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Education against violence at school

Report¹

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

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Summary

Too many schools in Europe continue to be confronted with very serious acts of violence. Incidents include attacks by pupils with or without weapons, bullying and harassment among pupils, sexual violence, acts of hostility and even aggression against teachers by pupils, as well as the use of violence by teachers against pupils. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to address violence as early as possible during school life and to introduce and further develop education against violence at school. It is necessary to take action at different levels and involve all key players, in particular families, teachers and pupils.

To this end, the Parliamentary Assembly wishes to encourage the design and effective implementation of proactive educational policies against violence at school and in society in general, based on a coherent set of guiding principles.

1. 2011 - Second part-session



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned by the fact that too many schools in Europe continue to be confronted with very serious acts of violence. Incidents include attacks by pupils, with or without weapons, bullying and harassment among pupils, sexual violence, acts of hostility and even aggression against teachers by pupils, as well as the use of violence by teachers against pupils.
2. Although such events may remain infrequent, the Assembly considers that they deserve the greatest attention as they always produce very significant – if not dramatic – effects on the persons involved and their immediate environment, provoking frustration, fear and feelings of insecurity. They are a worrying sign that, despite many efforts, the phenomena of violence at school and of violence in society in general have not been properly addressed.
3. Humanism, non-violent behaviour, tolerance and mutual respect are common fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe since its foundation six decades ago and the Organisation has made longstanding efforts to combat all kinds of violence, in particular against children.
4. Fundamental safeguards are provided by Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and by the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163). The latter states in its Article 17 that children and young persons shall be protected against negligence, violence or exploitation, with a view to ensuring the effective exercise of their right to grow up in an environment which encourages the full development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities.
5. The Assembly has dealt with these issues in many texts, including: [Recommendation 561 \(1969\)](#) on the protection of minors against ill-treatment; [Recommendation 1666 \(2004\)](#) on a Europe-wide ban on corporal punishment of children; [Recommendation 1778 \(2007\)](#) on child victims: stamping out all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse; [Recommendation 1905 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1714 \(2010\)](#) on children who witness domestic violence; [Recommendation 1934 \(2010\)](#) on child abuse in institutions: ensuring full protection of the victims.
6. Standards for the protection of children against violence are also included in Committee of Ministers' Recommendation No. R (79) 17 on the protection of children against ill-treatment, Recommendation No. R (85) 4 on violence in the family and Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence. The Assembly also recalls General Policy Recommendation No. 10 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.
7. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the harmonious and safe development of each child and its Article 19 explicitly relates to protecting children against violence. The Assembly welcomes, in this context, the work of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children.
8. The Assembly recalls that according to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and ethnic or religious groups".
9. Notwithstanding worldwide condemnation, violence unfortunately appears to be an aspect of human relations which is very difficult to eradicate. It occurs everywhere, between individuals and groups as well as within families, social groups and society. It can manifest itself in direct physical aggression or take less evident, but equally pernicious, psychological forms. Violence at school and violence in society are interrelated; it is therefore not surprising that various forms of violence also exist within the school environment.
10. However, the Assembly will continue to combat with the greatest determination all forms of violence, in particular that directed against children and young people. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to address violence as early as possible in the school life of children and to introduce and/or further develop education against violence at school.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 4 November 2010.

11. The radical transformations which have occurred in education policies show that it is possible to achieve results and change mentalities: the authoritarian teaching methods have gradually given way to a non-authoritarian style, often promoting a critical approach to authoritarianism. Similar developments exist within parent-child relations and within society as a whole.

12. Research into violence at school has been pursued in many countries and several governments have established national programmes to combat such violence. The Assembly also welcomes the work in this field by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children. Results are encouraging, but further efforts are required to reduce violence at school.

13. If this problem is not treated adequately, the resulting social and financial costs will clearly exceed the costs of setting up more comprehensive programmes to deal with violence effectively, not to mention the unacceptable human suffering of those children who are and were exposed to violence.

14. It is, of course, crucial that violence be prohibited and acts of violence which fall under penal or disciplinary provisions be referred to law enforcement or disciplinary authorities and corresponding sanctions pronounced and implemented. However, sanctions are the ultimate recourse and not a remedy. Preventive action and support to victims are needed even more. Consideration must be given to the fact that violent children are most likely to be themselves victims. In addition, the greatest transparency must be guaranteed, while respecting the dignity and privacy of the victims.

15. Given the complexity of our society and the plurality of factors that may generate violent behaviour, it is necessary to take action at different levels and involve all key players, in particular families, teachers and pupils, in order to combat effectively violence at school.

