

Intercultural Dialogue: Only a Means, Not an End in Itself

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Abstract

In view of the manifold crises that the Euro-Mediterranean region currently faces, especially on issues related to migration and integration, this paper critically engages the practice of intercultural and interreligious dialogue (ICD) on both sides of the Mediterranean. The paper argues that the proclamation of more ICD per se does not make any difference. Rather, it is a means, a method, not an end in itself. When ICD does not tackle concrete topics, with clear objectives and a method that goes beyond moderating workshops, it can become counterproductive. By simply increasing the provision for and quantity of ICD, like it is nowadays demanded by many political and non-political actors as the universal remedy, without really clarifying what it sets out to achieve, any effort in building mutual understanding is condemned to fail. When ICD is applied purely as a harmonization tool that does not aim to effect self-reflection, ICD does not make any difference and might even solidify existing stereotypes and prejudices against Islam, the Arab world but also against the West.

The study does not represent the position of the OSCE nor of its participating States and exclusively reflects the research and opinions of its authors.

INTRODUCTION

At least since the events of 9/11 in the year 2001, intercultural and interreligious dialogue activities (henceforth: ICD) have been popping up like mushrooms. However, when looking at today's news, which seems to show us more culturally or religiously motivated frictions than ever, it may be questioned whether such commitment has been worth the effort.¹

But 2001 was not year zero for ICD; it had entered stage long before the events of 9/11. The history of ICD as an instrument emerged from an international relations context, and the discipline has always aimed at shedding light on questions with global dimensions.

Throughout history, ICD has occupied different conditions, pretexts, perspectives and objectives. Today, from a European perspective, we mainly find ourselves looking into the potential of ICD as tool to develop relations between Western countries and Muslim-majority states, to understand better how Muslims live in European societies (people who used to be called Turks or Bosnians until the 1990s have become "Muslims" today) and how interreligious dialogue specifically might serve as a way of contributing to conflict resolution. On the other hand, certain other states support ICD as an instrument to supersede Western political concepts that do not find consent in those places.

Here is where the rub sets in, because today ICD has been hauled into the service of quite different objectives. It is therefore necessary to rethink the form dialogue takes and the efficacy it might have, depending on the work we expect it to do.

Questions should also be raised about the role of institutions promoting dialogue. Without casting doubt on their good intentions, organizations have interests and insecurities of their own, which may impede the dialogical process or push it in a direction that may not be very productive.²

¹ It is important to note that different terminologies exist in the field, all of them with distinct meanings. Terms in use include: intercultural, interreligious, interfaith dialogue and dialogue among/between/of civilizations/cultures. This paper subsumes all these terminologies into simply "intercultural dialogue." By suggesting this, mainly for the ease of the reader, the author is aware of adopting a Euro-centric view, seeing religion as a subset of culture. It is not only the author's opinion, but also that of, for example, Mieke Bal in her *Kulturanalyse* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2002), where she refers to the crucial mistake of analysing fluid concepts such as culture, identity and religion as discrete entities without mutual influence. It is of central importance not to isolate religion from culture and vice versa.

² Phillip Darby, "Finding Appropriate Forms of Dialogue for Engaging with the Politics of Security", in Michális S. Michael and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Civilizational Dialogue and World Order. The Other*

This applies equally to United Nations agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other similar actors. Pitching dialogue at the global level may also be intended to entrench the positions of states, as for instance in the case of lacking good governance and proper human rights.

With these reflections as a point of departure, the present paper aims to develop the following three hypotheses with regards to the question of whether and how our currently exercised concepts of ICD impact the contemporary crises of Europe and the Mediterranean, especially on issues related to migration and integration.

The three hypotheses regarding what impactful ICD should look like are the following:

- 1) ICD is political and therefore a political instrument (which in itself is nothing negative).
- 2) ICD offers a safe framework for addressing controversial issues.
- 3) ICD is about co-operating, problem-solving and building resilience.

