



**European Cooperation
in the field of Scientific
and Technical Research
- COST -**

**Brussels, 3 May 2000
(OR. en)**

Secretariat

COST 233/00

LIMITE

LEGISLATIVE ACTS AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS

**Subject : Draft Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of a European
Concerted Research Action designated as COST Action A18 "Comparing the
dynamics of violence within European countries"**

Please find attached the abovementioned draft Memorandum of Understanding.



DRAFT
Memorandum of Understanding
for the implementation of a European Concerted Research
Action designated as
COST Action A18
Comparing the dynamics of violence within European countries

The signatories to this Memorandum of Understanding, declaring their common intention to participate in the concerted action referred to above and described in the Technical Annex to the memorandum, have reached the following understanding:

1. The Action will be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the document COST 400/94 "Rules and Procedures for implementing COST Actions" the contents of which are fully known to the Signatories.
2. The main objective of the action is to develop knowledge in order to understand the various forms of violence in European countries, particularly that which is outside the discourse of law enforcement, together with theoretical insights.
3. The overall cost of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, at EUR 3 million at 1999 prices.
4. The Memorandum of Understanding will take effect upon being signed by at least five Signatories.
5. The Memorandum of Understanding will remain in force for a period of four years, unless the duration of the Action is modified according to the provisions of Chapter 6 of the document referred to in Point 1.

COST ACTION A18

Comparing the dynamics of violence within European countries

1. Background

The problem of violence in Europe is largely at a national level.

- 1.1. In terms of law and order, European integration has focused attention on the workings of informal economies and the implications for these economies for transnational crime, the trafficking of drugs and/or women and children, and money laundering. While such illegal activities have considerable impact on the stability and welfare of transnational structures, the bulk of criminal violence in any one jurisdiction is often "home-grown", and fostered by internal, cultural, and historic tensions that are rooted in social processes and social identities. Violence here is defined as any behaviour by an individual that intentionally threatens, attempts to inflict, or does cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to others or to themselves.

- 1.2. Violence, and its potential, has a massive impact on the quality of life. To date, studies of the impact of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (to name but a few) have expanded our understanding of violence. These studies have led to questions about the adequacy of criminal statistics in capturing the true dimensions of violence. While European countries are currently collaborating to create a European Sourcebook on Criminal Justice Statistics for 34 countries from the Council of Europe, this effort may not adequately address the problem of violence because so much of it remains outside of the domain of criminal justice. Information stemming from police statistics, moreover, has the effect of treating all violence as if it has similar meanings, motivations and impacts. This is further complicated because most violence – regardless of its meaning and motivation – is not reported to police. A mechanism to explore the impact of violence outside the discourse of law enforcement is urgently needed. The traditional way violence is studied leads to a fragmented understanding of the overall impact of violence on social groups. The current level of research on violence concentrates too exclusively on national comparisons of law enforcement statistics or international crime surveys. There is no recognition in these two kinds of available information of the ways in which the meanings and forms of violence may differ, or have similarities. Nor is there any explanation as to why some forms of violence may arise in one historical or geographical context and not in another, within one country or countries and not others.
- 1.3. Accounting for violence, in its many forms, and the impact of these various actions on the wider meaning of violence has largely been neglected. The impact of this homogenising of violence is to mute its differences, and to distort our ability to tackle its impact effectively.

- 1.4. This Action will explore violence for its social patterns. These patterns currently illustrate that the risk of violence is not equally distributed throughout society. Across time and place, the form of violence that dominates the landscape is male on male violence. Women and men are most likely to be assaulted and killed by other men. Children are at risk from those who have access to them; the family and school feature prominently as sites of children's abuse. Those who experience discrimination because they are gay or lesbian, have experienced psychiatric treatment, or have mental health problems, are members of disabled, disfigured, racial, religious or immigrant minorities also report high levels of violence. Concern about violence as a problem of transnational organised crime has been recognised by European states. However, the forms of violence that cost countries more and create internal crises in confidence in policing and other forms of social control remain insufficiently understood.
- 1.5. An approach to the study of violence that disaggregates its many forms is sorely missing from international and European debate. International comparisons should shed light on the kinds and impact of violence different groups of people experience within and across Europe. If for instance violence is most likely to arise in situations where victim and offender are known to each other, how has this finding affected social policy in particular countries? If violence may erupt in circumstances of some young men's leisure (Saturday night drinking in pubs and clubs), why has an emphasis on policing and social policy highlighted the danger of other forms of young men's leisure, such as the attendance of football matches? What has been the approach of nations to rising forms of racist violence or violence against immigrant or refugee communities? How are forms of violence monitored? An analysis of social policy responses to violent activity in one jurisdiction should have significant practical application in other jurisdictions. Too often social policy fails to recognise the specific dimensions of the forms of violent activities it seeks to confront.

