

OPENING ADDRESS OF SIMON STEEN, CHAIRMAN OF ECNAIS, AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE ECNAIS CONFERENCE IN KIEV 19th APRIL 2018

I welcome all of you to the 30th annual conference of the European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools ECNAIS about

Educational freedom and democratic changes

The role of independent schools in Ukraine

A European perspective.

We are very grateful for the willingness of the Association of Private Schools in Ukraine to host and co-organize – together with the Executive Committee of ECNAIS – this conference in the beautiful city of Kiev.

I want to thank Mrs. Olena Movchun, Head of the Ukrainian Associations of Private schools and Father Roman Nebozhuk, director of Andrey Sheptytsky Educational Foundation.

They formed, together with their colleagues of Kiev Private schools, The Ukraine Organizational Committee for the preparation of this conference.

They have done a great job and as always this could only be done with the strong support of others and I mention especially the city of Kiev and the ministry of education and science in Ukraine.

I thank Mr. Vitali Klitschko, mayor of Kiev for his nice words and for his hospitality and cooperation to make it possible to have the official opening session of the conference in the historical Kiev City Hall.

A special word of welcome to the speakers, who will give a presentation during the official opening session. I mention

- Mrs. Lilya Hrynevych, minister of Education and Science in Ukraine
- Mr. Volodymyr Kovtunets, First Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine
- Mr. Oleksandr Spivakovsky, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Science and Education (unfortunately not present)
- Mrs. Olena Fidanyan, Director of the Department of Education and Science of the City of Kiev
- Prof Nathaliya Shulga, Secretary of the Commission of Kiev City Council on Education and Science
- Prof Ben Vermeulen, professor of Educational law and Member of the Dutch Council of State

And last but not least I want to welcome Mr. Carlos Diaz-Muniz, honorary member and honorary Vice-President of ECNAIS.

We received personal apologies for absence from Mr. Kjeld Ahlmann Olesen (first Secretary-general of ECNAIS), Mr. Cor de Raadt (first Treasurer and interim-chairman of ECNAIS) and Mrs. Sofia Reis (former Secretary-general of ECNAIS).

We are very glad that we can have our conference this time in the city of Kiev, where 5 years ago brave citizens stood up and came together at the Maidan square, just around the corner of the Kiev City Hall, to fight for the future of their beloved country and to convince authorities and politicians that the only way forward with the Ukraine society is to share a common belief in human rights and democratic values.

I'm proud that I can announce that we are gathered here with representatives of associations of independent schools from 16 different countries and with a variety of people.

During this conference you can make contact and share experience and expertise with policy makers, politicians, experts in educational law in the different national education systems in Europe, but also with board members, directors and staff of associations of independent schools all over Europe and with members of school boards, headmasters of schools, teachers and students. And most of us are parents or grandparents as well!

ECNAIS functions on conferences like this one in Kiev as a living knowledge centre and that is the best way to bring the European perspective on the added value of independent schools for the democratic society alive!

As representatives of a vital part of civil society, independent schools are important players in the process of democratization of the whole of society.

I have participated the last 10 years in AGM's, conferences and symposia of a lot of ECNAIS' member associations of independent schools all over Europe.

The approaches of freedom of education, freedom of parental school choice and the establishment of public-private funding of independent schools differ in Europe from country to country.

I can now only mention some countries as examples of how independent schools in Europe are functioning, flourishing or sometimes struggling to survive nowadays.

In Denmark and the Netherlands there are constitutional guarantees for these freedoms as fundamental citizen's rights. The Danish independent schools receive public funding for 75% of their costs, so they rely on an additional parental fee to cover all the school costs. In the Dutch constitution there is a guarantee of equal public funding of public and independent schools. I will not go into details about the Dutch system because later this morning the Dutch expert on the freedom of education, prof Ben Vermeulen, will go more in depth on this subject.

Portugal is one of the countries where there is recognition in the education legislation for the establishment of independent schools, but their degree of school autonomy and public funding depend on a contract with the government. And as they have experienced since the outcome of the latest parliamentary election, this makes the position of independent schools

fragile, because the new left wing government terminated at short notice the public funding of quite a number of independent schools, even in violation with the terms of the contract.

In countries like Bulgaria and Ukraine, if I read the new Ukrainian law 'On Education' correctly, there is a legal basis for public funding of independent schools, but it depends on the annual parliamentary budget decision, if and how many public funding will be given to the independent schools next year.

Within the given time the Executive Committee of ECNAIS, with members from Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands, managed to make a short overview of the headlines of public funding of public and private schools in their countries.

We will handover this report about public funding to the minister of education and science in Ukraine later this morning. In the coming week the information of other countries may be added and the whole report will be published on the ECNAIS website.

In Iceland there is a strong position for independent Kindergarten schools and although there is a legal recognition of independent primary and secondary schools, it are the municipalities who have the power to decide if a new school will be a public school or an independent school.

In Sweden the independent denominational schools had last year suddenly to deal with a rapidly growing hostile attitude from the government and political parties in the parliament. The Swedish Christian Schools Council asked ECNAIS for support and we were present at and contributed to their seminar in the Swedish Parliament earlier this month with a presentation of Per Kristensen.

