



20 November 2015

DGII/EDU/CIT(2015) 22

Conference on Human Rights and Democracy in Action: Addressing Extremism and Radicalisation through Education

Project Showcase and Debate

Council of Europe
Strasbourg, France
24-25 September 2015

**Report by the General Rapporteur,
Katerina Toura, EDC/HRE Coordinator, Greece**



Introduction

The pace and scale of intolerance, radicalisation and violence in Europe today demands an urgent response, and education has an important role to play in this respect – states Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland in his report on the state of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe¹. In the context of the terror attacks of the beginning of 2015, education in general and citizenship and human rights in particular are drawing attention as an effective means of addressing violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism.

For many years, the Council of Europe intergovernmental programme has supported cooperation among its member states in this area; allowing the development of a broad range of valuable expertise, tools and materials in the field of citizenship, human rights and intercultural education and inspiring several joint programmes with the European Commission. The said conference was organised with the aim of discussing some examples of these programmes, and exploring how this work can be better supported, upscaled and developed in the years to come, in particular in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan to combat violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (2015-2017).

The conference also wished to bring together a broad range of actors, with a view to facilitate a multi-perspective and thought provoking debate, and to support the bridging of policy and practice in this area.

Background documents

1. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism - Action Plan (2015-2017)
- Recommendation on ensuring quality education. CM/Rec(2012)13
- Recommendation on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. CM/Rec(2010)7
- Recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. CM/Rec(2008)12

2. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:

- Resolution 2031 (2015) Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response
- Resolution 2011 (2014) Counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism

¹ State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe: a shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe. Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2015

Participants

About 120 participants attended the conference, including representatives of ministries of education, education professionals and civil society organisations including youth organisations (most of whom took part in various CoE and joint EU/CoE initiatives). A number of experts attended the conference via the network of EDC/HRE coordinators².

Aims and objectives

The conference aimed to highlight the relevance of the Council of Europe work in the field of education (often carried out in cooperation with the European Union) for addressing violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, and to explore how this work could be developed further, in particular in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism” (2015-2017), the Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies and the implementation of the Charter on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7).

Additionally, the conference show cased recent outcomes of the following initiatives:

1. EU/CoE Programme: Human Rights and Democracy in Action

The pilot projects implemented within the framework of the scheme have the overarching objective to empower educators and learners with knowledge, personal and social skills and understanding to appreciate and value diversity, build mutual respect for human dignity and shared values, encourage dialogue and promote non-violence in the resolution of problems and disputes.

2. EU/CoE Joint Programme: Regional Support for Inclusive Education in South East Europe

The project highlights the role of education and training in the promotion of social inclusion, tolerance, intercultural dialogue and non-discrimination.

3. Council of Europe initiative: No Hate Speech Movement

The campaign is against the expression of hate speech online in all its forms, including those that most affect young people, such as forms of cyber-bullying and cyber-hate. The campaign is based upon human rights education, youth participation and media literacy. It aims at reducing hate speech and at combatting racism and discrimination in their online expression.

² The co-ordinators for education for democratic citizenship and human rights (EDC/HRE coordinators) are officially appointed contact persons whose main tasks are to ensure that Council of Europe information on this topic is disseminated in the member states and to keep international partners (CoE, network of coordinators, other international organisations when appropriate) informed of EDC/HRE developments in their own countries.

Analytical summary of the conference discussions

The Conference on Addressing Radicalisation and Extremism through Education brought together a broad mix of interesting people from different countries, of different backgrounds and with expertise in several fields, which generated stimulating and thought-provoking debate on the issues under discussion.

In this very timely conference, the minds of the participants were indeed inspired by plenty of ideas, information, and interpretations, and it will probably take some time before we can sift through them all, and consolidate our own personal perspectives. Upon completion of the conference, there was plenty to reflect upon and, if this in any way enhances our individual and collective, practical contributions to meeting the challenges of the controversial issue under discussion, then this conference can truly be judged a success.

