



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT AND YOUTH  
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**

**Welcome Remarks for the  
Handover Meeting of the Presidency of the European Schools  
The Minister of Education, Sport and Youth  
Dr. Athena Michaelidou  
Friday, 21 June 2024, 10:00  
Dionysus Conference Room, Hilton Nicosia**

It is my distinct pleasure to extend a warm welcome to Cyprus and to the Handover Meeting of the Presidency of the European Schools held here in Nicosia. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Secretary-General Beckman and Deputy Secretary-General Bordoy, both of whom have provided great stewardship of the European schools and the Brussels-based Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools. I would also like to congratulate the Italian delegation on its successful presidency so far and to welcome the delegation from Latvia who will be following our presidency.

It was my distinct pleasure to have had the honor of visiting one of the European Schools during a working visit to Brussels last month. “Brussels III” is one of the two European Schools that includes a Greek language section. Dr. Ioannis Savvides encouraged me to see the school up close so I could see for myself the unique school environment that is offered in the European Schools system. The value of seeing this in person was immeasurable. The quality of instruction, the multicultural and the multilingual nature of the school, including Greek, was inspiring.

I have been also briefed on the work carried out by the Board of Governors of the European Schools in Parma in April, starting with the First Teachers Forum, a pioneering initiative offered by the Italian presidency. We are privileged to continue that initiative during the Cyprus presidency, taking the lessons learned and building on it, with the intent to deliver a program of professional development for teachers and provide the opportunity for our teachers to communicate, exchange ideas and best practices with teachers of the European Schools. May our work in the coming months be favorable to that goal, to ensure that we provide a quality forum for teachers that addresses their unique needs and with a view towards providing a blueprint so that Latvia can build on the efforts of both Italy and Cyprus when it assumes the presidency in 2025-2026.

The three-day Board of Governors meeting in Parma last April took important decisions for the improvement of the European Schools system itself. In April 2025, we shall be honored to host you and the rest of the delegations here in Cyprus for the Board of Governors meeting as well as the teachers of the European Schools for the Second Teachers Forum.

The European Schools System is integral to the broader European project, a manifestation of the goals in education to which we all ascribe. The European Schools provide a seamless education for students, fostering not just a European education through the European baccalaureate, but instruction in both the chosen language and in their native language. This is a unique educational system. Despite the fact that Cyprus does not host a European School, it is our intention to prioritize the aims of the European Schools System during the Cyprus presidency. We will be focusing

primarily on three priorities which will be discussed today in greater detail in the handover meeting: (1) Providing a pathway to improving the quality of the working environment and teachers' levels of well-being; (2) Building a respectful and supportive school community that fosters a sense of meaning and purpose for all the students; (3) looking at education as a critical implementation tool for sustainable development; (4) responding to the administrative challenges that may arise with a view toward addressing the needs of the European Schools system.

With great pride, Cyprus will assume the Presidency of the European Schools for the first time. This year, our country celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary since EU accession. Although relatively new to the EU, Cyprus adds its ancient history into the kaleidoscope of this organization, a perspective that is both classic and contemporary. Education has always been a priority of these ancient and modern cultures, dating back to the ancient Hellenic world, of which Cyprus was a part. Many Greek philosophers have extolled the virtues of education, including Socrates, Aristotle, Pythagoras and Plutarch. I share with you a quote from Thales, which best aligns with the priorities of the Cyprus presidency:

Τις ευδαιμόνων; Ο το μὲν σώμα υγιής, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν εὐπόρος, τὴν δὲ φύσιν εὐπαιδευτός.

en. *The happiest ones are those with a healthy body, a wealthy soul and a well-educated nature.*

Many of you know that the ancient Greeks promoted the virtues of a healthy body and a healthy mind, as a pathway to living well. Thales expands on this by determining that to be happy, one not only has to take care of one's body to possess a "wealthy soul" but also to cultivate one's mind through education.

These are universal truths, ones that span time and distance. We understand implicitly that a healthy body is important, because sickness is anathema to it, drawing attention away from our physical well-being. Thales' reference to the "soul" points to personality traits. Therefore, a "wealthy soul" is one that reflects magnanimity, generosity and patience. Fostering these aspects in the school environment is fundamental to the success of education itself, as it prepares students to confront and overcome difficulties and challenges.

By a "well educated nature", Thales conveys that a well-taught person has the willingness and capacity to seek knowledge and to keep on learning. Therefore, a happy person is open-minded.

These are the values that we must instil in our students. The universal concept of well-being (in Greek, *εὐημερία*) is an important aspect that impacts the entire school environment from administrators to educators to the students. Well-being absolutely impacts the quality of education and the school experience for all stakeholders.

Dr. Savvides, along with the Cyprus presidency team, will be sharing with you in more detail these priorities and the direction that the Cyprus Presidency will take under the slogan, "ΔΡΑΞΑΣΘΕ ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ" (in English, "*Seize Education*"). A program has been curated for you as we begin this transition, to culminate with Cyprus officially assuming the presidency on August 1. We will be holding a press conference at the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth to announce this news, along with the priorities of the Cyprus presidency.

Thank you for your participation and commitment to education through the European Schools System. I look forward to sharing our ideas on the year ahead as we convene this evening for our gala dinner. I wish you all the best success for this transfer among the trio of delegations and the Office of the Secretary General and for the future success of the European school system.



