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International Youth Forum

Intercultural Dialogue and its Religious Dimension

Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation
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Final Forum Document

KAZAN ACTION PLAN

all different
all equal

все различны
все равны



PREAMBLE

Cultural diversity in Europe is a reality represented by numerous religious, ethnic and social communities. This is generally acknowledged as an asset and as a great potential for the vitality of our societies. This richness stems from the history of the peoples of the European continent, and is nowadays further enhanced by migration flows from globalisation. The immense asset lying in this diversity has been repeatedly proven - in history through the emergence of periods of innovation when cultures met and synergies were created, as well as in modern day cooperation aimed at reaching peaceful coexistence and interaction of cultures, ethnicities and religions. Religion and belief can play a key role in the development of identities and promote values which may constitute one of the core elements in the strengthening of democracy, civil society and social cohesion.

In order to use the potential of a multicultural Europe, work on the development of dialogue and cooperation is needed. The involvement of young people and their role in this process is crucial¹.

Political reality, though, often seems to pose great challenges to the development of intercultural dialogue and cooperation, threatening to hinder the mutual enrichment of cultures and the development of positive potential inherent in our society. Diversity is not always accompanied by social cohesion and cooperation, equality in the access to rights and social opportunities. Human rights, democracy and tolerance, which constitute the core pillars of democratic societies, are threatened by discrimination, exclusion, ignorance, aggressive nationalism and multiple forms of racism and violence. Antisemitism, Christianophobia, Islamophobia and all other forms of discrimination and prejudice are serious dangers for our societies and for the principles of human rights upon which they are built. Young people should not be deprived of the right to cultural and religious identity, which is to be secured by cooperation of the state, civil society and religious communities. The role of the media in these issues is of special importance in this context.

Intercultural dialogue plays a key role in overcoming these difficulties and in creating a society based on diversity, equality and social cohesion. The active involvement of young people is of crucial importance to these issues and to the sustainability of our societies.

Thus, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue of the Council of Europe, explicitly states that “Youth and sport organisations, together with religious communities, are well placed to advance intercultural dialogue in a non-formal education context. Youth groups and community centres, alongside with the family, school and workplace, can be pillars of social cohesion (...)”².

Numerous initiatives have taken up this important principle and aimed at reinforcing intercultural dialogue, participation and diversity.

The Council of Europe’s Youth Campaign “All different – All Equal” succeeded in mobilising millions of young people across Europe in the promotion of diversity, participation and human rights. In this context, the results of several youth conferences focusing on interreligious dialogue, which promoted the importance of these issues should be mentioned, such as the Volga Forum Declaration³, the St. Petersburg Declaration⁴, The Final Declaration

¹ Amongst others notably see: Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 25 November 2008

² White paper on Intercultural Dialogue, Council of Europe, May 2008, p. 30

³ International Conference „Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Cooperation“, Nizhniy Novgorod, September 2007

of the Diversity Youth Forum⁵, the Istanbul Youth Process⁶ as well as the Youth for the Alliance of Civilisations YAOC Initiative⁷. Recently, the international youth conference “Beyond religious differences - Islamophobia and other forms of Discrimination based on religion or belief”, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, resulted in the “Baku Youth Initiative”, focusing on proposals to further interreligious and intercultural dialogue through youth work.

Based upon these initiatives, the International Youth Forum “Intercultural Dialogue and its Religious Dimension” furthered these proposals and recommendations and drew up the “Kazan Action Plan”.

Focusing on examples of best practice and the participants’ in-depth experience, **the Kazan Action Plan aims at developing proposals and identifying concrete actions to promote and sustain intercultural and interreligious dialogue with and by young people.** The partners of the Forum are called upon to support and facilitate the implementation of these projects by youth organisations.

The Forum was co-organised by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Sport and Tourism of the Tatarstan Republic and the National Youth Council of Russia.

As a partner of the Council of Europe, the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation selected participants to contribute to the International Youth Forum. As a partner of the Council of Europe, the Future Generations Division of the World Jewish Congress selected participants to contribute to the International Youth Forum.

