



**KULTUSMINISTER
KONFERENZ**

**Democracy as objective, subject and practice
of historical and political education in schools**

(Resolution adopted by the KMK on 6 March 2009,
as amended on 11 October 2018)

1. Preliminary remark

The development of Germany into a free, democratic and unified social legal state is of great importance in our history. In Articles 1 to 19 of its Basic Law, Germany has committed itself to fundamental rights; in Art. 20 to democracy as its form of government, and in Art. 21 (2) and Art 79 (3) to safeguard its democracy. This would not have been possible without the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848/49 and the liberation movement preceding it, the Weimar Constitution of 1919, the free and democratic basic order recorded in the Basic Law in 1949 after the liberation from the tyranny of the Nazis, and the peaceful revolution in the GDR in 1989.

To this must be added Germany's active role in the European Union, the Council of Europe and the global community of the United Nations. In this context, Germany also signed conventions and made statements relating to human rights and, explicitly, to the rights of children, gender equality and inclusion.

The 20th century was the backdrop for spreading democracy and constitutionality in many countries and states, but also for unprecedented crimes against humanity and democracy. We know this: A constitutional democracy cannot be taken for granted. Again and again, it must be learnt, fought for, lived and defended.

Democracy needs staunch, committed democrats. A constitutional democracy must face the complexity of this world:

- It is fundamentally important to understand that it is not enough to invoke the will of a majority in order to legitimise democracy as a form of government. A commitment to human rights and human dignity, a separation of powers and a protection of minorities, as well as to the processes of a constitutional state is essential, even if these may at times appear long-winded and cumbersome.
- Exclusionary, inhuman and antidemocratic positions are a special challenge for schools. In addition, all revisionism of history must be counteracted, and simplified views of society must be actively exposed.
- The special tasks of schools also include strengthening social cohesion, the participation of all members of, and cooperation between different ethnicities and cultures, especially in an era of migration and other global interdependencies. This comprises encouraging an enlightened, conscious and sensitive treatment of diversity, standing up for partnership and solidarity in Europe and across the world, and promoting empathy, respect, regard and tolerance. Schools can, and should, be places where democracy is reflected and lived as a dynamic, constant organisational style – including in situations in which different democratic rights are at odds. One basic condition for ensuring the success of historical and political education in schools is to discuss diversity and ambiguity tolerance.

Digitization is a driver of social development, a connecting link and an opportunity for participation. However, it can also result in a restriction of privacy and self-determination, and of a free and democratic development through fake news, hate speech or social bots. As a result, digitization must go hand in hand with promoting critical media competence. This special responsibility of schools is due to the fact that they are the only social institution in which it is possible to reach all children and adolescents. Therefore, schools carry a high level of responsibility as places where democratic knowledge is transferred and at the same time democracy can be experienced. Schools must be places where democratic and human rights values and standards are lived and learnt, and where examples are set.

Therefore, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs has decided to update its recommendations on democracy and human rights, and to put them in context of further resolutions relating to historical and political education.

2. Objectives and general principles

Children and adolescents need a value system which can guide them. Schools are responsible for conveying a value system which corresponds to free and democratic fundamental and human rights. The fundamental rights in the Basic Law are not only defensive rights of citizens against state despotism. According to the jurisprudence of the German Federal Constitutional Court, the provisions of the Basic Law also embody an objective system of values. The most important such value in the Basic Law is human dignity. All humans are entitled to it by virtue of their humanity, and it is inviolable. This means that schools are also not a value-neutral location. Pedagogical actions in schools are based on democratic values and attitudes which are deduced from the fundamental rights of the Basic Law and from human rights.

The non-negotiable core of the free and democratic system of values is – particularly in light of the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis and their consequences – made up of the inviolability of human dignity, observance of human rights, including children's rights, the right to a free development of the individual, freedom of faith and conscience, equality of all people before the law and in all social institutions, independent of their sex, origin, religion, disability or sexual orientation, the implementation of general, free, equal and secret elections with an active and passive right to vote given to all citizens, protection of minorities, freedom of opinion and freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, separation of powers and political pluralism, interaction between the government and the opposition, state monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force, in sum: the democratic constitutional state governed by rule of law with the principle of a separation of powers.

The free and democratic state is reliant on conditions which it cannot guarantee by itself as a state. It is dependent on citizens voluntarily acting democratically based on their own convictions. The key competences of historical and political judgement and democratic action and ability to act must be developed and practised.

This must become part of everyday school life in a variety of ways. The aim of schools must therefore be to convey the required knowledge, promote values and participation, and to encourage and empower to take responsibility and show commitment in state and society. It is the responsibility of schools to organise the respective learning opportunities in curricular and extracurricular situations to try out actions and meet challenges. Active democracy must become a basic quality feature of our schools. In this context, a democratic development of schools and teaching becomes a cross-sectional task.