16. The media has been exhibiting violent content in different forms for decades and the debate about the impact of such content has been going on for just as long. With the development of new forms of interactive online media, potentially greater psychological impact has been identified and should be studied further. On the other hand, since children spend more and more time using media, informal education through the media may produce positive effects and should be considered and investigated more seriously.

17. The Assembly therefore adopts the following guiding principles for education against violence at school and calls on member and observer parliaments to endorse them at national level and to ensure that the competent government authorities support schools administratively, logistically and financially, and monitor the implementation of these principles:

17.1. legal framework and administrative practices:

17.1.1. penal and/or disciplinary standards should clearly prohibit all acts committed at school which can be qualified as "violent", including physical or degrading punishment of pupils, violence against pupils by school staff, violence by third persons against pupils on school premises as well as violent behaviour by pupils against other pupils, school staff or school property;

17.1.2. penal and/or disciplinary sanctions should be foreseen that are commensurate with the seriousness of these acts; however, with regard to young perpetrators of violence, account should be taken of the guidelines enshrined in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on the European rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures, and in the Issue Paper of 2009 on children and juvenile justice by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights;

17.1.3. all acts of violence should be investigated and recorded and, where an act is of a sufficiently serious nature, it should be reported to the competent law enforcement or disciplinary authorities; in this context, appropriate complaints mechanisms should be set up for pupils in education settings;

17.1.4. administrative procedures in relation to acts of violence at school should guarantee the right of parents to be informed promptly and properly as well as the right to protection of privacy of the victims;

17.1.5. school headmasters should be held professionally responsible for the effective implementation of the above obligations;

17.2. awareness-raising and training:

17.2.1. a culture of democracy and human rights should be promoted at school, in accordance with the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in the framework of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7;

17.2.2. awareness raising about violence reduction, non-violent conflict resolution and children's rights, in particular at school, should form part of general education curricula; violence should be addressed from different angles in classes on, for example, history, literature, media, the arts, music, sports, sociology, psychology, philosophy and religion or ethics;

17.2.3. school teachers and staff should have mandatory training to understand better the different forms of violence (physical, psychological, verbal and behavioural violence) and learn how to combat such violence and respect the right of children to a non-violent school;

17.2.4. training curricula for school personnel should take account of the specific needs related to their responsibilities, but also of pupils' needs, especially those who are more vulnerable;

17.3. preventive and supportive measures:

17.3.1. strict security measures should be taken to enforce the prohibition of introducing weapons and drugs into schools and to prevent criminal acts at school;

17.3.2. teaching methods should help address the causes of violence and seek to avoid individual pupils finding themselves in a situation of isolation or exclusion; to this end schools should provide specific support for pupils with learning, physical, social or other difficulties, reduce competitive trends in classes, foster team work, co-operation and tolerance as well as provide opportunities for pupils to control their physical or psychological tensions in a non-violent manner through sports activities, music or artistic work;

17.3.3. school staff should include specialised confidential counsellors, trained to help pupils who have experienced violence and those who have committed violent acts inside or outside the school; in addition, mediators and psychologists should be available for pupils, their parents and teachers;

17.3.4. at the level of school circumscriptions, specialised teams with relevant knowledge and expertise should be established to provide advice to schools facing particular difficulties;

17.4. getting pupils and their families more involved:

17.4.1. schools should develop practical projects and extracurricular activities (such as forums, round tables, open days) on the problem of violence at school, bringing together teachers, pupils and parents; special attention should be given to a non-sensational approach of the media (print media, music, television, film, Internet, mobile phones, etc.) to violence at school and social violence in everyday life (such as family violence, group violence, criminal violence);

17.4.2. schools should organise voluntary programmes with parents aimed at helping them to assume their parental responsibilities, as well as to ensure full recognition and respect of children's rights;

17.4.3. in implementing targeted projects and activities, schools should envisage collaboration with NGOs having specific knowledge and experience in relation to education against violence;

17.5. monitoring and assessment:

17.5.1. national authorities should establish a system to centralise statistical data concerning violence at school and the results achieved by different measures implemented to combat this phenomenon;

17.5.2. national surveys should be conducted in order to identify good practices; co-operation between schools at national and European levels should be encouraged.

18. The Assembly invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to ensure that work on children and violence will remain a priority for the Council of Europe in future programmes of activity.

