



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT AND YOUTH**

**Welcoming Speech by Dr Athena Michaelidou, Minister of Education, Sport and Youth, 7 May 2026, 1000 a.m.
Filoxenia Conference Center
“European Conference: Whole Institution Approach and Education for Sustainable Development from Policy Vision to Educational Transformation”**

It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility that I welcome you to Cyprus and to the European Conference “Whole Institution Approach and Education for Sustainable Development: From Policy Vision to Educational Transformation”, organised in the framework of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

This Conference is one of the flagship initiatives of our Presidency in the field of education. It reflects a clear message: Education for Sustainable Development and the Whole Institution Approach are not peripheral concerns, but central priorities for the future of education in Europe.

We meet at a time of multiple and interconnected crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, social inequalities, democratic fragility, geopolitical instability, technological disruption and uncertainty about the future. These challenges are not distant from education. They enter our classrooms through the questions, hopes and anxieties of children and young people, and through the responsibility placed on teachers and educational institutions to prepare learners for a world that is complex, unpredictable and rapidly changing.

More particularly the young people are already asking us to act with greater courage, consistency and honesty. Our responsibility is to create the structures that allow their voice to become agency, their participation to become shared responsibility, and their ideas to become action.

In this context, Education for Sustainable Development is more important than ever. Education for Sustainable Development is quality education itself. It enables learners to understand complexity, think critically, act responsibly, participate democratically,

care for others and for the planet, and develop the competences needed to shape sustainable futures. In the face of today's crises, it is our only viable educational choice if education is to remain relevant, meaningful and transformative.

Yet, if ESD is to become the foundation of quality education, it cannot be implemented through isolated initiatives or fragmented projects. It requires systemic change. This is where the Whole Institution Approach becomes essential.

The Whole Institution Approach is not a method, a checklist or a label. It is a pathway for transforming the whole educational ecosystem. It asks us to move beyond the question, "How do we teach sustainability?", and to ask instead: "How does the whole institution become sustainable in the way it learns, decides, operates, leads and connects with society?"

This shift is fundamental. We cannot teach participation in institutions where learners have no real voice. We cannot teach sustainability in environments that do not practise it. We cannot teach democratic culture without democratic relationships. And we cannot prepare young people for transformation if our education systems remain rigid, fragmented and disconnected from real life.

The Whole Institution Approach transforms educational institutions from places where knowledge is simply transmitted into living laboratories of sustainability, democracy, inclusion, resilience and shared responsibility.

For Cyprus, this vision is not theoretical. It is reflected in concrete policy choices, institutional structures and long-term commitments. The importance that Cyprus attaches to Whole Institution Approach and ESD is reflected in the new national Whole Institution Approach Framework for Education for Sustainable Development, which will be introduced from September across all levels of education, together with an accreditation scheme for WIA and meaningful incentives for educators. It is also reflected in the revised National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and the Green Transition 2030, which places sustainability, institutional transformation and quality education at the heart of our education system.

We know from experience that no educational change can be effective or sustainable over time without governance, coordination, accountability and mechanisms for

monitoring and support. This is why Cyprus has invested not only in programmes, but in the structures that make transformation possible.

We are proud that Cyprus is among the very few countries in Europe — and, to our knowledge, internationally — that has established a permanent dedicated structure within the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth: The Unit for Education for the Environment and Sustainable Development. As a horizontal structure of the Ministry, the Unit is responsible for the implementation, coordination, monitoring and updating of the national strategy for ESD across all levels of education, in both formal and non-formal learning. This reflects our understanding that ESD needs institutional continuity, policy coherence and systemic support.

As a Mediterranean country at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Cyprus understands that sustainability challenges are shared challenges requiring cooperation and common responsibility. For this reason, Cyprus has worked systematically with European, regional and international organizations to strengthen ESD policies, networks and practices. We see our role not only as a Member State of the European Union, but also as a bridge between regions, between policy and practice, between formal and non-formal learning, and between national priorities and global commitments.

Dear Colleagues,

The real value of this Conference will not be measured only by the quality of the discussions we have here in Nicosia. It will be measured by what follows. The conclusions of this Conference should not remain in a document. They should inform national policies, support European cooperation and inspire institutions to review and transform their practices. Most importantly, they should contribute to shaping the next generation of European education policies, ensuring that Education for Sustainable Development and the Whole Institution Approach are placed at the center of the European Education Area and the wider European agenda for skills, resilience, democratic participation and the green transition.

Dear colleagues and friends,

As we open this Conference, let us think beyond systems as they are, and imagine systems as they could become. Let us connect policy with practice, research with

implementation, institutions with communities, and young people with decision-making.

Let us leave with a renewed European commitment: to make every educational institution a place where sustainability is not only taught but lived; where democracy is not only discussed but practiced; where young people are not only listened to, but trusted; and where education becomes a true force for transformation.

I warmly welcome you all to Cyprus and wish us a productive, inspiring and meaningful Conference.