

## Strategies of developing intercultural dialogue in the context of strengthening national security: Urgent issues in the social and political doctrine of Western Europe and the USA

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**Abstract.** The article looks at the urgent issues of social and political doctrine in its treatment of intercultural dialogue. We focus our attention on problems deemed crucial for European states and the USA. Intercultural dialogue and its efficiency are discussed in many aspects: those of migration, communication, science, culture, education, sport, etc. A special focus is made on interfaith dialogue as a pivotal element of the intercultural exchange. We provide a critical assessment of basic European documents on intercultural dialogue, such as the White Paper of the Council of Europe, and their applicability in practice. The article concludes that several aspects of intercultural dialogue should be specifically enhanced, e.g. interfaith dialogue should be institutionalized into a special forum to coordinate a single global view of urgent issues of international relations and their development under globalization. The present article can be of interest to a wide range of professionals dealing with the issues of interactions between cultures, peoples and religions, especially the social and political aspects of such interactions.

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### Introduction

The current situation in the international system can no longer be guided by the “us vs. them” stereotypes or by the idea of survival of the fittest civilization. Given the challenges of globalization, transparency, pervasive interdependence and increasing global migration, such clichéd thinking can inadvertently lead to a world-scale catastrophe. In this regard, there is no doubt that intercultural dialogue should be understood as most urgent for the modern social and political space. The rise of ideas of tolerance to people of other cultures and their values can be traced in almost any traditional religion. Moreover, it forms a part of their ideological core. Religious tolerance and cultural diversity have long been understood as a guarantee of a society’s development.

The main thesis now articulated and propagated almost in every global forum, most importantly at UN institutions, can be formulated as follows: “After the end of the bipolar world order, which had divided the world along ideological lines, dialogue among cultures and civilizations has indeed become an existential issue for the international community”. [1]

Why is it increasingly often becoming the focus of international attention? The cultural diversity has been increasing in the recent decades, most importantly on the European continent as the most developed and well-to-do region. Hence the corresponding increase in the flow of migrants and

refugees there. On the other hand, the ever-expanding opportunity of intercultural communication and the development of mass media under globalization give new importance to the problem of preserving cultural identities. This situation not only mandates a closer scrutiny of this problem, but also urges us to find new efficient means and methods of removing the arising contradictions, primarily preventive measures against the conflict within the intercultural connections. The world has changed, and the closedness of domestic policy, together with what is perceived as direct measures to enhance the national security of individual nation states, no longer provide protection from major threats, creating instead only an illusion of security.

### *From multiethnic states to a multiethnic Europe: The White Paper of the Council of Europe*

It has historically come to be that multiethnic states developed in different ways. Basing their development on different foundations and utilizing dissimilar ideas, nations began forming their unified states. However, most of these societies, especially the ones endowed with large territory and troubled with complex border issues, have recognized external security as the single crucial issue in state formation. Dialogue and accord between nations in the name of development and elimination of external threat have come to be viewed as paramount. The same logic is followed now by all nations of Europe who recognize the importance of intercultural dialogue within

European states to achieve peace and prosperity. While intercultural dialogue has long been a large item on the agenda of many European institutes, the most conspicuous progress has been reached since 2005, after the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue was adopted. It marked the start of realigning positions and approaches to the issue of intercultural dialogue and its constituent elements. As the outcome of this process, the 118<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (in the foreign affairs configuration) adopted the so-called White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue on May 7, 2008.

This basic European document defines intercultural dialogue as "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world".[2]

#### **Intercultural dialogue as a multilateral process**

Dialogue between cultures proceeds in diverse aspects and reveals itself in many fields of human activity, including education, culture, tourism, science, arts, sport, diplomacy, religion, tourism, migration and means of communication. All of these fields are vital for the dialogue and can either bring nations together or separate them, sowing discord and giving rise to future conflicts, as well as inciting hatred in the present times.