19. The Assembly invites the Joint Council on Youth as well as the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe to join the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers in their efforts to combat violence against children and violence at school through activities in their respective sectors.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. Referring to its Resolution ... (2011) on education against violence at school, the Parliamentary Assembly considers that school violence is a violation of children's rights. There is a need to enhance policy design concerning education against violence at school and better support the implementation of national policies aimed at counteracting all forms of violence affecting children and young people.
2. The Assembly believes that, in order to create synergies which can strengthen the impact of national policies dealing with this complex issue, greater co-operation is needed at European level and that the Council of Europe should play a more active role in this respect.
3. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 3.1. submit Resolution ... (2011) to their competent ministries, urging them to take account of the guidelines therein and to communicate them to all their educational institutions;
 - 3.2. invite, through their education ministers, the next Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education to devise, in close co-operation with the competent steering committee of the Council of Europe, holistic and proactive educational policies against violence at school and in society in general;
 - 3.3. assist member states in conflict or post-conflict areas in developing practical school projects against violence at school, within the family, in society and among nations;
 - 3.4. assist member states in promoting a culture of democracy and human rights at school, in accordance with the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in the framework of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7;
 - 3.5. establish closer co-operation with, and provide direct support to, the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) and its secretariat in Strasbourg;
 - 3.6. establish direct co-operation with the European Commission with regard to its work on a European Union strategy for the rights of the child and seek to extend this work to all Council of Europe member states;
 - 3.7. co-operate with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children, and co-ordinate regional European action in this field more closely;
 - 3.8. launch, through their competent ministries, national action plans against violence in the new media, if possible in co-operation with child protection agencies and organisations as well as media and Internet companies.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 4 November 2010.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Flego, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1.1. My mandate and the preparation of the report

1. On 30 April 2009, I tabled with colleagues a motion for a recommendation on education against violence at school ([Doc. 11889](#)), which was referred to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education for report. I was subsequently appointed rapporteur by the committee on 25 June 2009.
2. On 14 October 2009, I contacted all the education ministers in Europe asking them to provide me with relevant information about the experience of their countries and with answers to four basic questions:
 - forms of violence at school which had been identified as a problem;
 - policies which had been developed for dealing with violence at school;
 - how the issue of human violence was approached in school curricula and subjects taught at school;
 - measures for dealing with violence at school that they would recommend.
3. Twenty-eight countries⁴ replied to the questionnaire and I am thankful to them for their contributions. These replies are available on the Council of Europe's website.⁵ Their number and content confirm the importance of this subject as well as the need for closer co-operation in Europe.
4. On 8 December 2009, in Paris, the committee held an exchange of views on this subject with Mrs Linda King, representative from UNESCO, and Mr Wijayananda Jayaweera, Director of the Communication Development Division at UNESCO.
5. On 25 January 2010, the committee was informed by Mrs Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, about the Council of Europe's "Building a Europe for and with children" programme and the specific action it is taking to combat all forms of violence against children, including violence in the educational setting.
6. The European Commission organised in Brussels on 25 February 2010 an expert consultation meeting on violence in schools, including bullying and cyber-bullying, in the context of its work towards an EU strategy on the Rights of the Child. I participated as a speaker in this meeting.
7. Finally, the committee organised a hearing in Paris on 10 March 2010 with the participation of Dr Dan Olweus, Professor of Psychology at the University of Bergen (Norway); Mr Hugues Feltesse, Chief Executive at the Office of the French Ombudsperson for Children in Paris, on behalf of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC); and Mr George Fotinos, Member of the French Committee for UNICEF in Paris.
8. I wish to express my gratitude to all those who have so actively contributed to the preparation of this report.

1.2. Aim of the report

9. School violence has become, and must be regarded as, one of the main issues concerning the protection of children's rights.
10. European media report occasionally on serious acts of violence among pupils, acts of hostility and aggressions by pupils against teachers as well as teachers' violence against pupils. It is mainly extreme cases of physical violence – such as assaults with weapons or sexual abuses – that attract public attention on this issue. However, such incidents are very rare and not representative of the problem of school violence, which is much greater in extent and mainly concerns "ordinary" situations. The phenomenon exists in all European countries and affects the majority of children: it is estimated that more than 60% of pupils are subjected to bullying and violence at school.⁶

4. Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and United Kingdom.

5. www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/violence/Flegoreport-violenceatschool.pdf.

6. Gittins C. (ed.), *Violence reduction in schools – How to make a difference*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2006.

11. Pupils' problem behaviour is a cause for increasing concern as it is becoming commonplace and more and more brutal and being seen in ever younger children. Adults are often unaware of, or underestimate, intimidation and bullying among schoolchildren. Furthermore, cases of "inappropriate conduct" among teachers and even corporal punishment have been reported in some European countries.

12. Violence, whatever its form, has a considerable effect on the school environment. Children's success and emotional health are directly linked to the school climate and the quality of relations with teachers and other pupils. In addition, acts of violence provoke frustration, fear and generate a feeling of insecurity.

