

Committee of Ministers: White Paper on Intercultural dialogue

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In this 'Year of European Intercultural dialogue', the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Council of Europe have adopted the 'White Paper on intercultural dialogue'. The White Paper has been presented as a pan-European contribution to the increasingly international discussion on cultural diversity. The paper establishes that an intercultural approach is necessary to manage cultural diversity. For this approach, the paper seeks to provide a conceptual framework and a guide for policy-makers and practitioners. In addition, the media should play a role in this intercultural approach.

In order to advance the intercultural approach, it is necessary for the Contracting States to concentrate on five policy areas. First, the democratic governance of cultural diversity should be adapted. This means that the common values of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, pluralism, tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual respect must be guaranteed by the government. Second, the democratic citizenship and participation should be strengthened. It must be easier for migrants to participate in local and regional elections, something which contributes to their prosperity and enhances integration. Third, the competences necessary for intercultural dialogue should be taught and learned. The three key competences to be taught in this respect are democratic citizenship, languages and history. The development of these competences should not be limited to primary and secondary education. On the contrary, learning outside of schools also plays a prominent role. Fourth, spaces for intercultural dialogue should be created and widened. An urban space has to be organised in open-minded ways and has to embrace busy parks, lively streets and markets. It is important that migrant populations do not find themselves isolated from city life, which is often the case. Virtual spaces created by the media can also contribute to a more open-society. Finally, intercultural dialogue should be taken to the international level. This will help to overcome sterile juxtapositions and stereotypes that may flow from the general view that the world exists of mutually exclusive civilisations, vying for relative economic and political advantages at each other's cost. International dialogue emphasises that cultural identities are increasingly complex, they overlap and contain elements from many different sources. This will eventually contribute to conflict prevention and conflict solution and support reconciliation and the rebuilding of social trust.

Subsequently, the Council of Europe continues to formulate policy directions for its future action. Included in these directions will be plans involving the media. The Council of Europe will launch a campaign against discrimination together with media professionals and journalism training institutions. Furthermore, training in intercultural competences will be offered to journalists to promote teaching outside school by the media. Moreover, media organisations are invited to promote the participation of minorities in all levels of production and management, while still paying due regard to their professional competences. The Council of Europe sees this as an important realisation of freedom of expression, for which not only public broadcasters are responsible.

Additionally, the media are encouraged to develop arrangements for sharing and co-producing material, which has proven its value in mobilising public opinion against intolerance and improving community relations. To conclude, the Council of Europe intends to institute an annual media award for media, which have made an outstanding contribution to conflict prevention or resolution, understanding and dialogue.

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue 'Living Together as Equals in Dignity', 2 May 2008, CM (2008) 30

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/whitepaper_interculturaldialogue_2_EN.asp

