



# **KULTUSMINISTER KONFERENZ**

## **Remembering our past for our future**

### **Recommendations for a culture of remembrance to form an object of historical and political education in schools**

(Resolution adopted by the KMK on 11 December 2014)

Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

Taubenstraße 10 · 10117 Berlin  
Postfach 11 03 42 · 10833 Berlin  
Tel.: 030 25418-499

Graurheindorfer Straße 157 · 53117 Bonn  
Postfach 22 40 · 53012 Bonn  
Tel.: 0228 501-0

## 1. Preliminary remarks

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the brief period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century thus far, people have fought and continue to fight successfully for freedom, human rights and democracy at various locations in the world. At the same time, disputes have arisen and still arise regarding the evaluation and designation of inhumanity in historical processes.

The year 2014 saw a large number of impetuses aimed at fostering remembrance and a “culture” of remembering the past as an essential objective of historical and political education. The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War in Europe, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the peaceful revolution in the German Democratic Republic and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the eastern expansion of the EU were all of particular significance in this regard.

The next few years will also afford many occasions to remember historical events and to reflect on the effects these exert down to the present day. Examples will include in 2015, which will mark 70 years since liberation from National Socialist tyranny and the establishment of the United Nations, the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation and the centenary of the October Revolution in 2017, the 80th anniversary of the National Socialist pogroms in November 2018, remembrance of the enactment of the Weimar Constitution in 2019 and, in 2019 and 2020, as well as of the attempts to create peace and a new world order at the Paris Peace Conference 100 years earlier. Such developments and historical caesuras influence societal, political and cultural reality until today.

Remembrance does not solely depend on the external occasion of a date to be commemorated. Memorial days, anniversaries and visits to places of remembrance offer a particular opportunity of elucidating to the younger generation the significance of the past for their own life and times. Responses to questions regarding causalities, continuities and discontinuities are indispensable, especially within this context. The aim of a common “culture of remembrance” in schools is to enable young people to describe and evaluate historical developments and to understand that they have the ability to shape and change our world with their own actions. For this reason, the present recommendations are directed at teaching staff, at those with management responsibility in education, in teacher-training, further training of teachers or extracurricular education, training and learning venues.

## 2. Objectives and general principles

A culture of remembrance is the result of complex interaction between many stakeholders, debates and traditions. Both for individuals and groups, remembrance forms the respective basis for self-reassurance and for action that is directed towards the future. The contents and nature of remembrance may change over the course of time and need to be continuously remodelled in accordance with the system of values governing human rights and based on the constitution.

The area of conflict that arises as a result of various possible interpretations of history places an equal focus on the acquisition of historical awareness, on knowledge, on empathy, on the development of a fundamental democratic attitude and on the promotion of judgement and competence to take action.

Remembrance and a culture of remembrance form part of historical and political education and are therefore also an object of school-based learning. Many schools integrate memorial days or visits to places of commemoration, memorial sites and museums into a long-term pedagogical concept of historical and political education. Numerous teaching subjects contain multiple points of reference and connection. Cooperation with non-school partners from memorial sites, museums and archives and with further stakeholders from within civil society expand the leeway and horizons of historical and political education in schools. The following basic principles provide initial guidance.

### **Individual and societal remembrance**

Every generation needs to adopt its own new approach to dealing with, classifying and assessing historical traditions and the traces of past events. Each generation readdresses the issue of how history can be described, rewritten, mystified, demystified or deconstructed. This applies even more given the fact that today's generations in Germany and in other countries exhibit a high degree of plurality.

Remembrance is a process that relates the past the present and the future in various social and cultural contexts. If nothing else, the reasons for present day conflicts and wars can also be derived from previous wars, the respective reasons and occasions for war, subsequent peace settlements and, in due course, new reasons for further armed conflicts. Those who remember ask themselves how past events affect the present and future and which possible alternative courses of action could have been taken in the past.

Dealing with reasons for remembrance and places of remembrance happens via such vehicles as narrative accounts, media, symbols and institutions. School is also one such institution. In addressing history, attention is directed

at both victims and perpetrators, at resistance and at those who instigate democratic renewal, at those who adapt and procrastinate and at those who go along with events and become involved without reflection.

This approach opens up an opportunity to investigate the question of individual and collective scope for action and imparts in equal measure empathy and respect vis-à-vis the victims and esteem for those who display civil courage and a spirit of resistance. It relates to the suffering caused to people by injustice, but also encompasses the role model function provided by those who resist such injustice in whatever a manner or in whatever circumstances and who have fought for the values of democracy, human rights and peace or continue to do so in the present age.

### **Culture-sensitive and multi-perspective remembrance**

The children and young people of today's multicultural society have varying experiences, understandings and evaluations of historical events and developments. Family remembrances from the generation of the parents and grandparents form part of this, as do specific memories of their own country from which they may have had to seek refuge in Germany as a result of war, breaches of human rights or experiences of discrimination.

