



# Collaborating for peace

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peaceinstitute

*“Despite the fact that the Flemish Peace Institute is deeply embedded within the parliamentary community, its independence is of critical importance. As former Chair of the Flemish Parliament, I am in a position not only to effectively monitor this, but also to enhance this special bond”.*

Jan Peumans  
Chair of the Flemish Peace Institute

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## A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT 2019



### **NILS DUQUET & JAN PEUMANS**

*Director ad interim Flemish Peace Institute &*

*Chair of the Board of Directors Flemish Peace Institute*

Striving for peace is not an individual endeavour. We, as Flemish Peace Institute, strongly believe in cooperation aimed at creating a more peaceful society. First of all, this applies to our own operations. In 2019, as in previous years, the Peace Institute worked in conjunction with a wide range of different partners in order to develop and disseminate its research and recommendations concerning peace-related topics. Furthermore, the need for successful cooperation is also a recurring theme throughout our research. ‘Working together on the promotion of peace’ will consequently be a common theme throughout this annual report.

Being an independent research institute embedded within the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Peace Institute obviously aims to support the parliament where possible in all its activities centred on peace and the prevention of violence, with research, recommendations and other types of information. The Flemish Peace Institute also regularly receives requests for advice and research from the Flemish Parliament, and this cooperation is vitally important for us.

In 2019, we also focused our attention on a number of peace-related topics at the request of the parliament. For example, we published an extensive research report on the current challenges associated with export controls for products and technologies that might contribute to the development of nuclear weapons, and formulated recommendations to strengthen this export controls policy. Additionally, in 2019 and at the request of the Commission for the prevention of violent radicalisation, the Flemish Peace Institute carried out research focused on the approach of local governments to this prevention. The report covering this research and the corresponding recommendations aimed at strengthening the approach of local governments will be published in 2020.

As we have such a special bond, we try to make our research as relevant as possible to the Flemish Parliament and, where possible, present our research results and recommendations to its commissions. Following the elections on 26 May, we focused specifically on meeting the new members of parliament in the autumn of 2019 and entered into discussions with the chairs of various commissions and all political groups. Our aim was to gain an insight into existing expectations with respect to the Flemish Peace Institute and how we can continue to support parliamentary activities going forward.

Ever since its creation, the Flemish Peace Institute has built up a solid reputation as a research institute that executes critical analyses of various relevant peace-related topics in an objective manner. This reputation has enabled the Institute to sustain parliamentary debate, have an actual impact on policy and on the development of other initiatives focused on these subjects. We are obviously immensely proud of this but would like to emphasise that we have not achieved this on our own and that cooperation is critical for a small research organisation such as the Flemish Peace Institute.

That is why we not only encourage internal interaction between our researchers but are also increasingly collaborating with valued partners at home and abroad. In 2019, for example, the Flemish Peace Institute initiated Project DIVERT, an international research project financed by the European Commission that analyses various ways in which firearms are being diverted from legal channels to the illegal market. DIVERT is being coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute with partners that include the Swedish peace research institution SIPRI, Europol, the Belgian Federal Police Force and the Spanish CITCO. It is a follow-up study to the extremely successful Project SAFTE, which the Flemish Peace Institute coordinated in 2017-2018 and for which we were awarded the Counter Terror Award for best international project in March 2019.

In the research domain focused on peace, conflict and violence in society, we are also increasingly striving for international cooperation. In 2019, for example, we organised an international workshop on how to deal with controversy and polarisation in various European educational contexts in conjunction with the Evens Foundation. Together with

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academics and field experts from Sweden, Poland, the Netherlands, Croatia and Spain, we reflected on how educational professionals can manage tensions and contrasts at school. Adopting this approach, we not only aim to publicise our insights on a wider international platform, but also to learn from international experience and introduce it into Flemish practice.

In addition to its international collaborations, the Flemish Peace Institute continues to pay particular attention to cooperation with local and Flemish partners. In 2019, this resulted in various forms of cooperation with partners, including the Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie (Special Committee for Remembrance Education), Kazerne Dossin (Dossin barracks), FARO (Vlaams Steunpunt voor Cultureel Erfgoed – Flemish Interface for Cultural Heritage) and CANON Cultuurcel. Being a partner in a network that aims to support professionals in dealing with polarisation, the Flemish Peace Institute was also involved in the start-up of the wij-zij.be website.

The Flemish Peace Institute has managed to significantly expand its research capacity in recent years thanks to external project finance. In 2019, for example, we assessed the Flemish Action Plan for the prevention of violent radicalisation and polarisation at the request of the Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur (Home Office Government Agency), resulting in us being able to temporarily recruit two additional researchers. The results of this evaluation will be published in 2020. European funding for Project DIVERT also enabled us to employ two additional researchers, i.e. Quitterie de Labbey and Matteo Dressler, who in an interview later in this report provide more details on this unique European partnership.

European research projects help us to gain a better insight not only into the illegal firearms market in Flanders, but also into international developments that have an impact on this market. They enabled us to learn from the approach adopted by other European countries with respect to this market. Benchmark studies of this kind are highly significant when it comes to providing support for the regulation of the legal, and struggle against the illegal, arms trade by the various stakeholders involved in Belgium. We are, therefore, particularly pleased that in the autumn of 2019, the European Commission approved the financing of a large-scale research project in 2020-2021 into the characteristics of firearms violence in Europe and the link with the illicit firearms trafficking (Project TARGET). Again, we will be collaborating with various international partners on this project, including Leiden University, Europol, UNODC and SEESAC. Together, we will expand our knowledge of the various forms of firearms violence in Europe, with the ultimate aim of supporting policy initiatives focused on the prevention of violence, at both a local and a Flemish, national and international level.

Due to its research into the trade and use of weapons, the Flemish Peace Institute has gained a significant reputation across Europe. In 2019, for example, the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium asked us to write a paper on the new EU Strategy to combat the illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The Flemish Peace Institute also conducted an analysis of the amendment of the Council Common Position governing arms exports and (the lack of) effective progress in the convergence of the European member states' arms export policies. By successfully monitoring these European developments, the Flemish Peace Institute is

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able to help direct arms trade policy at a European level and at the same time anticipate the Flemish conversion and implementation of European policy initiatives.

Cooperation is not only important when performing research. As mentioned earlier, the need for better collaboration is often also one of the main conclusions of research carried out by the Institute. In his essay on arms import controls (more on this later in this annual report), researcher Diederik Cops points out that many stakeholders are (in)directly involved in the control of the trade, the possession and the acquisition of firearms in Flanders.

However, the lack of systematic coordination and collaboration has an adverse effect on the efficiency and quality of the controls, which in turn has consequences for the risks of gun violence in our society.

In his essay (more on this later in this report), researcher Maarten Van Alstein also highlights the importance of collaboration. He maintains that conflicts are inevitable in our society but that this is not necessarily a major problem. What is important is how we manage these conflicts: in a hostile and destructive way or a democratic and peaceful way? Schools can play a key role in this process. Not only with respect to the de-escalation of acute tensions, but also through the learning of peaceful ways to deal with differences of opinion and conflict. But this requires cooperation, both within the schools and with external partners, e.g. parents, the local neighbourhood and field experts.

Being a fairly small organisation, we try to valorise the results of our research where possible in various publications aimed at diverse target groups. In 2018, for example, the Flemish Parliament asked the Flemish Peace Institute for recommendations on the implementation of the IWT guidelines pertaining to government financing of defence-related research and development projects. In 2019, this resulted not only in the requested recommendations and a corresponding research report on the challenges and implications for Flemish policy with respect to this kind of government support, but also in separate Dutch and English language publications on the potential impact of the European Defence Fund on weapons export controls. The example illustrates how we aim to also disseminate the results of Flemish research at an international level.

Other examples dating back to 2019 of how we circulate and diversify our research results, include our contributions to various magazines dealing with how to handle controversy in the classroom, or the dozens of lectures, lessons and presentations we held concerning the results of our various research projects. We also organised our own events, including our annual 11 November lecture, and initiated lunchtime seminars on various peace themes in the Flemish Parliament.

However, collaboration also means frequently having to say goodbye to familiar and welcome new faces. The Institute has seen various changes in its personnel base over the past year. We wish our former colleagues all the best in their new careers and look forward to welcoming our new colleagues. In fact, there are also many new faces on our Board of Directors due to the fact that our previous Board's mandate came to an end in 2020. Following a chairmanship of five years, Mieke Van Hecke passed the baton to Jan Peumans in March 2020. As former chair of the Flemish Parliament (2009-2019), Jan is particularly familiar with the Flemish Peace Institute and has always safeguarded its independence. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Mieke for her many years of endeavours on behalf of the Institute.

