

Speech of H.E. Mr Albert Esteve Garcia,
Minister of Culture of Andorra
An Intercultural Cities Milestone Event
Making Diversity work for Cities
(Dublin, 6-8 February 2013)

Honourable Lord Mayor

Excellency Minister of Justice,

Excellency's, Honourable Mayors, Ladies and Gentleman,

It's an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Andorran chairmanship of the Committee of ministers of the Council of Europe. I would specially like to thank the Irish presidency and the city of Dublin for their warm hospitality and for this excellent initiative.

Andorra is emblematic of Europe's diversity: Geographically landlocked between two great European nations, France and Spain, it is a land of exchange, a country with a long standing culture of peace, which has evolved in line with cultural diversity and the defence of multilingualism. Andorran citizens have been for a long time a minority in their country and this particularity reflects our history. Diversity and multilingualism are pillars of our national identity; we

consider it as an asset, an opportunity – small nations are real laboratories for “the living together”.

Andorra is a Council of Europe member state since 1994 and holds the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers for the first time. Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, Intercultural dialogue and Youth are priorities of our Chairmanship – unsurprisingly because of our History and demography, but also because we believe that building inclusive societies with full respect for diversity is one of the key challenges for contemporary Europe.

The Council of Europe is not only the continent’s human rights and democracy watchdog – it has also played a pioneering role in addressing complex societal challenges: 60 years ago the European Convention on Human Rights seemed like an almost impossible challenge, but now it has become a keystone of Europe’s legal space and a symbol of the values that all Europeans share. Turning human values into reality – this is what Council of Europe is so good at doing, building consensus between its 47 member states, or sometimes beyond them, on challenging issues such as living together in today’s multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.

The Council of Europe has played an equally innovative role in areas of social cohesion, education and culture. One important reference text with wide-reaching recognition and impact is the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. Since 2008 it has paved the way for a set of initiatives that have influenced our thinking, attitude and action with regard to diversity.

The Council strives to meet the challenge of reconciling diversity and social cohesion. Working with educators, young people, journalists, editors and civil society organisations has allowed the organisation to develop and to test many tools that help citizens understand that diversity can constitute richness for the development of societies.

In the framework of our chairmanship, we aim to contribute to this effort. We consider it crucial to promote the values that we, in the Council of Europe, all hold dear, in particular by fostering education for democratic citizenship and human rights. Andorra benefits from three public and free education systems, the Andorran, the French and the Spanish. This singular educational structure brings to the country a multicultural richness and strongly contributes to its social cohesion.

Education is essential for assimilating the competences that we need for living together in harmony. We have therefore decided to organize a conference, which is starting tomorrow in our capital, Andorra la Vella, on “Competences for a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue: a political challenge and values”. This conference will provide an opportunity to reflect on the aims of education and the role it can play in teaching future citizens to live together within democratic , sustainable and culturally more and more diverse societies.

The other important message of the Council of Europe is that culture matters. We need a democratic culture to build up strong democratic institutions; we need culture for personal fulfillment, for promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity. Therefore we are trying to promote civil participation in cultural policies, facilitating access to culture, including through the tools made available in today’s networked information age, where democratic expression and debate takes place on social media.

In this context, we are launching today a campaign for the promotion of the European Convention of Human Rights among civil society, through the Internet and the Social Media. We encourage you to join the campaign on <http://human-rights-convention.org/>,

Intercultural cities are among the initiatives where the Council has been successful in helping to shape policies, discourses and practices on diversity in a positive way. The diversity added value is the driving concept of the Intercultural cities project. It has been adopted by many city leaders and has helped build strong coalitions of professionals and citizens who want to help their cities grow with diversity.

The success of Intercultural cities shows that in order to address fears, we need to be more clear and explicit about Europe's fundamental values of human rights, freedoms, equality and justice. We need to highlight that these values are shared by the overwhelming majority of people and that a democratic intercultural education can make societies resilient to protectionism, provocation and cultural conflict.

The management of diversity requires joint efforts by many stakeholders and the very varied profiles of participants in this conference are a case in point: we need to keep working together – politicians, urban planners, police officers, teachers and journalists, artists – to build the culture of diversity and realize the diversity advantage. Culture is made of, by and for people with first and last names of many cultural and social backgrounds. Each of them contributes to the global development of our communities. If public institutions and civil agents cross work, multiculturalism becomes a keystone of cohesion, a social wealth, contributing to individual and collective well-being.

I thank you very much for your attention.