



*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*

## **European Year of Citizenship through Education – EYCE 2005**

**EYCE 2005 Conference: National Experiences – European Challenges**  
**2 December 2005, Berlin**  
**Opening session: 9.50 – 10.50 a.m.**

**Speech by the**  
**President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and**  
**Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany**  
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**Brandenburg Minister of Higher Education, Research and Culture**

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## Address

It gives me great pleasure to address you in my capacity as the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs at the opening of your conference – a conference which is being held on occasion of the “European Year of Citizenship through Education”. It might almost be considered a conclusion to this very important year and the numerous conferences which were held in recent months across the continent at various locations in Europe. The common objective of all these events was to strengthen democracy through education in Europe – democracy not as something we accept as self-evident, but as something for which awareness needs to be strengthened that even the best democracy will not survive without public commitment, the willingness to use democratic rights and to defend ourselves against their abuse.

Today we will bring together the various experiences in the European area, compare notes and endeavour to safeguard the sustainability of this idea, its roots and its future. We are all very aware that is the only way in which Europe will have a common peaceful future.

"Learning and living democracy" is also the slogan of the “European Year of Citizenship through Education" which the Council of Europe – with its 46 member states from Albania, Armenia or the Azerbaijan Republic to Cyprus – proclaimed for 2005. It was a key objective of this year to encourage children, young people and adults to participate in democratic life, to build identification *with* and enthusiasm *for* living democracy. Our model is not a democracy of bystanders, but a democracy of active citizens in a participatory democracy. This includes shared values, tolerance, solidarity and the promotion of social cohesion, gender equality, the capacity for mutual understanding and the readiness to engage in peaceful conflict resolution.

I am aware that the implementation of these aims in political work both inside and outside schools is not always easy, particularly if the objective is to move beyond instruction and to achieve active involvement. You, the disseminators of these ideas, thus play a key role in this “Year“ – and beyond. You reach a particularly great number of people, young and old, within and without educational institutions. You can make a significant contribution to raising awareness with regard to the open flanks of vulnerable democracy, the careless use of rights

which were once fiercely fought over, and the necessity of taking action, of *intervening* actively and responsibly in the concerns of the world – turning *passive* into *active* participants.

Allow me to mention briefly how we approached this "Year" in Germany.

The overarching aim – promotion of an active and living democracy and entrenchment of democratic values in society – applies to all member countries of the Council of Europe. However, the situation is different in the 46 member countries and the same is true of education for democratic citizenship. That is why the implementation of the aims in the individual member countries has been undertaken in accordance with their respective requirements.

The overall aim for the implementation of the "Year" in Germany was and is not the development of new measures and activities – such as new curricula or new textbooks. On the contrary, the situation in Germany called for making the wealth and diversity of political education inside and outside school visible to a wider public, communicating it more effectively and making it easier to use in practice. In other words, to raise the treasures which Germany has to offer in the field of citizenship education, political education and human rights education.

The Coordinating Committee at the Standing Conference, set up to implement the "European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005" in Germany, reflects this wealth and diversity with representatives from the education administrations of the 16 Länder as well as the Federal Foreign Office as ministry responsible for matters of the Council of Europe. Other committee members include the Federal Agency for Civic Education, the German Association for Political/Civic Education, the German Commission for UNESCO, the Federal Committee for Political Education as well as Youth for Understanding – European Educational Exchanges. Only the creative diversity of all participants was able to ensure that the Year had a sustained effect within society.

The Coordinating Committee initiated numerous activities of supraregional importance throughout Germany. It strengthened the role of political education and active education for democracy in schools and adult education. It brought together the many different initiatives as examples of best practice to vitalise democracy in the life of schools, it raised our awareness

of the active observance of the rights of everyone involved in school life, but also reminded us of the duties of politically responsible citizens. The central conference of the German Coordinating Committee "Learning and living democracy" in Bonn on 13 and 14 June, under the auspices of the Standing Conference, provided an opportunity to sum up the many activities and measures of the European Year of Citizenship through Education which – in accordance with our federal structure – was implemented in the German Länder. It proved to be a great advantage in the implementation of the "Year of Citizenship through Education" that each federal state (be it small or large, east or west, city or territorial state) had the opportunity to focus on different aspects in accordance with its particular requirements. This applied to the same extent to the organisations represented in the Coordinating Committee, who – in their particular fields of activity – contributed to the implementation of the Year with measures of their own.

The numerous activities of the Länder and of the institutions and agencies working at supraregional level provide vivid examples of the great significance which is attached to the "Year of Citizenship through Education" in Germany. And this conference illustrates in a particularly gratifying way that we wish our work in Germany to be understood not just in a national, but also in an overarching European and international context and that we value the exchange and collaboration with our partners abroad!

It is a great concern of mine to set out clearly that it is not just this one year which is of prime concern for us, but that the whole project of strengthening democracy through education is emphatically supported by Germany. From the beginning – that is, since 1997 – the Standing Conference has actively participated in the planning and implementation of this project. It became clear at a very fundamental level that we shared the broadly-based approach of the Council of Europe from the beginning: for us, the Standing Conference, school is of course a central place for political education, but it is by no means the only place where democracy must be learned and lived. On the contrary, school requires active support – be it in the family, the club, at work or in the community. That, too, is active democracy: that people are encouraged, whatever their circumstances, to defend their point of view, to stand up for others or to display moral courage. Citizenship education in this sense is a process of lifelong learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the start of the project for the “European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005”, the Council of Europe provided a forum for experts and practitioners concerned with citizenship and human rights education. This conference in Germany on occasion of the European Year of Citizenship through Education also strengthens the work of the Council of Europe. It represents a small but important contribution in support of the overarching objectives which the Council of Europe has pursued since its establishment in 1949. Secretary General Terry Davis expressed these aims as follows at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw:

*You have adopted an ambitious Plan of Action which confirms the Council of Europe’s leading role in developing democracy, defending human rights and advancing the rule of law on our continent, and in promoting our values in a broader sense – the values of democratic culture, tolerance, justice and social cohesion.*

In this sense, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Standing Conference which carries responsibility for the implementation of the European Year of Citizenship through Education in Germany, I wish all participants profitable impressions, fruitful discussions and 'sustainable' results.