

## **KEYNOTES OPENING SPEECH SIMON STEEN ECNAIS SEMINAR**

**in SOFIA, BULGARIA**

*New approaches to learning as keys for success*

19 November 2015

Welcome to all of you and a special word of welcome for the speakers, who will be introduced later today.

I want to express ECNAIS' gratitude to the Bulgarian Private School Association (BAPS) for hosting and co-preparing this seminar and I mention in particular the chairwoman, Ms. Milka Slavcheva and two board members of the BAPS, Ms. Radka Karagiozova and Ms. Diliانا Bojinova.

ECNAIS is back in Sofia. We have organized before in Sofia (in April 2009) in close cooperation with the Bulgarian member Association a conference about Benchmarks & Values and as you can see it made us enthusiastic to return, this time for our annual Seminar in the autumn.

Let's not keep silent about the recent horrible terrorist attacks on the people of Syria, Lebanon, Russia and France. It's also an attack on our way of living and on the core value of an open and democratic society.

We have as citizens of the world (les citoyens du monde) to share our feelings and thoughts about this horrifying event. It is important to clarify the role of our schools in the education of the young generation in making them aware of the whole meaning of tolerance and respect for each other.

And how difficult it may be we also have to think about the support we can give to our headmasters and school staff, how to talk in an open way about necessary measures to guarantee the functioning of the school as a safe learning environment.

I want to quote the Israeli author Amoz Oz, who has said that the new threat full gap in society is not all about the economical one between the rich and the poor, but first of all between the fanatic and tolerant people.

He says that what we need the most at his time is more curiosity and interest in what drives the other and at least a little bit of humor to avoid that we take ourselves too serious.

It is my personal believe that only with an open mind to the future we can contribute to a hopefully inspiring new narrative about Europe for the young generation

The role of schools in the de-radicalization of youngsters will be the theme of the coming ECNAIS Hearing in the European Parliament in Brussels on 26th of January 2016.

Let's go back now to the theme of the seminar *New approaches to learning as keys for success*.

The freedom of education is based on two pillars

- The right of self-organization and self-governance as proven concepts of strengthening the civil society
- The right of choosing an alternative approach in education

Crucial pre-condition for exercising these fundamental rights is the availability of a fair share of the public funding for independent schools.

How to find the right balance between the freedom to establish independent schools and the necessity of sufficient public funding on justifiable conditions?

In this Seminar we will hear more about the struggle for life by the private schools in Bulgaria, but also about their innovative pedagogical initiatives.

We will hear more about how they overcame a period of hostile audience against independent schools with politicians?

But we can also learn from each other and share our experiences with the independent schools in our own countries between this struggle for life on the one hand and on the other hand our deeper feeling, that one way or the other, our independent schools are also contributing to the creation of the future.

We are here at the seminar all together with more than 40 participants from 13 different countries in Europe, not only members of the EU (Iceland, Turkey and Ukraine).

We will start with the experience of the Bulgarian independent schools

- where are they proud on
- what could they achieve in the public debate about education
- how are their schools doing
- which kind of examples of new approaches of learning can they share with us?

A seminar always depends on the willingness and eagerness of all participants to take an active part in the dialogue.

The program gives enough opportunity to do so with school visits and reflections from neighbor countries like Greece, Rumania and Ukraine.

It is not only about the dialogue here today among ourselves, but first of all about the dialogue in the classroom.

The Norwegian professor, Ms.Olga Dysthe will later today go in depth with us on what she calls the multi-vocal dialogue in the polyphonic classroom

Finally I want to bring you the warm regards of Carlos Diaz Muniz, our honorary vice president.

I spoke him two weeks ago in Madrid at the impressive conference of Escuelas Catholicas with a challenging statement as theme of the conference *We know how to educate: freedom and commitment.*

I wish all of you also on behalf of Sofia Reis and Per Kristensen, my colleagues in the Executive Committee of ECNAIS, an inspiring seminar.