



by Jovana Bazerkovska

Y o u t h  
Y o u t h  
Y o u t h  
Y o u t h  
Y o u t h  
Y o u t h  
Y o u t h

# Institutional perspective on ICD: European Youth Forum

## The Youth Perspective! Political climate for intercultural dialogue

When speaking of intercultural understanding as basis for intercultural dialogue, we will immediately start with a question:

“  
**How does our daily reality  
build the foundation  
for intercultural dialogue to begin?**”

Let's start with observing the media. The media is still full of information promoting fear of people different than yourself and fear of cultures different to our own. If we look at the political arena, we see that we are faced with national political debate based on populist discourse. If we look at our educational system we realize the education we go through made very little or no progress in responding to diversity, as it is still based on normative and “national identity” approaches encouraged through school calendar, school books, history education, pedagogical methods, etc... We are still confused by the debate: cultural relativism vs. human rights, especially when it comes to women's rights! Our daily surrounding does not reflect the diversity we live in, and the political efforts we hear about still do not or hardly ever reach or change our world and the perception towards it.

Definitely the presence of the issue on the political agenda at the European level assures us that there is willingness, understanding and importance given to it. It is implemented in different political contexts and processes, but still it brings us to one very direct conclusion that:

*Promoting diversity and intercultural dialogue is not the sole responsibility of decision-makers and of the European level, but has to be tackled at all levels and with the involvement of stakeholders: People who are able to put forward the vision of the different social groups they represent and the knowledge of the ways these groups can be reached in the most effective and direct way.*

### ►How do we understand intercultural dialogue?

Europe is by nature a culturally diverse continent. This fact directly gives us all responsibility to ensure that this diversity is recognized, promoted and celebrated.

In this sense dialogue between cultures is necessary in order to create an inclusive European society for everyone. This is the precondition for social progress of each individual and at the same time a precondition for the promotion of the cultural diversity of the continent.

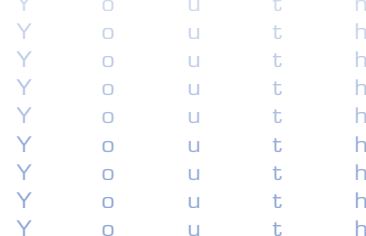
In the European Youth Forum (YFJ) we believe that intercultural dialogue is the only way forward in shifting the political debate in a new direction towards respect and understanding.

Quoting the former UN Secretary General:

**«I see ... dialogue as a chance for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better, whether they live on opposite sides of the world or on the same street»**

*United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan*

We also see dialogue as the only way that will bring people of our local community, country, Europe, and world together, and would help for all the phobias to be overcome!



## ► **What we are reaffirming and what we believe is still to be done!**

As YFJ we follow all the processes in the field of ICD closely and we are involved in many of them to bring the perspective of youth organizations. Magazines very often tend to make “YES” and “NO” based analyses of different political actions. I will use the same method to analyze what has been done and what is to be done on European level.

In the spirit of future-oriented approach this time I will leave out the “NO”. The YFJ “Reaffirmations” and “Must do’s when it comes to intercultural dialogue and the views of young people in making a difference on European and national level are below.

### ► **We reaffirm:**

- The European understanding of ICD as a mainstream issue as it affects: gender issues, education, social inclusion, etc
- The successes of the campaign “All Different – All Equal” in reaching and bringing together young people on different levels to celebrate diversity
- The EU European Year of ICD – putting the issue in focus is very important and we believe that it will open many new doors and perspectives for ICD in Europe
- The preparation of the COE White paper on ICD
- The promotion of the Euromed dialogue and cooperation, as it represents an important part of ICD on a European level

### ► **Must do list:**

- Involve youth organizations and thereby young people in ICD at all levels
- Recognize non-formal education as tool for the promotion of intercultural learning
- Encourage ICD at all levels: International, European, regional, national and local
- Include intercultural dialogue as part of global education in the school curriculum
- On the macro-level expand and ensure wider funding for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue programmes
- Have civil society and decision-makers acting together
- Promote dialogue as a tool for embracing diversity in Europe and worldwide
- Examples of good practice for ICD to be promoted by all institutions

### ► **What we as YFJ do to promote intercultural dialogue?**

We understand intercultural dialogue as a mainstreaming issue and therefore it is part of our work in several fields:

- Education
- Global Youth Work Development
- Equality and Human Rights

We promote non-formal education as a tool for intercultural learning. We promote the role young people have to play in intercultural dialogue. We promote the concept and its importance towards our member organizations and we encourage them to get actively engaged in promoting it in the context of their national, European or international level work.

We have been actively engaged in Euro-Mediterranean and global cooperation in general, and for us they represent an important step in bringing young people of different cultures to work together. The Euromed cooperation has been voted as a priority area for the YFJ work on global youth work development by the YFJ member organisations. In that regard, it is important to add that the Youth Forum has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Anna-Lindh Foundation. The Foundation is a far reaching partnership between the European Union and its partners in the southern Mediterranean region. It was launched at the Barcelona Conference in 1995.

We have created an YFJ Faith-based expert group, which is composed of the faith-based member organizations of the Forum where FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations, not member of the YFJ) is permanently invited. The group aims to develop cooperation among young people belonging to different religious communities and to support the work of the YFJ Bureau in the field of inter-religious dialogue as part of intercultural dialogue. Another relevant memorandum of understanding for inter-religious dialogue has been signed with the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation.

Last but not least, the YFJ is actively involved in the consultation for the white paper on ICD and the contact group for the preparation of the EU 2008 Year of ICD.

### ► **Young people and youth organisations in ICD**

As actors of social change and in many ways the avant-garde of European young people and youth organizations, we are ready to make a difference and ready to take a step towards the development of a dialogue- and understanding-based society! Through our activities and programmes we are actively contributing in this sense.

We are convinced that the dialogue must start with us as the present and the future of the societies we live in! We call for an intercultural dialogue that takes this fact into consideration!

• Institutional perspective

**Contact :** ✕

[jovana.bazerkovska@youthforum.org](mailto:jovana.bazerkovska@youthforum.org)

@