

**ADDRESS BY THE
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
MS OLYMPIA STYLIANOU
AT THE STUDY VISIT
OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT
IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION**

TITLE: “TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION”.

UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS 21 MARCH 2011, 9.15 A.M

It is with great pleasure to welcome you all to Nicosia Cyprus for the Study Visit carried out by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education within the framework of the “Teacher Education for Inclusion” project.

Education is one of the major priorities in each society. The right to education has been described as a fundamental human right. All children are entitled to a public education therefore, teachers in today’s schools must provide instruction and other educational services that meet the needs of a growingly diverse student population.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus has launched an ambitious educational reform program, inviting dialogue among all stakeholders, with a view to turn into reality the vision of a better and more modern educational system that would meet future needs and challenges. The ongoing educational reform represents the main educational policy of the Government. It is an effort for a

comprehensive introduction of reforms and innovations at all levels and aspects of the educational system.

One of the most important innovations is the reconstruction of the curriculum. This effort intends to ensure that teaching will meet the needs of all students. At this stage, teachers are educated to put into action the new curriculum, which is programmed to be launched in September 2011.

Considerable efforts have been made to develop and implement inclusive policies on all levels to further support and improve the existing special needs education programs and to develop new support services in order to provide education for ALL children.

The inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream education is a matter of major policy for the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus that is in line with current international conventions and philosophical thought. The adoption of this policy has been accompanied by a change in the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of society towards children with special needs whether they are in the education system or the community at large.

Dear participants,

Cyprus has been a member in the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education since 2004 as an observer country and from 2005 as a full member.

The outcomes of the projects and research carried out within the framework of the Agency are seriously taken into account and disseminated.

The Teacher Education for Inclusion Project including the international policy and research literature reviews and the project synthesis report, which we are awaiting to be issued, are important information for our Ministry.

You are here now to explore something that is also crucial for inclusion: the competences that all teachers need and should acquire within their initial teacher education (ITE) to prepare them to work in inclusive settings. The outcomes of this study and of the other country visits will be seriously taken into account and we believe that they will help us in our policy making.

I would like to congratulate the Director and Chairman of the European Agency for Development in Special needs, the member countries, as well as the agency staff for the high quality work that has been carried out all these years of the life of the Agency, all the experts and national representatives who worked hard for this and all other project.

I wish you all the best in your work these two days and in all your future work and hope that we will be able to host another Agency event in a re-united Cyprus.