Where schools are places of active democracy, dignity is treated as a core value, tolerance and respect towards other people and opinions can be practised, civil courage is strengthened, democratic processes and rules are observed, and conflicts are resolved without violence. That's where young people learn how to deal with controversies, contrasts and risks, with imperfections, incomplete and provisional knowledge and judgements. Conveying resilient knowledge and skills includes the ability to question oneself and others, and to reflect on language and communication to reveal explicit and implicit statements. Ultimately, practice in the diverse types of democratic debate and democratic actions also provides the skill to change perspective, to perceive and understand the positions of minorities, and to handle conflicts without violence.

A central principle of democratic learning is the application of the Beutelsbach Consensus at schools. It contains not just a prohibition against overwhelming the students, and the requirement to give weight to the personal interests of students, but also the requirement to treat controversial subjects as such: "Any subject that is controversial in science and politics must also be treated as controversial in lessons."

This requirement is closely linked to the need for democratic learning, because in order to avoid indoctrination, we must not fail to mention different standpoints, must not ignore options, nor fail to discuss alternatives.

Therefore, the requirement to treat controversial subjects as controversial is intertwined with the prohibition against overwhelming the students. Both imperatives point to the duty to show, and allow, different perspectives of a topic. This means that conflicting or contentious positions must be included.

It does not mean that every position must be accepted, or that all positions apply equally. If, during a discussion, students express attitudes which cannot be

reconciled with a free, democratic system of values and with human rights, teachers must ensure that such attitudes are subjected to comments and reflection. If schools deal with controversial topics, teachers have the demanding task to examine the subject from multiple perspectives, to moderate, if necessary, to steer discussions in a different direction, and to pinpoint any boundaries that may have been crossed. Therefore, the implementation of the Beutelsbach Consensus is subject to a clear commitment to fundamental rights and a corresponding self-confidence on the part of the teachers.

Learning democracy includes the skill to comprehend, understand and reflect on another's position. However, respecting the freedom and opinions of others does not mean arbitrariness and neutrality. Children and adolescents should experience and identify the advantages, achievements and opportunities of a democracy based on a constitutional state governed by rule of law, and learn that basic democratic values such as freedom, justice, solidarity and tolerance must never be treated as disposable. In addition, they must become aware that even the best intentions can at times have the opposite effect. Hubris and overzealousness can create the temptation to only allow one's own perspective. Controversies and debates train the ability to change perspective.

Young people can formulate their own ideas independently of their age and show commitment towards our democracy. Participation, personal responsibility, self-confidence, self-efficacy and sharing must be learnt and experienced early on and, if possible, in all contexts of life - including, and particularly, at home and at school. Participation is therefore a key element of the educational mission of schools. Children and adolescents have the right to be informed, to look after their own and community-focused matters, and to be responsibly involved in the further development of their school and lives.

Students should be introduced to and become familiar with the basic principles of our democratic state and social order as early as possible. They should learn and experience that democracy empowers people to take responsibility for themselves and their community and to demand their rights.

3. Education policy and education system measures

The *Länder* have much experience with educational democracy programmes and initiatives. For example, the "Quality Framework for Teaching Democracy" developed as part of the federal programme "Learning and Living Democracy" is a good basis. It has been included in school quality documents in the *Länder* with titles such as "Orientation framework" or "Reference framework".

The European and international context is also offering impulses to strengthen democracy at schools. One example is the Council of Europe project “Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education” (EDC/HRE) which was established in 1997 and focuses on active democracy. It is also a subject of the European education strategy ET 2020. A sub-goal in the United Nations global education agenda Education 2030 is dedicated to Global Citizenship Education.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs also wants to promote a development of democratic schooling and teaching in future and encourage all institutions and people at schools and involved in schools to accept responsibility and participate in shaping the school and civil society. The extent to which we realise the opportunities of our democracy largely depends on whether we manage to create and further develop our schools as places of democracy based on freedom and a constitutional state governed by rule of law.

