Chapter 1

The Council of Europe project on Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity

1.1 Introduction

The final declaration of the 2007 Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education (Council of Europe 2007) recommends:

> promoting, in member states, education and training for teachers, educators, school heads and other educational staff in the formal and non-formal sectors in order to make teaching staff better qualified and more professional; to this end, identifying examples of good practices to be used as guidelines for specific EDC/HRE syllabuses in order to improve the initial and in-service training of teachers and define the basic skills needed to teach democratic citizenship and human rights.

Throughout 2005, work on the conceptual framework of the new project on Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity was carried out by the Secretariat and the Bureau of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED). It was adopted at the committee's plenary session in October 2005.

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, 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 (Council of Europe 2003), 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.

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

In order to take action on the political priorities set by the ministers, in 2006, the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education (CDED) stepped up its activity on teacher education through the gradual introduction of training modules for teacher education in several fields of activity. While the emphasis was placed mainly on the production of teaching materials, the development of new skills remains a constant concern, especially the way teachers acquire new skills in a context of constant change in the teaching profession and new challenges the profession is facing in today's societies.

The Council of Europe has therefore initiated the creation of a common reference framework across the European countries, encompassing "core" competences for teacher education. These competences may serve as a basis in preparing teachers for working in a context of sociocultural diversity (see *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education,* Volume 2 in the project series).

1.3 The project and its objectives (2006-09)

Teacher education institutions have a crucial role in the process of developing competences for diversity in education. The Policies and Practices for Teaching Sociocultural Diversity project is intended as a response to certain key questions connected with initial teacher education and the introduction of common principles in relation to the management of school diversity. It is therefore addressed both to education policy makers, and to teacher educators.

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

- Phase 1, 2006-07: analysis of the teacher education programmes available in a number of states to provide teachers with the skills they need to manage culturally diverse classes;

- Phase 2, 2007-08: preparation of a skills framework for young teachers relating to education for diversity;

- Phase 3, 2008-09: preparation of reform guidelines through training sessions and the raising of awareness among the main parties.

The project has two main features:

- it relates to teaching and teacher educators whose job it is to prepare new generations for a future of variety and differences;

- 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 – one of the Council of Europe's major concerns.

1.3.1 First phase (2006-07)

When we talk about teacher education, we are thinking in the first instance of initial or pre-service teacher education programmes of study. However, when intending to promote changes, other aspects of policies and of regulating teacher education institutions are equally worthy of consideration. These include admission policies, recruitment policies, professional development of teaching staff, the importance attributed to research and development work and the way in which life is organised within teacher education institutions and links with the community. All these aspects were the subject of a survey which the ad hoc advisory project team (ED-DS) set up. Some 18 member states contributed country reports, and 14 teacher education institutions took part in the survey.

The survey was conducted in two stages:

- drawing up of national reports on initial teacher education in sociocultural diversity on the basis of a common questionnaire (in 18 countries);

- semi-structured interviews with different target project teams (from 14 teacher education institutions).

The national reports covered the following aspects of teacher education:

- policies;

- curricula and syllabuses;

- teacher qualifications;

- initial teacher education institutions.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in teacher education institutions, with three target groups:

- academic managers of teacher education institutions (directors, principals, deans);

- teacher educators and educators;

- new teachers who had recently left these institutions.

The main results of the surveys together with a comparative analysis and recommendations, aimed at policy makers in the field of teacher education, has been published in the report *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – A survey report* (Volume 1 in the project series).

1.3.2 Second phase (2007-08)

Our approach to teacher education in sociocultural diversity initially had three main aspects :

- acquiring knowledge: enabling students to acquire a basic knowledge of diversity;

- managing diversity: being able to adopt appropriate attitudes and employ suitable methods for taking account of the diversity of a project team of pupils;

- enhancing the value of diversity: creating the conditions for promoting diversity and developing an environment conducive to integration and inclusion (see Volume 1).

