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### **Opening Words**

What a pleasure it is to welcome you all here today: invited guests, social work professionals *and* scholars from the Netherlands, Europe and beyond; and a very special welcome to all EUSW members who over the last 6 years have turned into *both* colleagues and friends.

I would like to take advantage of this moment to share with you a personal and professional observation.

One of the most challenging forms of collaboration is that of transnational collaboration; in our case, a collaboration of mostly academics involved in social work education. What a remarkable process of self-reflection and collective discovery this has been. Over the last 6 years, we've managed to create a European Social Work Education community; an **epistemic community**. By this I mean that even though collectively we have different histories, together we share the quest to develop a common idea: a robust knowledge base on social work education and practice across Europe.

If I look at how our collaboration has evolved - within a rather strict, output-oriented EU setting – what strikes me most is how we've come to understand that in order to generate (new) knowledge together, we have to invest *substantially* in the **process of dialogue**. Creating explicit moments for exchange and reflection; looking for ways to make our thinking explicit.

Believe it or not there's more to transnational collaboration than the co-ordination of international meetings and the division of tasks. There is an **ongoing conversation present** that is steering us in directions we probably wouldn't have gone alone. We may have entered as individuals but, by now, those engaged in the conversation are

inevitably aware that we are entering new ground. We are facing new questions. And, the thematic - **and social** - dialogues we engage in together have the potential to influence the direction of social work education in the European Union.

I hope our next 3 days together; inspire us to extend this *dialogical process*: **dialogues that encourage us to ask, to re-consider, to reflect and to act.**