13. Longstanding efforts have, however, been made both at international and European level to combat violence against children and young people, including violence at school.

14. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the harmonious and safe development of each child and its Article 19 explicitly relates to protecting children against violence. It requires states parties to take "all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement". A child's right to education is also enshrined in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), which emphasises equal opportunities in access to and the quality of education and stresses the importance of a non-violent learning environment. More recently, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) linked the right to a quality education with the right to a healthy and safe school environment.

15. The Council of Europe has always taken an interest in matters associated with the protection of children's rights. In its case law, the European Court of Human Rights has demonstrated its commitment to the effective protection of children's rights, especially by stating that corporal punishment – both at school and within the family – violates the European Convention on Human Rights. The revised European Social Charter (1996), in its Article 17, requires states to protect children and young persons against violence in general. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly have adopted a range of recommendations on recognising and promoting children's rights.

16. In 2006, the Council of Europe launched a transversal programme entitled "Building a Europe for and with children" in order to ensure a holistic approach to the protection of children's rights in all the Organisation's policies. This programme is being carried out by means of three-year plans (the most recent was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2008) covering the areas of social, legal, educational and health affairs and its aim is to help various players to establish strategies for combating violence against children. The project's priorities include, amongst others, combating corporal punishment and school and internet violence.⁷

17. The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) plays an important role in the protection of children's rights. Through its members, it has developed tools for combating violence at school.

18. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has developed policy guidelines through its General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.

19. Notwithstanding the efforts made, the problem of violence at school, and in society in general, still needs a solution. The present report is therefore intended to provide a better understanding of the extent and complexity of this problem and take stock of policies and programmes developed at national level to address it, in order to identify ways to deal with it effectively.

7. Speech by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at the conference "Building a Europe for and with children: Towards a strategy for the years 2009-2011", 8-10 September 2008.

2. Violence at school: the extent and complexity of the problem

2.1. Forms of violence and bullying

20. Violence is part of human relations. It may be direct and physical, but it may also take on various psychological forms. Given the many different forms of school violence and the various players involved, as well as the big differences between national perceptions of the phenomenon, the term “violence” needs to be defined as broadly as possible.

21. From the point of view of the seriousness of acts of violence, the term “violent” could be considered to refer not only to aggressive behaviour involving the use of force, but also to simple threats, verbal attacks or indirect pressure on a person by means of rumours, social exclusion, cyber mockery, etc. Some countries, such as France and Belgium, include impolite or uncivil acts or remarks (*incivilités*),⁸ as well as situations involving abuses of power or institutional violence. As far as its purpose is concerned, violence may be self-destructive (consumption of alcohol and drugs) or be directed at an individual (pupil or teacher), a group (racist, sexist or gang violence) or at property or an institution (theft, vandalism).⁹

22. An analysis of the data provided by European countries shows that verbal and psychological violence is more common than physical assaults, while material damage is in third place. Verbal assaults are particularly widespread (they dominate in France, Germany, Cyprus and Estonia, for example) and target both children and adults. In several countries, psychological violence is directly associated with bullying.

23. Harassment, bullying and persecution among children is a phenomenon specific to schools, and bullying is recognised as one of the major factors that have an adverse effect on children’s mental health.

24. Bullying may be defined as a situation in which a child is repeatedly exposed to aggressive behaviour by one or more pupils over a long period of time. This behaviour is always characterised by a power imbalance between the victim and the aggressor (dominant/dominated relationship) and by the proactive nature of the aggression.

25. Bullying is a complex phenomenon that comprises all forms of violent behaviour, but it is mainly its psychological aspects and indirect aggression that set it apart and make it hard to detect: indirect physical violence (grimaces, obscene gestures, damage to personal property), direct verbal bullying (comments, mockery, teasing and hurtful nicknames, malicious letters/e-mails) and indirect verbal bullying (rumours, lies, posting photographs and comments on the Internet), social exclusion, extortion of money, etc.