Also partner in the Forum was the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Kazan, chosen as the city hosting this Forum, has always been a crossroads of civilisations, between Europe and Asia, a multinational city, a symbol of tolerance and harmonious living together of different religions and cultures.

It is in this environment that over one hundred young participants, supported by numerous international experts, contributed in developing these proposals.

KAZAN ACTION PLAN

Intercultural dialogue and education

Intercultural dialogue and human rights education involve the learning of languages, culture, traditions, or religions with the aim to educate and support social integration.

- Projects should target youth and engage families, teachers and local communities and should be created for young people by young people.
- NGOs and governments should promote youth projects that include evaluation measures, consider multiplying effects, and take into account the short and long term impact of the projects.

⁴ European Youth Event “All Different- All Equal”, September 2006, St. Petersburg declaration

⁵ Diversity Youth Forum, European Youth Centre Budapest, October 2006

⁶ Istanbul Youth Process, Istanbul Youth declaration during the European “All-Different- All Equal” Campaign, March 2007

⁷ Organised by the ICYF-DC and Heydar Aliyev Foundation in partnership the DYS of the Council of Europe, ISESCO, the European Youth Forum and UNDP, Baku, November 2007,

- The multipliers in the youth field should have access to human rights education and acquire competencies in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
- Internet technology may provide the possibility to exchange with religious and cultural communities not present in a specific area.

Non-formal Education

Activities should facilitate communication and integration with different cultures and include among many other possibilities:

- Intercultural festivals in schools and local communities, European youth festivals and games,
- Support and creation of intercultural educational facilities, community centres, and volunteer services,
- Sport activities that involve dialogue and communication, especially universiades and olympic games,
- Youth camps as well as international courses and team-building seminars,
- If appropriate, the celebration of religious holidays not only within the community, but beyond should be encouraged.

Formal Education

Young people have the right to learn about their own religion and/or about other religions. The teaching should foster understanding and respect towards other religions, cultures and histories.

Schools and educational institutions are recommended to provide their students with intercultural learning opportunities and activities in order to encourage students to get to know their peers' cultures and respect them. Non-formal education methodologies should be encouraged in these activities and their learning outcomes be recognized.

Freedom of speech and religious ethics

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right which, like all human rights, must be exercised with responsibility and which can not be used to violate other people's human rights.

Any limitations of the freedom of speech should be accepted only in extraordinary circumstances, such as to combat hate speech and incitement to violence.

- To invest in the development independent youth media for youth through youth empowerment programs such as: seminars, symposia, study sessions, peer education training programs etc. for youth leaders and journalists;
- To launch educational programs for youth on religious issues, the responsibility of freedom of expression and human rights to minimize risks of alienation and social tensions within civil society. Similar initiatives and campaigns should be focused on the awareness on the above-mentioned issues among journalists.
- To support the development of independent youth media for religious communities and ethnic minorities.
- To establish independent youth consulting bodies that include representatives of religious communities, journalists and mass media stakeholders to provide consultations on issues related to religion and freedom of expression which should be used for prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The Role of young people in the dialogue of cultures and civilizations

Young people can and should play an active part in fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue. There are already many possibilities for young people to get involved – youth exchanges, students' exchange programmes, youth movements. In order for all of them to be effective, youth participation should be fostered and supported. Through supporting young people's participation in decision making processes, societies can benefit as a whole, since young people are a source of innovative ideas and provide energy for positive change.

This can be done through:

- Promoting projects that aim to enrich knowledge and awareness of young generations from different civilizational backgrounds on the histories, cultures and religions of other civilizations through organizing cross-cultural programs. Such project goals are cultural exchange, understanding historical background, educational exchange, youth business partnerships and international campaigning on understanding identity, religion, culture and history.
- Motivating young people to participate in cultural exchanges, for example, in organising intercultural art festivals (music, theatre and other) and intercultural exhibitions
- Encouraging teams of young volunteers coming from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to take part in common projects helping people in need in the respective localities.
- Encouraging youth organisations to jointly respond to interreligious and intercultural events and any acts of discrimination and intolerance; Particular attention should be paid to the use of mass media in communication with the society.
- Recommending inclusion of voluntary visits to sites of cultural heritage of different faiths and organising educational activities related to different religious, cultures, traditions and festivities in the educational process. This should be done without prejudice towards individual religious convictions and rights.

