The political context – Introduction

Work on the conceptual framework of the new project on Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity went on throughout 2005 in the Secretariat and in the Bureau of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED), and it was adopted at the committee's plenary session of October 2005.

Several events which occurred that year influenced the work as it progressed, some of these at the highest political level within the Council of Europe, and others in the context of intergovernmental co-operation in the education sector. The objectives pursued during this project have been tailored to meet the wish expressed by the Heads of State and Government, meeting at the 3rd Summit (Warsaw, May 2005), for recognition of the need to promote a democratic culture and to encourage intercultural dialogue, both amongst Europeans and between Europe and its neighbouring regions.

Previously, the European Ministers of Education, meeting at the 21st session of their Standing Conference, held in Athens in November 2003, had redefined the objectives of co-operation in the education field in Europe, and acknowledged the role of intercultural education in, and the major contribution made by the Council of Europe to, the maintenance and development of the unity and diversity of European societies.

Then came the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue, adopted in October 2005, at the end of the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention; this defined several lines of action pointing to future priorities for intergovernmental co-operation in the education sector, tallying with the concerns expressed by the Ministers of Education at their Athens conference, such as:

• respect for cultural rights and the right to education;

• the introduction of inter-sectoral policies promoting cultural diversity and dialogue;

- development of knowledge of history, cultures, arts and religions;

- support for cultural activities and exchanges as a means of engaging in dialogue;

- the strengthening of all the opportunities for teachers to obtain training in the fields of education for democratic citizenship, human rights, history and intercultural education.

1.1. Teacher training: a priority for Council of Europe intergovernmental co-operation in the field of education

It is in this context, and in order to take action on the political priorities set by the Ministers, that the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education (CDED), as early as 2006, stepped up its activity on teacher training through the gradual introduction of training modules for teacher trainers in several fields of activity, such as education for democratic citizenship, the European dimension of education, the education of Roma children, and the teaching of history and languages.

While the emphasis was placed mainly on the production of teaching tools based on methodological concepts, principles and approaches and on examples of learning activities in these different fields, the development of new skills remains a constant concern, especially because the question of how teachers acquire skills has to be considered, and because, in most cases, the skills acquired remain closely linked, and limited, to the specific fields of each subject taught.

It is therefore a worthwhile step for the Council of Europe to consider the creation of a reference framework to serve as a common denominator, encompassing "core" fundamental skills. Were this common denominator to be "education for diversity", the skills that appeared in the reference framework would, once they had been acquired and applied, provide teachers and education professionals in general with means of successfully coping with our societies' growing diversity.

1.1.1. The project and its objectives (2006-2009)

In this process, the crucial role clearly devolves to initial training establishments and training programmes which have not yet been the focal point of a Council of Europe project. The Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity project is intended precisely as a response to certain key questions connected with initial teacher training and the introduction of common principles to the management of school diversity. It is therefore addressed mainly to education policy makers, and more specifically to teacher trainers.

The Steering Committee for Education wished to develop this project through three separate phases:

1. Phase 1, 2006-2007: analysis of the teacher training programmes available in a number of states to provide teachers with the skills they need to manage socioculturally diverse classes;

2. Phase 2, 2007-2008: preparation of a skills framework for young teachers relating to education for diversity;

3. Phase 3, 2008-2009: preparation of reform guidelines through training sessions and the raising of awareness among the main parties.

This project has two main features:

1. It relates to the training of teachers whose job it is to prepare new generations for a future of variety and differences.

2. It regards sociocultural difference not as a neutral concept, but as one accompanied by discrimination and inequalities which need to be combated through dynamic national policies, which are one of the Council of Europe's major concerns.

1.1.2. Sociocultural diversity: content and context

If diversity is regarded as a value, it has to be assumed that ours is a society which not only acknowledges diversity, but is also able to manage and enhance it. Enhancement, in particular, is an important issue, quite distinct from the tendency to categorise

which gave rise to the marginalisation and hierarchisation of certain groups.

In the teaching-related activities and initiatives of the Council of Europe, the fundamental issues relating to diversity are access for all to education and educational activities, plurilingualism, respect for minorities, the integration of migrants, education for citizenship, schooling for Roma children, equality of opportunities and equity at school, intercultural training and education, and the preservation of specific individual characteristics, giving us a fairly full picture of the kinds of diversity addressed by this project.