The Flemish Peace Institute is looking forward to the future with confidence. A new strategic plan was adopted at the start of 2020 that defines the criteria for our operations over the next few years. Obviously, we will continue to focus on outstanding policy and practice-based research and on meaningful recommendations. However, another key objective is the further development of our platform function in order to take our communication/information task even more to heart and to promote the exchange of ideas and insights relating to peace themes wherever possible. The realisation of our ambitions will, to a large extent, depend on the degree to which we will continue to cooperate with our various partners over the coming years. We would like to thank the Flemish Parliament in particular for its interest and faith in our work,

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and for the practical collaboration with its services. Now more than ever, our society needs objective analyses that underpin policies and practical applications focused on a more peaceful society. The Flemish Peace Institute will continue to cooperate and pursue this on a daily basis.

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**Nils Duquet**

Director ad interim of the Flemish Peace Institute

## PUBLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



02/2019

**Vlaanderen en nucleaire non-proliferasie - Uitdagingen voor nucleaire *dual use* exportcontrole (Flanders and nuclear non-proliferation – Challenges for nuclear *dual use* export controls)**, Diederik Cops

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02/2019

**Advies over de optimalisering van de Vlaamse *dual use* exportcontrole in het licht van de preventie van nucleaire proliferatie (Recommendations relating to the optimisation of Flemish *dual use* export controls in light of the prevention of nuclear proliferation)**

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04/2019

**2018 Annual Report**, Flemish Parliament, Brussels

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04/2019

**Controverse en spanningen in de klas: wat te doen?, (Controversy and tensions in the classroom: what is to be done?), in Impuls. Guidance Magazine**, Maarten Van Alstein

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04/2019

**The 2018 EU SALW Strategy: Towards an integrated and comprehensive approach**, in EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, Nils Duquet

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07/2019

**Consonanten en dissonanten. Over dialoog en controverse in de klas (Consonance and dissonance: About dialogue and controversy in the classroom)**, in *Filosofie-Tijdschrift (Philosophy Magazine)*, Maarten Van Alstein

—

08/2019

**SIPRI Yearbook 2019**, Summary in the Dutch language





10/2019

**Armed to kill**, Nils Duquet, Nino Kbiltsetskhilashvili, Isthiaq Khan and Eric Woods

—

10/2019

**Hoe het conflict hanteren? (How to manage conflict?)**, in **FARO (magazine focused on cultural heritage)**, Maarten Van Alstein

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10/2019

**'Een stad als palimpsest van de oorlogsherinnering' (A city as palimpsest of the recollection of war) (review M. Connelly & S. Goebel, Ypres, 2018)**, in **Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis (Belgian Chronicle of Recent History)**, Maarten Van Alstein

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12/2019



**Reviewing the EU Common Position on arms exports: whither EU arms transfer controls?** Diederik Cops and Nils Duquet

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12/2019

**Controversy and polarisation in the classroom. Suggestions for pedagogical practice**, Maarten Van Alstein

—



12/2019

**Sustainable EU-funding of European defence cooperation? Accountable and transparent coordination of arms export policies needed**, Diederik Cops and Aurelie Buytaert

## EVENTS AND PRESENTATIONS IN 2019

One of the Flemish Peace Institute's key tasks is to make the results of its research known to the Flemish Parliament and the general public. The Peace Institute also encourages the exchange of ideas and views on peace-related topics.

In 2019, the Flemish Peace Institute actively participated in 45 events, mainly by giving presentations of our research results at events staged by other organisations. An overview of our activities shows that they encompass an extensive array of activities, ranging from the communication of research results in parliamentary committees, lectures for the general public, presentations at academic conferences, guest tutoring at universities and other higher education institutions, active participation in diverse panel discussions and specialist workshops. These activities, conducted both at home and abroad, gave the Flemish Peace Institute a voice and the ability to stimulate the exchange of ideas about peace and the prevention of violence.

The following paragraphs provide an overview of these activities, for each of the Flemish Peace Institute's research domains. The Flemish Peace Institute also organised six events in 2019 (see summary on page 13).

## ‘Managing conflict and violence in society’

In the autumn of 2018, the Flemish Peace Institute published ‘Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie in de klas’ (Managing controversy and polarisation in the classroom) (published by Pelckmans Pro). The book provides pedagogical guidance and tips on how to initiate difficult conversations, create an open and democratic classroom climate, and constructively manage social conflicts and tensions at school. Based on the book, researcher Maarten Van Alstein held a number of lectures and participated in several panel discussions over the course of 2019.

Lectures were staged at venues including the Departement Onderwijs en Vorming van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (Flemish Community Education and Training Department) (7/2/2019 and 6/5/2019), the Agentschap Inburgering en Integratie (Integration Agency) (3/5/2019), VVSG and the city of Sint-Niklaas (16/5/2019), and at the Remembrance Education Forum Day of the Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie (Special Committee for Remembrance Education) and Kruit/Kleur Bekennen (Global Citizenship organisation)(7/11/2019). Within the framework of the Wij-zij-network (<https://wij-zij.be/>), of which the Flemish Peace Institute is a partner, lectures on polarisation were staged at educational days organised by Kazerne Dossin.

In addition to these lectures, we presented our insights during panel discussions at the CANON Cultuurcel Culture Education Day (12/3/2019), the VEFO (Vlaams Netwerk voor Eigentijds Filosofieonderwijs – Flemish Network for Contemporary Philosophy Education) Philosophy Education Day (30/3/2019) and at an Ucsia study day focused on diversity (21/11/2019). We also made two contributions to the project initiated by FARO (Vlaams steunpunt voor cultureel erfgoed – Flemish Interface for cultural heritage) in 2019, focused on ‘conflict and polyphony’ in the heritage sphere, during a morning of debate in April and a session on ‘controversial heritage’ at Het Groot Onderhoud (annual consultation meeting for the cultural/heritage sector) in Antwerp in November.

In May, the Flemish Peace Institute, in cooperation with the Evens Foundation, organised an international workshop with academics and practitioners on controversy and polarisation in various European educational contexts, to benchmark and disseminate our insights at an international level, and to introduce knowledge derived from international experience into Flemish practice.

We also made ourselves heard in the research field that deals with violent radicalisation in 2019. For example, we contributed to study days and seminars organised by the Egmont Institute on the subject of new research approaches to radicalisation and research methods into radicalisation and extremism (14/06/2019 and 18/06/2019), and participated in a panel discussion on radicalisation policy in Belgium and the Netherlands (19/9/2019).

## ‘Arms trade and arms use’

In 2019, the Flemish Peace Institute staged a number of events to communicate the results of research into the arms trade and arms use to members of parliament, policymakers and other stakeholders. Research publications concerning the new EU strategy to prevent the illegal proliferation of arms (4/4/2019), the weapons used during mass shootings in Europe (3/10/2019) and the impact of European defence cooperation on arms export controls (3/12/2019) were introduced at events we staged in the Flemish Parliament. We also presented our research results and recommendations on export controls pertaining to nuclear related dual use products to the Committee on Foreign Policy, European Affairs and International Cooperation of the Flemish Parliament (19/2/2019).

The Flemish Peace Institute is reaching both a national and an international audience with its research into arms trade issues and was consequently invited several times to present its current projects and research results abroad. For instance, the Flemish Peace Institute participated in a prestigious Wilton Park meeting on the illegal arms trade and links with terrorism at the request of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (23-24/1/2019). It was also invited to present Project DIVERT at the annual steering committee for small arms and light weapons of the SEESAC platform (5/3/2019) and held a lecture on the role of the internet in the illegal arms trade in Europe at a conference organised by IRIS and GRIP (15/5/2019).

Moreover, the Flemish Peace Institute organised a panel discussion on the prevention of arms misuse and several presentations of its own research results at the annual conference of the European Society of Criminology (19/9/2019). The Institute also staged a presentation on the future of the European arms export controls policy at the annual COARM-NGO conference (15/5/2019) and, at the sixth International Conference on the observation and analysis of criminality (4/11/2019), on the status of current research into the illegal arms trade in Europe. Another lecture, focused on the implementation of the 2017 European firearms directive in Belgium, was held at a Politeia study day (18/10/2019). Finally, the Flemish Peace Institute gave lectures on the position of Flanders in the debate on nuclear disarmament at the UN Day Flanders, organised by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), CIFAL Flanders and the United Nations Association (21/10/2019), and on European arms export controls at the UN Disarmament Fellows (12/9/2019).

The Institute was also repeatedly asked in 2019 to give guest lectures on various issues of arms trade and arms use. They included guest lectures on the relationship between the illegal arms trade and armed conflict at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (26/2/2019), on the international arms trade and the UN Arms Trade Treaty at the Vives Hogeschool (28/11/2019), on the illegal firearms trade in Europe at various national police forces abroad as part of a series of lectures by CEPOL (25/9/2019), and on the security impact of the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons at the Hoge Studies Veiligheid en Defensie (High Level Security and Defence College)(8/11/2019).