A workshop on these themes, held in Strasbourg in November 2007, brought together experts from 15 countries within the ad hoc advisory project team.

On the basis of discussions at the workshop and within the project team, it was possible to:

- specify in more detail the theoretical framework of diversity in terms of concepts, principles and challenges for teacher education;

- discuss further knowledge and skills about diversity and inclusive practices that new teachers need in order to work meaningfully.

The results of the second phase were published in *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education* (Volume 2).

1.3.3 Third phase (2008-09)

This phase involved developing a framework of competences. The project team decided to analyse teachers' needs in greater depth, concentrating on newcomers to the profession, in liaison with the initial primary teacher education institutions. The studies conducted during the first phase showed that initial training was seldom practical enough to enable young teachers to cope with the diversity which they met in their classrooms. Drawing up a list of competences was, obviously, not a solution in itself, but it did provide a optional basis for improving provision for future teachers' needs within the initial primary teacher education programmes. In order to broaden the scope on the discussion of competences, it was decided to organise a selection of national consultation tables. The consultation tables were aimed at informing and discussing the competences with key stakeholders and considering the competences from national and thematic perspectives. Four countries, represented by members of the project team, were selected to host consultation tables: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Estonia.

Meetings held in each of these countries gave project team members the opportunity to present their work, explore local experiences and engage in discussions with state officials, government officers, teacher educators, managers, researchers, principals, teachers and students. These discussions showed how to adapt the competences, as defined by the project team, to the reality "on the ground".

1.4 Sociocultural diversity

The development of competences is based on certain assumptions and concerns about the notion of sociocultural diversity. The concept is discussed in the preceding publication of the project, *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity*

– *Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education* (Volume 2). A short extract of the assumptions underpinning the work and the results in terms of competences is presented in this volume.

In terms of education policies, valuing diversity is a principle introduced in the late 1990s by the Council of Europe. The principle, defined as such by the 21st Session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Athens, November 2003), is based on the assumption that diversity represents an added value to both local communities and to society.

Diversity is a concept with multiple connotations and interpretations that are culturally, socially and historically embedded. Just like democracy, citizenship, civil society, equity or interculturality, diversity is a term that becomes explicit through the activities involved rather than by means of an all-embracing definition.

The implicit meanings of diversity are, however, broad enough to be applied in relation to a large community of practitioners and researchers, academics and policy makers with varied social and cultural backgrounds. Rather than defining diversity, it is possible to pinpoint some basic assumptions about human beings and sociocultural diversity drawn from a variety of sources (international policy documents and research) that are of particular relevance to education and to teacher education in this respect:

- all human beings are unique;
- individuals and groups of individuals have the capacity to differ from other individuals or groups with whom they live. It is the result of the individual's inherent characteristic of being unique in terms of culture, experience, skills, physical and mental features, morals, interests, attitudes towards and concepts of the world. Some types of diversity are regarded as "natural" or genetic rather than "cultural", for example, skin colour, gender and certain forms of disability. However, such characteristics may become differentiated in a hierarchical manner and subject to discrimination, varying over time, location and circumstances. But apparently "natural' diversities may also be 'cultural" as diversities are embedded in particular political, cultural and relational contexts. Being and/or feeling disabled depends on how society and environments are designed: for example, the extent to which the

physical and social environment is constructed for facilitating or hindering participation for individuals and groups;

- human beings are culturally shaped in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world. But people are not determined by the culture they have inherited. They may accept it uncritically, but also revise it or, in other ways, if needed, overcome some of its influences and views (Gutmann 1999). The human heritage and historical experience is actually the result of the interdependencies and equilibrium forged between individuals, communities and types of civilisations;

- diversity in a particular society or cultural context is structured in particular ways that may imply hierarchies, based on, for example, gender, skin colour, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or ability. Such structures are not stable but subject to change over time;

- there is an internal plurality of each culture, which may be taken for granted, be contested, or represent continuous discussions, and sometimes even imply conflicts, violence and exclusion;

- although diverse, people have always had to interact and co-operate, to find sustainable social forms of living together. The more diversity there is, the more important it is to gain a common ground or unity acknowledging the inevitability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue (Parekh 2006);

- human beings are not solely characterised by their differences, but also by their similarities or what they have in common as human beings, a basic assumption on which human rights are built.

