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**Council of Europe Standing Conference
of Ministers of Education**

“SECURING DEMOCRACY THROUGH EDUCATION”

**The development of a Reference Framework of
Competences for Democratic Culture”**

25th session

Brussels, 11-12 April 2016

Final Declaration on the Conference Theme

We, the Ministers of Education, meeting in Brussels on the occasion of the 25th session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference,

1. Reiterating our commitment to the common European values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
2. Having regard to the European Cultural Convention (ETS 18);
3. Mindful of the particular challenges with which Europe is faced, in particular terrorism and violent extremism, the greatly increased number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, an increased sense of crisis, the rise of populism and the jeopardising of democratic values as a reaction to that sense of crisis;
4. Referring to the Declaration and the Action Plan adopted at the 125th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Brussels, 19 May 2015) on *The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism* which states that “the best way to develop an understanding of ‘democratic culture’ is through education”;
5. Recalling that our conference, as well as the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture are included among the measures of this Action Plan;
6. Referring to the Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019) launched by the Committee of Ministers on 16 March 2016;
7. Referring to the Declaration of the 24th Session of our Conference in Helsinki (26-27 April 2013) which called on the Committee of Ministers to instruct the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) “to consider developing descriptors and a reference framework to assist member States in implementing a competence-based education for democracy and intercultural dialogue”;
8. Recalling also that preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies is one of the main purposes of education¹ and that “one of the fundamental goals of all education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law²”;
9. Referring to 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 education is crucial to developing the democratic culture that democratic institutions and societies need to function;
10. Referring to the Declaration of the 23rd Session of our conference in Ljubljana (4-6 June 2010) which called on the Committee of Ministers “to acknowledge the fundamental role of teachers as agents of change in the process of building and managing sustainable democratic societies respectful of human rights and diversity;

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research, Paragraph 5.

² Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, Paragraph 5.g.

11. Identifying, through the discussions at our Conference, as one of our MAIN GOALS the strengthening in and through education of the culture of democracy in new generations in Europe as an essential prerequisite of building cohesive and sustainable democratic societies;

12. Agree on the following STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES within the field of education:

13. To make the preparation for lifelong active democratic citizenship of all learners in education and training a hallmark of the quality of European education systems and an essential part of our response to the challenges Europe is facing;

14. To provide all learners in education and training with the necessary competences (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding) that will enable them to engage as active citizens in democratic and diverse societies and increase their chances of succeeding in their working lives;

15. Welcome the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and commit to contribute to achieving the abovementioned strategic objectives by taking a series of ACTIONS/ INITIATIVES;

16. The objectives, principles and policies set out below are to be applied with due respect for the constitutional structures of each member State;

17. Therefore *undertake*:

18. to enhance democracy in the life and culture of schools and universities;

19. to launch the next phase of the implementation of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture through support for its testing at national, regional and European level, while paying specific attention to the development of appropriate teacher competences and institutional settings that would favour such initiatives;

20. to increase the effectiveness of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE) at all levels of education and training for all individuals, in particular by:

- a) reinforcing its status in all strands of education and training;
- b) supporting member states, taking into account national circumstances, in referring to and drawing upon the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, in particular when reviewing school curricula;
- c) making available appropriate tools and instruments to ensure that democratic competences are adequately acquired, practised and assessed at school and/or national levels;

21. to support the work of the Council of Europe in developing digital citizenship education in line with the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture;

22. to support the development of a long-term strategy for a more coherent and comprehensive approach to EDC/HRE at European level by:

- a) asking the Council of Europe to take a regional role in measuring progress towards common long-term objectives on EDC/HRE, in line with global efforts to make progress towards Target 4.7 of SDG 4, in the 2030 Agenda;
- b) providing evidence and data in the area of EDC/HRE on which to base further policy recommendations;
- c) sharing efficient and innovative practices in terms of the content, training and guidelines provided through dynamic national implementation mechanisms;

23. to guide higher education policies, and in particular teacher education policies, towards contributing to efficient and innovative practices to foster democratic culture and student participation;

24. to examine policy measures to prevent violent extremism and radicalisation as well as their direct relevance to the fundamental mission of education and its actors and assess their long term effects;

25. *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 its programme of activities and with a view to maintaining a long-term impact at European level:

26. to ensure that the strategic objectives of this 25th session are reflected in the future programmes of activities of the Council of Europe (2018-2021);

27. to assist member States in examining and implementing the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in their national education systems, in particular by piloting descriptors and offering guidance for curriculum development, teaching and learning strategies and adequate assessments tools as appropriate and in dialogue with the educational community;

28. to explore the development of a European Portfolio of Democratic Competences and ensure the participation of all relevant education actors and in particular of students of all ages as well as of teachers in this process;

29. to renew the network of national coordinators for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education with a view to strengthening its contribution to the implementation of the strategic objectives and specific actions outlined in this Declaration;

30. to support an improved use of existing instruments, tools and resources developed over the past decade by Council of Europe expert bodies in Education and in other relevant sectors such as Youth;

31. to consider ways of increasing the impact of such resources and of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education,

32. to develop policy guidelines to support national authorities in developing digital citizenship education policies to address learning issues as well as the needs of students to work responsibly in open, collaborative, online environments;

33. to contribute from a European perspective to the development of global citizenship education, including education for sustainable development, and undertake a coordination role based on the outcomes of the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

34. Recognising that in view of the challenges of today's societies, more targeted investment in and support for education is needed to meet our strategic objectives. In providing this it is essential to co-ordinate partners to make the best use of resources and to ensure complementarity;

35. Noting that the Council of Europe co-operates with an array of partners to support States Party to the European Cultural Convention in adapting their education systems to substantially enhance education for democracy and human rights;

36. Therefore we *invite* the Council of Europe:

37. to reinforce cooperation with strategic partners in order to further support education reforms in member States. These partners include, inter alia:

- a) national governments, relevant ministries, national parliaments and local authorities;
- b) European Union institutions, in particular in the area of promoting education for democratic citizenship and fundamental values, fostering social and civic competences and intercultural understanding, combating discrimination and promoting an inclusive learning environment;
- c) the United Nations system and its agencies, notably UNESCO for its work on global citizenship education and the prevention of violent extremism;
- d) professional networks (in particular in school and higher education fields), higher education institutions, the European Wergeland Centre and national and international donors;

38. *Call on* the different Council of Europe bodies, in particular the Secretary General, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Human Rights Commissioner, the bodies responsible for anti-discrimination treaties and the INGO Conference to enhance their cooperation in the field of education;

39. *Warmly thank* Belgium for having hosted this session.