NOTE

from : Council General Secretariat

to : Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) / Council

Subject : Intercultural Dialogue and Young People
- Exchange of views

Delegations will find attached a Presidency background note as a basis for the exchange of views to be conducted in Council on 14 February 2008.
Presidency Background Note

Intercultural Dialogue and Young People

Introduction

Cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon. The European canvas is overlaid with the marks of intra-continental migrations, the redrawing of borders, colonialism and multinational empires. Over recent centuries, societies have responded by developing two mechanisms in particular, enabling us to live with diversity without creating unacceptable risks for social cohesion: political pluralism and tolerance. They underpin the very architecture of the political and legal structures surrounding us. In recent decades, the process of cultural diversification has gained considerable momentum. Europe has attracted migrants and asylum-seekers from across the world in search of a better life. Contemporary globalisation creates a world marked by a compression of space and time on a scale that is unprecedented. The revolutions in telecommunications, media and transport have rendered national cultural systems less isolated form each other. On the global scale, intercultural conflicts are played out in this new compressed world.

In this situation, pluralism and tolerance are more important than ever; however, they may not be sufficient to face the new challenges successfully. A more active, a better-structured and more widely shared effort in managing cultural diversity is needed based on mutual understanding and respect for core cultural values. Intercultural dialogue, which can be understood as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritages, is intimately linked to the fundamental ambition underlying the construction of Europe, namely to bring together the peoples of Europe. It is more than ever necessary since growing exposure to globalisation is both an opportunity for promoting diversity and creativity, and a challenge to Europe's ability to ensure cohesive societies.
The Treaty establishing the European Community gives it the task of creating an ever-closer union between the peoples of Europe and of contributing to the flowering of the cultures of Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and also highlighting their common cultural heritage. The key to success is intercultural dialogue.

In addition, the combined effect of the successive enlargements of the Union, the increased mobility resulting from the single market, migratory flows\(^1\), more significant exchanges with the rest of the world through trade, education, leisure and globalisation in general, is increasing interactions between European citizens, and all those living in the European Union, and the various cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religions in Europe and beyond.

European citizens, and all those living in the Union temporarily or permanently, should therefore have the opportunity to take part in intercultural dialogue and fulfil their potential in a diverse, pluralist, solidarity-based and dynamic society not only in Europe but also in the world.

Intercultural dialogue appears to be the tool of choice for citizens to manage the complex reality in our societies and galvanise them. Cultural differences cover all the facets of individual cultural identities: geographic origin, ethnicity, languages, social and educational environment, religious, philosophical or agnostic convictions. Those differences should be put in dialogue so that all people living in the European Union are involved in the transition from multicultural society to intercultural society.

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\(^1\) "The migrant population from outside Europe represents 18 million persons and is increasing; they are often young" – BEPA, "Investing in youth: an empowerment strategy", April 2007.
In this context, it is very important to encourage intercultural dialogue among young people living in the Union, at a time they are still developing their own vision of the world and acquiring skills and competences for their future. Contact and interaction with cultures other than their own stimulates their curiosity and the desire to connect with peers from around the world and contributes to tolerance and mutual respect which are prerequisites for intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue also generates new ideas and fosters an understanding of society. It allows them to discover the richness of cultural diversity for their own development as well as for society, thereby facilitating their involvement as citizens.

Over the years, intercultural dialogue has become an important element of Community action. Indeed, the European Union has for many years encouraged intercultural dialogue — inside and outside the European Union — through various programmes and initiatives.

At European level, EU policy recognises the valuable contribution that young people can make to intercultural dialogue through their active participation in society and encourages young people to travel and experience new cultures.

The European Union also acknowledges the importance of initiatives taken by other international institutions, including the Council of Europe, the OSCE and UNESCO. The Council of Europe Youth campaign "All different – all equal" is seen as a good example of promoting values of tolerance and solidarity among and by young people.

However, it appears necessary today to respond to the need for a deeper and more structured dialogue between cultures, which would involve not only public authorities but also civil society as a whole. This is the reason why intercultural dialogue needs to become a lasting and visible priority for the European Union.
The objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue


The specific objectives of the Year put a special emphasis on young people:
- seek to raise the awareness of all those living in the EU, in particular young people, of the importance of intercultural dialogue in their daily life;
- work to identify, share and give a visible European recognition to best practices in promoting intercultural dialogue throughout the EU, especially among young people and children;
- foster the role of education as an important medium for teaching about diversity, increase the understanding of other cultures and developing skills and best social practices, and highlight the central role of the media in promoting the principle of equality and mutual understanding;
- raise the profile, increase the coherence of and promote all Community programmes and actions contributing to intercultural dialogue and ensure their continuity;
- contribute to exploring new approaches to intercultural dialogue involving cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors.

A European Year devoted to intercultural dialogue constitutes a unique awareness-raising tool for affirming this priority and involving citizens. It will be the start of a more permanent dialogue between cultures in a changing Europe in order to bring people together and thus to contribute to tolerance and mutual respect.
But intercultural dialogue cannot be imposed from above, by the EU or a national administration; it is therefore essential to find best practices in civil society, support them, learn from them and share them at national and European level. The "bottom-up approach" chosen for the Year means that Civil Society, including youth organisations, has been involved in preparing the Year from the very beginning. The European Commission is collaborating with the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, ensuring that the voice of the organizations with a rich experience in this field is heard.