I would like to focus first on the most problematic issue within the process of the dialogue, the issue which makes it all the more urgent – that of increasing migration.

The current socioeconomic reality is characterized by marked inequality in global development. Catastrophic disproportions along the North-South and West-East divide lines have become its persistent feature. Several hundred richest families of the West control over half of all global resources and riches, while hundreds of millions in the global South lack means for even a most modest livelihood, run the risk of contracting an infectious disease, and, worst of all, have no prospect of seeing this situation changed. Another pertinent factor here is the aging of highly developed societies. By 2050, an average European would almost be of retirement age. These two mutually exclusive trends have led to an explosion of migration, especially to Western Europe and the USA. Europe does not need factory-floor labor force, yet is not ready to put up with dilution of its cultural identity and of the unique character of its every nation. The state of affairs in Western Europe is

markedly different from that in the USA. The latter, like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, is a country which has always had a migrant identity. In such nations, open dialogue on cultural interaction has a certain *raison d'être*, whereas in Europe migration is conditioned by an economic necessity to attract cheap labor from non-European nations, usually from an ex-colony or an otherwise dependent territory. Thus, the UK has India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as its migration sources, France has Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, etc.[3] Thus the very approach to multicultural dialogue in America and Europe is different. In Europe, the extreme disproportions and the growth of Islamic population with its objective and rightful claims to have their cultural rights respected threatens the very existence of European cultural identities. On the contrary, America can only benefit from the development of multicultural ties, as they formed the basis of its rise as a multiconfessional and multiethnic nation.

For European nations, the key problem is migrants' respect of the culture and the system of values in their new home. A required precondition, though, is the reciprocal respect and preservation of migrants' cultural identity, as long as they do not contradict the so-called fundamental human rights and laws of their new nation. This particular clause has proved to be the root of all migration-related problems. Herein lies the trouble. There is no magic formula to solve problems and put an end to conflicts.[4] It also has to be mentioned that in the recent years conflict-related topics in the discussion of migration have prevailed.

Experts from Central and Eastern Europe claim that in their societies anti-Moslem feelings have significantly increased after the collapse of communism due to a conscious effort of mass media which imposes on the public the view of Arabs as potential extremists.[5] At the same time, no European state wants a further growth of Islamic population on its territory. The "Westernization" of Europe, i.e. the process of integrating Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union and NATO, co-opting them to solve common problems by means of Western values and imperatives leads to a more acute interpretation of civilization clash (e.g., between the Christians and Moslems). This issue is as impossible to ignore as anti-Semitism was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Another constituent element of intercultural dialogue I would like to make mention of due to its extreme importance is communication. Given that national cultural identities seem to be preserved, English has clearly become the only international vehicle of communication. While learning the language, we are exposed to its culture, primarily to the American version.[6] Whether we accept it or not

is an open question, but, as a matter of fact, a number of societies are losing their uniqueness, becoming a part of the dominant culture. Language is more than just a communication tool; it comes tied up with a system of values, ideals and even lifestyles. On the other hand, having a common language unites people, allows them to communicate directly and to exchange knowledge and experience. However, communicative space as a truly important part of intercultural dialogue needs clear regulation, the rules and limits of mutual penetration have to be set in order to preserve linguistic and cultural uniqueness.

People of art, culture, science and sport are important actors of intercultural dialogue, communicating ideas which are common and understandable to all. These dimensions of intercultural communications know no limits, clear national boundaries, and belong to mankind as a whole. Thus contacts in these fields must be welcomed in order to neutralize the existing and prevent the potential interethnic and intercultural conflicts.

