

**Council of Europe Seminar  
UNIVERSITIES AS ACTORS OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN WIDER SOCIETY  
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### **Preamble**

*It is difficult to imagine how a society can be fully democratic if it cannot conduct intercultural dialogue and it is equally difficult to imagine how intercultural dialogue can be conducted in societies that stray far from the ideals and practices of democracy. The competences needed for intercultural dialogue are therefore also largely those needed to develop and maintain a culture of democracy, and this culture cannot exist without education.*

*Higher Education Institutions play an important role in fostering intercultural dialogue through their Education Programmes, as actors in broader society and as sites where intercultural dialogue is put into practice. As the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research suggests, the university is ideally defined precisely by its universality - its commitment to open-mindedness and openness to the world, founded on enlightenment values. The university thus has great potential to engender "intercultural intellectuals" who can play an active role in the public sphere.*

Source: White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity"

### **Preface**

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to have been invited to take up the task to report on the discussions and debates that took place over the past two days here at the People's Friendship University of Russia.

The Conference gathered 48 non-Russian representatives and 30 representatives from Russia; in total 24 countries were represented. The Conference attracted higher education leaders, academic and administrative staff, students and representatives from student unions, university organisations and network representatives, government representatives, and more.

Special thanks go to Professor Vladimir M. Filippov, Rector, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR) for being our kind and excellent host as well as a chair and speaker and to Kamila Guseynova, Head of the Department for Cooperation with International Organizations of the RUDN and her staff for their excellent work and dedication.

### **Report - Introduction and context**

The Seminar forms part of a series of key events organised by the Council of Europe to foster interest for intercultural learning and dialogue. The CoE held an initial Seminar on "Intercultural Dialogue on the University Campus" in Strasbourg in March 2008 and it adopted and launched a White Paper on intercultural dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity," which lay at the heart of the discussions that took place in Moscow in June.

Two main roles were identified for higher education to play in the promotion of intercultural learning and dialogue. The first one, the furthering of the dialogue on campus, was addressed more in detail at the Strasbourg Seminar. The second one concerns the role of the institution in promoting intercultural learning and dialogue in the wider society. It is this second role that the

Moscow Seminar concentrated on, even though the debates echoed and built on key concerns and conclusions issued at the Strasbourg Seminar.

The present report gives an analytical overview of the Moscow Seminar. It presents views and recommendations expressed by various stakeholders who impact on Higher Education policy and practice; it highlights the major dilemmas and challenges Higher Education Institutions have to face today when developing strategies for the development of intercultural dialogue; it ends with some conclusions that are further developed in the **conclusions and recommendations** adopted at the Seminar and appended to this report.

### Structure of the Seminar

All presentations were made in plenary; an interactive panel discussion concluded the debates. Contrasting viewpoints were expressed and confronted; the following parties and ‘voices’ contributed to the discussion:

The **Council of Europe**: after the official opening of the Seminar, Gabriella Battaini-Drioni, Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport and Coordinator for Intercultural Dialogue introduced the Council of Europe’s views on the topic and she introduced the principles and values underlying the Council of Europe’s White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue.

The role **Governments** can play was illustrated by Alf Rasmussen, Senior Advisor to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, Department of Higher Education, who presented the Norwegian White Paper on internationalisation of education; the importance of strengthening intercultural dialogue and of developing strong policies to facilitate and support such dialogue was emphasised.

The Role of the **University Leadership** in the promotion of intercultural learning and dialogue in universities was introduced by Lars Ekholm who spoke on behalf of the European University Association (EUA) and who presented the EUA’s perspectives. His presentation was followed by 4 strong case studies highlighting examples of actions undertaken to develop Intercultural Dialogue initiatives, of policy development and of challenges faced in Russia, Kazakhstan and Lebanon. The presentations were made by Prof Barasby S. Karamurzov, Rector of the Kabardino-Balkarian State University and President of the Association of Russian HEIs, Prof. Bakhytzhan Zh. Abdraimov, Rector of the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU), Prof René Chamussy, SJ, Rector of the Saint-Joseph University of Beirut and Prof. Vladimir M. Filippov, Rector of PFUR.