Youth and migration

Migrants make important contributions to the economic, social and cultural development of the societies they settle in. However, the process of integration can raise a number of challenges including difficulties for migrants in accessing education, housing, employment and social services. Migrants very often suffer from discrimination in the countries they live in, therefore the following recommendations and actions should be undertaken in order to facilitate integration:

- The necessity of cooperation of governments on the issue of the legalization of labor migrants;
- Increasing the level of migrants' awareness about the country they enter, and about the country they leave, and their culture;
- Involving local young people as well as young migrants in solving problems related to migrants and migrants' integration;
- The development of cooperation of civil society organisations involved in solving the problems of socio-cultural adaptation and integration together with the state bodies, including immigration services and immigrants themselves;
- Involving religious leaders in the dialogue on the issues related to solving problems of migration as well as in the process of integration of migrants through the participation in the life of religious communities;
- Encouraging migrants to learn the language of integration;
- Involving migrants in the activities of youth organizations.

All activities aiming at solving migrants' problems should be long term and systematic.

Overcoming discrimination and prejudice

Discrimination and prejudice based on religion and belief can be the result of lack of knowledge about the other – or can also be for example the result of a general insecurity regarding cultural differences. Discrimination and prejudice can manifest themselves in different forms, usually very harmful for people who experience them. In order to develop and sustain a just society, it is important that discrimination be combated and that people are aware of their prejudices. It can be done through:

- supporting an ongoing youth-led campaign including media to combat discrimination and prejudice
- developing a youth web portal allowing for active participation and focusing on common and specific values of religions and cultures
- collection and exchange of best practices, and facilitating of international trainings on overcoming prejudices and discrimination
- development and implementation of learning programmes and peer-to-peer methods in human rights education in schools and other educational institutions
- developing and providing resources for non-governmental religious and interreligious youth organisations
- awarding youth projects promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue
- promotion of dialogue between non-governmental youth organisations and governmental structures at local, regional and national levels, as well as with European and international institutions
- raising the awareness of and providing training to representatives of mass media on cultural and religious diversity
- introducing and enforcing legislation to combat and prevent Antisemitism, Christianophobia, and Islamophobia
- encouraging and supporting current research and projects gender issues in different cultures and religions
- participation of youth organisations in raising awareness on instruments and mechanisms to protect Human Rights

MECHANISMS TO IMPLEMENT THE KAZAN ACTION PLAN

At the 8th Conference of European ministers responsible for youth affairs which took place from 10-11 October 2008, the main priorities of the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sports of the Council of Europe until 2020 “Agenda 2020” were adopted. One of the main priorities of the work of the Council of Europe in the youth sphere was declared “Living together in diverse societies”, with special emphasis on:

- Empowering young people to promote, in their daily life, cultural diversity as well as intercultural dialogue and cooperation;
- Preventing and counteracting all forms of racism and discrimination on any ground;
- Supporting initiatives of young people and their organisations in conflict prevention and management as well as post-conflict reconciliation by means of intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimensions;
- Supporting youth work with young refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons;

- Further encouraging the development of subregional youth cooperation in Europe and beyond;
- Encouraging young people to promote global solidarity and cooperation.

The Kazan Action Plan constitutes a mechanism to implement this priority of the Council of Europe until 2020. With the support of the statutory bodies of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, the Directorate of Youth and Sports, within the framework of the priority “Living together in diverse societies” can then annually collect the proposals of the member states to organise events and adopt plans of events implementing the Kazan Action Plan.

Member states of the Council of Europe should provide support to ideas and initiatives described in the Kazan Action Plan.

The Kazan Action Plan of the Council of Europe is open for other interested countries and organisations to join.