## IN-HOUSE ACTIVITIES

**02/04/2019**

Presentation '**2018 Annual Report**',  
Flemish Parliament, Brussels

**04/04/2019**

**How to curb the firepower of criminals and terrorists? A new EU strategy to prevent the illegal proliferation of firearms**, Flemish Parliament, Brussels

**03/10/2019**

**Lunchtime seminar Armed to Kill**,  
Flemish Parliament, Brussels

**29/10/2019**

Book presentation 'Srebrenica overleven' (**Surviving Srebrenica**), in conjunction with Kazerne Dossin and Uitgeverij Polis, Flemish Parliament, Brussels

**10/11/2019**

**11 November** Lecture in Ypres with Lois Bibbings,  
in conjunction with the city of Ypres

**03/12/2019**

Lunchtime seminar: '**Sustainable EU funding for European defence cooperation? Accountable and transparent coordination**',  
Flemish Parliament, Brussels



## Trade and possession of firearms in Flanders

### Working together to maintain a successful and efficient control system

Firearms have a special place in society. On the one hand, they are tools that private individuals can acquire and use for legitimate purposes,

i.e. hunting, sports or collecting. On the other hand, firearms are a potential threat to public order and safety if they fall into the wrong hands. An efficient, successfully managed firearms control system should guarantee that only people who comply with the relevant legal obligations can acquire, own and use a firearm. This helps prevent legal firearms from entering the illegal market and makes it possible to identify (developments in) the nature and extent of firearms ownership and use. This essay describes the challenges with respect to controls on the import of firearms in Flanders and puts forward several suggestions to deal with these challenges.

**DIEDERIK COPS**

## More firearms in Flanders. Reasons and challenges

Almost no firearms or ammunition are produced for civil use in Flanders and Belgium, which means that the majority of firearms and ammunition sold in Flanders is imported from abroad. Mainly other European countries such as Germany, Austria, France and Italy are the most popular countries of origin in recent years. The Flemish Government has been controlling these imports into the Flemish Region since the regionalisation of this competence in August 2003. In practical terms, the Flemish Strategic Goods Control Unit is responsible for issuing import licences for firearms and ammunition. Both private individuals and arms traders who want to import firearms or ammunition legally require such a licence. What is quite noticeable is that the value of these licensed imports into Flanders has been systematically increasing for several years, e.g. licensed imports of firearms increased over a five-year period from 5.5 million euro in 2013 to 10.5 million euro in 2018. Licensed imports of ammunition rose to 24.5 million euro in 2018. By comparison: in 2013, licensed imports of ammunition amounted to 16.4 million euro and in 2011 barely to 4.3 million euro.

### *Licensed imports of firearms into Flanders have almost doubled over a period of five years*

This increase in licensed imports of firearms and ammunition coincides with a rise in private firearms ownership and the number of active firearms owners. The Central Weapons Register (CWR), the national database of all registered firearms in Belgium, indicates that the number of registered firearms in Belgium has risen from approximately 700,000 in 2010 to just over 800,000 in 2019. There are currently approximately 335,000 registered firearms in Flanders, and each year, approximately 5,000 to 6,000 additional active firearms owners are registered, amounting to a total in August 2019 of approximately 94,000 registered, active Flemish firearms owners. It is mainly the growing popularity of sport and recreational shooting that is contributing to this gradual increase. Almost 40% of all firearms in Flanders in the CWR are registered under this category. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of firearms in this category has also increased by more than 20% (from 102,000 to 127,000). Despite the fact that, similar to many other European countries, ownership of firearms in Flanders – 3 to 4% of Flemish households own one or more firearms – tends to be on the low side, the number of firearms in private hands is gradually increasing. Similar trends are also evident in other European countries. Our research has shown that consideration of whether to acquire a firearm is primarily fostered by a more general sense of insecurity and desire for self protection.

Ownership of weapons among police forces and private security services has also changed in recent years. Both the federal and various local police forces are in the process of replacing, or planning to replace, their existing firearms with higher calibre weapons. Private security services are also increasingly making effective use of the legal option to carry firearms for specific surveillance tasks. There is a need, however, for ongoing monitoring of the developments with respect to the extent and nature of armaments held by government and private surveillance services. Although changes in, and an expansion of, the available firearms arsenal could be a logical reaction to increasing risks and previous experience with the fact that criminals are more frequently armed with – in most cases illegal – higher calibre firearms, this kind of reaction also has a side effect. It threatens to create a vicious circle of ever more and higher calibre firearms being introduced into our society.

In other words, it is important to remain aware of the potential unintended consequences of a trend in which the increased presence of firearms in society is merely met with even more firepower. More (fire)arms is not necessarily the only or best response. A well-functioning control system plays a key role in relation to this problem: it allows legitimate owners to acquire firearms, but simultaneously prevents people from obtaining firearms for all the wrong reasons and with evil intent. Maintaining a balance between efficiency – a seamless procedure for legitimate owners of firearms – and effectiveness – effectual controls to prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands – is a constant challenge. Even though ownership of firearms remains relatively low in Flanders, the gradual increase in private ownership makes this challenge even more pressing. This trend puts quantitative pressure on the system in the shape of an increase in the number of licence applications. Moreover, these developments also put a degree of qualitative pressure upon the control system, i.e. because of the need to guarantee that only people who (permanently) comply with the legally stipulated conditions can acquire and own a firearm.

***More (fire)arms is not necessarily the only or best response to the increased presence of firearms in Flemish society.***

In brief, rising imports and increasing ownership of firearms not only raise questions concerning the desirability of a growing presence of firearms in Flemish society, they also increase the need for a successful and well-functioning control system. In practice,

however, various elements have an adverse effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the control of the (international) trade in, and ownership of, firearms.

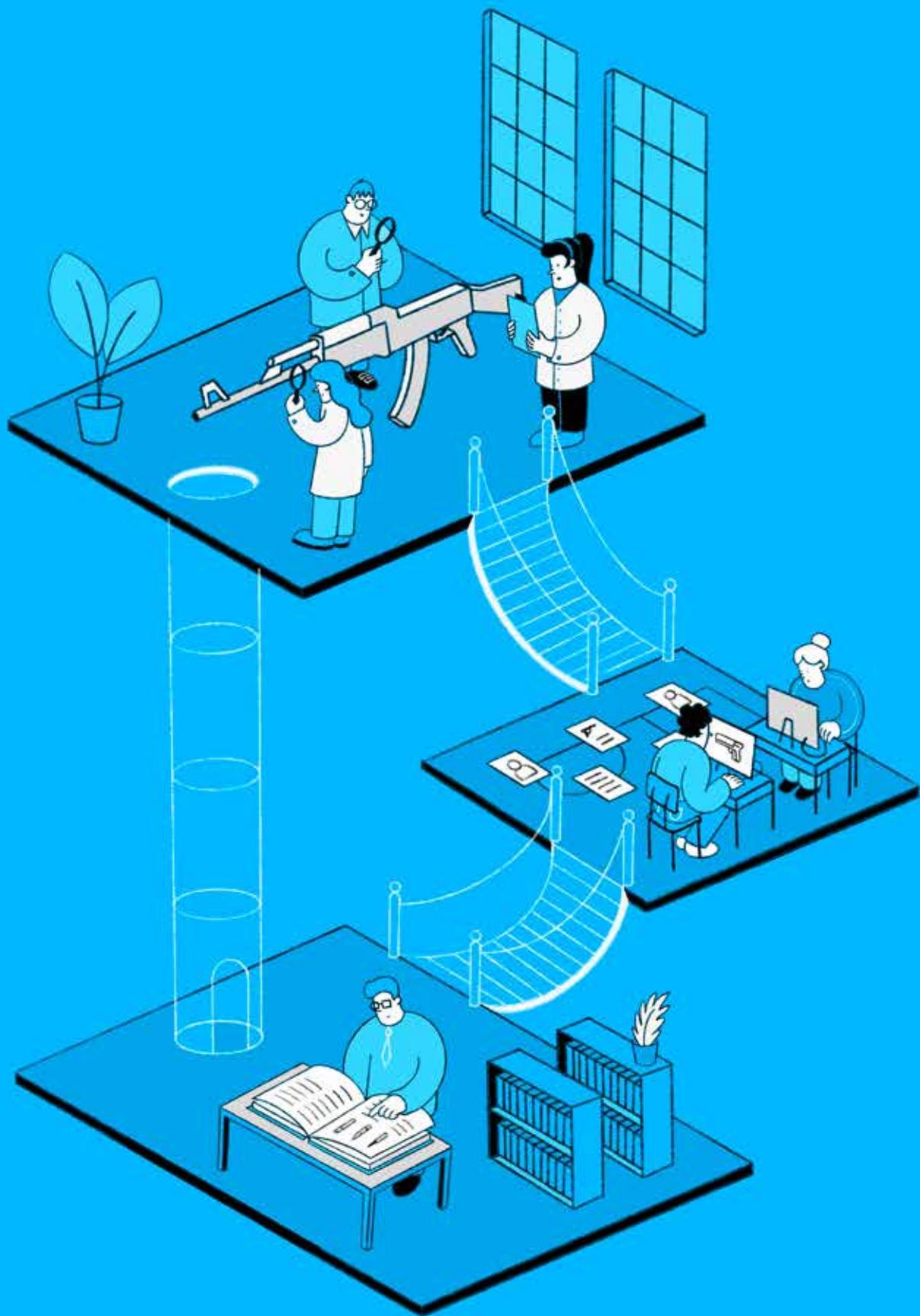
## A complex and compartmentalised control system