Numerous positions and points of view were outlined and many messages delivered, covering a wide spectrum of the issue as seen from the perspective of policy makers, academics, teachers, and representatives of institutions alike. Topical and important projects of the CoE were presented, which are one way or another interrelated and interwoven in their details. But what do they all share, what is their common denominator? It can be said to be what has also been the overriding message given by most speakers and participants, that more needs to be done, maybe not so much on a theoretical level, but on a practical one. More needs to be done in the direction of addressing radicalisation and extremism through education, and of course in the direction of reinforcing EDC/HRE. So for better and substantial effects action needs to be relevant and practical.

In reviewing some of the main points raised during discussions and sessions, it has generally been admitted that the challenge remains big. Despite considerable efforts so far, there has been an increase in radicalisation and extremism incidents, inside and outside schools. *“What is it then that makes young people leave their families and join extremist groups?”*, was a question posed all too often in the conference. It was very interestingly mentioned that although there is no single set of characteristics in research of people that move towards violent extremism, very common features tend to be displaced. So, in the film *“Extreme Dialogue”*, shown at the opening of the conference, the protagonist very clearly admitted *“I wanted people to feel what I felt”*. Intolerance towards minorities, towards those who are different, creates feelings of exclusion and resentment. It leads to marginalization. These persons suffer a lack of sense of belonging and identity. They are disillusioned with mainstream policy. They tend to be treated as second class citizens and their religion is often seen as weaker. These are barriers that need to be removed.

And, there was no disagreement during the sessions to the fact that in Europe, despite considerable efforts in the field of education, young people continue to be tempted by violent extremism ideologies. Learning to live together has not been given sufficient priority, while teaching and learning to live together is in cases seen

as luxury. Because it is quite a paradox that with all the mobility in Europe, levels of intolerance have not been reduced, whereas on the contrary monoculturalism-oriented and anti-diversity behaviours, and intense hate speech, come to fore in different instances in schools, outside school, or online, all so often.

So, education is not absolved from responsibility. And as such, the crucial role of education was repeatedly emphasised in the conference discussions along the lines of ensuring equal opportunities in life, promoting values of democracy in action, and inclusive education in practice, whereby intercultural and interreligious dialogue holds a prominent place. But tools and competences are critical in supporting such processes. It seems it will require concerted efforts to see how further to develop these tools and upscale them in the years to come.

It was made very clear that if we want to avoid further divisions, destabilization and polarization in societies, then adequate priority needs to be given to building inclusive societies. Not just tolerant, but truly inclusive societies.

As such, it came through strongly in the discussions that children and young people, from a very early age, need to internalise democratic values and be taught how to interact with people from different walks of life. It is imperative that education be intercultural and interreligious not only in a transversal way of teaching EDC/HRE, not only by introducing relevant subjects, but by building a culture of inclusion and respect among all involved in its processes.

So, students, teachers, parents and the leadership in education, all need equally to gradually adhere to the values of democracy and human rights in practice and in action, if we are to see results in the direction of deradicalisation and of fighting extremism, hate speech and potential terrorism in our increasingly non homogeneous societies. But when it comes to teachers, several speakers were heard to express concerns as to whether teachers are really in a position to effectively work in this respect. Are teachers ready to effectively teach EDC/HRE, to promote critical thinking, to support inclusive education and to teach media and religious literacy; to inspire respect of difference? It remains a huge gamble to see how inclusive education can in practice incorporate respect for difference in an attentive way. And as was suggested extensively during the conference, it is equal access of all children to quality inclusive education, not access to education alone, which can have additional value to ensuring results in combatting radicalisation and extremism.