26. A large body of research shows the extent and impact of this form of school violence. According to an international HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children) study carried out in 2008 in 18 Council of Europe member states, one in five adolescent boys between 11 and 15 years of age had been a victim of bullying, with the rate exceeding 40% in four European states.¹⁰ There are considerable national differences (less than 10% in Sweden and over 40% in Lithuania) and even local differences; according to H. Feltesse, this phenomenon affects 50% of pupils in some schools.¹¹

27. School bullying causes long-term psychological disorders, both among the victims and the aggressors. The victims of bullying have difficulty in adapting socially and emotionally and in making friends. Children often refuse to go to school and become anxious, depressive and incapable of learning. It has been shown that a considerable proportion of victims of bullying suffer from depression, a lack of self-confidence and suicidal urges.¹² The perpetrators of bullying at primary schools may go on to practise more significant forms of bullying at the end of their school life and serious acts of violence in adulthood.¹³ Finally, the economic and social costs of bullying are not insignificant. According to a recent study, half of 160 young adults (with an average age of 35) who had consulted a psychiatrist for the first time had been victims of school bullying.¹⁴

8. Smith P. (ed.), *Violence in schools: The response in Europe*, London, 2003.

9. “A dynamic social policy for children and adolescents in towns and cities”, Assembly report of 10 September 2001, (Doc. 9192).

10. Craig W. et al., “A cross-national profile of bullying and victimization among adolescents in 40 countries”, *International Journal of Public Health*, 2009.

11. Committee on Culture, Science and Education, exchange of views with experts on “Education against violence at school”, Paris, 10 March 2010.

12. Olweus D. and Limber S., “The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Implementation and evaluation over two decades”, *The International Handbook of School Bullying*, Routledge, New York, 2010.

13. Freeman J. et al., “The relationship of schools to emotional health and bullying”, *International Journal of Public Health*, 2009.

14. D. Olweus and S. Limber, op. cit.

2.2. Factors that may generate violent behaviour

2.2.1. Family

28. Despite the changes in the modern world, it is parents who play the key role in a child's education. The family environment can foster personal development, but it can also lead to problematic behaviour. If a child is exposed in its family to strong or even authoritarian paternalism and interpersonal tensions or is even subjected to corporal punishment, the chances are that he or she will be intolerant and violent at school. Public condemnation of domestic violence is a very slow process, even in Europe. To date, 22 Council of Europe member states have explicitly prohibited all corporal punishment against children in all settings.¹⁵

29. Rapid economic and social change, especially the deterioration in poor families' living conditions and the change in the traditional family structure, have had adverse repercussions on the formative role of parents. Violent families often belong to the economically and socio-culturally most disadvantaged groups. Apart from poverty and deprivation, experts include among the factors contributing to school violence arguments between parents and parental separation, a lack of supervision and the absence of one or both parents for work-related reasons.¹⁶ Parenting is perhaps the only job not to be taught, so it is crucial to provide help for families in difficulty or whose children exhibit violent behaviour. Generally, intensifying the dialogue with parents and improving communication between the school and the family would help to reduce school violence.

2.2.2. School

30. Education, another key aspect of the child's development, is both an objective and a means to achieve it. The school must not only ensure knowledge transmission but it also has the task of improving the pupils' state of health and guaranteeing their balanced development, especially by promoting such values as respect for others and cultural diversity.¹⁷

31. It is only possible to carry out these two functions in a "positive atmosphere" that encourages non-violent attitudes among pupils as well as between teachers and pupils. This climate depends in particular on the school's internal organisation, the children's involvement in school and extracurricular activities, mutual trust between teachers and pupils and the example set by school staff. However, the reality is often different.

32. First of all, corporal punishment is still prevalent and makes it impossible to instil respect for human rights into children. The "survival" of such practices can be put down to the inviolability of the private sphere of the classroom and the fact that pupils keep silent about what has happened.¹⁸ On the other hand, as society and education methods become more democratic, teachers have less control over children, so that traditional disciplinary measures prove ineffective in dealing with the violent behaviour of pupils, who are more aggressive today both towards other pupils and adults. Moreover, school staff seriously lack experience in conflict prevention and management and are often at a loss when it comes to dealing with aggressive behaviour.

33. The lack of resources in schools is one of the main problems. This is first of all reflected in the reduction in the number of teachers, which has resulted in large classes and therefore limits the possibility of "human" contacts between pupils and teachers. The lack of resources is also reflected in the quality of the training of school staff and, consequently, the quality of the teaching. Finally, insufficient funding is an obstacle to improving a school's facilities and educational environment, which would be more conducive to study and play.¹⁹

34. The poor organisation of the educational process is liable to create considerable physical and emotional constraints, causing stress and, ultimately, violent behaviour. The Assembly's 2005 report on balanced development in school includes among stress factors the organisation of teaching incompatible with pupils' biorhythms and inadequate teaching methods that are out of phase with the children's age and stage of development.²⁰

15. "Child victims: stamping out all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse", Assembly report of 21 December 2006 ([Doc. 11118](#))

16. "Parents' and teachers' responsibilities in children's education", Assembly report of 22 December 2000 ([Doc. 8915](#)).

17. "Education for balanced development in school", Assembly report of 20 December 2005 ([Doc.10767](#)).