The question arises how young people with a family biography in Germany, other European countries or countries outside Europe experience, understand and evaluate the figures, events and locations of German, European and global history including the context of exile.

For this reason, historical and political education needs to accord due consideration to the didactic principles of multi-perspectiveness and controversy, needs to understand history and the icons of history as a construct and increasingly needs to provide the skills to address and deal with different historical events, processes and patterns of interpretation. The focus must be on constant autonomous reflection on interpretations of history and on active participation in historical and societal controversies.

Young people learn about the suffering of political prisoners, refugees and displaced persons, about the violation of human rights in some countries and about genocide. These are represented by the names of places. Auschwitz, for example, symbolises the concentration and death camps of the National Socialists. There are also many other locations where crimes against humanity have taken place, such as Babi Yar, Leningrad, Bautzen, Katyn and Vorkuta. In more recent times, these have been joined by Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Darfur and Rwanda.

History offers a diverse range of reasons for historical and political education that uses culture-sensitive and multi-perspective remembrance as a vehicle for addressing the various traditions of freedom struggles, self-determination and democracy. Within this context, historical origins and the consequences of foreign rule, dictatorship and colonialism play an equally important role.

A form of reflective memory that is sensitive to other cultures and social systems also directs the attention to various forms of co-existence in a world where in some places walls or fences, hostility and armed conflicts still make it virtually impossible for people to live together.

### **Reflective memory, decision making and responsibility**

Remembrance is always fractured. A culture of remembrance also addresses the themes of non-remembrance, not wanting to remember and not being able to remember. People have constantly set one case of genocide off against another or sought to provide justification for genocide by using one example as a reason for the other. Displacements of one ethnic group are equated with the displacement of another. The degree of injustice in the Third Reich is compared with the level of injustice in the SED dictatorship in East Germany.

The consensus arrived at by the commission of enquiry set up by the German Lower House of Parliament to undertake a “reappraisal of the history and consequences of the SED dictatorship” is the correct one. Crimes committed under National Socialism cannot be modified by equating them with the crimes of socialist state dictatorships, and the criminal acts of socialist state dictatorships cannot be trivialised by making reference to the crimes of National Socialism.

One further perspective is narrating the possible abuse of memorial days and places of remembrance in the past. Examples here include “Sedan Day” celebrated under the Imperial German Empire and the cult surrounding 9 November, the day of Hitler’s attempted “putsch” in 1923.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel has pointed out how important it is to combine dealing with the past with the creation of a democratic and peaceful future: “It is wrong to speak of the past if you do not act in the future.” However, in a speech to mark a visit to the former Buchenwald concentration camp by US President Obama in 2009, he also questioned whether the world had learned anything with regard to the horror of this place: “Had the world learned, there would have been no Cambodia and no Rwanda and no Darfur and no Bosnia.”

Such questions illustrate that reflective memory requires a critical approach to history and with the ways in which historical policy and historical and political education is shaped. A moral imperative is not sufficient in itself. There is a constant productively useful or conflicting relationship between action and future orientation and a reflective and critical approach to history and the images of history. Within this framework, and especially in the light of the diverse range of different information which is also increasingly accessible digitally, historical and political education can assist with the acquisition of guidance knowledge and competence to take action in order to enable people to stand up for freedom, self-determination and democracy.

### **3. Cooperation with non-school partners**

Initial and specific encounters with the past may be facilitated via such vehicles as the media, commemoration days and places of remembrance. Regular cooperation with non-school partners fosters deep and effective learning. Commemoration sites, memorial sites, meeting centres, war cemeteries, museums, archives, foundations, historical associations and organisations and contemporary witnesses are all important partners for schools.

Pupils should be encouraged to act autonomously in researching topics and places of collective memory within their environment. This includes dealing in a critical manner with family stories which are passed on by young people's parents, perhaps also over two or three generations. These should be reflected upon on the basis of historical knowledge together with the distortions, understatements and exaggerations that have taken place over the course of time. The focus is also on developing places of memory that are perhaps invisible at first sight.

### **4. Educational administration or educational policy measures**

The stipulations of the federal states provide numerous starting points for remembrance and a culture of remembrance as the object of historical and political education. This applies to teaching and educational plans, to curricula, to the examination requirements of all education and training courses and to education and training of teaching staff and other education professionals working in schools.

The educational administration or educational policy of the federal states:

- takes account of a critical approach towards a culture of remembrance in teaching and educational plans, in examination requirements, in examination tasks and in education and training;
- encourages schools to develop profiles of remembrance in accordance with democracy, human rights and intercultural and trans-cultural understanding and in the form of further developing existing resolutions of the KMK;
- encourages schools firmly to establish historical and political education in 'school programmes' and to cooperate with extra-school institutions involved with a culture of remembrance and with places of memory and commemoration;
- encourages organisations within civil society to work together with schools;
- supports schools in the thematically related preparation and arrangement of trips to commemorative and memorial sites, meeting places, archives, cemeteries and other places of remembrance;
- takes account of contents and means of accessing a culture of remembrance in the authorisation of analogue and digital teaching and learning materials;
- encourages participation in international programmes and exchange projects;
- integrates results from academic research studies and the educational provision of foundations involved with the culture of remembrance into the further development of historical and political education;
- documents examples of good practice from schools for other schools and supports schools in the public presentation of their work.