Inclusive quality education can cater for the marginalised and excluded students, in an open and safe school environment. It is crucial that children and young people have opportunities to express their views in a school where, with agreed ground rules, it is safe to be “seen”, and to be “heard”, it is safe to be different. Such a school can provide a viable alternative to the “safe” invisibility of the internet. Because it is in a school like this that extremism and terrorism will potentially be deglamourised. Young people will be given alternative ways of engaging in non-violent activities to express their views on controversial issues, and even become able to identify hate speech, not only off line but also online.

Several speakers stressed that media and in particular the internet have played a determinant role not only in the spread of radicalisation, extremism and potential terrorism, but also to an increase in online hate speech.

Media literacy could contribute substantially to dealing with extremism and hate speech. Developing critical and analytical thinking is a competence that could be deemed essential for children and young people to survive in a digital world. They need to acquire skills to analyse messages and to recognise harmful behaviour. It was an opinion expressed by most speakers in the conference that young people need to be empowered by strengthening independent learning and thinking, by using education and training to encourage debate on religion in formal but also in non-formal settings.

But this brings us to another set of competences discussed in the framework of religious literacy. It was clearly stated that increasing 'religious literacy' for the whole population needs to be a priority by which the internal diversity of religions is acknowledged, and religious extremism is seen as marginal to particular religions.

It was also made clear that there is a distinction between religious nurture (fostering religious understanding within a tradition) and understanding religion(s), (something that all can engage in). It was concluded that there is a relation between the two, and that 'outward looking' people involved in nurture can assist/support understanding religions.

It was a clear message that many different competences are needed to deal effectively with diversity in societies; a full set of resources to be deployed in a particular set of circumstances. And what do these resources include? They include what has been referred to repeatedly during this conference: values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding.

But apart from students, to what extent have parents, teachers, or other actors in education acquired these competences? It was very importantly mentioned that the focus should not only be on whether young people are mature or ready enough to deal with controversial issues, but whether teachers or other actors in education, and parents as well, are ready to touch upon them, to reflect on their own prejudiced perceptions and attitudes, in order to become positive role models and work constructively in helping young people make the most of diversity, avoid hate speech and all in all have strong alternatives when dealing with polarised opinions, which might lead to violent radicalisation and extremism.

All in all, during the conference participants explored the issue of addressing radicalisation and extremism through education, shared information, and reached important conclusions (quoted hereafter) during the four workshops, of interest to policy makers and other stakeholders in education throughout Europe. The debates and conclusions of this conference constitute already considerable input to the consultation process. Moreover, the participants were committed to contribute - through their respective activities - towards joint efforts to make a real impact on the ground by bridging theory and practice.

Key conclusions

1. Europe needs to act together on issues such as addressing violent extremism and radicalisation, not only religious radicalisation but other forms as well.
2. The Council of Europe provides a unique pan-European forum for debate and a platform for cooperation which needs to be taken full advantage of.
3. The approaches, guidance and materials developed in the framework of the Council of Europe's and joint EU/CoE initiatives have strong potential for the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation.
4. These approaches, guidance and materials remain largely unknown to the key actors in the member states. They need to be made available in the member states' languages, broadly disseminated and promoted.
5. The Council of Europe should be a promoter of good practice, tools and pedagogical materials developed in the member states.
6. The Council of Europe's projects and initiatives, which play an important role in promoting intercultural values and in combating extremism and radicalisation through education, need to be further followed-up.
7. The Council of Europe's legal instruments need to be strengthened, possibly through a binding legal framework, which could be developed on the basis of the Charter on education for democratic citizenship and human rights.
8. There is a demand for a clearer consensus on the definition of key terminology in debated issues.
9. Projects and initiatives ought to aim not only at minority students but also at majority students inside schools, and among minority and majority youth at large.
10. Schools alone cannot address these challenges: cooperation with families and communities needs to be developed.
11. Teachers need to be further empowered in teaching controversial issues in the framework of quality inclusive education.
12. The development of a guide for assessment of teaching of/about religions was proposed.
13. The involvement and active participation of young people, also youth at risk, should be ensured when developing solutions to violent extremism and radicalisation.