18. "Stopping Violence in Schools: What Works?", expert meeting report, UNESCO, Paris, 27-29 June 2007.

19. "Parents' and teachers' responsibilities", op. cit.

20. "Education for balanced development in school", op. cit.

35. In addition, schools based on an authoritarian and undemocratic model aimed at controlling pupils rather than fostering their critical awareness become a hostile environment that discourages pupil participation.²¹ Among the other aspects of school life that contribute to the development of violence and bullying are a climate of competition and rivalry, a lack of pupil mentoring and insufficient supervision.

2.2.3. Media

36. Information technologies present a new challenge to combating school violence. Since their inception, the traditional media have reflected violence in all its forms, and their influence in this area is the subject of an ongoing debate. Today, this impact has increased with the emergence of the electronic media. The internet has permitted the unprecedented development of means of communication and sharing information and its psychological influence is commensurate with its extensive use by children. On the other hand, positive informal education through non-violent media may also produce positive effects.

37. Video games often convey images of violence and, in particular, bring about inordinate self-awareness and a misperception of others and human physical abilities. Such cognitive and emotional changes could result in it almost becoming standard behaviour to resort to violence to solve a problem.

38. Finally, the new means of communication and socialisation provided by the internet and mobile telephony have been employed by young people as instruments of cyber-bullying.

39. It is therefore very important to pay special attention to the influence of the media and to content potentially harmful to children. On the other hand, the media, especially television, can make a considerable contribution to the prevention of school violence by raising public awareness of this issue.

3. Combating school violence

3.1. National policies and programmes

40. Countries' replies to the questionnaire sent by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education to the member states' ministers of education include valuable information on forms of violence identified in schools, on policies introduced to combat violence, on ways of dealing with the problem of violence in school curricula and, finally, on the measures to be considered.

41. As far as the definition of violence is concerned, the vast majority of countries have identified its main forms (physical, verbal, psychological). Some states, such as Cyprus, have presented a fairly detailed analysis of the structure of violent behaviour. In a number of countries, the phenomenon of bullying has not yet been identified, while in others the emphasis is mainly placed on harassment among pupils. A minority of states raised the question of the role of the new technologies in violent behaviour, such as the identification of cases of cyber-bullying (Austria, Estonia, Germany, Luxembourg) or the management of internet content (for example, checking the presence of internet filters in Latvian schools).

42. Most countries have introduced programmes specifically devoted to the subject of school violence ("School Free of Violence" in Bulgaria, 2009; "Safe school 2009-2011" in Estonia, etc.) or have incorporated a programme within a broader framework, such as policies for the long-term promotion of child health (Cyprus). The measures favour a complex approach that musters the resources of several ministries (education, justice, social affairs, health), combining security and educational approaches and acting on different levels (national and local).

43. Clearly there are still states where the problem of school violence is managed solely from the security and deterrence point of view. The ombudspersons of some European countries have reported increasing recourse to judicial proceedings and, in general, an increasingly criminal-law approach to the problem. In France, for example, there is a tendency to describe acts of school violence as lesser indictable offences. Child advocates in Greece report that the school administration only reacts in cases of serious incidents and that its intervention is limited to punishing the perpetrators.²²

21. "Stopping Violence in Schools", UNESCO, op. cit.

22. "Stopping Violence in Schools", UNESCO, op. cit.

44. As far as school curricula are concerned, apart from the civics courses provided in several countries, the subject of violence is dealt with by means of a multi-disciplinary approach: as part of language, history, philosophy courses, etc. Some countries recognise the inadequacy of the teaching of civic skills in the curriculum.

45. There is evidence that in the absence of an appropriate response, bullying is likely to increase. According to the Bulgarian authorities, for example, the number of victims of school bullying in the country rose from 17% to 23% between 2002 and 2007. On the other hand, the exceptionally low rate of bullying and victimisation in Scandinavian schools is said to be due to the existence of national policies on this subject.²³

46. In 2009, researchers in Cambridge analysed more than 500 reports on various anti-bullying programmes. This meta-analysis revealed the effectiveness of these programmes in reducing bullying and victimisation (by 20-23%).²⁴

47. The research also concluded that programmes based on the Dan Olweus method (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, or OBPP) are highly effective.²⁵ This is confirmed by the Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, which has included the OBPP among the world's most effective programmes.

48. The OBPP was introduced by the Norwegian Government in the country's schools in the early 1980s. In addition to reducing the latent and manifest problems of bullying, it aims to improve the interpersonal relations between children in general. By restructuring the pupils' social environment, it eliminates the conditions that contribute to bullying and cultivates a sense of community among everyone involved in the life of the school. The programme is based on the central role played by the teacher and tackles the problem of bullying on three levels: the school, the classroom and the individual.