The challenges that present themselves are mainly the result of the complexity of the import control system, particularly when this system is analysed from the moment a private individual or trader wants to import firearms or ammunition to the moment when these weapons are effectively in their possession. This process (in)directly involves various services. Regional control services are responsible for controlling the import of firearms and as such represent a first layer in the global control system pertaining to the trade in, and possession of, firearms. Although these services have a specific and clearly defined responsibility – i.e. to deliver licences for the legal import of firearms to the respective regions – they are at the same time closely connected to the other stakeholders (also at different levels in the Belgian state structure) within the global control system.

This close relationship is reflected in the formal link between the Flemish control system for the import of firearms and the federal framework governing the national trade and ownership of firearms. Private individuals or arms traders can only obtain an import licence providing they can submit proof of a legitimate reason for owning a firearm, to test the potential risk to public order and safety. Stakeholders such as provincial weapons services, the federal weapons service, recognised Flemish shooting sports federations and district commissioners are linked to the Flemish import controls system because they issue the legitimate reason certificates and are responsible for the checking and monitoring of their validity. Moreover, the Liège based Firearms Proof House is responsible for the technical inspection and verification of imported firearms and provides technical advice to the Strategic Goods Control Unit whenever a licence application is submitted. Finally, local police forces are responsible for the physical verification and inspection of registered firearms with respect to owners of one or more firearms.

In other words, the control of the trade in, ownership and acquisition of civil firearms involves many different stakeholders, who each have a specific role and competence within the overall control system. This extensive fragmentation has an adverse effect on the efficiency and quality of the controls. This close relationship and mutual dependence amongst the various authorities and relevant services requires systematic coordination and collaboration. But this is exactly what appears to be lacking, resulting in a compartmentalisation of the control chain. Despite the fact that information is shared where necessary if misuse is suspected, systematic sharing of information appears to be limited, which is critical for the ongoing identification of potential misuse. There is also little feedback concerning the usefulness and relevance of shared information. This flawed exchange and feedback are symptomatic of the poorly structured contacts between the various services. Another consequence of this compartmentalisation is the dearth of consultation or information exchange pertaining to changes in legislation, policy or practices. This is unfortunate, particularly because due to the significant interconnectedness changes at one level or in one

department will also have inescapable consequences for other levels or departments. A lot of good intentions and willingness to collaborate in a pragmatic manner appear not to be enough to overcome this compartmentalisation. In particular the limited personnel capacity and low level of digitalisation, combined with a lack of overarching coordination, are hampering continuity within the control system and resulting in the existing system being complex with sometimes long turnaround times. This kind of compartmentalised control chain threatens to create quite a number of loopholes and increases the risk of firearms escaping legal controls and ending up in the hands of illegal operators. In addition to the challenges presented by this compartmentalisation for the control system itself, it also has a negative impact on the intelligence picture. The triangulation of various databanks, which each present a 'partial picture', does make it possible to identify specific trends and potential explanations, but an accurate, complete picture of the influx of, trade in and possession of firearms and ammunition is currently not available. Furthermore, the absence of such a comprehensive overview is symptomatic of the way in which the control system is currently operating.



## Working together to establish better and more effective controls

The control and monitoring of the trade in firearms deserve better. Obviously, each department or organisation involved has to try to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness in its own operations. However, an unbroken effectively functioning control chain, which prevents and traces potential misuse, can only be achieved with enhanced coordination and collaboration between the various services. First and foremost, this requires initiatives or measures that facilitate this kind of coordination.

Further digitisation could make a significant contribution to tackle the current compartmentalisation. It could lower the threshold for information exchange and facilitate direct access to relevant and up to date information from other agencies. Digitisation is necessary, but it is not a miracle cure. As such, digitisation could accelerate the handling of controls by the various services, but it does not necessarily improve the quality of the control chain. Coordination and interoperability between the various management systems of the departments and agencies in question is a minimum requirement. Even better would be a far-reaching functional integration of these digital systems to ensure that relevant information is shared more quickly or could even be made directly accessible to other agencies. The quality of the controls would also benefit from continual access to up to date information on the exact location of a firearm and the validity of the submitted documentation.

As mentioned before, control of the trade in and possession of firearms is a competence shared between the federal and regional levels. A successfully functioning, overarching consultation structure with respect to the (inter)national trade in firearms and ammunition is, therefore, vital in order to avoid the current compartmentalisation and guarantee an uninterrupted legal circuit for the trade in, possession and use of firearms. An even better option would be to impose measures that reduce the complexity of the existing control system. That is why it would be useful to investigate whether the integration of the various Flemish control authorities into a single government service could offer added value in order to avoid the current fragmentation. At a Flemish level the competences in question are currently scattered across departments and agencies such as the Strategic Goods Control Unit, Sport Vlaanderen, the Agentschap Natuur en Bos (Agency for Nature and Forests) and (private) Flemish sports shooting federations. The Flemish government's commitment to the development of a more coherent enforcement policy presents various opportunities within this context.



## **IMPORT OF FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION INTO FLANDERS.**

A more extensive analysis of developments in the nature and extent of (licensed) firearms and ammunition imports into Flanders since 2006, and a more in-depth discussion of the challenges facing the import control system can be consulted in “*De invoer van vuurwapens en munitie in Vlaanderen. Evoluties, verklaringen en uitdagingen voor controle*” (Import of firearms and ammunition into Flanders. Control related developments, explanations and challenges). This report was published in April 2020 and can be consulted free of charge on the Flemish Peace Institute website.

**For further information on the control of the weapons trade, please contact Diederik by e-mail ([diederik.cops@vlaamsparlement.be](mailto:diederik.cops@vlaamsparlement.be)) or follow him on Twitter ([@Diederik\\_Cops](https://twitter.com/Diederik_Cops))**





## Conflict, citizenship and peace

### Working together on a peaceful school climate

Conflict is like oxygen, peace researcher Kathy Bickmore once wrote. An essential and inevitable – but at the same time explosive – element of life. Nowadays, many people feel

that social tensions are becoming more intense and more hateful. Not surprisingly, many people tend to focus primarily on the second characteristic, the explosive nature of conflict. However, using her metaphor, Bickmore reminds us that conflicts, no matter how inflammatory they might sometimes be, are part of the human condition. People working or living together with others will inevitably be confronted with conflict from time to time. But conflicts don't necessarily have to be damaging or end in violence. Whether or not conflicts blow up in our face depends, to a large extent, on the way in which we manage them: in a democratic and peaceful way, or in a hostile and destructive way.

**MAARTEN VAN ALSTEIN**

In an era of hateful Twitter outbursts and irate info storms, it is wise to focus on this approach to conflict and peace. It reminds us of our duty to continue to work together to promote peace. Not necessarily to always achieve a consensus, that is an impossible ideal, but to continue to manage our differences and conflicts in an open minded and peaceful manner. A degree of conflict is unavoidable in a democracy. In practice this often leads to tensions and divisive controversies, but this makes the question as to how we deal with conflict all the more relevant.

This definitely also applies to education, where this issue has gained a prominent place on the radar in recent years. How do you, as a teacher, pedagogical consultant or head teacher, react when social conflicts and tensions occur in the classroom or school? If these conflicts and tensions are poorly managed, they threaten to put pressure on both the school community and on the learning process.

### *The Flemish Peace Institute has been trying to enhance the skills of educational professionals*

For several years now, the Flemish Peace Institute has been trying to enhance the skills of educational professionals to enable them to manage these tricky situations. The primary objective of our work has been to provide inspiration for teachers in how they can respond

appropriately to explosive situations such as provocative and confrontational remarks by students, tense discussions and polarisation in the classroom. Our approach to controversy and polarisation, however, is also based on a second perspective, where the focus is not so much on the short term in terms of the de-escalation and mitigation of rising tensions. We also stress the importance of the classroom as an open and many-voiced space in which pupils learn how to manage differences of opinion and controversial issues in a democratic way. This pedagogical strategy is beneficial for various reasons. Not only do well prepared classroom discussions and projects focused on current topics deliver cognitive learning benefits, teachers are also working towards an open-minded classroom climate in which pupils feel free to express their opinions. We know that this kind of open classroom climate is linked to democratic attitudes in pupils. In other words, an open classroom climate is imperative to enable pupils to gain knowledge about democracy and develop their citizenship skills in practice. This way, our approach to controversy deliberately targets the intersection between conflict transformation, peace education and civic education.

