

Notes on post-seminar action

Bonnevie Centre

Part 1: Relationship between the police and the citizen

1st question: what is the relationship between the police and the citizens?

The first question allowed participants to give their own impressions of the relationship they, and citizens more generally, have with the police. Different opinions were expressed.

Several participants highlighted the discrimination that citizens can suffer, particularly according to their origin. This discrimination can be expressed in a violent manner, notably with outbursts and acts of physical violence by certain police officers. Random checks were also highlighted by the participants, reinforcing this feeling of discrimination.

Because of their own personal experience, some young people emphasised their positive relationship with the police. In general, it was stated that no one should make generalizations: discrimination and violence do not come from all police officers, but from some. This observation raises the question of the image of the police officer, the values and standards to which he or she must adhere when joining the police force.

Another point of view was put forward: the question of the pressure that police officers may experience within their function, especially at the hierarchical level. This pressure can lead to a difficult psychological situation.

2nd question: what is the role of the police?

To continue the debate and based on the elements put forward in the first question, the young people were asked to discuss their impression of the role of the police, and the tasks they should fulfil.

For many of the participants, in the context of a police officer being charged, there would be a certain "protection" according to the young people, with the police officer being perceived as untouchable or protected by his colleagues and his hierarchy.

In general, the question of the **repressive** and **preventive** roles of the police was raised, as young people felt that repression was more visible and used than prevention.

Concerning the missions that the police should carry out, the young people shared different elements:

- Protection of the population
- Respect for law and order
- Proximity to citizens (role of community policing)
- Collection of complaints
- Listening to citizens

More specifically, the question of the place and role of women in the police was discussed. Possible abuses of power were mentioned, while other participants wanted to. On the other hand, other young people emphasised the often more understanding and pleasant character of female police officers. The question of the place of women in the Belgian police system was raised, indicating that there could be a certain degree of machismo, where the legitimacy of women would be questioned.

3rd question: what are the possible solutions?

In order to mobilise the different points of view and remarks that resulted from the first two questions, the young people were asked to propose solutions to improve the relationship between the police and the citizens as well as the role of the police.

As a first step to improve the relationship, the young people put forward the idea of awareness-raising campaigns on the role of the police, thus allowing a better understanding of their functions and missions. In addition, meetings between the police and citizens would allow for the development of exchange spaces, in order to improve communication.

The development of a local police force, closer to the citizens and whose missions would be to provide a concrete and close service to the citizens, was put forward by some young people.

Some participants suggested that police officers should receive more training on themes and issues affecting our society today: sexual abuse and how to accompany victims who come to file a complaint, awareness of the customs and practices of people from other cultures, etc.

Another more concrete measure proposed would be to consider disarming the police, as carrying a weapon creates a sense of fear and animosity in the eyes of the citizen.

However, it was pointed out that the behaviour of some citizens should also be pointed out, especially because of a lack of respect towards the police (physical or verbal). Raising awareness of the role of the police from an early age was suggested as a way of better educating citizens to respect the police.

Part 2: The role of the European Union

The second part of the debate focused on the European Union and its role in the fight against crime, justice, defence and its role in international issues.

The European Union has an important role to play in the fight against crime, having established in its priorities, among others

- Drug trafficking
- Tax fraud
- Cybercrime
- Trafficking in human beings
- Environmental crime

However, it was pointed out that citizens were not necessarily very aware of the role of the European Union in these matters, reinforcing this feeling of "distance" between the institution and the citizens.

In order to improve citizens' knowledge of the role of the European Union, especially in the field of crime, young people proposed that more seminars and information campaigns should be offered. This would allow the European institutions to be closer to the citizens and to exchange on different topics and themes.

Following recent events, in particular the war in Ukraine, the young people mentioned the various European issues in terms of defence and representation on the international scene.