The *Länder* will support the implementation of the following measures in order to further strengthen the commitment of teachers and staff, as well as of students, for a democratic development at schools and in society:

- Broader anchoring of contents relating to democracy based on the rule of law as form of government, society and lifestyle in the guidelines and curricula for all subjects, and use of the opportunities of social networks in this area,
- Empowering schools to develop and implement democratic committees and working methods which allow students to make decisions and genuinely become involved, and support student representatives at all levels to exercise their rights, e.g. by setting up and strengthening youth parliaments or other innovative participation methods,
- Encouraging and supporting schools in the development and implementation of innovative participation methods and civic engagement (e.g. peer-to-peer learning, service learning),
- Empowering schools to appropriately involve students in school and lesson development, to get involved in their local municipality, district or parish, and to take up societal developments such as migration, inclusion and digitization in their profiles and programmes,
- Supporting students in developing low-threshold access particularly for young people suffering from educational disadvantages or who are growing up with limited awareness of politics,
- Supporting diverse communication and participation methods in order to strengthen parents in asserting their rights and become involved in democratically shaping schools,

- Encouraging the supervisory board, school authorities and extracurricular partners to hold subject and project days on democracy, also in regions and municipalities,
- Regularly organising democracy days to present and discuss the commitment of schools for our democracy, including at *Länder* and municipal level,
- Strengthening schools in their cooperation with extracurricular support systems, creating transparency regarding prevention, intervention and counselling opportunities,
- Broadening the involvement of the *Länder* and the schools in programmes and projects to strengthen democratic commitment, e. g. “Democratic Action”, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, “Europe Schools” (*Europaschulen*), “Schools without Racism – Schools with Courage”, “Youth Debates” (*Jugend debattiert*) and “Youth Elections” (*Juniorwahl*), also with regard to the exchange between schools at European and international level, and
- Encouraging schools to participate in relevant competitions recommended by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

4. Implementation in schools

Strengthening young people in their commitment towards a democratic legal state, and in their decisive actions against antidemocratic and inhumane attitudes and developments is a task of school and lesson development, of all subjects and of extracurricular offers.

Democratic schooling and teaching are manifest in

- a school’s teaching and schooling culture, as well as respectful communication within the school showing awareness of diversity,
- curricular anchoring in subjects, as well as in multi-subject, interdisciplinary and extracurricular contexts,
- the school’s organisation, e.g. the developmental stage of assistant committees and the introduction and maintenance of parliamentary formats such as class councils or similar committees,
- the active, pro-democracy attitude of teachers and staff,
- the school principal’s leadership style,
- the communication channels between the different groups at the school, and
- the transparency of information and the formation of opinions.

Social science subjects play a particularly important role in this context. But, since learning and experiencing democracy is a cross-sectional task, all teachers and staff are obliged to promote our democracy based on freedom and the rule of law in their teaching and actions. Each subject, and also extracurricular events, must demand and promote students' willingness to accept responsibility and actively shape school life. This can for example be achieved through

- the sustainable mediation of knowledge about the basic principles of a free democratic state and social order, the UN Charter and other UN conventions, central EU norms, the German Basic Law and *Länder* constitutions, the democratic legal state and the principle of a separation of powers, the democratic institutions and their tasks,
- developing conflict-handling skills in order to be able to understand and withstand conflicts between the different interest groups which will always occur in a pluralistic society, and to be able to effectively and democratically handle them,
- the teaching of a differentiated definition of democracy which distinguishes between democratic behaviour in relation to democracy as a way of life, and the democratic principles in relation to the political organisation as a form of government,
- the promotion of historical, memory-focused learning, examination of inhumane and antidemocratic pasts, particularly during the Nazi era and the SED dictatorship, as well as during German and European colonialism,
- promoting an understanding of minority protection as a core aspect of a democracy based on a constitutional state, as well as developing skills to analyse and evaluate anti-democratic systems and tendencies, and their underlying interests and ideologies,
- promoting a substantiated examination of all types of discrimination, racism, out-group hostility, antisemitism, denigration of Sinti and Roma people, Islamophobia, xenophobia, fundamentalism, sexism, homophobia, violence and intolerance, and political extremism,
- illustrating the interdependency of local and global actions,
- promoting subject-related, interdisciplinary and multi-subject teaching at all school levels and types of schools,
- the involvement of diverse action- and experience-based methods, particularly debates, case and conflict analysis, problem and case studies, or simulations, e.g. on reaching local policy decisions and simulating Landtag, Bundestag and European Parliament elections,

- linking the contents and methods of teaching democracy with historical and political education, human rights education, media education/digital learning, value formation and education for sustainable development in guidelines and curricula,
- strengthening students' media competence particularly in relation to handling social media, different formats for conveying facts, news, information, opinions and interpretations,
- increasingly integrating education for democratic citizenship in curricular and extracurricular analyses of anti-democratic systems and tendencies in all phases of teacher training and continuing professional development,
- fostering acceptance of responsibility by children and adolescents in their immediate teaching environment, in shaping school interaction and in extracurricular projects,
- opening up and maintaining opportunities for active and serious student participation within the meaning of democratic participation and commitment for our democracy, e.g. using the method of "service learning/ learning through commitment",
- increased, systematic involvement of extracurricular places of learning which act as reminders for key events in the history of our democracy, and of memorials, museums and archives, places of human rights violations and state crimes of violence, places of resistance against anti-democratic actors, intolerance and human rights violations, and involvement of living witnesses.