The afternoon session gave the floor to the **Students’ voice(s)**. It was introduced by Olav Øye, Member of the Executive Committee of the European Students’ Union (ESU) and was complemented by presentations made by students from 5 different countries and studying at the PFUR. Mr Vladimir Chety is head of the PFUR Students Union; Mr Ibrahim Naofav (Syria), is President of PFUR Association of Arab Universities; Mr Miguel de la Cruz Salcedo (Peru) is President of PFUR Federation of students from Latin America and the Caribbean countries; Ms Dorothy Rotich (Kenya) is a PhD student at the Faculty of humanities of PFUR and Mr Chandra Saha Biplob (Bangladesh) is President of the PFUR Association of students from Asian countries.

The role of **University Networks** was debated as well. Joseph Mifsud, Rector of the Euro Mediterranean University (EMUNI) and Marijke Wahlers, head of the International Department of the German Rector’s Conference (HRK) presented their projects and policies and made recommendations as to actions such networks could undertake.

Alain Mouchox, Vice-Chair of the Conference of **INGOs** of the CoE addressed the role INGOs do and can play. Finally the initiative of the newly created **European Wergeland Centre** was presented by its Executive Director, Ana Perona-Fjeldstad, along with the projects it will undertake.

Germain Dondelinger, Premier Conseiller de gouvernement, Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research, of Luxembourg, completed the panel of speakers and discussed the role **public authorities** are to play.

Sjur Bergan, Head of the Department of Higher Education and History Teaching of the Council of Europe, chaired the concluding panel in which the following persons took part: Prof Radu Damian, Chair of the CDESR, Mr Olav Øye (ESU), Prof Vladimir M. Filippov (Rector PFUR) and Prof. Marina Larionova, Vice-Rector of the State University - High School of Economics. The discussion allowed for broader debate on the role public authorities, higher education as a whole and students and staff in particular should play in promoting intercultural dialogue. Moreover, the value of and the possibilities offered by a European policy were discussed.

## Council of Europe

The Meeting recalled the CoE White Paper's statement that *Higher Education Institutions [are] to play an important role in fostering intercultural dialogue through their Education Programmes, as actors in broader society and as sites where intercultural dialogue is put into practice*. At the same time, the paper stresses that *in order for this role to be taken up fully, it needs to be assisted by scholarly research on intercultural learning, to address the aspects of "learning to live together" and cultural diversity in all teaching aspects (WP, page 31)*.

The White Paper lists seven cornerstones of any political culture valuing diversity: [Values of] democracy; human rights and fundamental freedoms; the rule of law; pluralism; tolerance; non discrimination; mutual respect. It also identifies five policy approaches to the promotion of intercultural dialogue; those are:

- The development of democratic governance of cultural diversity through a political culture valuing diversity; Human rights and fundamental freedoms; equality of opportunity to equal enjoyment of rights;
- The fostering of democratic citizenship and participation;
- The promoting of learning and teaching of intercultural competences.

Key competence areas: democratic citizenship, language, history;

Levels of education: primary and secondary education; higher education and research; non formal and informal learning.

Actors: teachers, professors; administrative and other support staff and the leadership of the universities and other higher education institutions as well as other education institutions at all levels;

- The creation of adequate spaces for intercultural dialogue;
- Policies and practices securing ensuring intercultural dialogue in international relations.

*"Universities cannot be universities unless their mission and the education they provide is greater than the sum of its individual academic disciplines."*  
Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni

The Seminar discussions built on both the key concepts on which intercultural dialogue and understanding initiatives rest and the policy approaches identified.

Building on these principles, the fact that universities are communities in themselves and that diversity on campus is a reality that needs to be fully seized and valued was reiterated. Yet, at the same time, universities are key actors in the broader society. Both core academic activities, education and research, are to take this up. Facilitating students' access to the job market is one of the aims and goals of higher education; providing them with adequate competences and qualifications to enable them to become well informed and critical citizens, aiming at living together as equals in dignity on campus and certainly outside of it, locally as well as globally, is another essential one. Hence, to better take part in the development of our future societies, universities need to foster intercultural dialogue, they need to ensure that Citizenship education is embedded in the very mission of teaching and learning. Students need to be prepared for sustainable employment, for life as active citizens in democratic societies, for personal development and for the development and maintenance of a broad and advanced knowledge base<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation Rec (2007) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research

Intercultural competences should be key in citizenship and human-rights education; those are to provide the learners with a broad world view, or what Council of Europe calls ‘multiperspectivity’<sup>2</sup> that allows individuals to grasp the complexity of the societies they live in. Citizenship education is not only a right but an obligation and, as one of the outcomes, the competences acquired should help foster and maintain a culture of democracy.