We learnt from our many conversations with educational professionals in 2019 that this two-pronged approach fits in with the needs and expectations of teaching practice. We also established, however, that there was something missing in our approach. Our work mainly focused on teachers in the classroom and did not pay enough attention to aspects of the wider school context, e.g. team work, the school's pedagogical vision and

school climate. However, this wider context is crucial. In fact, to determine whether peace and citizenship education have an impact on a practical level, we should not only look at the effects of one-off projects or lessons but also of the broader school climate and the ‘hidden curriculum’. The latter indeed seem to play an important part in the effectiveness of educational efforts.

This contribution aims to address this shortcoming in our approach and explain why a whole school approach is helpful in order to manage conflict and controversial issues in a constructive and effective manner. We approach this in three stages. Initially, we outline how the school climate and a whole school approach are understood in the literature. We then try to explain why a whole school approach is highly promising, i.e. by looking research on the effectiveness of this approach. We then look at how a whole school approach is currently put into practice in the Flemish education system.

### A whole school approach?

When consulting literature on school climate and a whole school approach, it is clear that these concepts by no means exclusively relate to civic and peace education. In recent decades, education experts have emphasised the importance of school climate and a whole school approach for a diverse range of education purposes – from care, health and safety to tackling problem behaviour. Thapa and colleagues (2013) define the school climate in very general terms as a combination of patterns of experience at school, for both pupils and school staff and parents. The school climate reflects a complex combination of standards, values, objectives, teaching and learning practices, interpersonal relationships and organisational structures, as they are shaped and experienced at school. Four dimensions are relevant in this: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the institutional environment (mission and values).

Definitions of a whole school approach are closely related to this. Authors point to the interaction between various elements, such as the school vision and school policy, the quality of the curriculum and teaching, the leadership and management, the school culture (values, norms, rituals), the various forms of pupil participation, and the cooperation between the school and the wider community or neighbourhood. (The latter is also sometimes referred to as the ‘wider school community’.)

Within the field of peace and civic education, there is also a level of interest in a whole school approach. Projects starting from this approach try to structurally embed interest in peaceful methods of conflict management into the school by operating at different levels simultaneously, from the school’s pedagogical project to the day-to-day management of conflict. The school management plays a key part in this process. In order to be sustainable programmes are best integrated into multi-annual projects, i.e. sufficient time, support and finance must be provided. The importance of a support base in the school team is also highlighted. In fact, all members of staff, from teachers and pedagogical consultants to administrative personnel and management, act as a model for

the project: if they set the example in terms of the expected skills and attitudes, a programme will have a better chance of being successful. That is why it is advisable to organise training for school staff in team format, allowing schools to develop into 'learning communities'.

### **Learning about a peaceful and democratic society should not be limited to a series of lessons mainly focused on conveying knowledge.**

Relevant literature states that a whole school approach involves a number of aspects. Firstly, transferring knowledge about democracy and peace remain crucial. Without knowledge, practical application is based on guesswork – you're flying blind. However, learning about a peaceful and democratic society should not be limited to a series of lessons mainly focused on conveying knowledge. Learning about democratic and peaceful citizenship can only become more effective providing it is successfully integrated into a wider framework in which the school is considered a democratic community, a kind of mini democratic society. Similar to society beyond the school, this community will of course be based on a structure of authority. Within this structure, however, pupils also learn to take responsibility for their own citizenship and, more importantly, they learn in practice how they can constructively manage the many differences of opinion and conflicts that are inevitable in any kind of living together – from school to democracy (Verhoeven, 2012).

Of course, this all may sound good in theory, but it obviously presents a considerable challenge to schools and school teams. If they want to tackle these challenges in practice, they are bound to encounter a number of obstacles and pitfalls (Van Tuijl & Ruiterkamp, 2011). A typical example is the lack of experience with a whole school approach. Both individual teachers and teams may view this approach with trepidation, e.g. because they are frustrated by earlier failures or suffering from a degree of innovation fatigue. Another stumbling block relates to the fact that the impact of a whole school approach is not immediately evident or quickly apparent. These challenges and many obstacles are real. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to continue to make an effort to promote a whole school approach to democratic and peaceful conflict management in schools. This is demonstrated by empirical research into the impact of the school climate.

### **The importance of the school climate**

Why is the school climate so important? According to Thapa and colleagues (2013), a positive school climate can be associated with, amongst other things, learning benefits and academic performance, as well as an effective health and prevention policy. Schools that want to tackle bullying effectively, they argue, should for example not just invest in learning packages but better also focus on reforming the school climate. The importance of the school climate is also evident within the framework of citizenship and peace education. As Spruyt and colleagues (2015) wrote in a report for the Flemish Peace

Institute several years ago, research shows that the development of citizenship competencies is stimulated if, in addition to conveying knowledge and skills, the school also has an open and democratic climate.

In other words, specific initiatives organised by schools (e.g. a project week) or the contents of particular lessons are by no means the only defining factor when it comes to achieving or not achieving the educational objectives relating to democratic values, norms and participation. The effectiveness of citizenship education also largely depends on the way in which the school is organised and the nature of the school climate. Schools that aim to implement workable programmes focused on citizenship and peace education should, therefore, take into account the wider school climate. For example, it is quite possible that the impact of a programme that is effective in itself, is undone by elements in the wider school context (Spruyt and others, 2015). Moreover, the classroom and school climate in which pupils attend lessons also has an influence

*Pupils acquire the values and skills of democratic citizenship better within a school setting that is in itself democratic and peaceful;*

on pupils' democratic attitudes.

Pupils acquire the values and skills of democratic citizenship better within a school setting that is in itself democratic and peaceful, and where they are encouraged to speak their mind and discuss their opinions.

All this suggests that citizenship and peace education will benefit when programmes take into account the wider school climate, and where possible also focus on reforming this climate. A whole school approach to citizenship and peace projects therefore seems to be a highly promising direction to take. Again, research offers some interesting pointers in this respect. For instance, projects prove to be more effective if the school management actively cooperates and provides support, if there is commitment and input from a competent team of teachers, and if the programme's objectives match and fit into the school's wider pedagogical project.

## Whole school approach to citizenship in Flanders

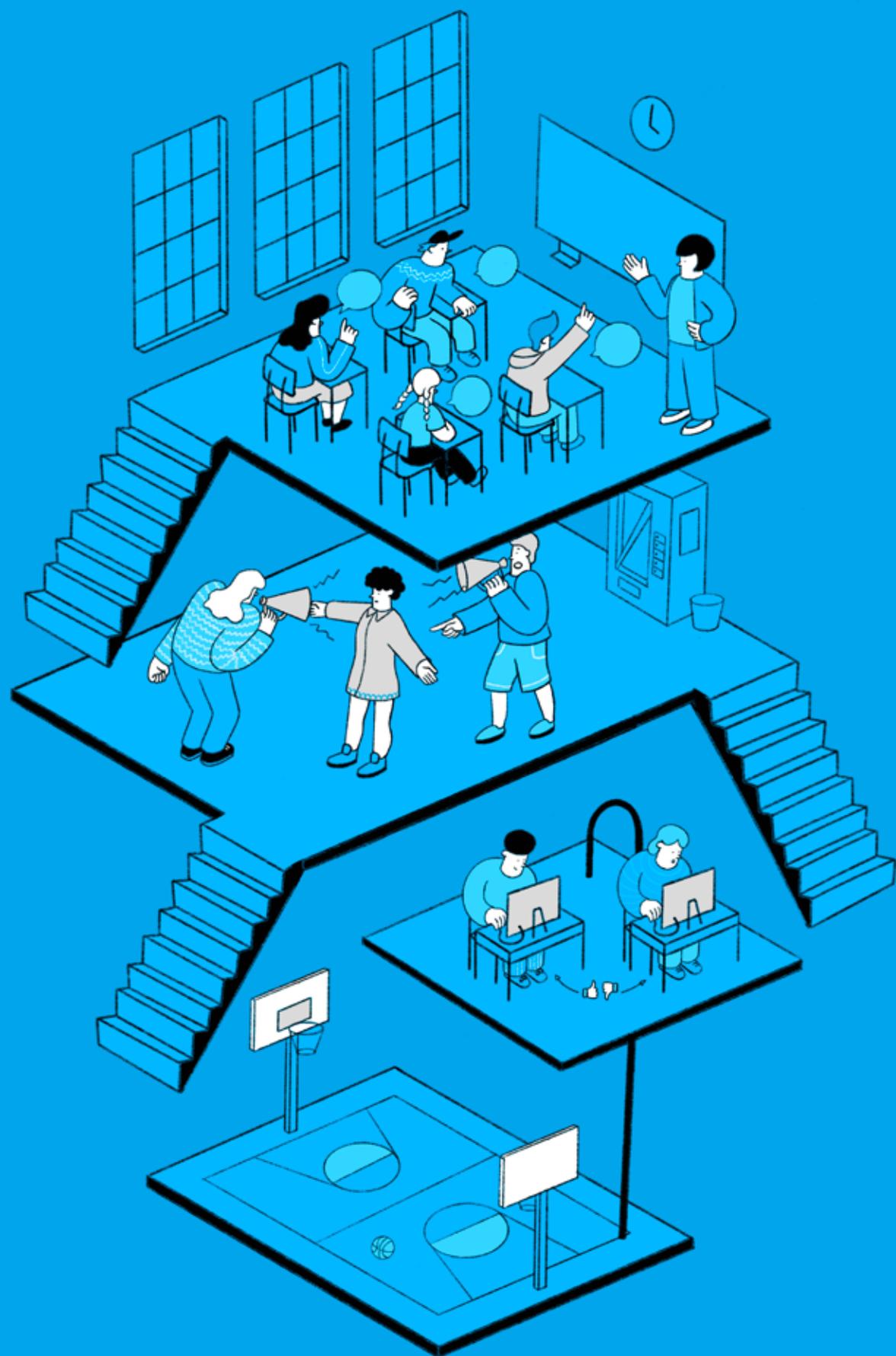
In 2018, the Flemish Parliament adopted new attainment targets for the first level of secondary education; over the next few years, new education targets will also be intro-