49. According to Olweus, the behaviour of the adults in schools must be guided by four principles:

- adopting a warm and positive attitude and showing an interest and becoming involved in the pupils' lives;
- setting firm limits to intolerable behaviour;
- using non-violent and non-hostile disciplinary measures when rules are breached;
- playing an authoritative and example-setting role.²⁶

50. Several assessments of the OBPP have shown its effectiveness and the sustainability of the results. A study carried out in 1997-98 showed that in one year bullying went down by 23% and the number of victims by 36%, whereas bullying in schools not involved in the project increased by 4%. Over a period of two years (2001-2003), the number of victims fell by approximately 33% and the number of aggressors by 44%. Finally, according to a study carried out in Oslo between 2001 and 2006, the implementation of the programme over a five-year period brought the number of victims of bullying down by 40% and the number of aggressors by 50%. These results show that the OBPP has a lasting impact and helps change school "culture" by strengthening schools' ability to deal with bullying on a permanent basis.

51. An approach diametrically opposed to the Olweus philosophy and method is the one involving zero tolerance policies widely implemented in the United States since the 1990s. It is based on deterrence and consists in severe and punitive sanctions (the suspension or even exclusion of pupils) for minor offences. However, doubt has been cast on the effectiveness of these policies as far as reducing school violence is concerned.²⁷ The UNESCO experts include among counterproductive prevention programmes those that are targeted at disciplinary problems and difficult pupils and employ methods based on fear.

23. Craig W. et al., op. cit.

24. Ttofi M. and Farrington D., "What works in preventing bullying: effective elements of anti-bullying programmes", *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, April 2009.

25. Among the other successful projects not based on the Olweus method, mention might be made of the anti-bullying programmes in Finland (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen and Voerten, 2005) and Greece (Andreou et al, 2007) as well as the Kia Kaha (Raskauskas, 2007), KiVa (Salmivalli, Karna and Poskiparta, 2007) and Respect (Ertesvag and Vaaland, 2009) programmes.

26. D. Olweus and S. Limber, op. cit.

27. *Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations*, American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008.

3.2. Good practices and lessons learnt

52. The general recommendation would be to tackle the problem of school violence using a holistic approach, that is to say involving all players at all levels and employing all available means. Experts stress the need to focus on long-term proactive measures.

53. According to the study by M. Ttofi and D. Farrington,²⁸ the key elements for reducing bullying are:

- educating teachers and parents;
- working with aggressors and their victims (case work usually done by psychologists in co-operation with teachers);
- collaborative work between pupils (mediation, mentoring);
- better supervision of playgrounds (especially with the identification of bullying “hotspots” and “peak times”);
- classroom management (techniques for detecting and combating bullying);
- disciplinary methods;
- school conferences (raising pupils’ awareness of the phenomenon and of the extent of bullying at their school);
- classroom codes of conduct (drawn up by the pupils together with their teachers, often displayed for all to read);
- the official anti-bullying policy in each school;
- support materials (in the context of the basic curriculum or new courses).

54. The exchange of views held by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education with experts in school bullying pointed to a number of specific elements that can help improve anti-bullying measures.

55. A clear definition of acts of violence is a necessary pre-condition, especially in order to distinguish bullying from other forms of violent behaviour and put it on the agenda in countries where school bullying is not recognised as such. It is also crucial that the harmful effects of bullying are recognised. School staff are reluctant to admit the existence of bullying and to intervene, since – erroneously – harassment and violence among pupils in general are considered an integral part of children’s lives.

56. There needs to be better communication between pupils and teachers on the problems associated with bullying. A study carried out in Estonia in 2009 shows that children and adults have two different ways of looking at violence: while pupils judge its psychological dimension to be the most important, the teachers focus on physical assaults.

57. A strong consensus has been reached on the idea that resolving the issue of school violence requires the close co-operation of everyone involved in a child’s education, including the school, parents, local authorities, NGOs and the church.

58. The mechanisms for receiving complaints must be simplified and strengthened. According to the French Ombudsperson, pupils do not know whom to contact in order to talk about bullying. Denmark’s National Children’s Council stresses that pupils do not even have the right to complain about certain issues. It is therefore necessary to create procedures that enable complaints to be recorded centrally and formally communicated to the heads of the schools concerned.

