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The Role of Intercultural Dialogue in the EU Policy

Culture and creativity are important drivers for personal development, social cohesion and economic growth. Today's strategy promoting intercultural understanding confirms culture's place at the heart of our policies.

José Manuel Barroso,
President of the European Commission, on 10 May 2007[1]

The European Union cultural policy is based on respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity – "unity in diversity". The Article 151 of the EU Treaty states that: "...the Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore" and that "action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:

– improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;

– conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;

– non-commercial cultural exchanges;

– artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector"[2].

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[1] http://productivityofculture.org/symposium/cultural-policy-2/.

[2] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11997E/htm/11997E.html#0173010078; about cultural policy see more: K. Waluch, 2001. *Polityka kulturalna Unii Europejskiej*. Pock: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Novum.

Additionally, on an agenda for culture announced by the Commission in May 2007 we can read that: "…culture lies at the heart of human development and civilisation. Culture is what makes people hope and dream, by stimulating our senses and offering new ways of looking at reality. It is what brings people together, by stirring dialogue and arousing passions, in a way that unites rather than divides. Culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual and material traits that characterize a society and social group. It embraces literature and arts as well as ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs"[3].

Therefore, to help construct a European cultural space, based on a common cultural heritage as well as on national and regional diversity, the EU realizes special programmes which support many cultural actions and projects. It is worth noticing that the Commission pays special attention to safeguarding the position of Europe's small cultures and less-widely spoken languages.

The EU's current Culture Programme (2007–2013) aims to achieve three main objectives:

— to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector,
— to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output,
— and to foster intercultural dialogue[4].

Why do EU members put so much effort to help intercultural dialogue develop? The answer is easy – because culture can unite people as well as divide them. Cultural differences can cause conflicts in workplaces, schools, local communities and at a country's level. And why is the dialogue needed? Because Europe's cultural face is changing very fast.

In their books, Michelle Lebaron and Venashri Pillay pose a question how culture shapes and reshapes conflict. They think that "culture frames the outer boundaries of our mind's vision, so that the cultural outsiders' terrain that lies beyond our horizon is difficult to recognize". They also stress that "culture tells us subtly why we do what we do, rendering us unfamiliar with the lives of cultural outsiders". Authors add that "culture also carries shared memories and expectations across historical periods and geographic areas by means of symbols that touch our heart and mind" [Lebaron, Pillay 2006, p. 93].

Apprehension of cultural differences can lead to the simplification and false statement that we and our values are good while they (strangers, migrants) and their values are worse. We promote tolerance in all aspects of our life, but nowadays more and more Europeans experience fear of "strangers".

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[3] *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world*, SEC (2007) 570. Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0242:FIN:EN:PDF.

[4] http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc611_en.pdf.

Our continent was always multicultural, but historical and social diversity of Europe increased after the Second World War, when over 20 million people had to change their place of residence. During next decades Europe became a continent of immigration which resulted from the disintegration of former colonial empires – the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese ones. The cultural face of Europe changed also the needs of European economies greatly damaged during the war (*Gastarbeiters*) [Nowak, Milczarek (eds.) 2006, p. 334]. Nowadays, the multicultural diversity increases especially as a result of the enlargement of the European Union, the free movement of workers and globalisation.

Europe is today home or host to over 40 million international migrants, who represent about 8.9% of its total population. More than half of them have come from countries outside the EU. The other 45% have moved between the countries of this region. In the meantime, Europe has become one of the main destinations on the world map of international migration. The most important causes of immigration are related to the considerable economic, social, and political differences between relatively rich, democratic, and stable European societies and much poorer, often unstable, less free, but also much younger and demographically growing societies in neighbouring and other world regions. It is clear, that migration occurs from more disadvantaged to less disadvantaged countries which offer better opportunities [Münz, Straubhaar, Vadean, Vadean 2006; Düvell 2006, p. 224].

Immigration increases diversity – Europe becomes new home for more and more people of different nationalities, religions, cultures. Fears that the influx of migrants will disrupt the social system and dilute national identities are more and more frequent. There is a concern that increasing numbers of immigrants will fragment communities into smaller pieces. Nowadays, many European cities are multicultural and cosmopolitan. This mosaic of cultures changes cities, landscapes and lifestyles as well as food habits – "ethnic" food is more and more popular [Vertovec, Wessendorf 2004]. But there is a long way from the popularity of kebab or Peking duck to the acceptance of minorities.

According to Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union, ethnic origin is a dominating reason for discrimination [*Discrimination in the European Union…*]. However, other survey shows that in 2000 two out of three EU citizens (64%) consider it a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions and cultures [*Attitudes towards minority groups in the European Union…*].