#### **Intercultural dialogue: theories and practice**

European philosophy of global society arose several centuries ago. In their gestation form, the ideas of global society and dialogue within it can be found in the works of Immanuel Kant and his concept of cosmopolitanism. According to Kant, everyone can enjoy their rights without asking permission from others, as states had entered a certain cooperation to enhance trade and interact otherwise.[7] Kant actually places patriotism in the context of an individual's cosmopolitan rights, which forms the so-called "patriotic cosmopolitanism". However, Kant postulates that to build a global society, ideals of the "universal republic" must overcome those of "local" patriotism.[8]

How could these fundamental views find a practical realization? Under the current conditions of extreme disproportion in social, economic and intellectual development of peoples and nations, this well-justified and well-meant theory makes patriotism and cosmopolitanism clash rather than complement each other. People are seeking better opportunities and use cosmopolitan rhetoric to become patriots of the most advanced nations. Pluralism of ethnic identities has become a cornerstone of patriotism in such multiethnoconfessional societies as the USA, where it is based on achievements and victories of the civic nation and not particular ethnicities or cultures.

Without achieving the ideals of true brotherhood and integrity in the intercultural dialogue, there will be no peace and common accord in the new millennium, as Pope John Paul II famously declared in his World Day of Peace message on January 1, 2001.

According to the pontiff, at the moment only a few countries of the world have a monopoly over the cultural industry, imposing their ideals on many systems of values across the planet. As a result, thousands risk losing their cultural identities.

At the same time, we have to understand that the existing mechanisms of intercultural dialogue are far from ideal. Moreover, no dialogue is possible with those who reject the very existence of this dialogue by denying the fundamental values of life, dignity and cultural diversity. There can be no dialogue with terrorists and extremists, although this does not mean that a democratic society should stop creating continuous opportunities for such dialogue

There are other, more global, issues in setting the mechanisms of intercultural dialogue to work. According to the Western doctrine, this dialogue is based on the fundamental ideas of democracy, the rule of law and protecting inalienable human rights (3.4.1). "Ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic affiliations or traditions cannot be invoked to prevent individuals from exercising their human rights or from responsible participating in society" (3.4.1).

In reality, human rights in practice tend to give rise to a conflict between individual interests and these of society or state. An individual is always guided by his/her own interests and needs. It is, however, impossible to doubt that an individual can only develop in league with the whole society, when his/her behavior matches its traditions and moral ideals. What ideals and moral guidelines, then, does the White Paper proclaim?

The basic answer found in the White Paper is that «universal principles, as upheld by the Council of Europe, offered a moral compass». Such an approach surely cannot be consensual. One of the fundamental doctrinal documents of the Russian Orthodox Church – "The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights" (2008), setting forth its approaches to this problem, stipulates the following: "Human rights cannot be superior to the values of the spiritual world... One's human rights cannot be set against the values and interests of one's homeland, community and family. The exercise of human rights should not be used to justify any encroachment on religious holy symbols things, cultural values and the identity of a nation." "The weakness of the human rights institution lies in the fact that while defending the freedom (αὐτεξουσίαν) of choice, it tends to increasingly ignore the moral dimension of life and the freedom from sin (ἐλευθερία). The social system should be guided by both freedoms, harmonizing their exercise in the public sphere".[9]

This position of the Russian Orthodox Church is indirectly supported by many Western

scholars. One of the leading theorists of the philosophy of human rights, professor Jurgen Habermas notes a dualistic nature of human rights as a concept: they can be viewed in different contexts from the standpoints of morality or law. He also mentions that the American concept of everyone's equality before the law often puts non-Western scholars in doubt.[10]

The questionability of the «moral compass» clause in the White Paper has been proved by the current discussion on single-sex marriages and homosexual propaganda. At the end of PACE's summer session 2013, where a resolution has been passed calling on the Council of Europe's member state to develop legislative mechanisms, introduce educational programs and provide political support to people with homosexual orientation, the Russian Orthodox Church's representative at the Council of Europe has provided the following telling comment on the situation in Europe: "What we are now witnessing is a civilization-level upheaval. The idea of man based on natural law is being replaced by virtual anthropology. Up to now, the family and marriage law has been based on nature and its laws – but it is going to be placed on a flimsy ground of human opinions and fancies. What next? Legal protection to practitioners of pedophilia, bestiality, polygamy and various mixed-type relationships? But why should they ever become the foundation of society and state policy?"[11]

This vivid example proves that the moral doctrine found in European "fundamental documents" cannot be accepted and put into practice in many states, and even where it has been adopted, faces a wave of protest.

