

A.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRACY

*Lodz Team*

## INTRODUCTION

The Team «Intercultural Dialogue and Democracy», composed of seven researchers: Enrique Banús (Spain), Léonce Bekemans (Belgium), Anna Jedrzejewska (Poland), Maria Karasinska-Fendler (Poland – coordinator of the Team's work), Stanislaw Konopacki (Poland), Kazimierz Sobotka (Poland) and Johannes Thomas (Germany), concentrated its work on the role of the intercultural dialogue as a mean of creating the better quality of European democracy, with greater and deeper involvement of citizens and with a better horizontal interaction between citizens of Europe.

The Team worked on the basis of the agreement that our work should be carried out following an interdisciplinary and policy and action oriented approach, while intending to provide intellectual input to the academic milieu, to the policy makers as well as to civil society organisations and movements.

The starting point for our research was the relationship between concepts of democracy and of intercultural dialogue. The current theoretical status of the intercultural dialogue appears to be rather an isolated subject than a mainstreamed issue in the existing debates on future construction of European integration. The traditional forms of representative and participatory democracy – in practice – showed their deficiencies, manifested by decreasing involvement of citizens in democratic life, frustration and a certain state of «morbidity phenomenon», resulting in voting abstentions and several violent street events in various countries of Europe.

Our assumption to be verified through this research project was that the intensification of intercultural dialogue and reinforcement

of its role in terms of «deliberative democracy» might contribute to the development of a new European polity of greater and deeper inclusiveness and sense of belonging.

The current decade greatly increases the diversity of the Union. With the accession of 10, and since January 2006, 2 more new members and potential further enlargements, the EU represents an immense richness of cultural, social and linguistic diversity. In our opinion multiculturalism does not deny nationhood. It does not abdicate national identity needs in favour of unrecognisable mixture of cultures. The multiculturalism ideas stand in direct opposition to nationalism. The enlarged cultural area means that intercultural communication needs to be intensified. The enlarged cultural area without the intensified *connaissance* may lead to the danger of re-inforcing nationalisms.

In this context, the shared values that hold our societies together, such as freedom, fairness, democracy, tolerance and solidarity, become more important than ever. The recognition of cultural pluralism requires the development of an advanced democracy, which embraces not only citizen's participation in the administration of traditional institutional structures, but which is also a method for dialogue and consensus between groups with different interests and backgrounds.

We therefore assumed that greater participation is a substantive value as an aspect of civic empowerment. European citizens must therefore be given chances of direct, personal experience of what European citizenship and these values mean in practice – be through participation in dialogue with the institutions or through the horizontal intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue contributes to making European equal and inclusive citizenship a reality through encouraging direct involvement of European citizens in the integration process. It may be helpful in developing the feeling of belonging to the Union and to make citizens able to identify with it.

The second core assumption of the Team was the concept that democratisation demands the Union moving towards greater equality and inclusiveness. It therefore rejected notions of democracy that stress the interests of the «insider» against those of the «outsider», the dominant nation against the minority nation, the traditional roles and values against those that challenge stereotypes. We assume instead that the European democracy must be as

inclusive as possible. The concept of the «deliberative democracy», elaborating an ideal, in which all those affected by decisions should be able to participate equally and openly in the deliberative process, by which policy outcomes are determined, constituted the departure point for the analysis and debate on the role of the intercultural dialogue in deepening of the European citizenship, understood as the more active and conscious participation in the integration process.

Thirdly, we started with the conviction that the widened cultural richness of the enlarged EU may contribute to the deepening of the European identity, constituting a solid basis for the European citizenship.

The work of the Team was structured in such a way as to embrace the key theoretical concepts of the relationship between intercultural dialogue and democracy. In the first part, challenges for the place and role of identity, culture and democracy concepts in the larger understanding of *demos* and democratic values are debated (paper by Kazimierz Sobotka). The second part of our research is concentrated on several aspects of an equal and inclusive citizenship as a basic ground for building up of citizens' sense of belonging necessary for full inclusion (paper by Stanislaw Konopacki). In the third part the place of the dialogue and deliberation within the concept of deliberative and inclusive democracy has been analysed (paper by Maria Karasinska-Fendler). The fourth part argues that intercultural dialogue, if it is to be effective, has to be held «on the street» by the common citizens, who are confronted with alternatives of how to position themselves while being confronted with multicultural society problems. They can threat these problems as the ones negatively impacting their daily lives or as the ones which enrich their knowledge, understanding and as the enrichment of their personal experience. This part underlines the role of education as a substantial tool for building up citizens readiness for dialogue and ability to dialogue (paper by Enrique Banús). The fifth part raises the specific importance of urban environment of intercultural dialogue in the process of building up of democratic public space and democratic *urban civitas* (paper by Léonce Bekemans). The sixth part provides us with the inventory of the currently existing opportunities for intercultural dialogue, within European programmes, which could serve as reference for future development of public venues for intercultural dialogue among European citizens

(paper by Anna Jedrzejewska). The seventh part presents a closer look at the basic question of the intercultural dialogue with Islam and its compatibility with democracy (paper by Johannes Thomas). This chapter can serve as a particular case study, while considering one of the important topics for the European intercultural dialogue.

The last part of our joint work (conclusions, by all members of our Team) gathers policy recommendations, which may constitute a basis for elaboration of the more inclusive European society with greater citizens involvement, and as such contributing to the larger implementation of deliberative democracy principles.

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