Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, esteemed participants of the conference, Your Excellencies,

It is both an honor and a pleasure to address you today on behalf of the Institute for the Advancement of Education in Serbia regarding the topic of Digital Civic Education.

In the previous presentation, you briefly learned about Digital Civic Education – a concept that is gradually becoming key to shaping responsible citizens in modern society. This fall, a major conference in Ljubljana will be held on this very topic. I would like to offer perhaps the simplest definition of Digital Civic Education: it is the development of democratic competencies in the digital world. Or more broadly: a subject which, through ten thematic areas, attempts to cover most activities in the digital world by establishing a behavioral standard aligned with democratic competencies.

The Ministry of Education and the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing in Serbia have been continuously working on improving education within the ever-accelerating pace of digital development. We live in a world where digital technologies are changing how we communicate, learn, work—and how we participate in social life. Much has already been done: digital education, artificial intelligence awareness, use of digital tools and textbooks, improvement of digital competencies and trainings, etc.

Yet, what are we lacking? We are running out of time. We are too slow for the speed of digital development. No matter how fast we've been running, it hasn't been fast enough. That is why it is crucial not only to teach younger generations digital skills but also to teach them to use those skills responsibly, critically, and safely. We live in an era where time has accelerated—artificial intelligence reached mass adoption within just two months. For comparison, television took 40 years to reach mass use; smartphones took 15.

More and more people are living in virtual worlds—communicating, working, learning, loving—while the processing power of personal computers doubles every 18 months. That world will only become more lavish and tempting. It's likely that one day we'll even create superintelligence—infinitely smarter than us. Have we designed one of the possible unfortunate endings to our own story? What will such an entity do with us—its creators? Digital reality will become less predictable and more chaotic. We cannot know what's coming, but we can assume that Digital Civic Education may become the foundational subject that ensures safer living in the digital world through early education.

We cannot teach children every single risk of the digital world—but we can teach them to think, to explore. Digital Civic Education is, in essence, the education of how to live under digital conditions. We educate students, nurture our children, and hope to empower them to face the challenges of an uncertain future. To prepare them for the world of tomorrow, schools must teach children how to learn and how to think critically, how to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, and how to develop work habits and personal motivation. The traditional teacher who simply delivers knowledge is outdated—that role can now be fulfilled by artificial intelligence. The future

calls for a teacher ready to constantly adapt and evolve, to help students acquire thinking knowledge—not just reproduced content.

That is why the topics of Digital Civic Education are so important. At this moment, raising awareness of their relevance is crucial—at school, in the media, at home, and in society as a whole. Even though there are many indications that we should fear the future, we must simultaneously overcome our fear of change and of this new age. Algorithms are already shaping our lives—and we ourselves are, in a way, becoming algorithms. We no longer memorize phone numbers; we outsource calculations and many routine tasks to digital tools. It is meaningless to think we can escape AI. Why should we even try? We must learn how to live with it.

Why is this subject important to our country—and to every country?

Digital Civic Education involves raising awareness of digital identity, privacy, media literacy, and the responsibility we each bear for the content we share, the information we trust, and the way we treat others in digital space. It is our shared responsibility to equip students with the knowledge that helps them make good decisions, recognize misinformation, protect privacy—their own and others'—and participate actively and positively in digital society. The future of our society depends on the digitally conscious citizens we are educating today.

Over the past two years, digital promoters have been holding monthly working group meetings, including sessions in Strasbourg. We've created a curriculum model divided into four age groups, covering most educational levels. Each group includes 10 learning outcomes across 10 areas of Digital Civic Education. This document is currently being finalized and will soon be available, allowing each educational system to develop its own version tailored to its specific needs. There are several implementation models—it can be a standalone subject, a part of Civic Education, or cross-curricular, integrated with subjects that relate to it directly or indirectly. It can also be incorporated through extracurricular activities and project-based learning.

In Serbia, our approach is cross-curricular. We will continue working as we have with the Council of Europe on democratic competencies—through trainings, national portals, manuals, apps—focusing on cross-subject integration, developing free teaching activities, and fostering universal values in the digital world.

Let me return to the beginning. The teacher can no longer be just a warehouse of knowledge passing it on to students. First, because no human can now possess more knowledge than modern technology. Second, because the role of the teacher has become increasingly pedagogical. This allows them to focus more on the socio-emotional development of students, as avatars and AI tools can now deliver content and information. A teacher can now approach any subject through democratic values. Those values—respecting others' rights, embracing diversity, empathy, tolerance, privacy—are universal. They must guide our lives both in the real world and in the digital one.

Given the pace of digital transformation, we have no choice but to embrace new technologies and thoroughly develop new teaching methods and models for behavior evaluation in such a world. Therefore, I see Digital Civic Education as a central theme around which many

school subjects will eventually revolve. The role of the teacher will become more important—not in transmitting knowledge, but in inspiring students toward values and virtues.

"If you don't know where you're going, wherever you end up — you're in the wrong place.

And finally—maybe we humans can never fully answer where we come from, who we are, or where we are going. But through education, and through constant learning of virtue, we can at least define what kind of people we should strive to be—before we leave this cosmic reality