**Summary of the group discussions about the integration of refugees in our schools, 7 October 2016**

On the one hand we observe that the atmosphere in the European Union toward foreigners in general and refugees in particular has changed in recent years. With the rise of many nationalistic and xenophobic political parties the attitude has become more hostile toward foreigners and more negative toward the European Union. This is a serious cause for concern.

On the other hand we notice that the attitude in our schools is positive and welcoming toward refugees and students from immigrant backgrounds. We have seen and we are still seeing many examples of teachers, students and parents who are putting a lot of effort in helping the new students feel at home and settle in their new environment. Schools have to be a ‘safe and healthy place’ for these new students who have such a difficult background and personal history. Some schools experienced that subjects such as sports, music and arts can be very helpful in this respect. In all schools, the arrival of refugee children has given a boost to the sense of community and solidarity. The teachers in the schools consider it to be a challenge to help these newcomers integrate into school life and into society.

In some but not in all countries the governments provide extra financial facilities or extra staff to assist schools in providing schooling and coaching for refugees. The participants of our conference felt that it is an absolute necessity for governments to provide professional support to schools and to teachers to cope with this difficult task given the fact that in many cases we are dealing with traumatized children. In some countries the government has provided psychologists to support schools and students in dealing with these problems.

In order to facilitate the integration of refugee children in the schools and to give them a fair chance for further education, it was recommended that we give them the opportunity to follow the classes of the language of the their host country ‘as foreign language’. In other words, we should allow them to function on a somewhat lower level than the autochthonous students since it is impossible to become fluent in a new language in 1 or 2 years.