In order to take ID and citizenship education on board, universities and their staff are expected to “*design[e] and implement curricula and study programmes at all levels of education, including teacher training and adult education programmes*” (WP, page 43). Foreign languages education for all is one area to be developed further. It not only fosters better communication but also provides appropriate tools for a better understanding of diverse entry points to realities. History teaching is likewise important. It also provides keys to a better understanding of views of others. Alternative and probably new teaching methods may need to be developed along with new teaching and learning programs that would provide space for such disciplines to be taken up across the faculties and the disciplinary divides.

The basic assumption underlying the Council of Europe’s call for the principles of intercultural dialogue to be translated at the level of higher education is that: *The risks of non-dialogue need to be fully appreciated. Not to engage in dialogue makes it easy to develop a stereotypical perception of the other, build up a climate of mutual suspicion, tension and anxiety, use minorities as scapegoats, and generally foster intolerance and discrimination. The breakdown of dialogue within and between societies can provide, in certain cases, a climate conducive to the emergence, and the exploitation by some, of extremism and indeed terrorism. Intercultural dialogue, including on the international plane, is indispensable between neighbours. [...] Only dialogue allows people to live in unity in diversity (WP, Page 16)*

As such, and in Europe in particular, the debate on integrating intercultural learning and dialogue into the curricula should form part of the discussion on the higher education reform process stimulated by the Bologna Process. This structural reform is important but becomes significant only if it serves a purpose. The new European higher education structures should be ‘structures with a mission’. The purposes and missions of the new structure should include ways to develop the kind of societies in which people can live together as equals in dignity and in which all citizens are fluent in intercultural dialogue.

### **Intercultural dialogue as integral component of internationalisation of higher education**

The need for the principles of intercultural dialogue to be further integrated in higher education governance and to be further promoted through governmental policies was well illustrated by the adoption in Norway of a White Paper on internationalisation of education. The paper stipulates that intercultural dialogue is to be considered as an integral component of the overall process of internationalisation of higher education. The Norwegian White Paper (2009) has been developed in order to help higher education institutions and other stakeholders make strategic choices as to what necessary skills or competences students need to act and interact better in a globalised world. The issue of quality, quality education, quality mobility, quality teaching and research is at the heart of the Norwegian initiative. The ultimate aim is to help them overcome intercultural barriers and to foster more openness and better understanding of oneself and of the other(s) both at home and abroad.

In order to internationalise the higher education systems, governments are called upon to help develop and promote:

- Joint degrees and study programmes;
- Transfer of training and common improvements (Tuning-like projects) across national borders;
- Pilot projects in short professional degree studies;

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation Rec (2001) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on history teaching in twenty-first century Europe

- Closer co-operation between education and research in order to show that research is possible and desirable;
- Research on effects, best practices, problems and drivers within internationalisation of higher education to better understand what is at stake;
- Develop high quality study abroad opportunities at policy level and offer mobility facilities through financing.

### **How can the leadership of the universities promote intercultural dialogue?**

Considering that students take their essential values with them in their professional careers, and in their future lives, universities are to be held responsible for teaching and promoting the basic values needed for democratic citizenship. Students should not be conceived of as clients who see higher education as a knowledge market, they are citizens who take part in the life of the community they live in and of society at large. They need to be equipped with - and they themselves need to develop - norms and values associated with democracy, international understanding, human rights, acceptance of all people irrespective of social background, humbleness, readiness to incorporate the unknown.

The translation from words and concepts into policy and practice is not a straightforward exercise. No one model can be applied to all institutions in all socio-political contexts. Some universities are very much internationalised and intercultural dialogue can lean on programmes and policies already available. Where internationalisation is not yet developed, mechanisms need to be put in place to introduce intercultural learning and dialogue. This requires specific policy measures and support. Sharing of good practice at the level of the leadership was advocated for.