Nation-states struggle to combat violence in its different forms, but rarely share knowledge about how these different forms intersect.

- 1.6. All European countries have statutes that define criminal violence. Most recently, the campaign efforts of particular groups have questioned how these criminal statutes address the kinds of violence citizens face. Community campaigns to challenge domestic violence, homophobic violence, racist violence and neighbourhood disorder exist in many COST countries. These campaigns include the use of information gleaned from public health records, victim surveys, and victim hot lines to widen the perspective of law enforcement. Some European countries have histories of internal political violence, such as that in Spain and the UK in particular. There has been little attempt to understand political violence alongside that of routine, 'ordinary' violence. Politicians, social policy makers, law enforcement, and voluntary agencies that provide support and assistance to a plethora of victims struggle to make sense of particular forms of violence in order to devise ways to minimise their impact on the everyday lives of citizens. Too often this sense-making isolates the similarities and differences of forms of violence, and this has an impact on the way societies conceptualise violence. Many trades unions, for instance, have undertaken surveys to document the violence their members meet in their daily working lives, but few understand the impact of domestic violence on their staff. Schools, hospitals and other public institutions have undertaken safety audits, but rarely include incidents that take place among staff. Public transport and city streets now display CCTV cameras and other safety warnings in an attempt to discourage crime and violence. The overall presumption is that violence is the result of outsiders, not partners, families, friends, neighbours, co-workers and so forth. There is little attempt in any one jurisdiction to explore the above sources of information for common lessons about the impact of violence and differing approaches to minimising its impact.

2. Objectives of Cooperative Research

- 2.1. The main objective of the action is to develop knowledge in order to understand the various forms of violence in European countries, particularly that which is outside the discourse of law enforcement, together with theoretical insights.
- 2.2. In order to achieve this goal, the Action seeks to establish a European network of programmes and researchers through which violence research and policy can be identified to challenge its many forms.
- 2.3. Complementary to this goal is the objective of establishing a common knowledge base about violence, which includes but is not limited to criminal statistics. In this way, researchers working outside government, particularly in universities and research institutions, can contribute to strategic frameworks which enhance violence and crime prevention efforts on the part of government and non-government bodies.
- 2.4. Another objective is to share national, regional, local and comparative research on how forms of violence come to the forefront of national importance in different countries. Countries currently define different kinds of violence as having different impact on the general population, and on Europe as a whole. Information about the violence of and against young people, ethnic and racial minorities, immigrant and refugee populations, politically-motivated organisations, women, sexual minorities, the elderly, and especially between men and men, for instance, are of crucial importance to these debates. The ability to interrogate detail about forms of violence is often lacking in criminal statistics, but key to targeted violence prevention work and work with victims of violence.

3. Structure of the scientific programme

- 3.1. Research activities within the framework of the Action should collect the results of various empirical and theoretical studies on violence in Europe (including Eastern European countries). The research should reach beyond the traditional approach to violence that relies on victim studies and criminal justice statistics. It should gather materials from health, education, welfare, trades unions, women's and other non-governmental organisation, immigrant and refugee support agencies, and others to paint the widest picture of the kinds of violence that impact people's lives in Europe. This material will be used to analyse the way in which Europe as a whole, and nations within Europe, identifies different forms of violence as a social problem.

Establishing a European network of researchers

- 3.2. In order to address the issues described above and to follow a valuable comparative approach, it is crucial to establish a European network of researchers for this purpose. Moreover, there is a need to look at violence through new questions which problematise the way in which violence is treated as solely a problem of law and order. This network of researchers will explore how violence – and its creative challenges – must come from studies of social relations within and without individual nation states.

A multi-disciplinary approach

- 3.3. Researchers using cross-disciplinary and multi-method approaches to the study of violence bring expertise in the fields of criminology, education, geography, history, medicine, social policy, social psychology, sociology, women's studies and urban studies. Methodologies used by researchers include ethnographic research, in-depth interviewing, documentary research, large-scale survey work, experimental methods, and the use of geographical information systems.

