

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE “CALL FOR IDEAS” FOR  
PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN  
EUROPE**

**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATOIRES  
(AEC)**



*A) How can one contribute towards identifying, evaluating, developing and exchanging projects, experiences and good practice in intercultural dialogue on a European scale?*

Intercultural dialogue can only flourish in frameworks and contexts that support such a dialogue. Therefore, we would like to draw attention to the activities of the many European NGOs, associations and networks that exist in the various areas of civil society today (education, culture, youth, citizenship, etc). Being European, they are almost automatically involved in intercultural dialogue, as they are mostly aimed at discussing certain issues at the European level. More importantly, they are usually organized according to specific themes (e.g. subject-specific or institutional networks, or networks aimed at a specific type of activity): this is crucial, as these themes give European citizens the opportunity to identify themselves with such networks. Once inside such networks, the citizens will then develop an intercultural dialogue naturally, although much will depend on the network’s geographical balance and level of organization. It is in these frameworks, in which persons meet personally, that intercultural dialogue will take place effectively and understanding between cultures will grow. In addition, such networks are also effective tools for the dissemination of good practice.

*B) What information and communication initiatives could contribute towards involving all European Union residents, and particularly young people, in the promotion of intercultural dialogue in day-to-day life and familiarizing them with it?*

We are not sure if the promotion of intercultural dialogue is a matter of information or communication policies. Information and communication policies tend to ‘sell’ a product or concept top-down. Initiatives bombarding citizens with messages promoting intercultural dialogue do not have to be necessarily effective. Bottom-up approaches could be much more effective (see C).

*C) What specific European-scale initiatives likely to reach, directly and indirectly, as many people in the European Union as possible – and particularly young people – could contribute towards promoting intercultural dialogue?*

We would like to suggest several types of activities, with the aim to have a long-term impact. This will be much more effective than incidental activities or campaigns serving the short term only, as may be the danger with such a single EU year for intercultural dialogue.

1) Intercultural dialogue through musical and cultural education

The arts have a unique potential to support intercultural dialogue. This is in particular the case with music, which is a unique phenomenon of human expression. As the ultimate

form of non-verbal communication, it can bring people together, enhance social cohesion and create a basis for intercultural dialogue and common understanding without even having to use translation. The creative powers of music and its high level of accessibility can make music into a communication tool, which could be much more powerful than policy papers, information and communication initiatives, publications or presentations. However, music and cultural education have never been inserted in a European context supporting intercultural dialogue before. Therefore, we believe it to be important to seize the opportunity of the EU Year for Intercultural Dialogue and start the development of a European agenda for music and arts education, in which tools and contributions for intercultural dialogue can be further studied, tested and implemented. This could culminate in the EU Year for Musical and Cultural Education in 2011, for which a first proposal has already been made by Austria.

## 2) Capacity building for initiatives supporting intercultural dialogue

As mentioned in A), various frameworks exist in which intercultural dialogue can take place. In addition to the European NGOs, associations and networks, other excellent examples of frameworks in which citizens can engage in intercultural dialogue are exchanges in primary, secondary and higher education, and joint youth activities. Town-twinning schemes are another example of fairly simple, bottom-up and effective ways to bring persons together to engage in intercultural dialogue at grass-roots level.

Although it seems that the exchanges in education and youth are already quite well advanced through the support in the various EU programs, we feel that it is vital to improve the functioning of the European organizations. Many of these exist, but very few are professionally organized. A process of capacity building should therefore be developed targeting this field: this could be done through the organization of conferences for European organizations in the various sectors, during which experts specialized in the establishment, development and sustainability of such organizations can share experiences with organizations in other stages of development. In addition to such training seminars, practical handbooks, informational websites with examples good practice or other types of publications could help organizations in their development. An additional spin-off could also be that these activities would enhance the understanding in the European institutions that such networks are vital for bringing together European citizens to engage in intercultural dialogue and must therefore receive sufficient support.

## 3) National action plans for intercultural dialogue

It is in this context that we would also like to point out the important responsibility for intercultural dialogue in the member states: they are just as faced with this issue at the national level, as is the EU at the European level.

It would therefore be advisable to explore the possibility to set up a system of national action plans for intercultural dialogue. The national action plans for lifelong learning, which were developed some years ago, proved to be an effective tool for the exchange of good practice and relevant information between member states. The same could be envisaged for intercultural dialogue. It would, however, be advisable in this context, to develop a somewhat more specific definition of the term intercultural dialogue for this purpose, as the tendency exists with this term to address it in such a broad and abstract way that describing and talking about it can become a highly complex exercise.