Considering the prevalent socio-political context in some countries, introducing intercultural dialogue principles may be a must but seems problematic. The case of Lebanon was and is interesting in that respect and may serve as a case study to be developed and analysed further. The tensions present in the country and region were presented as being unavoidable considering the legacies of the past and present. Intercultural dialogue being inextricably linked to issues relating to interreligious dialogue, and the socio-political contexts of the region being what it is, it unfortunately often leads to violence, it jeopardizes dialogue and even is a threat to social security. It was stressed that dialogue cannot always be *the* solution to conflicts but is nonetheless a stepping stone to creating better conditions for a possible dialogue. Initiatives based on the assumption that dialogue can only succeed if based on fraternity and respect for each other's differences were presented as being successful and as leading to concrete and important results. Again, the development of an electronic database that would enable easy access and sharing of information on those was recommended.

The initiatives showed that it is important to provide adequate 'spaces' to enable dialogue. Such spaces can take different forms, they are to help counter violence or simply open up to others to learn and better understand the world in which we live. This came back in the presentations made by the students and again in the presentations of the initiatives undertaken by University networks.

In order for initiatives to succeed and have a real impact throughout, Higher Education leadership needs to get actively involved; policy and action at the governance level are essential to promote intercultural dialogue perspectives and actions at all levels in the institutions. Special emphasis was placed on the need to also develop research on cultural and historical backgrounds. Solid and objective knowledge of one's own culture and history is the best basis for good dialogue.

A plea was made to reinforce education of ethnic cultures, national traditions and cultures, and languages. At the same time, no culture is static; on the contrary, they evolve constantly and research on such evolution and its mechanisms is also required. Education should take that into consideration and emphasise the importance of a 'multiperspectivity' approach to culture, history and all related aspects of the socio-political and cultural environment in which one evolves.

### **What about the students themselves?**

Student perspectives offered a good insight into how intercultural dialogue is perceived by them, how it works and what could be done to better promote it.

A recommendation was made for their active participation in the reform process higher education undergoes, to ensure better inclusion of intercultural dialogue and learning policy and practice in the process.

Study abroad policies were to be promoted further but institutional policies were also to be developed to improve dialogue and exchange between foreign and local students, between the culture of the foreign students and the local culture. It was stressed that too often on-campus life and on-campus meetings aiming at integrating foreign students better in campus and university life are mostly only for foreign students or attended mainly (if not only) by foreign students. Enhancing dialogue with local students and others on and outside the campus is a real challenge. Better integration mechanisms need to be put in place.

Student organisations do participate in the process through publications, concerted actions and short and long term national, regional and international projects. The development of a global student union was called for along with a call for inter-governmental support for the creation of such a structure.

### **Role higher education associations and networks can play.**

Associations and Networks can, should and often do play an active role in promoting inter dialogue and understanding. Clearly, the role of associations is primarily to address issues relevant to their membership. It is thus also up to networks, associations and organisations to demonstrate that the promotion of intercultural dialogue is one such issue. It is relevant at the institutional level and as well and the national and international one.

Thematic groups, regional networks or alliances, international disciplinary initiatives can all lead to improve intercultural dialogue and thus contribute to improving understanding between individuals from very diverse backgrounds. The impacts can be significant; the development of action plans in that regard should be promoted at all levels within the organisations and among their Members or constituents. Networks, associations, organisations can also facilitate the creation of Centres of expertise; stimulate the development of interuniversity projects and of international or interregional cooperation projects.

NGOs and INGO have a similar role to play. Since lessons from the past seem to be hardly retained and history keeps on repeating itself, continuously support for the development of intercultural dialogue mechanisms is thus requested. (I)NGO's involved in education develop significant national, regional, international partnerships. Intercultural dialogue is promoted continuously at all levels of education, including in Life long learning.

The newly created **European Wergeland Centre** is to help build bridges between people and cultures and between initiatives. It is to help universities and other institutions and education stakeholders move from principals to policy, from policy to practice and offers a valuable channel for cooperation. Access to quality information and to networking can help move the agenda further.

### **The role of public authorities**

Last but not least, the Seminar stressed the fact that public authorities should also get more involved. In particular they should create and support spaces in which civil society will play a role and in which intercultural dialogue will take place.