- 3.4. A long-term understanding of the different forms of violence is a key element in the development of long-term challenges to internal security systems in Europe
- 3.5. The fact that different national experts will cooperate to look at different forms of violence and their meanings for social relations within the cultural, political and socio-economic context of each country should enable participants in the Action to go beyond traditional criminological and social policy approaches, and understand how and why certain kinds of violence rise and fall, and have differential impacts upon citizens in Europe. Participants should be able to identify how and why some measures to challenge violence have more impact than others do in particular contexts and social conditions. It is crucial at this juncture in Europe's history to go beyond the law and order debates and to highlight creative mechanisms to minimise the impact of violence for its varied forms.
- 3.6. The Scientific Programme will be structured around the following groups of questions:
- How do social identities affect (or not) the meanings, the consequences and the impact of violence?
 - How do social contexts, cultural meanings and specific geographical and social spaces impact forms of violence?
 - How do social divisions contribute to the various forms of violence?
 - To what extent do the above contribute to social exclusion?

- 3.7. How violence is monitored in many countries determines what forms of violence are defined as important. Innovative approaches to the study of violence should be identified through this collaborative effort. Cross-national comparisons will aid nation-states responses to violent activities.

4. Benefits of collaboration

- 4.1. The specific benefits of this collaboration include the following:

- access to information about various sources of information about violence that will enhance "official" criminal justice statistics on violence;
- exchange knowledge about how the various forms of violence are challenged in different countries, through activities of crime prevention, political activism, union activities, statutory and non-governmental organisation;
- inform creative methodological approaches to the study of violence;
- establish a network of identified researchers and research institutions engaged in research on violence;
- document the different approaches and strategies used by nations to challenge the impact of different kinds of violence on the quality of lives of European citizens.

5. Organisation of the Programme

- 5.1. The duration of the programme will be 4 years. The Action will be guided by the usual COST structure with a Management Committee (MC). In addition, Working Groups will be established as appropriate to assist the MC in the organisation of the Action.
- 5.2. In the first year, the MC will meet at least twice. A focused work programme will be submitted to the Technical Committee at the end of the first year. This programme will demonstrate the benefit of working "across" forms of violence and include innovative approaches to the study of violence. The programme explicitly will set out to combine quantitative and qualitative research. During this first year, at least one workshop will be organised to agree the structure of the inquiry among participating researchers. The MC will draw upon the wisdom of the workshop to inform its planning of the three conferences.
- 5.3. Three large conferences will be organised. The first one will focus on the mechanisms for documenting and explaining the impact of these forms of violence in participating countries. This information will be circulated in advance to participating researchers. The papers, plus the debate and discussion arising from the conference will be published as an edited collection. Two additional conferences will be organised according to key questions arising from this first conference. In addition, workshops will be organised to provide forums for the development of innovative perspectives that will assist our theorising about the impact of violence across and within its various forms. This will create a dynamic momentum within the Action for the promotion of theoretical, methodological and policy innovations. Proceedings of the Conferences will be edited and published.

6. Economic dimension

- 6.1. The following COST countries have actively participated in the preparation of the Action or otherwise indicated their interest in membership of this Action:

United Kingdom (the proposer)

Denmark

Finland

France

Germany

Italy

The Netherlands

Spain

Switzerland

- 6.2. On the basis of national estimates provided by the representatives of those countries and taking into account the coordination costs to be covered by the COST budget of the European Commission, the overall cost of the activities carried out under the Action has been very provisionally estimated at EUR 3 million in 1999 prices.

7. Time Schedule

- 7.1. The duration of the COST Action will be four years.

8. Dissemination of results

- 8.1. All publications arising from research carried out under this COST initiative will credit COST support. The MC will encourage and promote co-authored and cross-country collaborative publications in scientific journals throughout the world. At least four edited collections will arise from the workshops and conferences planned above. Work will be submitted to international scientific journals and reviews and subsequently published in an edited collection.
 - 8.2. The MC of this COST Action will meet every year with the aim of presenting results to the MC as a whole, and where possible, invite potential users and interested parties to this meeting.
 - 8.3. During its first year, the MC will formulate a workplan to ensure that multi-disciplinarity remains at the heart of the Action, including dissemination initiatives.
-