## 5. Implementation in schools

Notwithstanding the special responsibility in teaching history as a subject, all subjects can offer starting points for dealing with the contents of a culture of remembrance. Both within and across subjects, schools can align themselves to the following paradigmatic thematic areas.

- Significance and evaluation of public holidays and memorial days in various countries and regions of the world as part of historical policy
- Change in evaluation and dealing with aspects of central events in world history
- Analysis and evaluation of historical links between places in Germany and other countries, e.g. from the colonial era where reminders are provided within the cityscape by road names

- Debating various forms of the disparagement of people in history and in the present via discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsism
- Developments along the route to freedom and democracy, for the overcoming of dictatorships, borders and walls, for the change of fundamental political attitudes and values, for the establishment of religious and ideological tolerance and for a culture of remembrance and commemoration related to these values
- Development of gender, culturally and socially sensitive access points to the culture of remembrance
- Assessment and evaluation of historical blame and individual responsibilities in different times and countries and under different governments and forms of government including present-day responsibility
- Assessment and evaluation of debates about values that connect peoples and human rights, the development of European cohesion and the “one world” philosophy
- Development and evolving change of real and imagined borders with regard to current conflicts
- Experience from and with voluntary or forced migration, flight and displacement in different world regions and at different times
- Long-term effects of historical developments in the relationship between people and ethnic groups
- Origin and effects of self-images and external images, for example with regard to selected biographies, including fictitious biographies, of victims of deportation, flight and displacement, of people who displayed resistance and of those who were guilty as perpetrators
- Significance of education in the imparting of attitudes to other people and countries, including the origins and overcoming of “group-related hostility”

Schools can realise historical and political education and a culture of remembrance in programme terms especially from the following points of view.

- Development of school profiles in respect of democracy, human rights, remembrance and firm establishment within the ‘school programme’
- Discussion of the selection of suitable topics relating to a culture of remembrance at professional, teacher and school conferences
- Continuing training courses at memorial sites and places of remembrance
- Selecting suitable teaching and learning materials

- Linking subject-related and cross-subject teaching as well as extracurricular projects
- Encouraging pupils to address historical and political contexts in the classroom, in projects or in their free time and to shape their role in our democracy
- Development of artistic and of digital and electronic access points to process remembrance
- Inclusion of the history of various European and non-European countries
- Establishment and nurturing of educational partnerships with memorial sites, museums, archives and other places of remembrance
- Dialogue with stakeholders in civil society involved in the culture of remembrance, such as foundations, churches and religious communities, development policy NGO's and victims' associations
- Class trips to places of remembrance also outside Germany
- Establishing and nurturing international and trans-national school partnerships and projects, including via digital media
- Participation in national competitions and networks

## 6. References

Supplementary reference is made to the following recommendations issued by the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK).

- Menschenrechtserziehung in der Schule (*Human rights education in schools*, KMK Resolution of 04.12.1980 as amended on 14.12.2000)
- Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung Geschichte (*Standardised examination requirements for the upper secondary school leaving certificate*, KMK Resolution of 01.12.1989 as amended on 10.02.2005) and Sozialkunde/Politik (*Social studies, politics*, KMK Resolution of 01.12.1989 as amended on 17.11.2005)
- Berücksichtigung der Arbeit des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. in den Schulen (*Consideration in schools of the work carried out by the German War Graves Commission*, KMK Resolution of 22.03.1968 as amended on 27.04.2006)

- Europabildung in der Schule (*European education in schools*, KMK Resolution of 08.06.78 as amended on 05.05.08)
- Stärkung der Demokratieerziehung (*Strengthening of democracy education*, KMK Resolution of 06.03.2009)
- Empfehlung zur Nutzung des 9. November als Projekttag zur Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert (*Recommendation on the use of 9 November as a project day to appraise German history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, KMK Resolution of 18.06.2009)
- Medienbildung in der Schule (*Media education in schools*, KMK Resolution of 08.03.2012)
- Empfehlung der Kultusministerkonferenz zur kulturellen Kinder- und Jugendbildung (*Recommendation of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on cultural education for children and young people*, KMK Resolution of 01.02.2007 as amended on 10.10.2013)
- Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule (*Intercultural education in schools*, KMK Resolution of 25.10.1996 as amended on 05.12.2013)
- Gemeinsame Erklärung des Zentralrats der Juden in Deutschland und der Kultusministerkonferenz zur Vermittlung jüdischer Geschichte, Religion und Kultur in der Schule (*Joint declaration of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on the Teaching of Jewish History, Religion and Culture in School*, Resolution of the Central Council of Jews in Germany dated September 1, 2016; Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs dated December 8, 2016)

(list as of October 2017)