

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

Recommendation 135 (2003)¹ on local partnerships for preventing and combating violence at school

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Local Authorities,

1. Having regard to:

a. the work of the Conference “Local Partnerships for Preventing and Combating Violence at School”, held in Strasbourg from 2 to 4 December 2002 under the auspices of Integrated Project 2 “Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”, organised jointly by the CLRAE, the Directorate of Youth and Sport and the Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education;

b. the final declaration adopted at the end of the conference;

c. the compendium of case studies presented at the conference by representatives of ministries of education, local authorities and schools from twenty-three European countries;

2. Recalling:

a. the European Urban Charter;

b. Recommendation 17 (1996) of the CLRAE on responsibilities and initiatives of cities in respect of education;

c. Recommendation 59 (1999) of the CLRAE on Europe 2000 youth participation: the role of young people as citizens;

d. Resolution 99 (2000) of the CLRAE on crime and urban insecurity in Europe: the role of local authorities;

e. Resolution 116 (2001) of the CLRAE concerning the manual on local authorities and urban crime prevention;

f. Recommendation (2002) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education for democratic citizenship;

3. Welcoming the fact that this conference, organised under the auspices of the Secretary General’s 2002-2003 Integrated Project, offered a meeting point for persons from a wide range of backgrounds, including ministries of education and youth, local and regional elected representatives, representatives of youth movements, NGOs, social workers, academics and police representatives;

4. Notes:

a. an increase in violence throughout Europe, from which schools are not exempt;

b. a number of particularly tragic examples of school violence in various European countries but above all a significant increase in less serious but repeated, or even everyday, forms of violence;

c. the existence of a spectrum of violent behaviour ranging from harassment to verbal abuse, damage to equipment and buildings and physical aggression, not to mention racist acts and violence against girls;

d. a tendency for violence at school to start at an increasingly early age, which means that even the youngest pupils are concerned;

e. a marked concern about the problem of school violence in every European country, sometimes with a particular regional context, as in South-eastern Europe;

5. Considers that the problem of school violence cannot be dissociated from urban insecurity issues as a whole, since the perpetrators do not confine their activities to schools;

6. Is concerned that the effects of school violence on society include:

a. a deterioration in the image of schools as perceived by pupils and parents, and even teaching staff;

b. a deterioration in teaching conditions that may lead to a higher incidence of school failure;

c. a trivialisation of violence, which is likely to be repeated outside the school setting and continue into adult life;

d. a likely increase in the number of young persons finding it difficult to integrate into society on account of their behaviour or their low school achievement;

7. Therefore considers that school violence has an enormous social cost, and that greater awareness and the mobilisation of all sections of the community are thus required;

8. Is convinced that any policy for combating or preventing violence must be based on the following fundamental principles:

a. preventing school violence is a key aspect of education for democratic citizenship, components of which include tolerance, intercultural relations, equality between the sexes, human rights and the peaceful settlement of disputes;

b. priority must be given to protecting victims and helping those who actually suffer violence;

c. the policies introduced must strike a balance between preventive and reactive measures and have a long-term focus;

d. young persons must be acknowledged as being those most concerned and as key partners in any action in this field;

e. any act of violence should be dealt with promptly in a measured manner proportionate to the seriousness of the offence;

f. dialogue is the most important way of defusing potential violence, and enables pupils as well as teachers to develop skills in negotiation, the peaceful settlement of disputes and peer group mediation;

9. Is convinced that, since many of the underlying causes of school violence stem from external factors, effective responses will only be possible if the various elements of the education system, parents and all those involved in the local community work in partnership;

10. Considers that such local partnerships must be flexible and not excessively cumbersome, with an emphasis on responsiveness and co-operation based on mutual confidence and regular dialogue;

11. Invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. transmit the final declaration of this conference to the Steering Committee for Education (CD-ED) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) of the Council of Europe with a view to it being circulated to their principal partners and taken into account in their activities;

b. transmit this final declaration to the Steering Committee on the Mass Media (CDMM) and to NGOs with Council of Europe consultative status, for their information, with a view to it being taken into account in their activities and circulated to their principal partners;

c. encourage in the framework of the Integrated Project 2, in co-operation with all sectors concerned within the Organisation:

i. the drawing up of a draft recommendation to member states taking into account the following items:

– the need to grant due priority to preventing and combating school violence and allocate sufficient resources for effective policies to deal with the problem;

– the need for national, regional and local ministries and departments concerned to co-operate in developing comprehensive policies for preventing and combating school violence as part of general efforts to counter urban insecurity and prevent violence in everyday life;

– the support which should be given to local initiatives in this area, particularly ones reflecting the spirit of the Strasbourg Conference final declaration;

– the setting-up of policies which include research, assessments of existing programmes, intensive exchanges of experience and the dissemination of good practices both nationally and internationally;

ii. the circulation of the final declaration of the conference to all those identified as potential partners in preventing and combating school violence;

iii. the exchange of experience and good practice throughout Europe, including the production of a guidebook and training programmes for those most concerned, such as teachers and youth leaders;

iv. due attention to the educational dimension in the development of networks of violence monitoring centres;

v. work on the media and violence, particularly in connection with material aimed at young persons;

vi. specific activities in this area in response to the needs of certain countries, particularly in South-eastern Europe.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 21 May 2003 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 22 May 2003 (see Document CPL (10) 6, draft recommendation presented by Mrs B. Fäldt, rapporteur).