These assumptions and considerations underpin the project, and should be taken into account when competences are discussed and plans are made for teacher education programmes.
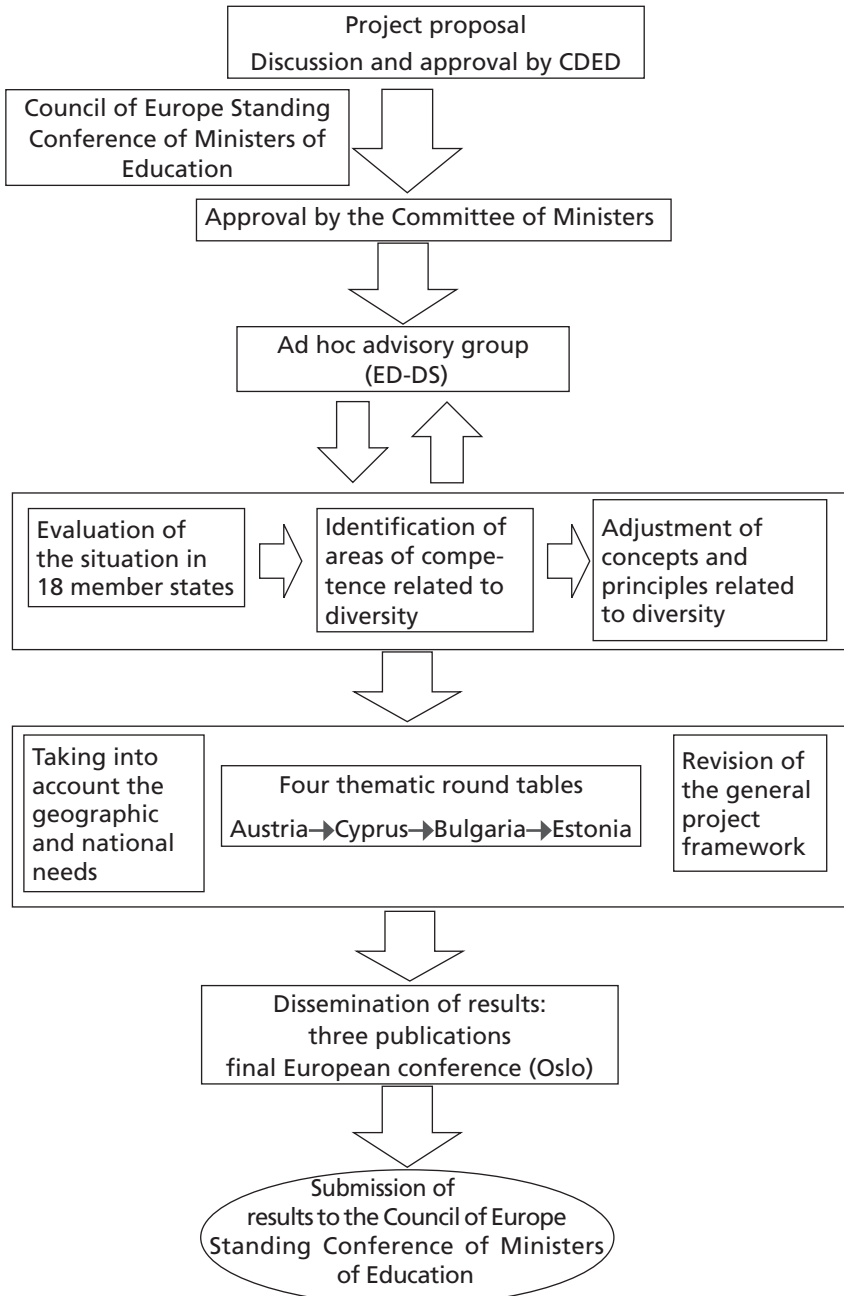
This publication (Volume 3 in the project series) has key competences as a focal point, promoting discussion on what is needed both at the level of teacher education institutions, schools and individual teachers. In this volume it has been equally important to give space to the process of developing competences for

