



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Introductory Remarks  
As delivered by H.E. Mr. Myqerem TAJFALI,  
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High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non Discrimination  
Plenary Session 5: The role of human rights youth education in promoting  
mutual understanding and respect for diversity in accordance  
with the existing OSCE commitments,  
Tirana, 22 May 2013

Honorable guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are grateful to Ukraine for its wise choice to put the topic of youth education to tolerance and non-discrimination as a priority of its Chairmanship's work in the Human Dimension of the OSCE.

Let me remind you a well-known citation from a western philosopher, Karl Popper, which eloquently encapsulates the substance of this Plenary Session. "The citizens of a civilized society, people who act civil, are not the product of chance, but rather the result of an educational process". Educating our youth according to the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination is crucial to promoting pluralistic societies. That is where respect for diversity and mutual understanding prevails.

The mobility of goods, services, capital and labour has increased interaction among people with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Managing diversity and complexity becomes a challenge for the nation states, more so if faced with increased tensions and enmity among various communities. In this framework, education could play a crucial role to combat misperception, prejudice and intolerance in pluralistic and multicultural societies.

This was clearly recognized by the participating States as early as 1990, in the Document of the Copenhagen, when they committed to take effective measures to promote understanding and tolerance, particularly in the fields of education, culture and information.

The transformation of our society under globalization generates new alternatives for personal fulfillment and increases the burden of responsibility. In this context, the societal changes have put the individual and education in a new relationship. Because of the state of interdependence among the nations and the individuals within a state, it is indispensable to address racial, religious and all forms of phobias and prejudice. This requires a long-term and systematic approach that only education can provide.

Therefore formal education takes a greater role in preparing the future generation. Its previous mission to train future citizens faces new challenges and expectations under the globalization and regionalization of our national economies.

Recognizing the role of education in promoting mutual understanding and tolerance, States participating in Document of Copenhagen have agreed to establish educational programmes to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, including intolerance against Muslims, Christians and other religious groups, and to promote mutual understanding and the remembrance of the Holocaust (Ministerial Council Decision No. 13/06). During the last decade the Ministry of Education and Science has put considerable effort into shaping policies, strategies and activities, which promote the role of human rights youth education in school, mutual understanding and respect for diversity in accordance with future development of globalization.

In order to effectively meet the present societal challenges and our expectations, we had to transform the learning content and its environment, the learning and teaching methodologies and the education and training of teachers.

Both the law on the pre-university education (2012) and the law (2010) on protection against discrimination provide the framework for future intervention in education. The Ministry of Education and Sciences is committed to help young people to develop commitment skills, democratic values and attitudes necessary for a peaceful and democratic coexistence in Albania and in the region.

Now we are confident that with the help of our international partners our schools have effectively adopted the strategic objective of training citizen capable of exerting their civil responsibilities and freedoms; and capable of contributing to further spiritual emancipation, social and material development of our society. On the other hand central and local educational institutions already play an important role in ensuring education services for the most vulnerable strata of our society.

International organizations such the OSCE and the Council of Europe can provide an invaluable contribution to raising awareness about mutual respect based on dialogue. Sharing experiences, lessons learned and good educational practices for action to encourage respect for diversity and promote social cohesion, is another way to address prejudice, misperception and intolerance.

We consider civic education - the education of our citizens with democratic virtues - as the response to the challenges affecting our society and our education systems. Because we perceive civic and citizenship in global terms, our school curriculum extends beyond the concept of national citizenship. The new curriculum is in line with the philosophy of the liberal democracy and future challenges of our society. The pre-university education now aims at cultivating virtues, knowledge, skills, and creativity in order to enhance the practical and physical capacities of our citizens.

Considering the importance of education for democratic citizenship, the curriculum emphasizes education of human rights, peace, and the role of youth education in promoting mutual understanding and respect for diversity. The European dimension of citizenship has also become a distinguished feature of our school curriculum.

The school curriculum contains a specific program for Human Rights and Democracy Education, which is in compliance with the country's education strategic priorities. The program aims at promoting respect for human rights and the practice of democracy in Albania. The goals of this program are to embrace a holistic understanding of human rights, improve institutions' democratic features, and encourage the participation of civil society in the education system. The program demonstrates the application of human rights values like social inclusion and applies a rights-based approach within the schooling system.

It is in our priorities to achieve the standards recommended by the Council of Europe, OSCE and UNESCO on teaching and learning the subject of history. The guidelines set by the ministry for the history of Holocaust, are reflected in the programs of history, for pre-university schools, and in the curricula of universities that prepare teachers of history. The guidelines are also applied in history textbooks and the work of our training institutions in Albania. The issue of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and harmony between religions and ethnicities is an inclusive part of the curricula of the subject of history in the Albanian education system.

In all the cases, interactive methods and participatory strategies are suggested, in order to reinforce basic skills and higher order thinking skills, conflict resolution, consensus building and problem solving skills.

The challenge of our system is to enhance the social inclusion and social cohesion by promoting inclusive education and training. With regard to inclusive approaches in education we have to further increase our capacities and the cooperation in order to better respond to the needs of the community. Enhancing awareness of diversity in schools is a benefit for all. However, we still have to progress on the removal of concrete barriers for vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- Develop a set of modules, activities and exercises based on the Guidelines which could be used for primary and secondary levels, as well as for teacher training, and by parents;
- Promote the use of school twinning projects, which provide a forum to engage the teachers and students in discussions on the issues raised by the Guidelines;
- Record the incidents and manifestation of intolerance in schools by organizing expert meetings on sharing experiences in this area;
- Use recording systems, which collect information on bias-motivated incidents in schools, to help to analyze the problem and formulate a strategy based on facts;

- Organize country-specific seminars for school administrators and high level educational authorities to obtain their support for the implementation of the Guidelines;
- Develop awareness-raising programmes for teachers in countering stereotypes and prejudice;
- Train students and educational staff to become mediators who can address conflicts before they escalate;
- Support the efforts of educators in reaching out to families in order to counter intolerance and discrimination in schools.

I thank you for your attention!