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Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR)

Bureau

Strasbourg, 30-31 May 2007
30 May – Room 2 – 8h30-17h30
31 May – Room 17– 8h30-13h00

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and
Research Division)

ITEM 7

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Higher education and intercultural dialogue

Draft proposal

I Introduction

The Council of Europe has to face the challenges of an ever-increasing cultural diversity on the European continent due to intra-European mobility of student and workers as well as international migration flows, globalisation processes (defined as the ever-growing interdependence among world-regions) and the advances of media and communication technologies.

The Council considers cultural diversity as a source of mutual enrichment in need of protection and adequate democratic management. "Protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are factors of human development and a manifestation of human liberty, and they are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations"¹. On the other hand, cultural diversity can be a source of misunderstanding, social exclusion or open conflict. Therefore, the fundamental challenge is to combine social cohesion and cultural diversity, i.e. to overcome the germ of conflict by engaging all parties into a continuous cross-cultural dialogue.

The Council of Europe is strongly engaged in activities promoting dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding among cultures, peoples and religions. The equilibrium between social cohesion and cultural diversity should thus be achieved in respect of the core values of European societies: the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law.

The third summit of the Heads of State and Governments has made Intercultural Dialogue a priority of the organisation. The underlying principles of the Council of Europe's strategy are laid down in the *Faro Declaration* of 2005. In November 2007, the Council of Europe will publish a *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, the first of its kind issued at an international level.

To implement this newly defined policy-paradigm, the Council builds on the standard-setting aquis and on its traditional policy-instruments (the case-law of the Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, conventions and monitoring mechanisms). Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers expressed the wish to promote synergies between the existing

¹ Committee of Ministers (2007) : *Preparing the 'White Paper on intercultural dialogue'*. p. 2
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programmes of activities among CoE divisions and between the Council and partner organisations such as Unesco.

II Promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the European Higher Education Area

Traditionally, higher education has a twofold mission in furthering the exchange between different cultures, peoples and knowledge communities:

First of all, universities play an integrative role at societal level by attracting foreign students and researchers. As truly international institutions and exchange platforms, universities provide students and staff from their home country with the opportunity to experience cultural diversity by getting in touch with educated citizens from all over the world. At the same time, they represent a national contact point for academically mobile scholars.

The second task of universities in promoting Intercultural Dialogue is to transmit intercultural communication skills (in form of linguistic skills or historical knowledge as well as communication skills) and to infuse young and mobile people with a set of democratic values cultured by the academic profession: freedom of mind and expression, tolerance and (self)reflection. Higher education institutions produce and diffuse cultural knowledge by involving teachers and students as equal partners of the academic community into a continuous dialogue.

However, this historical mission of universities needs a renewed discussion in the light of increasing cultural diversity and the challenges related to the realisation of an integrated European Higher Education Area.

The Council of Europe, as a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group and active promoter of a peaceful and culturally diverse European society, should therefore work towards the inclusion of Intercultural Dialogue into the Bologna agenda.

Issues of Intercultural Dialogue in higher education have already been considered by the CDESR: At its 2006 plenary session, the CDESR adopted a statement on the contribution of higher education to intercultural dialogue and considered a proposal for the creation of a university network on intercultural dialogue, made by the Russian chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

As mentioned in previous documents, the last years have been characterised by the creation of a high number of university networks dealing with the international dimension of higher education and issues of institutional co-operation. Hence, the added value of a university network on intercultural dialogue should be considered with great care. One possible solution for avoiding counterproductive duplication would be to focus the Council of Europe's contribution on providing a forum for exploring different aspects of Intercultural Dialogue in higher education.

The purpose of this project is to introduce Intercultural Dialogue into the Bologna Process and to propose - as a first step - the organisation of a series of three international seminars on *Promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the European Higher Education Area*.

By 1) identifying the challenges of cultural diversity for higher education in Europe and 2) defining the role and stake of European universities in Intercultural Dialogue, the seminar series seeks to identify means of promoting it.

Consequently, the organisation of an international seminar series brings together two important strands of the actual CDSEER-action programme:

- The implementation of a European Higher Education Area
- *The University between Humanism and Market* project

The objective of these seminars would be to draft a document (i.e. a recommendation or a code of good practice) on which to base further CoE action (i.e. the creation of a regular expert forum, the launching of a university network or the realisation of a platform including both - stakeholders and experts). Such a document could be fed back into the Bologna Process and initiate a reflection on issues transcending the structural side of the European reform agenda (for instance by discussing the function of universities in modern and multicultural societies).

