

**Speech by Mr. Mendes Bota, on the debate of report GALE (Doc.13509), about
“Violence in and through the media”
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
Strasbourg 24th June 2014**

Madam President,

Dear Colleagues,

Do you recall the Blacksburg school massacre, in the United States? 2007. 32 young people murdered. And the one in Dunblane, Scotland? 1996. 16 children dead. And that of Erfurt, in Germany? 2002. 16 people killed. In Germany still. Winnenden. 2009. 15 victims. And Columbine, yet again in the United States? 15 dead, among students and teachers. And Sandyhook, Newtown, USA, 2012. 20 children killed.

The list goes on endlessly and crosses every continent in the world. But there is a common trace these massacres perpetrated in universities and high schools share. Their authors were young people particularly attracted to extremely violent movies and videogames.

What motivates these killers to walk in there shooting randomly, leaving behind a trail of death, mourning, pain and blood, splattered all over walls and ground? What goes on inside their minds?

For decades now scientific studies have been made about the phenomenon of violence and the motivations of the perpetrators. The wide majority of this investigation points to a close connection between the overexposure to violent tv contents and a sickening use of computer games and the surge in violent behavior among children and young people.

The chances of them becoming woman abusers is also high. It is no exclusive to any race or social class. The bibliography backing this fact is vast.

But what is astonishing, or perhaps not, is the governments' inertia in tackling this problem that undermines the pillars of society. They have learned nothing from the issue of tobacco, to which they failed to react in time, despite certainties regarding the damage and the human and financial costs behind this addiction.

There are powerful interests in place, from the economic empires who exploit violence in tv entertainment and videogame productions, and who also exploit violent pornography, from which women and children aren't immune, main victims as they are of heinous crimes that jeopardize not only their physical and mental integrity, but especially their human dignity.

One may wonder: does the media only reflect real violence from the outside world, or do they stimulate and contribute for it?

The trivialization of violence, desert to our lunch, sitting with us at the dinner table, ends up transforming it into something normal, a part of our daily lives; it's all fine, it's all modern day culture. And there are those who extract entertainment from it!

It is a corruption of principles. Force outweighing intelligence. And, on its path of destruction, no human being or material goods are safe, whether it's children, women, or the elderly.

Be it at home, on the streets or at a football stadium. One shoots a person in the head as easily as setting fire to a forest. Assaults rage for no particular reason. People are murdered like flowers being stepped on. For nothing! Just for the pleasure in killing and wrongdoing.

The risk inherent to the matter is that children tend to replicate what they see. As early as 2007, New Scientist magazine reported that, on enrolling in primary school, the average north-american child had already visualized around 8000 murders and 100 000 acts of violence.

It is foreseeable that a european child does not wander far off these numbers, so many are the north-american shows and series taking root in european tv channels. And parents are not always present.

Studies point to an average of 25 acts of violence per hour shown on children's shows, against only 5 on remaining shows, and indicate that children who watch too much television become more aggressive than others. Television is a wicked "electronic babysitter."

There exist excessively violent animated cartoons. That's what "Dragon Ball", "Pokemon" or "Power Rangers" are, even in a logic of Good versus Evil. Children become tolerant to physical violence, convinced that aggressivity is rewardable.

They may, on the other hand, acquire the syndrome that they might be robbed, stabbed, assaulted, mutilated, hence suffering from sleep disturbances.

In saying this, I am aware that violence is a plural phenomenon, and one must not ascribe its causes solely to the media. One must reject that simplification.

Naturally, I agree with the proposals submitted by Mr. Roger Gale, aiming to fight and control violence in the media, as well as the need to erect legal frameworks and codes of conduct that involve all the private stakeholders.

I permit myself to doubt the efficiency of self-regulation regarding this matter on the part of those who think they only do what they do because the public wants it and consumes it.

The rejection of violence as a behavior or method in solving conflicts is a major civilizational issue and a question of civility, in which the most vulnerable must be the priority focus of our attention.

Violence kills us, inside and outside the skin. Kills both, our bodies and souls.