The clash of cultures became a serious problem for all the Member States. But we must remember that relocation to a new country and culture can be difficult for immigrants too. Challenges relating to languages, religion, culture, way of thinking, habits and customs are huge, especially when the local community has problems with understanding and accepting new people and their differences. But what makes life even more difficult for immigrants is racism

and discrimination. Immigrants also often experience misunderstanding and lack of acceptance. The challenges, which they have to face, can be strengthened by the fear of residents, who worry about what those unknown and different people might do. The local community can manifest their prejudices and show discriminatory behaviour towards immigrants very clearly. Very often we do not understand religion or culture of other nations. Strong adherence to their religious beliefs, regular religious practises and manifestation of symbols of their ethnic or religious identity arouse fears [Lebaron, Pillay 2006, pp. 121–123; Buijs, Rath 2002]. However, immigrants are not always flexible and do not adapt quickly to new and different living and working conditions in a new country. Many immigrants have also problems with sociocultural and psychological integration. The low level of their skills and lack of language proficiency cause that they have no chance on the local labour market, so they get unskilled or low skilled jobs without any good earning opportunities. They try to find help and support in the previous generation of migrants from the fatherland, so they integrate, but only with their countrymen. They tend to live with their ethnic communities, which can lead to isolation and creating ghettos. And isolation often means social marginalisation. At work many immigrants experience negligence, the lack of training possibility, unequal treatment and time and pay discrimination. Mostly, they have no chance to get a good job already at the beginning of the application process. In spite of their – sometimes very high – qualifications, their place of birth eliminates them.

Furthermore, also gender as well as the cultural background seems to be an important determinant of employment and reason for discrimination too. It is necessary to stress that migrant women experience discrimination in the labour market more often them men. It is very common that migrant women from middle and low-income countries are likely, even more than men, to remain outside the labour market and spend most of their time at home. Such a situation leads to serious social problems – due to difficulties in acquiring language skills and establishing social networks, women more often do not integrate with their host local society. In the era of globalisation and free workers' movement in Europe, discrimination in the labour market is an important social problem and it can lead to wasting human capital, knowledge or work experience [Kraal, Roosblad 2008, pp. 5–10; Münz, Straubhaar, Vadean, Vadean 2006, p. 35].

In addition, global migrations are taking on new forms. Due to the safer, quicker and cheaper transport and information technology, people have become more geographically flexible and mobile. The legal status plays a crucial role in integration. Only immigrants with legal resident status are included in the intercultural dialogue.

However, we can observe in Europe inter-religious and intra-religious conflicts and clear manifestations of anti-Semitism and discrimination, especially against Romanies and Muslims. Especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11

and later bomb attacks in Spain in March 2004 and in the UK in July 2005, significantly larger number of Europeans treat Muslims and Islamists with distrust. Also events such as the assassination of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh provoke aggression against Muslims. For many people it is difficult to understand that most minorities do not want to achieve religious domination, but they only want us to respect the symbols of their religion and want freedom for their religious practices [*Inter-religious dialogue*...].

Anyway, in European multicultural societies, the diversity of religious beliefs and convictions can lead to misconceptions and fears, and the lack of the ability to communicate in foreign languages hampers integration and cooperation.

The mix of cultures may affect the economic and social development and political stability of the EU. However, it can also develop European cultures, stimulate the reflection on cultural identity and build openness and respect for others. Therefore, an effective and constructive dialogue between people and cultures is necessary for any multicultural society to function. Intercultural communication helps to understand other cultures better, leads to wider recognition of cultural heritage, tolerance and full respect for different cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious groups. For these reasons, the promotion of an intercultural dialogue is one of the main objective of the EU cultural policy. This dialogue plays a fundamental role in building Europe where people live together, not just co-exist. It helps prevent racism, isolation and discrimination of immigrants.

To make the dialogue successful, the Commission has implemented a wide variety of cultural projects and programmes. Only a few of them are described in this article. In Spring 2007 the Commission ordered a poll on culture and values within Europe with a view to fostering intercultural dialogue. The survey was carried out in all the Member States [*September 2007 – Eurobarometer...* p. 1]. Its results show that the large majority of Europeans think that culture plays an important role in their own lives. Indeed, this analysis shows that culture is important to them personally. Most of them also agree with the opinion that most of the European countries have the same cultural roots. There is another aspect of this research. It shows that many people see an important role of education in the intercultural dialogue. They think that developing foreign language teaching in schools as well as increasing exchange programmes for students and teachers could help Europeans know each other better [*September 2007 – Eurobarometer survey...* pp. 3–4].

