

RECOMMENDATION 2212 (2021) BY THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY "MORE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE"

OPINION BY THE CDEDU BUREAU

The CDEDU Bureau takes note of the new recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly concerning "More participatory democracy to tackle climate change".

The CDEDU Bureau fully agrees with paragraph 1 of the Parliamentary Assembly recommendation, which highlights the added value of innovative democratic practices and enhanced citizens' participation and deliberation, which aim to strengthen democracy and allow for more effective responses to major policy dilemmas, in particular the climate crisis.

The Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation invites member States to promote effective means of enhancing citizens' competences for democratic culture, in particular through the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, with a view to empowering citizens, especially younger generations, to constructively tackle the environmental challenges and to drive public authorities and policy makers to duly address sustainability in a holistic way, linking environmental issues to the future of society at large.

The CDEDU Bureau would like to stress that the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) lies at the core of the Education Programme of the Council of Europe, whose objective is to help develop a culture of democracy through quality education. The Framework draws on the Council of Europe's longstanding priorities and values. It identifies 20 competences that should be taught throughout the education systems and which are necessary to equip our young citizens with the Values, Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge and Critical understanding they need in order to participate actively in today's complex, diverse democratic societies. The RFCDC includes "*knowledge and critical understanding of economies, environment and sustainability*" within its scope.

It is important to remember here that the RFCDC is not an imposition but a common reference that can be used by all educationalists who believe that the development of democratic competence is an essential component of any education system. In raising awareness of the RFCDC with persons or institutions who are not already acquainted with it, it should be emphasised that its purpose is to help them achieve their objectives and that a CDC approach can be included in any subject in any education environment.

The CDEDU Bureau would like to draw the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the work carried out through this Flagship project.

The RFCDC consists of three main components: context, concepts and model, descriptors of competences and a set of guidance documents for its implementation. So far, the latter have been developed for curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher education, whole school approach, higher education, the role of languages in developing learners' competences and building resilience to radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism.

An Education Policy Advisers Network (EPAN) was set up to facilitate the direct involvement of the member States in the implementation of the RFCDC and has been active since 2018. Reflections on embracing environmental citizenship education in the RFCDC implementation are ongoing within the network. The implementation of the project is also carried out through the Democratic Schools Network and numerous cooperation and capacity-building projects, as well as a recently set up Working Group on Training.

The project remains a priority for the 2022-25 Education Programme, which will advance the RFCDC implementation and also include further policy development. In particular, a new expert group is currently being set up which will promote the Competences for Democratic Culture in Vocational Education and Training (CDC-VET). There is also an intention to include non-formal education in this project, which will strengthen its links with the youth sector. In addition, in order to facilitate and promote the mainstreaming of the RFCDC at national level, a training-of-trainers programme is being prepared, aiming at the creation of an International Team of Trainers on the RFCDC that would cascade the RFCDC training in the participating member States.

The CDEDU Bureau also agrees with the remark in paragraph 3 of the Parliamentary Assembly recommendation, which acknowledges the potential of digital transformation in facilitating even further citizen engagement and participation in public affairs and the decisional processes. In relation to this, the CDEDU would like to draw the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the Digital Citizenship Education Project implemented with the intergovernmental programme, which building on the RFCDC, aims at empowering learners of all ages, the education and the development of the necessary competence, to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities online, and to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in cyberspace

The CDEDU Bureau would like to underline that the topic education for sustainable development is also addressed through the contribution of the Council of Europe to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 which focuses on education, where it is a member of the SDG 4-Education 2030 Steering Committee and where the Council of Europe, together with its Member States, has consistently advocated that education for democratic participation is the cornerstone of sustainable societies. The interconnection of education for sustainable development and citizenship education in a global context was also emphasized by the COE in the preparation of the Berlin Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (May 2021) where the ensuing UNESCO World Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development identified democracy, human rights and rule of law as framework conditions for sustainable development in all its aspects.

The COVID-19 pandemic only highlighted the importance of this topic. As stated in the Political Declaration adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Education under the Greek Chairmanship of the Council of Europe (20 October 2020), *'the COVID pandemic has underlined the importance of sustainable development and of education as an essential actor in achieving it'*. This conference also held a discussion on utilising education as a tool for promoting awareness of cultural heritage at risk from climate change in a culture of democracy.

The CDEDU Bureau believes in the need to empower young people as agents of change in relationship to environmental issues and strongly supports further work on this topic through the Council of Europe Education Programme in the coming years.