

Dear participants in the Second International Workshop *“Participation to the Community Programs in the Field of Education and Training – an Important Tool for European Integration”*,

I'm honored to address this wonderful ERI-SEE event on behalf of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science.

Bulgaria started its participation in the regional cooperation under the framework of the Graz Process in 1998. Launched under the Austrian EU-Presidency in 1998 as a follow-up to the First International Conference *“European Education Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy in Southeast Europe”*, the Graz Process aimed at promoting educational co-operation in South Eastern Europe, thus supporting the process of peace, stability and democratization. Bulgaria as participating country in the Graz Conference and a member of the Task Force, supported the decisions taken by the Conference and fully assisted the Task Force by offering its human resources potential, as well as its regional knowledge.

In November 1999 Bulgaria hosted the Second International Experts Conference *“European Education Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy in Southeast Europe”*, thus further promoting the Graz Process in its enhanced form and under the auspices of the Stability Pact. The Sofia Conference consolidated the achievements and made even more effective contribution to the ongoing process of regional development.

Between 2000 and 2002 the Enhanced Graz Process launched the Quick Start Projects Initiative. Bulgaria actively participated in 25 projects. A wide range of Bulgarian experts and institutions were involved in these projects and contributed to the promotion of the regional co-operation and to the establishment of networks with strong regional impact. These projects could be considered as a reliable background for further initiatives.

In December 2002 the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe was established. It was aimed at supporting the implementation of the education reforms in the region, taking into account both country-specific needs and latest developments oriented towards the establishment of the European Area of Education.

In June 2003 the ministers of education of the South East European countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding, oriented towards the European perspective on the Western Balkan countries that fully share the objectives of the EU and look forward to joining it. Bulgaria was among the signing countries, thus demonstrating its commitment to the ERI-SEE agenda.

In compliance with the Memorandum of Understanding, the Secretariat of the ERI SEE in its 2005 working program included activities to develop capacity building so that the SEE countries could effectively participate in the new generation of Community programs. Bulgaria and Romania are members of the current Community programs in the field of education and training- Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci. For Bulgaria these programs mark the beginning of different European initiatives in

the areas of education, training and youth, thus giving the country the unique chance to gain a better understanding of common educational policies and to gather experience in the respective areas. The experience acquired provides for sharing the best results of such participation at regional level. The knowledge transfer capacity of our country has been taken into account by the ERI SEE Secretariat and the country's know-how in this area is fully used for regional purposes.

It is a well-understood necessity for Bulgaria, as an acceding country, to be part of the ongoing activities of the ERI-SEE oriented towards the European future of our region. Against that background, our country will continue to support the implementation of the activities included in the 2005 work program of the ERI-SEE Secretariat.

Allow me to wish the best of success to your Seminar

Thank you for your attention