



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

## **Participation Now! Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change**

21 - 24 November 2012  
Córdoba, Spain

### **Opening Address**

**by Kars Veling**

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*- The spoken word takes precedence -*

Good evening. Just a few words. It's an honour for me and a great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of ProDemos Institution in The Hague in the Netherlands working all over the country though. ProDemos, I should explain a bit, is a new name and probably most of you didn't know the name until now, but the institution it stands for has been active in the field of citizenship, education and also in the network for citizenship education for years and years. A lot of work has been done in the preparation of this conference and a lot of people were involved. I would like just to mention the effort of the Bundeszentrale, Thomas Kruger and his colleagues. We owe, I think, many thanks to you and your people. Thank you very much. Next year our annual conference will take place in The Hague in the Netherlands the hometown of ProDemos. The experience of cooperation with the Bundeszentrale gives me great confidence in this endeavour.

We now we are about to start with the promising programme of lectures, workshops and last, but not least, many encounters with colleagues with whom we share the strong conviction that the democracy and the rule of law are of great importance and also never can be taken for granted. In the coming days we will discuss the turbulent developments in what is called the Arab Spring and I've great admiration for the power of the people who have fought and are still fighting for their freedom and make great effort, often at the price of having sacrifices.

Building democracy under the rule of law is an immense task; expelling a dictator is not enough. Developing a country, a community towards a free and democratic state is very demanding and the task is full of risks. We will hear the stories these days and we discuss the analysis and I hope what we are doing during the conference will encourage those who are involved in the struggle for freedom and righteousness.

But there is a second reason I look forward to the programme. Back home in The Hague, ProDemos is developing fast as a centre for introducing growing numbers of young people into the world of democracy and the rule of law. We do so all over the country, in municipalities, in schools and in courts, but especially in The Hague, the centre of government, centre also of several international institutions of justice, as you may know. It is our mission to convince people of the value of democracy and freedom and human rights and we often see that young people, as well as adults for that matter, consider freedom and democracy as self-evident. People who live in a democratic country, who are free to think and act as they wish, often don't realise how special this state of affairs actually is. We recognise the importance of democracy only when we are confronted with the opposite.



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Democracy and the rule of law are like, for example, clean clothes and an ability to take a shower every now and then. Only when they are not there we realise how much we rely on them. Therefore it is worthwhile to devote some time now and then to thinking about democracy and the rule of law. More importantly, we should be aware that without everyone's effort and involvement, democracy and the rule of law would deteriorate. They need to be maintained and therefore the experiences of people who know what it is to fight for freedom can teach us very important lessons.

Freedom is not self-evident. Democracy is not guaranteed, citizens of new democracies under the rule of law confirmed that freedom is vulnerable. We should be aware. I wish you and myself an inspiring conference. Thank you.