### *Citizenship education takes up a prominent role in the new attainment targets.*

duced for the second and third levels. Citizenship education takes up a prominent role in the new attainment targets. Pupils are not only expected to study how democracy and the constitutional state function, they also have to learn how to deal with diversity in society and in teamwork, how to engage in open dialogue, and how to manage conflict situations in a constructive manner. These attainment targets

are not tied to specific subjects. Schools must implement these educational objectives in a transversal manner. The link with a whole school approach is obvious. The transversal implementation of attainment targets offers various opportunities – school teams can adopt an innovative approach to citizenship education – as well as daunting challenges. In practice transversal projects will often necessitate a new way of thinking and organisation. However, for schools intent upon implementing peace and citizenship education across the school curriculum there is a lot of inspiration available. Indeed it appears that for several years now, Flemish education providers have exploring a whole school approach to a number of educational objectives, including citizenship.

Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen (Catholic Education Flanders), for example, is running a project centred on ‘inspirational citizenship’. Vision statements indicate that the catholic education system considers citizenship as “more than just complying with values, norms, rules and agreements”. The idea is that pupils should also learn to take responsibility vis-à-vis each other and society. To this end, it is emphasized that “everyone (all hands and minds) in the school must participate”. This means that schools ought to develop a vision that is shared and conveyed by the entire team, and that sufficient attention is paid to the atmosphere and interactions at school. This should ensure that the school becomes a “training ground for society”. Summarised, the conclusion is: “Focusing on a connecting school climate with your entire school team will have a preventive effect. Teaching should be combined with a focus on the atmosphere and relationships in the classroom. Pupils, parents and personnel must work together in a connecting school and continue to do so when things go wrong. Irrespective of whether it relates to behaviour that is difficult to comprehend or a serious conflict, a connecting school will always approach conflict from a transformative perspective.”



Government-provided education also views citizenship education from the perspective of a school-wide approach. GO! (Flemish Community education system), for example, developed an active citizenship learning/teaching course for secondary education as a “support tool for whole school citizenship implementation”. According to this view, the subject of ‘active citizenship’ “cannot be considered as an isolated topic”, but should be seen “as a school project that necessitates consultation and interaction with other topics and courses”. According to GO!, the success of active citizenship as an “cross-curricular training ground” is in fact closely related to the overall package of school initiatives and lesson content categorised under ‘citizenship’ (Gellens & Vernailen, 2017).

### **Working together on peaceful conflict management**

To conclude, we return to the beginning of this contribution. Our starting point was that, in addition to de-escalating heated tensions and polarisation, schools also have a duty to teach young citizens how they can peacefully manage the many differences of opinion and conflicts typical of a democracy. We suggested that a whole school approach is highly promising in this context. It appears that the success of this whole school approach depends on cooperation. This primarily relates to collaboration within the schools themselves: between the management, teaching team and pedagogical counsellors. Deliberating how to develop and put into practice a whole school approach is a team effort.

***Besides constructive collaboration within the school itself, cooperation with external partners also is valuable and meaningful.***

Besides constructive collaboration within the school itself, cooperation with external partners also is valuable and meaningful, e.g. in the shape of parental involvement, contacts with other schools or organisations in the neighbourhood, interaction with local government and the involvement of external education or training organisations. Finally, whole school projects focused on conflict management, peace and citizenship education can be enhanced through partnerships between schools and researchers. The latter can provide valuable input as to make sure that projects and initiatives tie in with insights provided in the scientific literature, as well as to assist in making these scientific insights more easily accessible to practitioners. In any event, this is how the Flemish Peace Institute views its task: to work in conjunction with people on the ground in order to teach young people how to deal with social conflicts and tensions in a peaceful manner.



## DEALING WITH CONTROVERSY AND POLARISATION AT SCHOOL

This contribution builds on earlier research carried out by the Flemish Peace Institute, published in, among others, a book entitled *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie in de klas* (Managing controversy and polarisation in the classroom) (2018). It also relies on publications pertaining to the effectiveness of peace education and school climate (including B. Spruyt (2015), *Kan je vrede leren? Effectiviteitsonderzoek en vredeseducatie: een literatuurstudie*, (Can peace be taught? Effectiveness study and peace education: a literature study,) Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute; and A. Thapa and others (2013), 'A Review of School Climate Research', *Review of Educational Research*, 81(3), p. 1-29); pertaining to a whole school approach (including M. Delvou and others (2019), *Building Learning Communities for Peace. Action Research Reports from Croatia, Greece, Sweden and the UK*, LCPToolkit (<https://www.lcpeace.eu/>); S. Gellens & L. Vernailen (2017), 'Interlevensbeschouwelijke dialoog. De leerlijn actief burgerschap secundair onderwijs als ondersteuningsinstrument voor schoolbrede burgerschapswerking in het GO!, *Impuls*, 47(4), p. 187-196; S. Verhoeven (2012), *De school als oefenplaats voor democratie*, Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht (thesis); and C. Van Tuijl & E. Ruiterkamp (2011), 'Beginnen met een schoolbrede benadering van gedrag vraagt om... (gedeelde) kernwaarden', *Zorgbreed*, 31(8), 9-12.

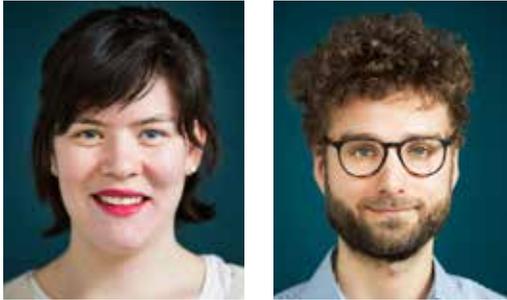
**For further information on conflict, citizenship and peace, please contact Maarten by e-mail ([maarten.vanalstein@vlaamsparlement.be](mailto:maarten.vanalstein@vlaamsparlement.be)).**



*“It is our task to continue to work together to promote peace. Not in the sense of always striving to achieve consensus, that is an impossible ideal. For our democracy, it is crucial that we continue to manage our differences and conflicts in an open-minded and peaceful manner.”*



**Maarten Van Alstein**  
Senior Researcher



## Project DIVERT, an international comparative study of firearms diversion from the legal to the illegal markets

Quitterie de Labbey and Matteo Dressler, both researchers with international experience, have been working for the Flemish Peace Institute since January 2019. They

are involved in Project DIVERT, an international comparative study examining the question how firearms are diverted from the legal to the illegal sphere. This large-scale project is financed by the European Commission and coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute. High time for an interview with our new colleagues about their activities within the Institute in 2019.

**QUITTERIE DE LABBEY AND MATTEO DRESSLER**

**Matteo:** My interest in peace related topics primarily started when, after completing my bachelor's degree, I decided to travel and live in Latin America. During that time I came into contact with communities that have suffered armed conflict in the past and are still facing violence related challenges today. Looking for more answers regarding the causes and potential solutions for these challenges, I decided to attend the Peace and Conflict Matters programme at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. Having completed these studies, I joined the Berghof Foundation in 2015, a German NGO that promotes peace and conflict transformation. At Berghof I started to research on the subject of armed social violence, with a focus on its social dimension. Now, at the Flemish Peace Institute, I mainly concentrate on the role of weapons in society. One of the main reasons for me to start working for the Flemish Peace Institute was the opportunity to study violence and conflict – and their peaceful resolution – within European societies. Something I had wanted to do for some time.