It is undeniable that school can play a very important role in the intercultural dialogue. In a multicultural society proper education can help to avoid conflicts and fragmentation in the society itself. According to Marie Marcey, who analysed Britain's experience of multiculturalism in education, cultural differences are viewed by the British society as a problem rather than a resource or as a cause

for concern rather than celebration. She explains that Britain has a long history of ethnic diversity, but significant immigration from outside Europe began just after the Second World War with the recruitment of workers from colonies and former colonies for reconstruction. At the beginning, it was assumed that they would return home, but they stayed and settled down. So, the question about the integration of immigrant children in British schools has appeared. Firstly, they tried to absorb immigrant children into the British way of life as quickly as possible. But this only increased hostility to immigrants and led to restrictive immigration law. Next, the government promoted integration, but at the meantime it ignored the problem of white racism for too long. No earlier than in late nineteen seventies, the government took a strong stance against racial discrimination and started to promote cultural pluralism in education and society. However, neither multiculturalism or antiracism eliminated racism, because there were too many mistakes in educational policy. Part of the educational programs claimed that there was a genetic explanation of educational underachievement of ethnic minority children – black intelligence is different from white one. Such programs ignored the problem of poverty and poor education opportunities. Other programs did not take into account the relationship between socioeconomic status and education, but they all ignored the fact that middle class children succeed in school whether they are black, brown or white. In conclusion, Marie Macey stresses that ethnic segregation is dysfunctional for both majority and minority groups and leads to tension, conflict and even violence. Racism and ethnocentrism are widespread and can significantly increase at time of rapid change, insecurity and uncertainty (economic crisis, terrorist attacks). However, she thinks that schools can influence society, both structurally and ideologically. She stresses that "...schools may not be able to change social hierarchies, but they could change the membership of them through ensuring genuine equality of opportunity, irrespective of social class or ethnicity" [Macey 2003, pp. 181–187].

Young people are our future, so the Commission thinks that we should encourage and involve them in shaping the future of the EU. They should also take part in the intercultural dialogue.

Many children of immigrants were born in Europe, grew up and were educated here, and they intend to spend the rest of their lives in Europe. Do they consider themselves to be Europeans? What does Europe mean for today's young people? These are the questions posed by the project **Born in Europe**. It tries to generate an important intercultural debate with discussions on immigration, integration, cultural identity, mutual understanding and acceptance. The project also touches such topics as European citizenship and the role of women in the society or family structures[5]. Another project, **Bosnian Triptych**, is, by reflection on the tragedy in Srebrenica, aimed to integrate children from different national and

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[5] See more: http://www.born-in-europe.de.

religious groups in Bosnia and partner countries. The children explored together the diversity of their cultural backgrounds, and worked to develop mutual acceptance. The project stressed that the tragedy of Srebrenica should not take place anymore, and that it should be a lesson for Europeans. The project drew attention to the role that cultural dialogue and exchange can play in uniting people of different religions, nationalities and ethnic origins[6].

The young are addressees of the programme **Youth in Action**[7]. This programme promotes mobility within and beyond the EU, encouraging learning beyond traditional classrooms, the mix0 of cultures and the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the Comenius programme, which focuses on the first phase of education, aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the diversity of European cultures and languages. The mobility of students and academic staff is promoted by Erasmus. Studying abroad helps students to develop academically and personally, to build vital life skills and to stimulate interest in other cultures.

The Commission thinks that the effective and constructive dialogue between people and cultures is necessary for any multicultural society to function. The intercultural dialogue is a process that can help all people living in the EU improve their ability to deal with a more open, but also more complex, cultural environment. What's more, intercultural dialogue is an opportunity to contribute to and benefit from a diverse and dynamic society, not only in Europe but also around the world. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence. Promotion of intercultural competences is important because they give us ability to communicate successfully with people from other cultures. They allow us to think without any prejudices and to understand other cultures. They are also essential in the context of the global economy. The employability, adaptability and mobility of artists and people working in the cultural field as well as the mobility of works of art are important for the cultural development as people from all the EU can benefit from an easier access to culture and cultural works.

To stress that Europe's great cultural diversity is a unique advantage, the European Parliament and Council established the year 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The aim of this initiative, with € 10 million budget, was to encourage all people living in Europe to explore both the benefits of European rich cultural heritage and the opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions. The project shows that the intercultural dialogue is a fundamental part of European citizenship – active and open to the world,

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[6] See more: http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/?s=tryptyk&a=main.