Another problematic issue of the mechanisms of promoting intercultural dialogue as suggested in the Western doctrine is their conventionality. Preserving a cultural identity today to a great extent depends on whether nations, states, separate groups and individuals representing them are truly prepared for open honest dialogue. In other words, dialectical thinking alone, together with the capability to see the world through others' eyes can help set the world free from the impending menace of intercultural and civilizational conflicts.

The Western doctrine also includes highly radical views of the necessity of intercultural dialogue. Some researchers, in particular professor Alan Wolfe, claim that in modern society the issue of intercultural conflicts is much less urgent for an average American than that of conflicts between individuals. It is the elites, including the political ones, who are fueling speculation on intercultural conflicts, whereas ordinary citizens are more inclined towards tolerance and try to stay away from extremist debates.[12]

### **Interfaith dialogue is larger than the intercultural one**

Dialogue between religions has been declared a part of the intercultural one. But how important is this part? Obviously, its role is far from mediocre, and furthermore, there is every reason to think it is of crucial importance. Interfaith dialogue has its own peculiarity: without placing axioms and dogmas of one religion above those of the other, this dialogue is founded on principles of kindness and neighborly love, which can be discovered among the tenets of every religion.

Upon completing her visit to Tatarstan, a region of Russia most attentive to the issues of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, the then US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said that Tatarstan is "a model of peaceful coexistence of people of different religions. We in the US are trying to strengthen the interfaith dialogue. You here do not have it in abstract only, but just what we in America need. We want to set up programs which will teach people to live together".[13]

In his turn, Tatarstan's first President Mintimer Shaimiyev in his speech at the session of UNESCO's Executive Board outlined Tatarstan's approach to interfaith dialogue as follows: "An interaction of cultures and their dialogue is the most beneficial foundation for developing interethnic and interfaith relations. It is only within such dialogue that stereotypes can be overcome and mutual enrichment achieved, and a foundation for stopping every conflict can be laid... Tolerance, including its ethnoconfessional type, must be cherished and supported by states".[14]

Interfaith dialogue has another important feature when viewed as a part of a larger intercultural process. Such an interaction is guided by certain moral values which strengthen the desire to understand and interpret others' positions. Hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church even claim that the interfaith dialogue is far more important than the intercultural one, as its participants are explicitly driven by God's will.[15]

It may perhaps seem surprising, but even such complex and highly important relations as those between China and the USA at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are strengthened by interfaith dialogue.[16]

For centuries Western civilizations have been implementing their values and lifestyles around the world, so there is little surprise that many in the Moslem civilization describe the current military operations by the USA and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq as "crusades".[17] The present-day situation in the interfaith component of the intercultural dialogue requires both hearing what people of other

faith are saying and trying to understand them and to provide an interpretation of their position.

We find it desirable that interfaith dialogue as the most efficient tool of settling conflicts in intercultural communications should be institutionalized and brought down to practice. A special interfaith forum should be created to discuss the most urgent issues and acute problems of intercultural dialogue. It would be a real step towards improving international humanitarian cooperation and an efficient tool of strengthening global stability and mutual understanding.

Intercultural conflicts (including the ones within America), both in the interfaith and intercivilizational dimension, are played between the orthodox part of the society who are overstocked with Cold War-times stereotypes, and those who take a progressive attitude to the changing realities of the world by both preserving moral standards and trying to discern and understand others' positions.

Life in the future centuries will largely depend on mankind's ability to overcome crises and make certain concessions in the name of common values and ideals. Preserving cultural uniqueness, enhancing real and not illusory mechanisms of intercultural communications will ensure the achievement of peace and global security.

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