In order to sustainably implement these recommendations, it is particularly important to strengthen student personalities and assist with identity development. Only strong personalities are able to resist group pressure. In this sense, schools' tasks include in particular:

- strengthening and promoting students' self-esteem to enable them to experience their own strength and self-efficacy, develop self-determination and civic courage, and learn to argue and act independently of collectives,
- motivating students to demand and actually take up opportunities for involvement, and strengthening the peer-to-peer approach,
- effectively supporting committee work and other forms of participation (e.g. class councils, school parliaments, assemblies, democracy ambassadors, learning through involvement),
- informing about and expanding participation rights and co-determination opportunities for students (e.g. introduction of local or *Länder* student councils),

- systematically anchoring a culture of respect, participation and feedback in relation to school development, involving students in school-internal evaluations, including with regard to developing lessons and extracurricular offers, e.g. for all-day schools,
- recognising and honouring civic engagement, e.g. through remarks on official school certificates.

5. Support systems and extracurricular partners:

A democratic school is characterised by its openness towards its immediate and general social environment. Therefore, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs advocates

- supporting schools in implementing contents and methods to teach democracy, including internal school curricula,
- supporting the development of a democratic school and teaching culture as a criterion of school and teaching quality,
- providing and strengthening support offers for schools and encouraging schools to take up the support offers of civil society actors committed towards our democracy, and
- supporting federal, *Länder* and international programmes to strengthen student commitment.

6. Recommendations for further development

The *Länder* are agreeing on the following measures to implement and further develop these recommendations:

- Setting up a regular exchange between the *Länder* with the inclusion of tried and tested, high-quality, cross-*Länder* and international programmes, competitions and projects,
- Participation of state and municipal institutions and civil society organisations with expertise, the Federal Agency and the *Länder* Agencies for Civic Education, as well as other bodies for extracurricular political education for adolescents,
- Continuation of regular subject conferences by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Federal Agency for Civic Education, with the involvement of civil society organisations,

- Linking of the activities of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs for the further development of schools according to the contents of this recommendation,
- Cooperation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs with other ministerial conferences of the *Länder*.

7. References

The content of this recommendation is linked to many other resolutions and recommendations by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, in particular:

- Recommendation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) and the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK) on Education for Sustainable Development in schools of 15 June 2007
- *Europabildung in der Schule* [European education in schools], KMK Resolution of 8 June 1978 as amended on 5 May 2008
- *Von der Kultusministerkonferenz empfohlene Schülerwettbewerbe in der Anlage zu den „Qualitätskriterien für Schülerwettbewerbe“* [Student competitions recommended by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in the Annex to the “quality criteria for student competitions”], KMK Resolution of 17 September 2009
- *Medienbildung in der Schule* [Media education in schools], KMK Resolution of 8 March 2012
- *Verbraucherbildung an Schulen* [Consumer education in schools], KMK Resolution of 12 September 2013
- *Empfehlung der Kultusministerkonferenz zur kulturellen Kinder- und Jugendbildung* [KMK Recommendation on cultural education for children and young people], KMK Resolution of 1 February 2007 as amended on 10 October 2013
- *Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule* [Intercultural education in schools], KMK Resolution of 25 October 1996 as amended on 5 December 2013
- Remembering our past for our future – Recommendations for a culture of remembrance to form an object of historical and political education in schools, KMK Resolution of 11 December 2014
- 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

- Curriculum Framework Education for Sustainable Development – joint publication by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2nd updated and extended edition, 2016
- *Darstellung von kultureller Vielfalt, Integration und Migration in Bildungsmedien – Gemeinsame Erklärung der Kultusministerkonferenz, der Organisationen von Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund und der Bildungsmediaverlage* [Depicting cultural diversity, integration and migration in educational media – Joint statement by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the organisations of people with migration background and the publishing houses for educational media], KMK Resolution of 8 October 2017
- *Strategie der Kultusministerkonferenz „Bildung in der digitalen Welt“* [Education in the Digital World Strategy], KMK Resolution of 8 December 2016 as amended 7 December 2017
- Human rights education in schools, KMK resolution of 4 December 1980 as amended 11 October 2018

The KMK resolutions listed here are also based on international resolutions at the level of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, especially:

- UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960
- UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1974
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 13 December 2006
- United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training of 19 December 2011
- United Nations: Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of 25 September 2015
- Council of Europe: Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture/RFCDK of April 2018