[7] See more about programme: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc100_en.htm.

and should be an important part of European policies towards neighbouring countries and external relations further afield [*Highlights of the European Year… p. 3*]. There was a special focus on eight major topics during the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue: culture and the media, minorities, migration, religion, education/science, the workplace, multilingualism and youth. The Year involved a large number of events and initiatives such as information and promotion campaigns, debates connected with the subject of intercultural dialogue, the photo competition "Cultures on my Street", the European Festival of Intercultural Dialogue, concert "Together with Diversity", Couleur Café Festival, mini football games "Football in the Park – Football for Diversity" or conference "New Perspectives for Intercultural Dialogue in Europe". There were ambassadors of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, also from Poland (Agnieszka Holland and Adam Michnik), who tried to show benefits of cultural diversity and promote the intercultural dialogue in the world. The Commission also co-financed seven European-wide flagship projects: **DIVERSIDAD Building the Bridge Between European Urban Cultures**, which offered European artists from different urban cultures opportunity to meet, share their ideas, and create a lasting bridge of exchange; **iyouwe SHARE THE WORLD**, which aimed to increase primary school children's awareness of intercultural dialogue by encouraging exchanges between artists from a range of cultures, thus creating a chain of diversity and developing a network of experiences; **Alter Ego**, which aimed to promote the intercultural dialogue, cross-cultural understanding and the active European citizenship of young people through collaborative art projects that would encourage them to reach beyond their normal social circles; **Cultures from around the Block**, which offered the participants a wide spectrum of creative activities, such as shooting a documentary film, creating a website informing people about the process of local integration, and finally presenting the results arising from the local projects; **Tatapume Intercultural Dialogue Radio Campaign**, which aimed to raise awareness of the extensive migratory movements in Europe and their impact on today's society; **Meeting the Other**, a multidisciplinary project with a special emphasis on cultural expressions created by migrants, which covered several areas including journalism, research and cultural production and **the StrangerFestival**, the biggest event for young people, which promoted artistic expression through video-making [*Highlights of the European Year… p. 3*].

The mentioned debates show that there are still many barriers to intercultural communication with migrants and minorities. The lack of language skills deprives migrants of opportunities for dialogue and prevents them from relations and contacts with their neighbours and the authorities. So, the participants of debates called for active strategies for integrating immigrants with local communities in the host countries. But on the other hand, due to dramatic falls in birth rate,

Europe needs migrant workers. And they stress that they considerthemselves to be Europeans and that they do not seek cultural domination, but want language training, better relations with their neighbours, the access to education for their children and attainability of the legal status [*Integrating conversations...*].

Moreover, the Commission considers intercultural dialogue as one of the main instruments of peace and conflict prevention. The Commission is also involved in the project of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, and the creation of specific debate on culture within the political dialogues with third countries. The Commission thinks that culture is a key factor in the international relations.

In addition to this, the Commission has focused its action on promoting support for human rights, including the protection and promotion of cultural rights, as well as the rights of persons belonging to minorities [*Communication from the Commission...*].

To support the intercultural dialogue, the Commission promotes many language projects, especially due to the fact that knowledge of languages has become a key factor of employability and mobility for people and gives an opportunity to understand cultural diversity better.

To sum up, making people aware of the cultural diversity as well as the need for intercultural dialogue are the most important issues. The role of such a dialogue in the EU cultural policy is crucial – it is one of three main objectives of the current Culture Programme. Nowadays, a true dialogue is urgently needed at all levels and in all fields, especially due to the fact that for migrants it can be a significant element of integration. But it will succeed only if we respect such values as pluralism, tolerance, solidarity and non-discrimination. Apart from this, we cannot forget that intercultural dialogue should take place in the streets, in shops, at schools, so anywhere where people meet and interact.

To be successful, the dialogue should avoid classifications of migrants and minorities according to the legal status, nationality, religion or ethnicity, because such categorisation can build stereotypes and prejudices.

Abstract

The European Union cultural policy is based on the respect for cultural diversity – "unity in diversity". Furthermore, the enlargement of the European Union, the free movement of workers and globalisation have increased the multicultural character of many member states. In those multicultural societies, the diversity of religious beliefs and convictions can lead to misconceptions and fears, and the lack of the ability to communicate in foreign languages hampers integration and cooperation.

The mix of cultures can develop European cultures, stimulate reflection on cultural identity and build openness and respect for the others, but also may affect economic and social development and political stability of the EU. The effective and constructive dialogue between people and cultures is necessary for any multicultural society to

function. Intercultural communication helps to understand better other cultures, leads to wider recognition of cultural heritage, tolerance and full respect for different cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious groups. For these reasons, the promotion of intercultural dialogue is one of the main objectives of the EU cultural policy. This dialogue plays a fundamental role in building Europe, where people live together, not just co-exist. It helps prevent racism, isolation and discrimination of immigrants.

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