In France the independent schools are currently facing strong political attacks. The last socialist government tried to control the creation of independent schools by making their legal frame more demanding. The new government just did the same, using the pretext of fighting the Islamism in France. By the way our French colleagues told us that 60% of the independent schools are non-denomination schools and 84% of the independent schools that opened this year have no spiritual background. The Islamic schools represent 0,5% of the total number of independent schools in France. The ECNAIS member in France, La Fondation de l'Ecole, organizes the 14th of may at the French senate an international conference about justice and education. They are interested by any inout from ECNAIS 'members about the contribution of independent schools to the justice and equality of chances. I mention the apology for absence from our France member, because of the actual turmoil they have to deal with.

In Greece independent schools are in a constant fight with all the ministries which are implementing the hostile vision from the extreme left wing government on independent schools. ECNAIS has given our Greek member association from the very beginning our full support and we will continue to so.

At the European level ECNAIS acts as the face and the voice of the independent schools in Europe.

The EU rapporteur on Modernization of Education in the EU, Mrs. Krystyna Lybacka, invited ECNAIS to the Round Table she organized in the EU Parliament in Brussels the end of November last year. There I have stressed that in ECNAIS' vision it is crucial, that parents can

exercise their right of free school choice from a variety of schools, that reflects the given diversity within our European societies. Each national government should respect the fundamental right to establish an independent private school on religious, philosophical or pedagogical basis as once stated in article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the citizens of the EU.

The freedom of education will in the long run only be effective, if independent private schools get fair access to public funding. Independent private schools all over Europe contribute- with their unique combination of private initiative and pedagogical entrepreneurship - to a growing self-awareness and self-esteem of the students and to their sense of belonging to the plural community as a whole.

As Peter Mason, the founder of ECNAIS, already stated, *'Independent private schools rather complete than compete the national public school system'*.

Independent schools have since decades taken initiatives for pedagogical renewing in education and for innovative school practices. In many cases experimental educational innovations, first put into practice by independent private schools, have later on been implemented in the national public school system.

In January 2018 we combined forces during the annual Meeting of Independent Education EMIE in Brussels, coordinated by ECNAIS since more than 20 years. Together with our EMIE partners we are now lobbying in the EU Parliament for a more balanced final version of the Lybacka report about Modernization of Education in the EU with special attention for the recognition of parental school choice, the importance of more room for diversity in education and for fair public funding of independent schools.

At the First EU Education Summit in Brussels in January this year I could share ECNAIS' vision on the importance of room for diversity in education with the EU Commissioner of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Tibor Navracsics. The point of departure of the EU Education Summit was the European Commission's paper on *'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture'*.

In this paper it is stated, on the one hand, that we have to strengthen our common European democratic values and to foster active citizenship, and , on the other hand, that we have to be aware that Europe is *'united in diversity'*.

This reminds me to the Common Declaration of the EMIE partners from 2002, initiated by Carlos Diaz-Muniz, who was coordinator of EMIE in that time and I quote: *'Independent schools provide all citizens with the possibility of choosing their education: the way to give a sense and a soul to their existence and to the personal history of their children'*.

Independent schools all over Europe, each with their own profile and curriculum, offer parents, students and - within the given variety of schools – also teachers, the opportunity to choose just that specific school, that best meets their own expectations, talents and skills.

They introduce a sense of ownership in society for education. The ownership of independent schools by representatives of what we now call 'the civil society' has brought a strong

community feeling with all stakeholders belonging to the independent schools and this has formed them to value based communities.

This can inspire people, especially in difficult times, to look forward and to take new initiatives to make education meaningful again for parents, pupils and society. This pedagogical entrepreneurial spirit doesn't only benefits the pupils attending the independent school. It is also an added value for society and can inspire the government to allow public schools also a certain degree of autonomy.

We are very interested to hear more about the actual school reform in Ukraine with special focus on human rights education and education for democratic citizenship.

Personally, I have very good memories on the inspiring contributions of the enthusiastic and numerous Ukrainian delegations, that took an active part in ECNAIS conferences and seminars the last 5 years.

Each time we met, they were eager to share with us the latest information about the ongoing political and social changes that were taking place in Ukraine. And how they tried to contribute from the civil society to a bottom-up renewing of the Ukrainian education system, from which public and private schools could benefit equally.

I remember especially the personal storytelling by Mrs. Oksana Balakshyna from the Kiev Private School 'Athens' and father Roman Nebozhuk at the ECNAIS conference in Palma d'Mallorca in April 2014.

Reading the recently adopted new Ukrainian law 'On Education' with an inspiring model for the new Ukrainian school I'm impressed about what is reached already under difficult circumstances and in such a short period of time.

We can learn a lot from what is happening in Ukraine with this bottom-up school reform. It is about forming the student as a person, as a citizen and as a future professional.

I want to quote the Ukraine minister, Mrs. Lilya Hrynevych from her address to the team in the folder about the conceptual principles of secondary school reform: *'Together, we will build a European society, the society of enlightened public, high culture and equal opportunities.'*

This is why we are so pleased to organize the 2018 ECNAIS Conference in Kiev, within the context of the Ukrainian educational reform.

The aim of the conference is to present and debate the role of independent schools in Ukraine within the context of the educational reform at hand, with an eye to the experiences of other European countries.

By sharing experiences from national educational reforms with a special focus on the reform that is unfolding in Ukraine, we may better understand the connection between the ideals of freedom in education and the common European democratic values.

ECNAIS members from several other countries are eager to share with the Ukrainian delegation their own experiences and to contribute from a European perspective on the Ukrainian Educational Reform.

I wish you an inspirational conference and a nice stay in Ukraine.