, and a valuable support in your continued efforts in your schools and local communities.

The EWC would like to thank the Council of Europe for its support to the idea of this Summer Academy.

The European Wergeland Centre is very pleased that the agreement between Poland and EWC states that the Summer Academy is designed to be an annual event.

We feel honoured to be a partner in this important mission, and we are impressed by the preparations made by our Polish colleagues.

The hospitality and generosity we have met in Poland has overwhelmed us. I would like to thank you warmly.

We are happy with the very positive response from the countries that were invited. Thank you for coming to Warsaw!

On behalf of the EWC I wish you a very fruitful Summer Academy!