



BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0256

Venerdì 11.05.2007

INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA 22ma SESSIONE DELLA CONFERENZA PERMANENTE DEI MINISTRI EUROPEI DELL'EDUCAZIONE (ISTANBUL, 4 - 5 MAGGIO 2007)

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Nei giorni 4 e 5 maggio scorsi, si è tenuta ad Istanbul, nell'ambito delle attività del Consiglio d'Europa, la 22ma Sessione della Conferenza permanente dei Ministri Europei dell'Educazione.

Pubblichiamo di seguito il testo dell'intervento di S.E. Mons. J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., Segretario della Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica, Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. J. MICHAEL MILLER

Mr. President:

At the outset, I would like to express the sincere and profound gratitude of the Delegation of the Holy See and myself to the Turkish Authority which has provided hospitality for this Conference of Ministers: for their organizational skill, and for the courtesy with which they received us in this city of Istanbul, so rich in history and a meeting place of diverse cultures.

1. The Holy See has followed with interest the preparation of this 22nd session of the Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education. Moreover, it has taken particular note of the projects promoted by the Committees for Education and for Higher Education and Research of the Council of Europe. These Committees express our common effort to ensure that education will make a significant contribution to building a more democratic Europe, one which embodies solidarity and respects the Continent's diversity and awareness of its specific identity.

2. The theme of the present session of the Conference of Ministers of Education, "Building a more humane and inclusive Europe; the role of education policies," is extraordinarily timely. Indeed, this theme deals with the strategic objective defined at the Third Summit of Heads of State and of Government of the Council of Europe held in Warsaw on 16-17 May 2005. The achievement of this objective necessarily entails a society that respects the dignity of every human person, a society in which providing a quality education for all is an indispensable

goal.

3. The term "quality" of education reminds us of the need to develop processes and means suitable to the objectives of an authentic education for the young. Among these fundamental educational objectives are the cognitive, moral, and spiritual development of students; the transmission of values and culture; the promotion of a social cohesion; and the growth of the student's personality in every dimension. Furthermore, an integral education should help to form the new generation in social participation, solidarity and a critical understanding of reality.

4. Education is, as we know, a work carried out by many hands and in various educational spheres. Among these, the school and the university play the central role, in as much as they offer a variety of educational experiences rarely found elsewhere. These different experiences - regulated by the principle of subsidiarity - are the result of the synergy among families, teachers, professors, students, non-governmental organizations, churches and religious communities, as well as people who contribute to this formative process in various ways. The Holy See is pleased that the prepared draft explicitly refers to the active participation of civil society in formulating the educational programmes and policies which concern its members.

5. For a society to be more human and more inclusive it must take care of its weakest members. The attention paid by educational policies to the rights of the child is a significant aspect of this tutelage. By means of education a child should be helped to satisfy his or her affective and cognitive needs. This calls for a unified response, that is, a system of coordinated interventions within the educational project. Children need to be loved and to love, to play, to use their imagination, to exercise free choice in a way suitable to their age, and to have satisfied their questions of meaning and their spiritual development. The school should be able to offer an environment where this can take place; it must be an educational community marked by respect, love and caring for one another. In addition, schools need well-trained teachers who serve as models for their students. Educators not only hand on ideas but they also closely accompany young people in this important phase of their lives, cooperating with parents who have the primary right and obligation to see to the education of their children.

6. As well, education has the responsibility of handing on knowledge of one's own cultural roots and of furnishing fixed points of reference, both of which allow students to situate themselves serenely in the wider world. At the same time, an authentic education should teach future generations respect for other cultures and promote appreciation for the richness of their history and values. Education is, therefore, called to provide indispensable elements for developing an intercultural vision among young people. Such a vision is fostered by undertaking a suitable formative and educational path. This moves beyond mere tolerance to welcoming of the multicultural reality of Europe - a path that strives for mutual understanding. At the pedagogical level, this intercultural perspective truly entails a paradigm shift. Past models of integration and of respect for diversity were more or less successful, but the time has come for adopting a new model of living together with our differences. This new model entails more than coexisting. Above all, it means building together a common destiny, striving for cooperation and fraternity, joining together on the road to shape our civilization. Such a model is not easy to bring about. On the one hand, it imposes the need to investigate the ethical foundations of all cultural experiences; on the other hand, it requires the preservation of one's own identity and avoids proposing generic models, which could easily lead to cultural fragmentation and political instability.

7. For these reasons, Europe needs courageous and respectful educational policies which will encourage a climate of dialogue and tranquility, and which enable schools and universities to be life-giving environments where students can establish and develop positive relationships. It is necessary, therefore, that we set out clear pedagogical objectives that foster the overcoming of radical individualism. We can do this by forming young people in the values of solidarity rather than competition, of participation and welcoming others rather than isolation and indifference. Finally, such policies should never forget that the primary goal of education is the integral development of the personality in every dimension, including the religious, both in the area of knowledge and of values. In this way, education will truly be able to make its contribution to building a Europe of tomorrow which is more human and more inclusive.

Thank you.

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