For them to be more successful or, rather, for them to actually be implemented more fully, policy development and concerted actions need to be framed legally. In the context of the European Union, certain legal frameworks are available. The EU places great emphasis on social cohesion; it supports the cultural diversity approach, aims to provide legal or political recognition of defined minority cultures and identities. The least binding dialogue approach adopted is the one promoting

artistic events and special media programs. Public authorities should also get involved more strategically. They can help create a specific environment to foster civic responsibility, and help establish an 'ambiance' that is requested for intercultural dialogue. They should:

- stimulate internationalisation and the necessary conditions required to enable constructive intercultural dialogue;
- guarantee academic freedom;
- create conditions for equitable access and success;
- create conditions for a better understanding of cultural diversity.

### **Dilemmas and barriers**

Many of the contributions to the debates were prescriptive, assuming the promotion and support of intercultural dialogue and understanding is a must. Yet if all stakeholders are in principle convinced, why then is intercultural dialogue not a priority today? What negative factors prevent higher education from getting involved fully? How can these factors be countered?

The major dilemmas and challenges higher education has to face today were outlined. Participants stressed the fact that competition, strive for excellence, for accountability, serious financial constraints, efficiency are concepts of which higher education leaders, administrators, teachers and researchers, students know all the ramifications and implications.

Reforms that are being implemented, especially in Europe in the context of the Bologna Process, make heavy demands on administrators, teachers and researchers who are all to become more and more multi-tasked and more and more efficient - perhaps with a somewhat narrow concept of efficiency as getting things done but omitting having actions perceived as legitimate -; priorities have constantly to be re-evaluated and adjusted; students see their study plans constrained and study length reduced and little space is left over for improvisation.

The commercialisation of higher education and its market oriented implications also stand in the way of a better integration of intercultural learning and dialogue principles in higher education. Financial constraints are such that leaders look for efficiency at all levels; little to no space is available for innovation that is not directly accountable, and at least 'visible'. Intercultural dialogue and understanding is not a discipline; it is not directly 'visible' or 'accountable' administratively. Since it requests interdisciplinary collaboration and action and thus requires time, can it be integrated into existing core curricula or will it be relegated to extra curricular activities? What mechanisms are to be developed to ensure active and committed participation by all?

How in such a context can higher education leaders be convinced of the importance of ID to be supported and translated in practice at all level of the institution? And if convinced, how to then convince their administrators and academic staff of the importance of integrating intercultural dialogue policy and practice into their work?

The impact of market oriented forces and logic on higher education is not a new phenomenon. However, the focus has shifted considerably over time. Market forces have had and do have positive impacts on higher education but, unfortunately, today they more and more often have a tendency to overrule all other concerns, such as the social responsibility higher education has to assume. Market forces need to be counterbalanced by values of relevance for the society as a whole as well as a coherent vision of the kind of societies in which we would like to live and the role of higher education in shaping this society.

Taking all that into account, the closing panel debates allowed the Seminar to conclude that all higher education stakeholders and partners have to safeguard and stimulate human and ethical approaches to teaching and learning. Intercultural competences should form an integral part of higher education learning outcomes. Students need to become literate in the complexity of the societies they live in and capable of addressing the increasingly interrelated issues at stake in both local and global communities.

**In brief, the Seminar concluded the following**

- Universities should be models of the state of the art in this area;
- University leadership should get on board internationally and turn policy into action at all levels within the institution;
- Frameworks for implementation of intercultural learning and dialogue principles need to be developed
- Norms and values need to be adopted to ensure proper intercultural teaching and learning and to favour dialogue;
- Tensions and conflicts are apparently unavoidable but need to be addressed, and higher education can help provide tools: intercultural dialogue can be used also as a conflict prevention mechanism;
- Information sharing and dissemination is required: universities and other higher education institutions need to share best practices nationally, regionally and globally and internationally;
- Access to higher education for all to foster intercultural dialogue: where needed, regional university systems need to be strengthened for individuals to gain access higher education and to benefit from it;
- Internationalisation and cooperation: the need for mutual and joint activities was reaffirmed in order to counter stereotypical views on cultures of the other.