Although some may have only recently realised it, most of the Council of Europe's member states are multi-ethnic and multilingual, and thus are faced with the challenges of protecting minorities and recognising cultural and linguistic rights, and an immigration problem, as the growing numbers of migrants and refugees who have arrived in Europe over the past forty years have generated new situations and challenges for education systems.

Education systems do not operate in a historical and social vacuum, but within a dominant culture, with its own specific objectives, behaviours, values and political rules. Yet this framework is by no means static and changes constantly. While some countries have a long tradition of multiculturalism, others have been shaped in a monocultural, monolingual context, based on the concept of a homogeneous population often influenced by a dominant elite, leading to greater national unity and standardisation. Minority populations are assimilated as a result. But the view taken of migrants or members of minorities is altering over time: once required to come into line with national standards in terms of culture, language, mentality and general attitude, they are now increasingly accorded the right to be different, with the emphasis being placed on the importance of integration into a society and into schools which are pluralist.

Languages, regarded as a cultural tool, a badge of identity and belonging, and an instrument of communication, are also given attention in policies on diversity, starting from the premise that some children with a poor knowledge of the predominant national language – usually the one in which teaching takes place – are failing at school or being less successful than those whose

first language is the one used by their teachers. On the other hand, if some teaching time is reserved for the language of pupils representing small linguistic communities, or of migrant origin, their linguistic identity and self-confidence will be boosted. Teaching in the mother tongue is therefore regarded as a basis for the building of identity and for the acquisition of a second language. The teaching of foreign languages has also acquired a new status. In the current context of globalisation, it is regarded as vital to better communication among European countries and worldwide. In the classrooms of virtually every country of the world therefore, multilingualism is now the rule, rather than the exception, causing real difficulties for teachers.

Religious diversity is familiar to Council of Europe member states. A few years ago, it took on crucial importance, being increasingly regarded as one of the component parts of the cultural identity of European citizens. It is also associated – at both European and global level – with tension and conflict. At the same time, both the number of religions and the number of their active members are rising in Europe. An awareness of the importance of the religious aspect thus seems to be one of the building blocks for learning to live in a community.

Gender equality is a priority theme in the documents that guide policy in various countries. International organisations have set themselves the task of fostering access to education for all (a universal concern), and especially for girls and women. The availability of education varies widely from one country and one region to another, to the disadvantage of girls as a result of sociocultural, structural and economic obstacles. Gender is a dimension of sociocultural diversity which is closely linked to all the other dimensions of diversity, such as ethnicity, religion and special needs.

The education provided for children with special needs has also developed further, and pupils with disabilities are no longer identified according to their personal disability, but according to their needs. The international commitment to human rights now offers a means of changing people's view of disability, the terminology used and teaching methods. The majority of teacher training establishments now cover the teaching of children with special needs, not only as a specialist subject, but also, in a gradual

process of change, as part of the general initial training course. The greater access currently enjoyed by pupils who would once have been placed in institutions, and the different way in which we now view the categories of disabilities and persons "with special needs" have brought far-reaching change, reducing the emphasis placed on disabilities and leading to their classification as "sociocultural".

The approaches taken in relation to diversity, whether from the social or any other angle, vary from one country to another, with what seem to be systematic variations in the way in which this diversity is regarded and dealt with in schools and in society in general. Cultural diversity is protected by human rights agreements. It is of fundamental importance that cultural diversity should be presented through education systems, but this is also a way of increasing knowledge of plural cultural identities and making them more dynamic.

Diversity in social contexts also implies trust, respect and recognition. This is why teachers need to be trained to understand diversity and must acquire the skills that will help them to cope with classes containing different sociocultural groups. Schools are regarded as the ideal public places for disseminating democratic ideas, drawing on our respective cultures to accentuate or play down differences in social origin. In Europe, the emphasis is therefore placed on how to make education the driving force behind change in social practices, both at school and elsewhere.

1.2. The legal framework – Council of Europe reference texts

The legal instruments dealing with education, cultural diversity and teacher training clearly reveal the relationship between the three. International organisations all feel the need to ensure, directly or indirectly, that pupils are provided with a high standard of education, paying particular attention to groups that are exposed to the risk of exclusion (such as children from ethnic minorities), and highlighting the value of cultural diversity in the context of globalisation, as well as recognising the role in this respect of teachers and the important need for high-quality teacher training to achieve these aims.

Our aim in this section is to give readers the gist of the Council of Europe's instruments of recent years on education, cultural diversity and teacher training. A full list of these conventions, declarations, recommendations and other instruments is appended.