14. It is essential to offer young people real opportunities for positive engagement and participation in the society, with a view to strengthening their sense of belonging and their defences against the influence of radical and extremist ideologies.

Follow up / Forthcoming events

The conclusions of this conference contribute to the preparation of the following events:

European Union

- Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe - Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights, Brussels, 1-2 October 2015
- European Education, Training and Youth Forum 2015 - Brussels, 19-20 October

Their conclusions will also be important in preparing a number of forthcoming events, including the following:

Council of Europe

- Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education – 25th Session - Competences for democratic culture: Follow up to the Council of Europe Action Plan to combat extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (Brussels, April 2016, subject to confirmation by the Committee of Ministers)

European Union

- A Union of shared values – the role of education and civil society: Jean Monnet Conference, Brussels, 9-10 November 2015

Appendix I – Programme

24 September 2015

09.00-10.30 Opening Session – Room 1

Chair: Mr Sjur Bergan, Director ad interim for Democratic Citizenship and Participation, Council of Europe

Film: Extreme Dialogue - Daniel GALLANT (8 minutes)

Welcome addresses (20 minutes)

- Ambassador Michèle Eisenbarth, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the Council of Europe, Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and Environment, Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
- Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe
- Ms Chiara Gariazzo, Director, Directorate General Education and Culture, European Commission

Round Table (1 hour): Violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism: root causes, key challenges, priorities for action and the role of education

With the participation of

- Ms Véronique Gasté, National Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research, France, France
- Ms Zubeda Limbada, Director, ConnectJustice
- Ms Vesna Marjanović, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Rapporteur on “Culture and democracy”
- Mr Bashy Quraishy, Secretary General of the European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion

10.30-11.00 Coffee Break – Hemicycle Lobby

11.00-13.00 Project Showcase and Debate - Part 1: Education Policy

11.00-12.00 Room 1

Preventing radicalisation through quality education for all

EU/CoE Joint Programme: Regional Support for Inclusive Education in South East Europe
Participating countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Kosovo³

Focus area: Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on ensuring quality education (CM/Rec(2012)13)

³ All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo

- Moderator: Ms Sarah Keating, Head, Unit for Regional & Bilateral Co-operation - South East Europe and Turkey

With the participation of:

- Ms Svetlana Jurko, Executive Director, Network of Education Policy Centers
- Ms Sabine Rohmann, Chair of the Education & Culture Committee of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and Bureau member of the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE)
- Mr Ognjen Spasovski, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Ss Cyril & Methodius University of Skopje

12.00-13.00 Room 1

Preventing the misuse of religions: how to teach about religions and non-religious convictions?

Council of Europe publication Signposts - Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education

Focus area: Recommendation from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12)

Moderator: Mr Villano Qiriazzi, Head of the Education Policy Division, Council of Europe

With the participation of:

- Mr Robert Jackson, University of Warwick, UK, and European Wergeland Centre, Oslo, Norway
- Mr Angelos Vallianatos, School Advisor for Religion Lesson at Ministry of Education of Greece

13.00-14.30 Lunch (self-organised, in the Council of Europe snack bar, canteen or restaurant)

14.30-18.00 Project Showcase and Debate – Session 2: Competences for Democratic Culture - Room 1

14.30-15.30 Room 1

Competences for democratic culture

Moderator: Mr Călin Rus, Director, Intercultural Institute of Timișoara, Romania

With the participation of:

- Mr Martyn Barrett, Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of Surrey, United Kingdom
- Mr Sjur Bergan, Director ad interim for Democratic Citizenship and Participation, Council of Europe
- Ms Claudia Lenz, Head of Research & Development, European Wergeland Centre

15.30-16.00 Coffee Break – Hemicycle Lobby

16.00-17.00 Room 1

Dealing with controversial issues at school: equipping teachers with relevant skills and methods and providing support and recognition