The seminar series on *Promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the European Higher Education Area* would raise the public awareness for those aspects that are not spelled out in the policy-documents of the Bologna process although they are inherent to this kind of reform endeavour.

III Format and timeframe of the project

Seminar 1: November/December 2007

Intercultural Dialogue on Campus

The first seminar focuses on the individual level, i.e. on student and teacher experiences with multicultural settings. By providing a bottom-up approach to the topic of intercultural dialogue, the organiser hopes to draw the attention on the necessity to enhance the individual's commitment to democratic values of open dialogue and mutual understanding:

- What are the means of furthering access and integration of international students and scholars into campus life?
- How to deal with cultural diversity in the classroom?
- Is it possible to define a set of intercultural competences students should have acquired by the end of their studies?
- Is there a need to reassert (or even redefine) the core principles and values of Intercultural Dialogue in academia?

This seminar should give rise to the publication of a compendium of examples of good practice.

Seminar 2: June/July 2008

The European university as international organisation and cultural mediator? Discussing universities' contribution to Intercultural Dialogue

- How to manage a multicultural setting (economically and socially)?
- How to further the integration/equity in access and how to make the most out of it?
- The state of institutional cooperation in promoting Intercultural Dialogue?

To launch the debate, it might be advisable to commission a study comparing institutional approaches to further dialogue and social integration in multicultural environments (+ publication in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series).

Seminar 3: January/February 2009

Promoting Intercultural Dialogue at universities through politics and policies

- How to promote intercultural dialogue among universities?
- What kind of policies are already existing (what do they bring and how are they financed)?
- What kind of expectations can be raised as to the function of universities in promoting Intercultural Dialogue?

There is the possibility to commission a study comparing national policies for promoting Intercultural Dialogue at European universities (+ publication in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series).

The last of the seminars should take place before the next Bologna conference in 2009. This way, the final document could be discussed by the BFUG and impact on the drafting process.

The audience of the seminar series would comprise university representatives (rectors but also academic staff), students, national governments representatives and stakeholder associations. It is important that the audience is mixed in order to assure a broad approach to any one of the three seminar topics.

Higher education researchers and experts should be invited to structure the discussion and provide information and background material. In addition to this, a task group of experts and stakeholders should be designated for drafting the final document. An internet forum should be created, in order to provide the seminar-participants with the opportunity to discuss, comment and amend the draft proposal. This sort of follow-up activity could fuel and structure the further development of the project (i.e. the creation of a network or a regular forum).

Project 'Promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the European Higher Education Area'

SEMINAR ON 'INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUS'

**Late November-December 2007
Draft programme**

1st day

- 08 30 Registration
- 09 00 Opening of the meeting
- The Secretary General of the Council of Europe or his representative
- Chair of the CDESR
- 09 30 -10 30 Keynote address and discussion
- 'Setting the scene – intercultural dialogue and its meaning for the university of today – (possible speaker: Goolam Mohammedbai, IAU tbc)
- 10 30 – 11 00 coffee break
- 11 00 - 12 30 **Session 1**

Challenges of cultural diversity in managing campus life

Defining the sources of intercultural conflict and desintegration among and between staff and students.

- 12 30 – 14 00 lunch break

14 00 – 15 30 Session 2

Examples of good practices in furthering intercultural dialogue on campus

What are the means of furthering access and integration of international staff and students to campus life?

- Case study (experience from W.Europe - Université de Strasbourg)
- Case study (experience from E.Europe – Russian Peoples’ Friendship University?)
- Case study (experience from Arab world)

15 30 – 16 00 coffee break

16 00 – 17 30 **Session 3**

Cultural diversity in the classroom

How to deal with cultural diversity in the classroom from a teachers’ and students' perspective ?

- Learning and teaching approaches and attitudes in a multicultural environment
- Internationalised curricula

2nd day

9 30 – 11 00

Panel discussion ‘ Generic intercultural competencies for students – myth or reality?’

- Is it possible to define a set of intercultural competences students should have acquired by the end of their studies?
- Is there a need to reassert (or even redefine) the core principles and values of Intercultural Dialogue in academia?

11 00 – 11 30 coffee break

11 30 – 12 30

Conclusions and recommendations by the General Rapporteur