1.2.1. Treaties, conventions and agreements

Treaties, conventions and agreements play a key role in the international legal framework because they are binding on the states that ratify them. Before acceding to a treaty or a convention, a state must be sure that it has the political will and the capability to do what is required of it. National laws, policies and practices must be in keeping with both the letter and the spirit of the instruments agreed to. At international level, and at the Council of Europe in particular, there are monitoring mechanisms through which shortcomings can be reported and recommendations made to member states.

The Council of Europe has always been heavily involved in promoting human rights education and intercultural education. It has adopted various conventions and treaties intended to foster education for all and mutual understanding between the peoples of Europe, with due regard for diversity.

Article 2 of the Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1952) (ETS No. 9) grants the right to education, while emphasising that, when implementing this right, states must show due regard for parents' religious and philosophical convictions.

Discrimination is prohibited under Article 14 of the Convention, and Protocol No. 12 (2000) (ETS No. 177) goes even further, extending the scope of the protection afforded, providing for a general ban on all forms of discrimination and guaranteeing that no one may be discriminated against by any public authority on any ground.

The aim of the European Cultural Convention (1954) (ETS No. 18) is to foster mutual understanding between the peoples of Europe and a shared appreciation of their cultural diversity, protect European culture and promote national contributions to Europe's common cultural heritage, with due regard for shared fundamental

values, by encouraging, in particular, the study of the languages, history and civilisation of the parties to the Convention. All of this entails specific policies in the spheres of education and teacher training.

The European Social Charter[1] (1961) (ETS No. 35) complements the Convention in the field of economic and social rights and contains several references to cultural diversity, education and teacher training.

In particular, the Social Charter grants everyone the right to appropriate means of vocational guidance and training, covering both schoolchildren and adults, the main goal being to ensure that everyone's diversity is respected so that people can choose the occupation that suits them best.

In the field of education, the Social Charter:

• in Article 17, guarantees the right to free primary and secondary education for all children, and requires states to take measures to encourage regular school attendance;

• in Article 7, prohibits the employment of children subject to compulsory education which would deprive them of the full benefit of that education;

• in Article 10, guarantees fair access to higher education.

The Social Charter also makes provision for the most vulnerable categories of society, including in particular:

• people with disabilities: Article 15 guarantees them guidance, education and vocational training irrespective of their age and the nature and origin of their disabilities;

• children of migrant workers: Article 19 requires states to promote and facilitate the teaching of the national language, or one of the national languages, of the receiving state, or the children's mother tongue;

• persons and their families living, or at risk of living, in situations of social exclusion or poverty: Article 30 requires states to strive to obtain for them, among other things, effective access to education.

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1. Both in the 1961 version and in the revised version of 1996, although all references here will be to the latter.

The Social Charter also includes a specific article prohibiting discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction, social origin, health or membership of a national minority. In guaranteeing all these rights, including the right to education and training, for the various parties it covers, the Social Charter effectively obliges states to take every possible step to ensure that they are actually guaranteed, implying indirectly that they must provide appropriate training for teachers.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) (ETS No. 148) relates to languages spoken by a minority group or used in particular areas of a country, and requires states to take every necessary step to promote education, teaching and research in and on these languages and their respective cultures.

Article 8 is specifically devoted to education, requiring states to provide the basic and further training of teachers needed to implement the measures laid down in the same article, namely those providing for pre-school, primary, secondary, higher, vocational and adult education in the minority language or languages in so far as is possible.

Under Article 14, states are required to foster cross-border contacts between users of the same language in various spheres, including education and vocational training, as well as cross-border co-operation between authorities using the same language.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) (ETS No. 157) includes a requirement both to protect national minorities – one of the fundamental aims of pluralist democracy and a key to stability, democratic security and peace – and to foster intercultural communication as a basis for true co-operation between individuals, regardless of their differences. The latter point is dealt with in particular in Article 6, and the hope is expressed that a growing sense of identity will not result in increasing compartmentalisation of society, but in mutual recognition.

Article 12, which deals with education and training, must be interpreted from this intercultural viewpoint when addressing the following issues: the promotion of the culture, history,

language and religion of both national minorities and the majority, the opportunities provided during teacher training for exchanges between communities, and equal opportunities for access to education.

It is important also to refer to the recent Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005) (CETS No. 199) (which is not yet in force), since this is the only instrument presenting cultural heritage as a resource which can be used, among other things, to emphasise the value of cultural diversity and promote intercultural dialogue.