teaching sociocultural diversity. In this respect, the work of the project team, in combination with the series of consultation tables, have turned out to be vital for the results of the project as a whole.

The experience gained from the consultation tables goes beyond pure "consultation". They provided interesting information and a framework to understand the importance of national backgrounds and particularities for the implementation of competences. They emerged as engines for reciprocal learning – something that will be outlined in the following chapter.

The project

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│         Project proposal            │
│   Discussion and approval by CDED   │
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│ Council of Europe Standing │
│ Conference of Ministers of │
│   Education   │
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│ Approval by the Committee of Ministers   │
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│   Ad hoc advisory group   │
│   (ED-DS)   │
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Evaluation of the situation in 18 member states	Identification of areas of competence related to diversity	Adjustment of concepts and principles related to diversity

Taking into account the geographic and national needs	Four thematic round tables Austria→Cyprus→Bulgaria→Estonia	Revision of the general project framework

┌──┐
│   Dissemination of results: │
│   three publications   │
│   final European conference (Oslo)   │
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        Submission of
  results to the Council of Europe
Standing Conference of Ministers
       of Education
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Chapter 2

The consultation tables

2.1 Introduction

Consultation tables were used as a method to reflect upon and modify a set of competences in diversity for teacher education. An initial framework of competences, based on the analysis of the country reports (Arnesen et al. 2008; Volume 1 in the project series) and the analysis of concepts and issues relating to socio-cultural diversity (Council of Europe 2009; Volume 2 in project series), was developed at the end of 2007. It was necessary to ensure that the framework of competences was valid and acceptable to the intended recipients – teacher educators and managers of teacher education institutions – thus a method of consultation tables was established with the following explicit aims:

- to consider the relevance of the competences within specific country contexts;

- to gain insights into the challenges faced within specific country contexts;

- to obtain feedback on the necessary modifications to the competences;

- to gain an understanding of the necessary conditions within teacher education for developing teacher competences and the implications for policy and practice;

- to obtain examples, from practice and research, which may help to illustrate the competences.

Austria, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Estonia agreed to each host a consultation table under the leadership of members of the project group from these countries. There was diversity in the contextual features of the countries; each of the consultation tables illuminated a particular theme of relevance for diversity issues in

teacher education programmes. The theme of each of the consultation tables was related to the specific features of the host country:

- Graz, Austria: language diversity and competences of new teachers (February 2008);
- Nicosia, Cyprus: inclusion and teacher competences in diversity education (June 2008);
- Sofia, Bulgaria: ethnocultural diversity and competences of new teachers (September 2008);
- Tallin, Estonia: diversity and the induction of new teachers (October 2008).

In order to facilitate access to reference and working documents, and to encourage dialogue with consultation table participants, a co-operative space was opened on a Moodle platform, hosted by Cyberlearn, the HES-SO e-learning centre, Sierre, Switzerland, and this included a discussion forum, with 112 registered participants.