59. Greater international co-operation on research on bullying and a more systematic review of national initiatives for the prevention of bullying are required in order to identify good practices. Moreover, a cost-benefit analysis of the various programmes will help persuade policymakers to approve their implementation.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

60. The vitality and future of a society depend on its young generation and, in particular, the conditions in which children grow up. The school environment is one of the key aspects of children’s lives, and the opportunity to study in a safe and healthy environment is crucial for their balanced development, personal

28. Ttofi M. and Farrington D., op. cit.

fulfilment and future as citizens. The quality of adult life depends to a significant extent on the quality of education. Bullying cannot be considered a natural practice of children, so the development of anti-bullying programmes is a necessary condition for a normal educational environment.

61. There are many different factors that influence school violence, the main ones being the family and the socio-economic environment in which the child grows up. The school environment itself may lead to violence, not only because of the stress it creates and the inequalities it reproduces, but because of the absence of dialogue between pupils and parents. Furthermore, the social environment in the broader sense (particularly the media and information technologies) exerts an undeniable influence on children's violent attitudes.

62. It is a difficult task to stamp out school violence, but measures are available that enable violent conduct to be prevented or minimised. However, schools would be unable to deal with this issue effectively on their own. Close co-operation between the various actors is essential.

63. In this respect, several successful projects enrolling the support of schools, parents and children in combating violence have already been carried out, and these initiatives could serve as good examples and be reproduced at the European level. In addition, the need to give priority to preventive measures, especially improving teachers' social skills, must be stressed.

64. On this basis, and building on the experience of different countries, a number of targeted actions could be envisaged to deal with violence at school:

Setting up continuing training programmes for teachers and school staff concerning the techniques for preventing and managing violent behaviour, and the creation of specialised assistance bodies:

- incorporating this training into teacher training programmes;
- creating programmes providing support for schools (such as the two-day "Bullying" and "Emotional Health" workshops and the five-day "Communication with adolescents" educational packages organised by the Cyprus Ministry of Education);
- establishing partnerships with NGOs specialising in training (such as the contract between the French Government and the association *Génération Médiateurs*);
- the introduction of "crisis intervention teams" to help resolve urgent and particularly serious cases (like the Committee of Direct Intervention in Cyprus).

Ensuring that a "peace education" component is part of the curriculum, especially:

- introducing interdisciplinary teaching not only of children's rights but also of their obligations;
- placing greater emphasis on the promotion of diversity and on the enrichment it provides;
- using humanities and social science classes to combat violence and its consequences.

Improving the school climate and pupils well-being:

- by introducing specialised programmes (European Network of Health Promoting Schools, Priority Education Zones);
- by funding projects for the refurbishment of school premises (playground revitalisation, turning classrooms into leisure areas);
- by developing extracurricular activities.

Involving children as agents for the prevention and reporting of violence:

- in the devising of policies: holding regular consultations with children (such as the Children's and Young People's Panel in Denmark and *Parole aux Jeunes* in France) and encouraging their participation in forums on the problem of school violence;
- in the operation of schools: school councils, mutual help groups, drawing up codes of conduct;
- raising children's awareness of the problems of abusive or dangerous behaviour from a very early age (such as under the Irish Stay Safe programme carried out in primary schools).

Improving the quantitative and qualitative monitoring of schools:

- remedying the lack of official statistics or their omission by schools (Cypriot project for a school violence monitoring centre);

- establishing criteria for assessing schools and teacher-training programmes in terms of their effectiveness in the prevention of violence;
- carrying out national surveys identifying good practices and promoting their dissemination (such as the Hungarian manual *A pocket book about violence in school*);
- increasing the authority of or encouraging the setting up of children's ombudspersons, especially with regard to their independence and monitoring powers.

Strengthening the links between the school, the family and the community:

- by means of parenthood support schemes (such as the French initiatives *Ouvrir l'école aux parents pour faciliter l'intégration* [Opening up the school to parents to facilitate integration] and *Réseaux d'écoute, d'aide et d'accompagnement des parents* [Networks for listening to, assisting and mentoring parents]), and setting up parent-teacher advisory committees;
- by establishing partnerships between schools and companies and setting up joint extracurricular and sports programmes.

Organising regular campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of school violence.

Appendix – List of background documents

Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, United Nations General Assembly, 2010 (A/65/262), www.crin.org/docs/2010_SRSG_Report_to_the_GA.pdf

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Stopping Violence in Schools: A Guide for Teachers, UNESCO, 2009 (ED.2009/WS/43), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001841/184162e.pdf>

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Gittins C., *Violence Reduction in Schools – How to Make a Difference*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2006 (ISBN 978-92-871-5870-3), www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/pdf/ViolenceHandbook_en.pdf

Violence in schools – A challenge for the local community, Council of Europe Publishing, 2004 (ISBN 978-92-871-5326-5)