

**International Conference on "Turkey and EU common values:
Reflections on the education system"**

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**The contributions of the "Democratic Citizenship and
Human Rights Education" Project to Turkey**

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Distinguished representatives of the Ministry of National Education,
Distinguished guests and participants,

The "Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education Project", which ended in May 2015, was a European Union (EU) and Council of Europe (CoE) joint project, conducted over four years, which built on the curriculum reform and on-going teacher training efforts undertaken in Turkey over the last years. It aimed to take those reforms a step further through a comprehensive approach that expanded its focus beyond the classroom environment to the school and to the community.

The overall objective of this project was to foster a more democratic society by strengthening Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC / HRE) that corresponds with European core values. The purpose of the project was also to increase the institutional capacity of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) on EDC/HRE through:

- developing and revising regulations and curricula on EDC/HRE;
- producing educational materials;
- increasing the capacity and awareness on EDC/HRE of pre-school, primary and secondary school communities (teachers, pupils, students, non-teaching staff, parents and community leaders);
- Fostering a democratic school culture from pre-school to the end of the secondary education.

Before I enter into the substance of these different facets of the project, I would like to extend my thanks, on behalf of the Council of Europe, to Minister Avci, for the commitment, support and active participation of the Ministry of National Education to the project. I would also like to thank our valued partner in the Board of Education, Prof Dr Emin Karip, and his colleagues, as well as the EU, for its financing and support, and the Central Finance and Contracts Unit. I would also like to pay my compliments to all students, parents, teachers, school principals and provincial administrators who were behind this success, and I congratulate them for their commitment.

I do not wish to dwell too much on that part of the project that concerned the **review of legislation**, beyond noting that a total of 73 pieces of legislation were reviewed in the light of EDC/HRE principles. Recommendations for improvement were developed in terms of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and linkages to human rights.

What I think is more interesting is to focus on **curriculum development**, and everything that sprang from that, in terms of developing new, interactive, holistic approaches to EDC / HRE and to its place and practice within the Turkish education system. This, for me and my colleagues, is I feel where the contribution of the project really lies.

In broad and factual terms, the curriculum for the elective course on EDC / HRE (upper secondary) was redesigned, piloted and approved by the Board of Education (BoE); the textbook

for the course was also developed and approved by the BoE. Additionally, the curriculum and teaching material for the compulsory course, for 4th graders, were developed and approved by the BoE.

These simple facts (which also hide a very collegiate and effective development process) do not show the success of the take-up of the curricula and materials. Suffice to say that in its first year of launching, about 270 000 students selected the course, making it the third most elected course in the 2014-2015 school year. What is of more consequence, in terms both of outreach and of sustainability of the EDC / HRE ideas, is that about 1.3 million 4th grade students aged 9-10 will take the new compulsory course as of the 2015-2016 school year. This take-up of EDC / HRE is also a testament to the Board of Education impetus given to these issues over the last few years.

These curricula put the student and learning at the centre of the process, rather than instruction-based teaching. Activities that were developed and later improved upon, based on the feedback from the teachers and students, provide links between school and daily life. The curriculum encourages students to express their opinions, to participate actively in society, to be aware of the problems in their surroundings, and to take action if needed to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. Interviews carried out during the pilot implementation verified that students: became more inclined to express their opinions; developed self-esteem; and became aware and concerned about the problems in their schools and wider school community, which they presented to the school administration and relevant authorities, and on which they developed solutions and followed up afterwards.

Thus, what emerges from the work undertaken on curriculum development leads to and finds its manifestation in the activities to promote a **Democratic School Culture**, one of the main aims of the project.

The Democratic School Culture and Democratic School Culture Framework and Manual that were prepared in the framework, are at the centre of the project's ethos and actions.

Providing pupils with a democratic learning environment allows them to develop democratic skills and to put the democratic values and human rights into practice. A competencies framework, consisting of a matrix of five fields, and corresponding indicators, was developed by a working group of broad representation of actors. The framework indicates where a school stands in terms of democratic practices in the following fields:

Communication; The studying and learning environment; Identity and belonging; Responsibility; Decision-making.

The manual then shows how the schools can improve existing practices or introduce new practices so that a democratic school culture is built. In addition to the framework, the working group developed 109 extra-curricular activities, designed to help the school to build and improve democratic school culture.

The framework was piloted in 22 primary, lower and upper secondary schools. Ten information meetings, and 5 workshops, were held in pilot provinces to promote democratic school culture and develop extra-curricular activities with the participation of teachers, school principals, students and parents. These events raised the profile of democratic school culture, gained buy-in and support, and collected contributions and suggestions to improve the quality of this expected result.