2.2 The consultation tables method

The consultation tables were used as a vehicle for change by facilitating discussions in which learning would take place by all of the parties. This emphasis on reciprocal learning made the consultation tables distinctively different from events in which the emphasis is on dissemination and where feedback may be incidental and/or cursory. Reciprocity is a central concept in social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000; Allan, Ozga and Smyth 2009) and was seen as appropriate for emphasising the relational nature of the consultation tables and framing them as exchanges among people with different levels and types of expertise, with all those involved considered to have something to both give and receive. This framing involved adapting the notion of "expert", as denoted by the Council of Europe, from one which posits individuals as informants with particular expertise to offer, to a more facilitative, developmental and sometimes challenging role. The expert member of the project team in each country in which the consultation tables took place was viewed as an "expert insider", with detailed knowledge of contextual features of the country and the specific issues. This was important in guiding the structure, practices and ethos in each of the consultation tables and advising the other members of the project team.

2.3 The consultation table reports

The following section contains reports from each of the consultation tables held in Austria, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Estonia. In each case the rationale for the main focus of the consultation table and the context in which it took place is presented. The selection of participants, and the rationale for their inclusion, is described together with the outcomes, including the key issues, emerging themes and follow-up activities. The four consultation tables do not constitute a representative sample across Europe, but each one featured the relevant teacher education stakeholders and reflected an important aspect of diversity. The reports of the consultation tables below, as well as highlighting particular contextual features and specific diversity issues, reflect the progression and refinement of the competences as the project developed. They may also serve as a model for other countries to organise their own consultation tables.

2.3.1 Consultation Table 1: Austria (organiser: Elisabeth Furch)

The first consultation table was held in Graz, Austria, on 21 and 22 February 2008. It was organised in co-operation with the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Austria and took place at the ECML (European Centre for Modern Languages).

2.3.1.1 Main topic and context

The focus of the first consultation table was on language diversity and competences of new teachers. This was related to an ongoing discussion about the language learning needs of established minorities and those who had settled in Austria more recently.

A Council of Europe initiative involving policy makers, experts and practitioners in different fields of education had identified some structural problems in the field of language learning and teaching in Austria (Language Education Policy Profile, 2006-08). The change of law concerning teacher education at *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (universities of education) in Austria 2007 established new curricula, but these are still in the process of implementation and some changes, especially in the area of widening up the range of languages being taught, have to be considered.

In Austria, pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than German are not taught in separate schools or classes, but are educated alongside German-speaking pupils. Pupils whose competence in the German language is not yet sufficient to follow classes held in German are admitted as so-called ex-matricular pupils for a maximum period of two years. Curricula for German as a second language (GSL) have been developed for compulsory schools (primary schools, general secondary schools, special needs schools, pre-vocational schools) as well as for academic secondary schools and medium-level and higher-level commercial schools. However, due to limited resources, pupils rarely receive the recommended maximum number of lessons.

Mother tongue instruction is part of the mainstream school system, and teachers are employed by the Austrian school authorities like all other teachers. However, this is offered on an optional basis. Currently, instruction is being offered in schools in the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Bulgarian, Chechen, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romani, Russian, Slovak, Spanish and Turkish.

Each of the nine provincial school boards *(Landesschulräte)* has established school counselling centres for immigrants. In addition, local school counselling centres in some provinces offer information and support to teachers, parents and pupils. These frequently operate in close co-operation with non-educational local institutions.

2.3.1.2 Participants

A range of educational professionals from Austria were invited to join the consultation table. To ensure lively participation, every attendee received leaflets including short summaries of nearly all the presentations in advance. Thus, they had the possibility to inform themselves beforehand and reflect on the current issues. The invited groups were as follows:

- policy makers from the ministry of education, arts and culture, ECML and ÖSZ;
- experts, with research knowledge, in the field of language diversity;

- education professionals presenting examples of current practice;

- managers of *Pädagogische Hochschulen* and universities in Austria;

- teacher educators of *Pädagogische Hochschulen* in Austria;

- teacher students of *Pädagogische Hochschulen* in Austria;

- newly qualified teachers (who had started teaching no longer than five years ago);

- members of the project team and international experts invited by the Council of Europe (from 12 countries).