**Quitterie:** I was working in a different field of study, that is international security, with a specific focus on arms export controls. In 2018 my career started at the Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité (GRIP – Group for research and information on peace and security), a research organisation based here in Brussels, where I primarily analysed the legal aspects of Belgian arms exports to countries outside the European Union. Having gained initial experience, I then moved to Stockholm to work for the Stockholm International Peace Institute (SIPRI), a prestigious think tank working on peace related topics, where I conducted research into the control of the arms trade and non proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Middle East and Africa.

*Since 2019, you have both been working at the Flemish Peace Institute on Project DIVERT, which focuses on three methods of diverting firearms and ammunition: theft, fraudulent practices and non-regularization. It is often assumed that most illegal firearms in Europe originate from the Balkans. Are the methods that you are analysing as part of DIVERT significant sources for the illegal arms markets in Europe?*

**Matteo:** One of the main objectives of the research project is to identify the importance of these sources for illegal arms markets in Europe. Extensive research has been carried out in recent years examining weapons smuggling in Europe and the ways in which armed groups and terrorists manage to get hold of these weapons. In fact, research conducted by the Flemish Peace Institute has made a major contribution to this field. However, the three different diversion methods studied in Project DIVERT have so far attracted considerably less research interest. In recent months, we and several other researchers involved in the project, have outlined the approximate scale and identified many cases of these diversion methods for all 28 EU member. This enables us to make a better assessment of the relative importance of these phenomena and gives us a better insight into the specific dynamics at play. In a second phase of the project we zoom in with greater detail on the situation in eight countries: Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden. I am cur-

rently analysing Germany and Spain, while Quitterie is investigating the situation in Belgium and Croatia. Our research partners at SIPRI and Arquebus Solutions have conducted the studies for the other four countries.

**Quitterie:** Our analysis looks not only at the modus operandi or quantity of firearms diversion, but also asks what happens to those guns after they entered the illegal sphere. For example, we are particularly interested to find out in what type of crime they are used. Our objectives are also to study and identify the policy actions and measures that are employed to prevent the diversion of firearms in Europe.

*You have been able to collect a huge amount of information on these topics during the last months. What was the most striking aspect of this research?*

**Quitterie:** I was struck how little is actually known about the phenomenon of firearms diversion in Europe and how difficult it consequently is to gain access to reliable information.

**Matteo:** I completely agree. On the positive side, we have noticed that there is a strong desire to find out more about the subject and that various stakeholders are keen to work in partnership with us to do so. For instance, we have talked to and exchanged valuable information with policymakers, stakeholders and experts throughout Europe in recent months. We hope that we can help them gain a better understanding of the subject, and that those insights can serve as a contribution for developing initiatives focused on preventing the diversion of firearms, in order to make our societies more secure and peaceful.

**Quitterie:** Our analyses indicate that the diversion of firearms is a complex issue involving many different aspects. Over the next few months, we intend to continue our research activities and organise workshops in several European countries, during which we will share our findings to discuss them with experts involved in preventing and fighting firearms diversion on national and international level. For example, agencies involved in the legal control of firearms and their export, police or customs. Effective information exchange is crucial here for the success of this project and our workshops are intended to gather input in order to incorporate it into our final report, which will be published at the end of the summer.

*2019 was all about Project DIVERT for you, but in January 2020, the Flemish Peace Institute also initiated a new research project financed by the European Commission entitled Project TARGET. Can you already tell us more about this research project?*

**Quitterie:** TARGET also analyses the illegal arms trade but takes a broader view, as we are not limited to the three specific diversion methods covered in DIVERT. In addition to the European member states, we will also analyse the situation in countries in the Western Balkans. The main difference, however, is that TARGET focuses specifically on

gun violence. We will study the scale and characteristics of this phenomenon in different European countries and will try to identify the specific relationship between the illegal weapons trade and gun violence.

**Matteo:** By examining gun violence Project TARGET concentrates on the social impact of the weapons trade by asking: How does illicit trafficking influence the level and nature of firearms crime? Is it only the availability of weapons that is important, or do other factors, such as an arms culture or criminal demand also play a role? We pose these questions because so little is known about this phenomenon in Europe. On the other hand we can draw on a large amount of studies examining this subject in the United States and in societies that are heavily impacted by armed conflict.

**Quitterie:** A significant aspect in both projects is the cooperation with other research institutes, i.e. SIPRI and Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University. There are also partnerships with other – more operational – partners such as Europol, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), various national police forces and the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). This collaboration is crucial to expand the exchange of information between the various stakeholders and to complement each other's expertise. Whereas our operational partners assist us with their data, information and insights we can provide them with scientific analyses that is relevant for policy making. By using this collaborative approach, we try to support policy actions and other initiatives aimed at preventing firearms violence.

#### ***To what extent do you focus on the situation in Flanders in these research projects?***

**Quitterie:** Belgium is a deliberate and specific case study in both the DIVERT and TARGET project. These studies significantly improve our insight into the situation in Flanders. Statistics provided by the Flemish Agency for Care and Health demonstrate that 42 people were killed using a firearm in a deliberate act of manslaughter between 2013 and 2017. One of the objectives of Project TARGET is to find out more about the specific context and characteristics of these fatal cases of firearms violence but also to analyse nonfatal cases. In fact, previous studies have shown that fatal arms violence only represents a small part of overall gun violence in Europe. Non-fatal cases of firearms violence often tend to pass under the radar. By analysing fatal and nonfatal violence we aim to better comprehend the actual extent and nature of this phenomenon in Flanders. We also want to be able to compare the situation in Flanders with that in other places in Europe.

**Matteo:** It is important to stress that the illegal firearms trade is very often organised at an international level, and that the situation in Flanders is consequently influenced by the situation in other European countries. By focusing purely on Flanders, we would miss out on important information. It is precisely because we maintain a wide interna-



tional perspective that we will be able to submit significantly better recommendations to the Flemish Parliament. Important in this respect is that we will not only focus on the problems, but also look for potential solutions. Projects DIVERT and TARGET identify good practices throughout Europe and provide inspiration for similar initiatives here in Flanders.

*The fact that you both speak several languages must be an asset for these international projects. You have been living in Belgium for more than twelve months now and are attending Dutch language classes. How are they progressing?*

**Quitterie:** Very well indeed! Understanding and being able to speak Dutch is important not only to be able to monitor the political situation in Flanders, but also to improve our research, as a lot of the information we collate and analyse is authored in Dutch. Being able to speak and understand several European languages is definitely a bonus for these international projects.

*You both previously worked for other research organisations. How is working in a parliamentary environment different?*

**Matteo:** I find working in this political environment very interesting because our findings and recommendations can directly contribute to policy making. We can also organise various events in Parliament, where we present our research to a wider audience. However, these projects are also valuable for the Flemish Parliament itself as they enhance its international outreach. The Flemish Peace Institute has been able to organise various meetings in recent years – including large scale events – in the Flemish Parliament that help give Flanders a voice on the international stage – and it is great to be able to contribute to this.

**For further information on project DIVERT, please contact Matteo and Quitterie by e-mail [matteo.dressler@vlaamsparlement.be](mailto:matteo.dressler@vlaamsparlement.be) or [quitterie.delabbey@vlaamsparlement.be](mailto:quitterie.delabbey@vlaamsparlement.be) or follow them on Twitter ([@MatteoDressler](https://twitter.com/MatteoDressler)) or ([@quitteriedl](https://twitter.com/quitteriedl))**

## FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE 2019 IN FIGURES

29

**Publications** concerning our research

1

**Advisory note** based on our research

45

**Substantive contributions to activities** including 7 abroad

57

**Media mentions** including 17 times  
on television or radio

9217

**People reached** with mailings

122.740

**Views on social media**

# Scientific Council evaluation report for 2019

30 JANUARY 2020

The Scientific Council evaluates the quality of the research performed by the Flemish Peace Institute and gives the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat advice on important research trends in the issues of peace and security.

As in previous years, the evaluation report relies on the Institute's own publications as a prime measure of this quality. However, the Scientific Council notes the Institute's numerous additional activities, including its own seminars and lectures, and contributions by its researchers at other events. Highlights in 2019 include contributions to and presentations at the Wilton Park meeting "Addressing illicit trafficking and access to firearms in the context of organised crime and terrorism – towards a new paradigm" in January; the COARM-NGO conference that was organized by the European External Action Service with Saferworld in Brussels in May; the CEPOL-course 'Firearms linked to organised crime and terrorism – implementation of the EU Firearms Directive' in Lisbon in September; the cross-regional meeting on illicit firearms trafficking, organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna in October; and the Expert Meeting 'Monitoring and Diagnosing Ammunition Diversion, Trafficking, and Misuse', organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in London in December. Taken together, these invited contributions reconfirm that the institute has been internationally recognized as a centre of excellent research on politically highly relevant issues. Moreover, the institute is also an active member of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, which comprises over 90 research centres and think tanks from across Europe, including all EU Member States.

