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Education against violence at school

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 1965 (2011)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has attentively examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1965 (2011) on "Education against violence at school". Like the Assembly, it considers that violence at school is a breach of children's rights. The educational function of schools is only credible when they offer positive models of behaviour.

2. In this connection, it wishes to reiterate the Council of Europe Policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence, set out in its Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10, which call on the member States to take "appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures […] to prohibit all violence against children at all times and in all settings and to render protection to all children within the state's jurisdiction".

3. Many aspects of the Assembly's recommendation are taken into account in the Council of Europe's activities. As advocated by the Parliamentary Assembly in paragraph 3.4 of its recommendation, the Steering Committee for Education (CDED) has begun work on implementing the "Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education" (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7), one of whose key objectives is to promote democratic culture and practices in the school environment.

4. The theme of violence in schools has also been the focus of several teacher training seminars run in recent years within the framework of the Pestalozzi Programme for the training of education professionals. Also under that programme, in 2011, the CDED launched an initiative to devise a European teacher training module in Education for the prevention of violence in schools, geared to making the school environment a safe space for learners where everyone can live and work, learn and play without fear.

5. The Committee of Ministers also notes the importance of youth work and non-formal education in addressing questions related to the prevention of violence, including at school. The Council of Europe's youth sector pays particular attention to the role young people can play in violence prevention, notably through its work on human rights education for and with children and young people. Regarding, in particular, paragraph 3.3 of the recommendation concerning action in conflict or post-conflict areas, the Committee of Ministers draws the Assembly's attention to the "Youth Peace Ambassadors" project which promotes and supports the role of young people in peace-building activities that contribute to living together in dignity and dialogue.

6. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers informs the Assembly that a high-level expert meeting "Tackling violence in schools" took place in Oslo in June 2011. This event was organised by the Council of Europe Programme "Building a Europe for and with children" in co-operation with the Norwegian Government and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The participants formulated a number of recommendations for improving action against violence in schools, such as implementing a holistic, proactive and multiprofessional approach, investing in human rights and democratic citizenship training, including enhancing skills in the Internet environment, child-friendly reporting, complaint and monitoring mechanisms, as well as opting for an approach based on open dialogue, mutual trust and participation.

1. Adopted at the 1130th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (11 January 2012).

7. The Programme “Building a Europe for and with children” also ran a joint project of the Council of Europe, UNICEF and the Council of Europe Development Bank between April 2009 and December 2010 in Georgia on the theme of “Making schools a safe environment for all children”. This initiative was well received by the participants and might, where applicable, serve as a basis for further co-operation programmes on preventing violence in schools.

8. Bearing in mind that sexual violence is also a form of violence that may occur in the school setting, the Committee of Ministers recalls the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, which calls on member States to “ensure that children, during primary and secondary education, receive information on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (…)” and that “this information, provided in collaboration with parents, where appropriate, shall be given within a more general context of information of sexuality”. It further recalls the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE Campaign to stop sexual violence against children, which promotes prevention and protection from all forms of sexual violence in society, including educational institutions.

9. Finally, where the prospects for future action are concerned, the Committee of Ministers will bear in mind the Assembly’s recommendations when examining the draft Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child for 2012-2015, drawn up in consultation with members of the Platform on Children’s Rights, international partners (EU, UNICEF, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children) and non-governmental organisations with an interest in this field. It also notes the proposals for the theme of the next session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Education, which it will consider in due course in accordance with the procedure governing those conferences.