



by Monica Urian de Sousa

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Institutional **perspective** on ICD: European Commission

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

What does living in today’s world mean in our relationship to others in our daily life? Each of us has at least one member of our family, a friend, a teacher or a boss from another cultural background. Each of us is the product of a mixture of cultures from which we create a hybrid identity; visible in the music we listen to, in the way we dress or talk or even feel. And there is a «magic» word to define this reality: intercultural. Add the «dialogue» ingredient to it, and you have much more than a concept: you have a way of life! The intercultural Europe that we want for the future is based on a respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds, on an equal basis.

What is the «history» of the topic at the EU level? Since the early 1990s, the Commission has implemented a wide range of initiatives that have stimulated intercultural dialogue: academic conferences, cultural projects or educational initiatives - to mention some examples. In November 2006, the European Commission organised a conference on best practice projects implemented by a wide array of organizations in different EU countries, which had benefited from EU funding. (From programmes such as Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Monnet, the Youth programme and Culture 2000 from the Directorate-General for Education and Culture or programmes from other DGs like Employment, Social affairs and Equal opportunities or DG Research.) Many of you have already benefited from these programmes and worked together on the concept of intercultural dialogue.

By declaring 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID), the European Union fully acknowledges the complexity of our societies, our cultural diversity, the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs that are at the heart of the European project. But intercultural dialogue cannot be imposed from above, by the EU or a national administration. It is therefore essential to find best practices in civil society,

support them, learn from them and share them at national and European levels. The «bottom-up approach» chosen for the Year means that the Civil Society, including youth organisations like the Youth Forum, have been involved in preparing the Year from the very beginning. The European Commission is collaborating with the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, ensuring that the voice of the organizations with a rich experience in this field, is heard.

► **What does the 2008 Year mean for you in terms of youth policies and programmes at the EU level?**

First of all intercultural dialogue will be the main subject in the youth field in 2008, with implications going beyond the Year. In fact intercultural dialogue will become a transversal priority in various EU policies, actions and programmes, in fields such as culture, sports, citizenship and, of course, youth. In the framework of the structured dialogue, young people at all levels – local, regional, national and European – will have the chance to pronounce their views on this topic and to get their opinions heard by policy-makers.

The highlight of the structured dialogue will be a European level youth conference on intercultural dialogue, probably in the framework of the European Youth Week 2008.

The Youth in Action Programme will tackle intercultural dialogue as a priority next year. This will support young people working together on this issue by offering co-funding for projects. Last but not least, a European youth event on inter-religious dialogue is envisaged during the Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

At this very moment, an open call for proposals published by the European Commission is ongoing. One of the award criteria is the number of people involved directly and indirectly in the project, with a special emphasis on young people. In parallel, at the national level, the National Coordination Bodies are in the process of selecting and preparing projects, many of which have youth as their target group.

The website for the EYID has a special section dedicated to Partners, online at www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu.

Here you can register your organisation and exchange best practice and ideas with colleagues from all over Europe; search for partners; learn with and from the experiences of other organisations. You have the opportunity to give visibility to existing web features dealing with the issue of intercultural dialogue, which can be published on the site or linked to it. The full version of the site will be a window on the activities of the Year; informing you about the events organised at national and European level, in all official languages of the EU. Even more important, you will be asked to contribute with your own story, testimonial, definition, etc. to the concept of intercultural dialogue and its expressions in daily life.

As you can see, at this stage many initiatives are in a preparation phase and a lot is going on in 2008 directly related to you. We will surely have the opportunity to present in more detail certain initiatives in the field of youth as they are planned and implemented. The objective of all these initiatives is to encourage you to explore European cultural diversity, leading to a mutual understanding and a better life together and last but not least, to foster active European citizenship and a sense of European belonging. Being open to the «other» and to the condition of «otherness» will help you develop your cultural sensibility and literacy – the capacity to acquire, interpret and apply knowledge about cultures.

► **Your curiosity and your creativity are key to the success of this European Year- so put on your intercultural glasses and join us!**



• Institutional perspective

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