**Achievements - What does intercultural dialogue mean in terms of youth policies and programmes at the EU level?**

Intercultural dialogue will be the main subject in the youth field in 2008, with implications going beyond the Year. In fact, intercultural dialogue will become a transversal priority in various EU policies, actions and programmes, in fields such as culture, sports, citizenship and, of course, youth.

The YOUTH Programme (2000-2006) financed a multitude of projects aimed at developing cultural understanding, strengthening fundamental values such as human rights and combating racism and xenophobia or addressing cultural diversity by facilitating dialogue and joint activities of young people from multicultural, multiethnic and multi-faith backgrounds.

The Youth in Action Programme (2007-2013) - which has as its general objectives to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union and to enhance mutual understanding between young people in different countries - will tackle intercultural dialogue as a priority in 2008. It will support young people working together on this issue by offering co-funding for projects.
Furthermore, a European conference on inter-religious dialogue in the youth field is envisaged during the Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

In the framework of the structured dialogue, young people at all levels – local, regional, national and European – will have the chance to make known their views on this topic and to get their opinions heard by policy-makers.

An open call for proposals in the framework of the year of intercultural dialogue was also published by the European Commission in 2007. One of the award criteria was the number of people involved directly and indirectly in the project, with a special emphasis on young people. In parallel, at the national level, National Coordination Bodies are in the process of selecting and preparing projects, many of which have youth as their target group.

By bringing young people together and creating links between them, intercultural dialogue counters phenomena of social exclusion and thus facilitates participation and fosters active citizenship of young people. Intercultural dialogue can consequently be considered as a tool which contributes to the fulfilment of the objectives of the European youth policy priority areas and particularly the common objectives of participation.

The Commission in its September 2007 Communication on full participation of young people in education, employment and society emphasises that empowering young people and creating favourable conditions for them to develop their skills, to work and to participate actively in society is essential for the sound economic and social development of the European Union, particularly in the context of globalisation, knowledge-based economies, ageing societies, but also in the culture of diversity.
Links with Culture and Education Policies

In the context of intercultural dialogue, young people need to be regarded as a political priority in all fields related to social life, including culture. Promotion of culture and access of young people to culture could strengthen links among individuals, encourage their participation in the society and promote intergeneration and intercultural dialogue. Culture and creativity are important drivers for personal development, social cohesion and economic growth. The arts are also a playground of contradiction and symbolic confrontation, allowing for individual expression, critical self-reflection and mediation. They thus naturally cross borders and speak directly to people’s emotions. Creative citizens, engaged in cultural activity produce new spaces and potentials for dialogue.

Promoting strategies in favour of intercultural dialogue is a demanding task. It entails an education system which generates capacities for criticism and innovation, and spaces in which particularly young people are allowed to participate and to express themselves.

Intercultural competences - citizenship competence, plurilingual competence, social commitment, a solidarity-based outlook and multiperspectivity - should be a full part of citizenship and human rights education and a tool for improving mobility, employment and social cohesion of the young generation. Competent public authorities and education institutions can make full use of the descriptors of key competences for intercultural communication in designing and implementing curricula and study programmes at all levels of education. The same goes for the cultural sector in designing activities for young audience.

Informal and non-formal learning in out-of-school education, particularly in youth work activities, plays an equally prominent role. Therefore it is essential to promote and recognise non-formal education and to encourage young people's commitment and contribution to the promotion of the values underpinning intercultural dialogue.
Governance and structured dialogue

The structured dialogue is also an important tool in the further involvement of young people in intercultural dialogue. Youth organisations must play a key role in this context, in facilitating and promoting youth participation and supporting young people in achieving their full potential.

How these issues are dealt with at national level?

A Study has been commissioned by the European Commission about national approaches and practices relating to intercultural dialogue. This study underlines that national youth policies generally pursue or provide support for three types of activities related to intercultural dialogue: anti-discrimination programmes, activities to bring migrant children into schools and support for cross-border exchange programmes. It would probably be very interesting to know more about these strategies.

Questions

1. Considering the growing diversity of cultural backgrounds of the people living in EU Member States, youth policy strategies and measures can play a crucial role at both national and local levels as an early investment in the ability of societies to promote the cultural heritage of certain groups, namely through the promotion of individual skills, knowledge and cultural autonomy, while fostering intercultural respect and solidarity.

Is there a specific project in your Member State that addresses these questions and that could contribute to peer-learning activities among Member States?
2. How do you regard the issue of intercultural dialogue relevant in the context of future perspectives of the European cooperation in the field of youth policy, namely bearing in mind the aim of achieving sustainability of the strategies developed during and after the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue?

3. How could the issue of intercultural dialogue be better included in the structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations? Which tools and mechanisms would you recommend at
   a) national and
   b) European level?

   What could be the role of young people and youth organisations in deepening intercultural dialogue?