Article 13, on cultural heritage and knowledge, is particularly important, as it calls for the inclusion of the cultural heritage dimension at all levels of education, a measure which would strengthen the links between heritage, training and research. During the consultation meetings held in 2008 as part of the second phase of the project, it became clear that some interesting experimental work had been done linking heritage promotion with education for diversity.

1.2.2. Declarations and action plans

The Council of Europe has dealt with cultural diversity, education and teacher training in many declarations issued by its various subordinate bodies.

This section will provide an overview of these, focusing on the concepts of diversity and pluralism which underlie Council of Europe policies. Our two main points of reference will be the Declaration on multicultural society and European cultural identity, adopted by the European Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs in 1990, and the more recent Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2000.

Both documents emphasise the fact that European culture stems not only from the diversity and vitality of its different national, regional and local cultures, but also from its openness to spiritual, intellectual and artistic influences from other parts of the world. The peoples of Europe therefore have a duty to preserve and promote this diversity, as it is one of the keys to the harmonious functioning of their societies. The challenge presented by the relationship between cultural diversity and social cohesion (in

the form of the broadest possible social integration) has become increasingly crucial over the years, not only because of the globalisation process and the use of new information technologies, but also in the wake of the events which changed the course of European history from the late 1980s onwards.

Consequently, during the 1990s the Council of Europe began a process of redefining its structure and policies, much of this shaped by its three summit meetings of heads of state and government. At the Vienna Summit in 1993, the Council of Europe placed the protection of national minorities at the heart of its policy on cultural diversity and education, and more specifically (see the description of the framework convention below) on history teaching and the development of education in the fields of human rights and respect for cultural diversity. The last-named aspect in particular was taken up again at the second summit, in Strasbourg in 1997, which saw the launch of a campaign on education for democratic citizenship. The last summit, in Warsaw in 2005, focused on human rights and the rule of law, but also dealt with education, expressing an intention to improve teacher training in areas of particular interest to the Council of Europe, such as education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, while placing particular emphasis on the need to facilitate access to and use of information technologies without discrimination.

The principles contained in these declarations appeared again in various documents drawn up by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education at its sessions in Kristiansand in 1997, Cracow in 2000, Athens in 2003 and Istanbul in 2007.

In the resolutions issued in Norway in 1997, the Standing Conference stressed the importance of initial and in-service training that incorporated, on the one hand, a European dimension showing due regard for the diversity of national identities, and on the other, an emphasis on interpersonal and communication skills, an interdisciplinary approach and teamwork, based on the notion that the school is an "educational community". With this in mind, it launched a specific programme of in-service training for teachers.

At the Cracow conference (2000), the Ministers of Education looked at training again, in the light of three aims: use of the

European Language Portfolio, prevention of a recurrence or denial of crimes against humanity (through the institution of a Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity) and, more generally, appropriate history teaching and education for democratic citizenship.

The Athens conference of 2003 was extremely important because it brought together all the issues addressed previously into an intercultural education strategy, closely tied up with improving the quality of education as a response to the challenges posed by European society's diversity. Accordingly, it set itself the goal of strengthening intercultural education and diversity management through its programme of in-service training for education staff, a goal which was again taken up in Istanbul.[2] At the Istanbul conference, the Ministers of Education highlighted the key role that access to quality education for all played in building a fairer and more humane society. They reiterated that, as stated in the Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion (2004), it was all too often those who were most in need of them who had most difficulty in benefiting from their fundamental social rights, particularly access to social protection, employment, housing, health and education.

This approach to the question is in keeping both with the Council of Europe's work on intercultural dialogue, which resulted in the publication in May 2008 of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, and with the cultural co-operation policy based on the European Cultural Convention.

2. The recommendations of the Athens conference with regard to teacher training were as follows: strengthen intercultural education and management of diversity through its programme of in-service training for education staff and encourage member states to contribute to that programme by organising seminars on topics directly linked to the aims of the declaration issued by the conference; devise and promote working methods, making it possible to incorporate the principles of non-discrimination, pluralism and equity into states' own initial and in-service training programmes; develop educational strategies and working methods to prepare teachers to manage the new situations arising in our schools as a result of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism and marginalisation and to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way; encourage the development of professional competences for the teaching profession, taking account of skills existing within a team linked to the roles of learning facilitator, mediator, counsellor, partner and human resources manager.