Following the pilot implementation, project stakeholders decided to extend the outreach of democratic school culture to 100 new schools in pilot provinces. 80 volunteer schools

implemented 5-6 activities in the 2014-2015 school year under the guidance of the pilot schools. Additionally, 24 control schools participated in the implementation independently from the guide school system. In total, over 100,000 students, teachers, school principals and parents were involved in the implementation; about one-third of them actively contributed and took part in the activities.

From all of this, as one of the specific outputs of the project, emerged a new brand – what we call the **"Generation Democracy"** brand and its visual identity (supported through a Facebook page, a website, a monthly electronic bulletin). Pupils are the final beneficiaries of this project; they are the young citizens who will shape the society of the future (whilst, we should not forget, being active in the society of today). "Generation Democracy" implies the following:

- Be aware of rights and responsibilities;
- Practice your rights;
- Take responsibility;
- Value diversity;
- Be active in school and society;
- You are a young citizen: do not wait to become an adult, act now.

In terms of impact, the practice of a Democratic School Culture provides benefits for pupils in terms of discipline, motivation, and reduced supervisory needs resulting from a higher sense of responsibility and autonomy created by more participation and involvement. Skills, attitude and behaviour evolve in relation to respect (and indeed self-esteem), and empathy, and the capacity to take decisions, as well as on taking a pro-active approach to dealing with conflict situations in the school environment.

To back up the practice of these ideas, nine CoE manuals on EDC/HRE were translated and adapted to Turkish context, and made available on project website (which, I should add, received 1.6 million hits in 3 years).

Alongside these actions, and indeed in an interlinked process, the basic skills and knowledge of Education Ministry personnel and concerned groups were developed on EDC/HRE, through **awareness-raising activities and training**.

Training programmes were developed, approved and included in the annual training plans of the Ministry of National Education, including a 15 module training package, made available on the project website, and distributed in 600 printed copies to the trainers.

To ensure quality delivery of both the elective and compulsory courses, 9 training-of-trainers sessions were organised for a total of 540 teacher trainers (165 philosophy and history teachers, 385 classroom teachers).

Additionally, in terms of training target groups, 9 training courses were organised for a total of around 1,100 participants from the following groups, on EDC/HRE: working group members from the BoE, deputy provincial directors/branch managers, provincial inspectors, school principals, textbook authors, textbook review experts.

Again, though, perhaps less important than the numbers is the creation of groups made up of individuals from the groups mentioned above, who will be able in the future to take their training out into all the regions of the country.

In addition, finally, 101 cascade trainings were organised, for 2500 philosophy and history teachers (about one-fifth of the total in the country), and for 720 classroom teachers.

Much of what I have raised here today has focused on what I hope has been the useful and substantive contribution of the "Generation Democracy" Project to Turkey. Let me finish by saying a few words about what the implementation of this project by Turkey, in partnership with the Council of Europe, has brought to our other 46 member States. In part as a result of the work done here, we are currently developing "Competences for democratic culture" or, in other words, competences citizens require in order to participate effectively in democratic society and in intercultural dialogue.

This measure is also part of a larger package of preventative measures in the CoE Action Plan Against Extremism and Radicalisation leading to terrorism, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (i.e. the 47 Foreign Ministers) at their regular session in May this year.

The framework itself will comprise:

- A model of competences for democratic culture
- A set of corresponding descriptors (i.e. indicators)
- Guides and support documents on, among others, pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment and combating radicalisation.

The competences will be the main point of discussion and hopefully endorsement at the upcoming Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, to be held in April April 2016 in Brussels. We very much hope that Minister Avci will be able to participate at this conference, given that the Ministry of National Education has been so involved and supportive of our joint actions.

In terms of the effect of the project beyond Turkey, the 23rd Annual Meeting of the CoE's network for EDC/HRE Co-ordinators was held in İstanbul in May 2015, to coincide with the Project's closing conference. The co-ordinators from CoE member states visited pilot schools and observed good examples of EDC/HRE practices first hand. We hope that by sharing our experiences, we will equip the next generation with the values, attitudes and skills to be able think critically and act with understanding and compassion towards each other, whether it be face-to-face or, as we increasingly see, via social media, in Europe and beyond.

We also hope that this is only the first step in our co-operation. The Council of Europe stands ready to continue our work with Turkey and the EU on democracy and human rights education and we are delighted that discussions are already underway to continue this important work. As mentioned above the project introduced a democratic school culture framework. The framework was successfully implemented in 126 schools of different types. There are, however over 50 000 schools in Turkey. Thanks to the efforts made and achievements gained within this project, the Ministry of National Education has submitted a new project/action to the IPA 2015 programming year, which has been accepted. The purpose of the project is to institutionalize democratic school culture in primary schools (over 35 000 schools), in what we hope will be a real "Generation Democracy" Phase 2.

Thank you.