2.3.1.3 Outcomes

The importance of intercultural education for mutual understanding among pupils of various social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and to combat euro-centrism and racism was underlined in the formal presentations. Mrs Elfie Fleck, Head of the Migration and School Division at the Austrian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, pointed out that intercultural education was introduced as a so-called "educational principle" in the early 1990s, primarily as a recommendation to teachers to take certain aspects into account across the curriculum.

At this point of the project, the outline of the competences that was presented (a brochure) was more detailed and complex than the one put forward in this volume. The following key competences were presented:

- to possess knowledge about different kinds and dimensions of sociocultural diversity;

- to promote positive communication within the school environment in relation to sociocultural diversity;

- to be sensitive to sociocultural diversity;

- to be able to manage educational settings related to sociocultural diversity;

- to be able to promote active and equal participation in a situation of sociocultural diversity in the school/classroom/ community.

Each one of these competences was accompanied by a definition, an argumentation and the its aspects and how they relate to the actual work that teachers are faced with.

The competences and needs of future teachers were discussed in small groups. The participants appreciated the philosophical underpinning of the competences. The competences seemed to provoke critical thinking and reflection and were obviously a starting point for further discussions about sociocultural diversity. In particular, discussions in small groups provided a rich input into further development of the competences. One important point was the usefulness of the competences in general, then the discussion of each one of the competences. However, certain participants (particularly some of the students) expressed the view that the complexity and wide range of the competences presented seemed both highly demanding and somewhat overwhelming. We were advised to place more emphasis on the process of developing the competences than was evident in the brochure.

Language was the main focal point of the consultation table. It was argued that the variety of languages brought into the classroom by children presented teachers with considerable challenges. It did, however, also create new opportunities in teaching. There is a limited supply of school textbooks and learning materials, particularly those addressing multilingual pupils. This means that teachers have to produce their own books and materials. Another problem is that the production of materials is very expensive and it is not always possible to print them.

The legal basis for learning minority languages was reported to be well developed, but the implementation process needed to be intensified. Different reasons were given for the limited use of legal frameworks thus far, including recruitment policies, lack of information, insufficient interest of pupils, parents and teachers, possibilities for adult education, importance of the minority languages in relation to English or French and less functionality of the languages in everyday life in society.

There was general agreement that the competences, perhaps in a more simple (but not simplistic) version, should be integrated into the new curricula of universities of education throughout Austria.

Examples of practice in Austria in the field of teachers' compe-
tences in language diversity were provided. These included pre-
and in-service training. Policy implications for teachers' education
were identified. In addition, there were special inputs at round
table sessions, including some in small discussion groups dealing
with the following issues:

- research outcomes within the field of language diversity in
  Austria:

- language diversity surprises in Austrian classrooms;

- multicultural kindergarten in Vienna – necessary changes?

- language diversity in the curricula of teacher education insti-
  tutions in Austria;

- projects and initiatives in the field of language diversity in
  Austria.

A number of outcomes of the consultation tables are highlighted
below. Discussions about language teaching and learning con-
tinue and further meetings with policy makers and experts in
different fields of education will take place. Teacher education
institutions are hosting seminars such as "German as a second
language" and "New needs for teaching in cultural and lingual
heterogeneous classes". New curricula will be installed. The min-
istry of education, arts and culture has funded a series of semi-
nars especially for teacher educators called "Train the trainer"
focusing on diversity. The ministry has also established a working
group to explore the current needs of new teachers in this field.
As a more general consequence of the project, a group of eight
experts has applied for a new COMENIUS project called e-Agora,
which focuses on dealing with sociocultural diversity in teacher
education.

2.3.2 Consultation Table 2: Cyprus
(organiser: Pavlina Hadjitheodoulou-Loizidou)

The second consultation table was held on 5 and 6 June 2008 in
Nicosia, Cyprus, and was organised by the Ministry of Education
and Culture of Cyprus in co-operation with the Cypriot Pedagogical
Institute.