In 2019, the Scientific Council has not only been involved in its regular core business of research assessment but has also accepted the invitation to contribute to the selection procedure of a new director and to discuss the future strategic orientation of the institute with the board of directors.

Over the last fifteen years, the Scientific Council has seen the institute grow into a widely respected source of reliable data and information and of evidence-based advice to the Flemish parliament. The remarkable achievements of a rather small institute have been the result of a stable and supportive environment. The Scientific Council is confident that there is a great deal of additional potential for the work of the institute if it can continue to conduct its research and operations in a supportive environment that respects its scientific orientation.

One of the key sources of the success of the Flemish Peace Institute is its institutional position and the support it has enjoyed over the last fifteen years for independent and high-quality research and analysis. The Scientific Council wishes to emphasize that an open culture for research and advice, a diverse set of stakeholders and an ongoing interaction with the institutional environment are crucial for the scientific quality of the institute and a vital research agenda in the future.

As in previous years, the assessment of the Scientific Council is structured along the main thematic clusters of the Institute.

### The arms trade and use of weapons

Research on the trade in and the use of arms has been the Institute's core business since its establishment. Over the last ten years, the institute has gained a particular recognition for its work on firearms in Flanders and beyond, which is reflected in the external funding it attracted.

In 2019, the Institute published three policy briefs – a format that was pioneered the year before and was welcomed by the Scientific Council a valuable addition to the institute's other publication series. The three policy briefs all address matters that are related to the European Union: 'Reviewing the EU Common Position on arms exports: Whither EU arms transfer controls?' stands out as one of the few profound commentaries of the review process that the EU undertook in 2019. The 16-page long policy brief provides an excellent overview of the (modest) result of the review and of the process itself. The other topic addressed is the European Defence Fund and its impact on the arms control policies of the EU members states. This policy brief is available in a Dutch and in an English version. For scholars and practitioners alike, these policy briefs are highly valuable sources of up-to-date information on important developments in the EU.

In addition to the policy briefs, the Institute published two reports and an advisory note. The report "Armed to Kill" focuses on public mass shootings that occurred in Europe between 2009 and 2016, and aims at understanding how the perpetrators of these acts acquired their firearms. It provides a detailed overview of the 24 cases of mass shootings that occurred in this period, which is extremely useful from an empirical point of view

as it gathers in one place the most important data on each mass shooting event. The analysis is fascinating and highlights some fundamental trends and differences between types of mass shootings, not just regarding weapons' types, but also pertaining to processes of acquisition and to weapons' origins. The report ends with a series of useful recommendations regarding the legislation on the acquisition of firearms, but also concerning the fight against illegal arms trafficking within and into Europe.

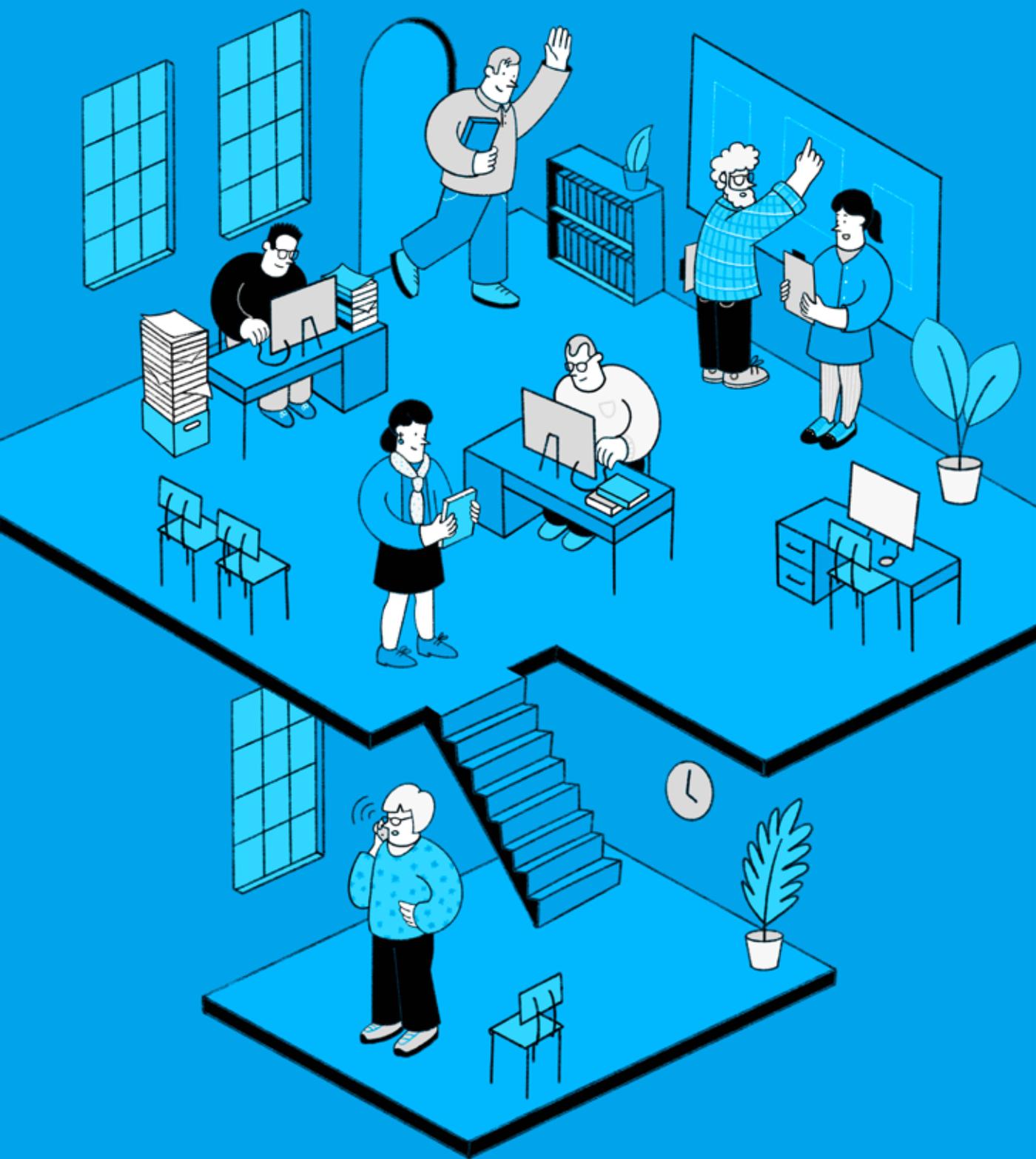
The report "Vlaanderen en nucleaire non-proliferatie" provides a very useful overview of the Flemish rules, procedures and regulations regarding nuclear materials in the context of the international governance of nuclear non-proliferation with the Non-proliferation Treaty, the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and the European Union as key institutional pillars. In addition, the report gives an overview of the Flemish industry in this field and points out that Flanders does not export any nuclear materials as such but a range of dual-use products. The report concludes with useful policy recommendations and advices to further elaborate and formalize the cooperation between the Flemish institutions responsible for the control of dual use goods, such as the Advisory Commission on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (CANVEK), customs, and the Federal Public Services Foreign Affairs and Defense. The advisory note "Advies over de optimalisering van Vlaamse dual use exportcontrole in het licht van de preventie van nucleaire proliferatie" builds on the report.

The Scientific Council notes that the fact sheet on the Flemish foreign arms trade in the previous year has not yet been published due to the late submission of the annual report of the Flemish Government, but is expected to come out soon.

## Managing conflict and violence in society

In comparison with the many publications on the arms trade and production, the research programme 'Dealing with conflict and violence in society' has been less visible in 2019 again in the reports published by the Flemish Peace Institute itself. Building on the book "Omgaan met Controverse en Polarisatie in de klas", the institute has published the report "Controversy and polarisation in the classroom. Suggestions for pedagogical practice". This report will help to disseminate the research findings to a broad audience and to build a reputation of the institute in this field. The results of this study have been valorised in 2019 in various external publications and presented at numerous events of (local) partner organisations.

The Scientific Council notes that the final reports for the study on the local approach for prevention of violent radicalisation and the evaluation of the Flemish Plan of Action on the prevention of radicalisation was foreseen for 2019, but has been delayed. The Scientific Council still sees a lot of potential for the Institute to acquire a reputation for high quality research on radicalization.



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*“Over the past fifteen years, the Scientific Council has seen the Flemish Peace Institute develop into a highly respected source of reliable information and empirical advice to the Flemish Parliament.”*

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