

European Conference
1914-2014: Lessons from History?
Citizenship Education and Conflict Management

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Vienna, Austria

Opening Address

By Dr. Heinz Fischer
The Federal President of Austria

The address was given by Prof. Dr. Ludwig Adamovich junior, former president of the Austrian Constitutional Court on behalf of the Federal President of Austria.

Ladies and Gentlemen!
Distinguished guests!

This year 2014 we are facing two anniversaries of both symbolic and historical importance, standing for two of the largest – better to say: this two – catastrophes of mankind: The centenary of the outbreak of World War one, the so called “Great War”, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two. Both of the wars had its history and roots in partly common, partly different reasons and interests of the various European States’ Offices: power and supremacy, hegemony and paternalism on the one hand, on the other hand ideas of unity and humanity versus separatism, nationalism and racism, escalated by hate and disrespect of human dignity and human life by National Socialism and its followers, believers and bystanders, ending in mass murder, especially in the mass murder of Jews.

In science there it is no doubt, that the collapse of the Hapsburg Monarchy, the various treaties and contracts between the allies and the successor states of the Empires of Austria and Germany with its restrictive limitations somehow were seed and roots of upcoming radicalism and totalitarianism and by that had an impact on the uprising national socialism movement and Hitler. And in science it is also still no further question, that the ultimatum against Serbia after the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand, heir of the throne, gave reason for war, – a war, which increased to a World War and which lead in result to the collapse of two of the largest Empires of contemporary Europe.

Yet if we turn our view into the past for another hundred years, we can face the bicentenary of another remarkable historic event: Of a time taking, diplomatic and in the end – concerning its results - long lasting process of re-arranging powers, keeping balance of power, territory and rules of coexistence in Europe: the so called Vienna Congress of 1814/15.

There is no doubt, that bringing this results to reality was quite often ending in wars or armed conflicts, if we consider the number of these conflicts on European Territory. However it had many positive effects on the co-operation and co-existence of States in Europe for a long lasting century.

When we face the presence, historians might call it “the contemporary history of tomorrow”. So when we face the presence we cannot ignore the recent conflicts in the neighbourhood of Europe,

- as there are
- the question of sovereignty and status of the Ukraine, demanding a solution and commitment for its future;
- the question of increasing radicalism and terrorism in the Middle East and parts of the Arabian World and its direct and indirect impacts on the European societies, especially if we take in account phenomena like the recruiting of young people or the number of young volunteers involved in radical armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq and in the ISIS-movement. We have to take this as a serious problem to be solved,
- finally not to forget questions of sustainable development, climate care and environmental issues, the lack of resources, the questions of lifestyles and prosperity, health care, et cetera, which necessarily are still top on the political agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Considering all this various aspects it cannot be a coincidence that this international conference of NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education – takes place in Vienna, to bring forward approaches, developments, perspectives on citizenship education in Europe and its fast changing society and its multiple challenges in and around Europe.

It has to be lined out, that participants from all parts of Europe, from the East and the West, the South and North, from the Balkans, the neighbourhood regions, from Mediterranean countries of Europe and Northern Africa, even from Central Asia and the far East have registered for this conference, right here in Vienna in the heart of Europe – for one big goal: Facing recent questions, discussing and finding ways and opportunities in the frame of citizenship education, learning Democracy, social cohesion and participation on the basis of Democracy and Human Rights. This is giving the conference importance and relevance.

Coming to an end I would like to congratulate Mr Thomas Krüger, president of the Federal Agency of Citizenship Education/Bonn, Mr Kars Veling, director of Pro Demos/The Hague (the Netherlands), and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs and all their staffs for organizing the conference.

Finally I want to wish all of you all the best and the energy, the courage and the persistence to bring citizenship education and networking European citizenship education to on-going success.