EU/CoE Programme: Human Rights and Democracy in Action

Participating countries: Cyprus, Ireland, Montenegro, Spain and the United Kingdom with the support of Albania, Austria, France and Sweden

Focus area: Article 9 of the Council of Europe Charter on citizenship and human rights education (Training)

Moderator: Mr Jan Pouwels, Director of the University of Arnhem and Nijmegen, The Netherlands

With the participation of:

- Mr Ted Huddleston, Citizenship Foundation, United Kingdom
- Ms Soula Ioannou, Health Education Advisor at Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus
- Ms Dijana Vukovic, Professor at the Teacher Training Department of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Montenegro

17.00-18.00 Room 1

Developing analytical and critical thinking competences towards online information

EU/CoE Programme: Human Rights and Democracy in Action

Participating countries: Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation

Focus area: Article 13 of the Council of Europe Charter on citizenship and human rights education (Skills for promoting social cohesion, valuing diversity and handling differences and conflict)

Moderator: Ms Yulia Pererva, Citizenship and Human Rights Education Unit, Council of Europe

With the participation of:

- Mr Anatolii Ermolin, Committee of Civil Initiatives, Russian Federation
- Mr Luka Gotsiridze, Student, Georgia / Mr Davit Bakuridze, Student, Georgia
- Ms Zivile Navikiene, Head of Science and Project Unit, St. Ignatius Loyola College, Lithuania
- Mr Vladimir Yanchuk, Dean of the faculty of professional development of specialists of education of the State educational institution "Academy of the postdiploma education", Belarus

25 September 2015

09.00 -10.00 Project Showcase and Debate – Session 2: Competences for Democratic Culture (continued) - Room 1

Combatting Hate Speech On-line

Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement

Focus area: Article 10 of the Council of Europe Charter on citizenship and human rights education (Role of non-governmental organisations, youth organisations and other stakeholders)

Moderator: Mr Sergio Belfor, Advisory Council on Youth

With the participation of:

- Mr Rui Gomes, Head of Education and Training Division of Youth Department, Council of Europe
- Ms Natalia Díaz Santín, Head of Area of Participation and Citizenship Spanish Institute for Youth (INJUVE), Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, Spain
- Mr Gubaz Koberidze, student and campaign activist, Georgia

10.00-10.30 Coffee Break – Hemicycle Lobby

10.30-12.00 Building on past experience to develop innovative solutions for addressing violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism - Working group sessions (4 parallel groups)

Rooms: 1, 11, 14 and 17 (please consult the workshops lists in the coffee break area)

Each group will discuss the following topics:

- Relevance of the CoE and EU education/youth projects to prevent radicalisation and extremism
- Strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities
- Dissemination, impact, sustainability and visibility of the outcomes
- Recommendations for future action

12.00-13.30 Lunch (self-organised, in the Council of Europe snack bar, canteen or restaurant)

13.30-15.00 Closing Session (1.5 hour) – Room 1

Chair: Ms Ana Perona, Executive Director, European Wergeland Centre

Feedback from the working group sessions (45 minutes)

Forthcoming events:

- **Competences for democratic culture:** Follow up to the Council of Europe Action Plan to combat extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism
Mr Villano Qiriazzi, Head of the Education Policy Division, Council of Europe (8 minutes)
- **A Union of shared values – the role of education and civil society:** Jean Monnet Conference
Brussels on 9-10 November 2015
Mr Ruard Wallis De Vries, Policy Officer European Commission (8 minutes)

Conference Conclusions

Ms Katerina Toura, Greece, the General Rapporteur (15 minutes)

Closing remarks

- Council of Europe: Mr Sjur Bergan, Director ad interim for Democratic Citizenship and Participation (10 minutes)
- European Union: Mr Jari Vilén, Ambassador, Head of the European Union Delegation to the Council of Europe (10 minutes)



Appendix II – List of Participants

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* All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo

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