1. ICD IS POLITICAL AND THEREFORE A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

Especially at the top political level, ICD has become the subject of a proliferation of initiatives and international meetings since 9/11. UNESCO was at the forefront in implementing 2001 as being the United Nations' proclaimed "UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations," based upon a UN resolution proposed by Iran's former president Mohammad Khatami. Furthermore, there is the Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO); in 2005 the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures was established; the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was launched by the UN Secretary General in 2007 and sponsored by Spain and Turkey; while in the same year Qatar established the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). One of the more recent international initiatives is the establishment of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), which remarkably has the status of an international organization, founded by Austria, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the Holy See in 2012. The KAICIID, with its very special structure of governance including board members representing the world's five major religions, goes back to an initiative by the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and former Pope Benedict XVI

Politics of Cultures, Religions, and Civilizations in International Relations, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2009, p. 134.

who were hoping with such a high-end institution to support the voices of “moderate” religious discourse.

On the question of how much impact can be generated through these high-level initiatives, all of them are facing a paradox: On the one hand, there is a political debate, but often the key actors keep repeating – like a mantra – that politics should stay out of ICD. Equally, there is a dilemma between the wish expressed by many ICD practitioners to receive more acknowledgement and support from politics versus a preference for less political interference. Secondly, it is often questionable if these kinds of initiative are aimed more at offering multiculti photo opportunities, public relations or placebo treatments, instead of tackling concrete political and social problems. Instead, they often end up as being high-profile debating clubs with limited political support, which is a paradox in itself as they all were born out of high-level political decisions in the first place. Do these political initiatives generate any results or should ICD be concentrated at the grass-roots and community level only? In reality, efforts at one level do not work without the other, so a healthy mix is required. In order to arrive at this statement, we are required to look into two aspects:

- a) that these new institutional forms and practice of ICD are part of a wider change in international politics;
- b) what are the political objectives of ICD and what are its mechanisms to pursue these?

An interesting recent article by Karsten Lehmann, a sociologist of religion, examines how the UN has adopted a discourse of religion (also through ICD) on a side-track parallel to universally acknowledged human rights, moving away from an emphasis on religious freedom towards “dialogue.”³ On the basis of looking at UN General Assembly resolutions issued from the early 2000s onwards, Lehmann concludes:

Throughout the 2000s, the UN’s religion-discourse has developed ambivalently into three directions: (a) The adjective “interreligious” has begun to refer to subject-matters or even actors (as opposed to an object of human rights protection). (b) The concept of “dialogue” highlights the perception of religion as a dimension of fundamental problems that cannot be solved by means of traditional politics. And (c) the notion of “interreligious dialogue” documents an attempt to describe religion as a positive contributor to a culture of peace.

³ Karsten Lehmann, “From Human Rights to Dialogue and Harmony: The Construction of the Concept of Religion in the United Nations’ General Assembly”, in Stanley D. Brunn (ed.), *The Changing World Language Map*, Springer, 2017 (forthcoming).

The key point here is that a set of states and religiously affiliated actors have successfully put religion onto the agenda of the UN. And this discourse of religion for peacebuilding and/or ICD for harmony and reconciliation erodes traditional human rights discourse. This separation of religious freedom and/or ICD from the UN human rights agenda can be seen as problematic because it opens up a parallel, and softer, dialogue track for states that face difficulties in adopting or implementing existing human rights instruments. Furthermore, through fostering the discourse away from religious freedom and towards a concept of dialogue that goes beyond mere diplomacy, the current UN texts also reveal a new set of problems within the organization: The references to dialogue characterize the field of religion as a context where the international community has developed such a degree of mistrust that the UN perceives itself to be in need of new tools to deal with this situation.

In the best case the political pretexts and objectives for ICD should be to support the acceptance and implementation of existing agreed political objectives, such as the universal acceptance and protection of human rights, good governance, rule of law, democracy and responsible citizenship and participation based on humanistic convictions.

As Lehmann's analysis shows, some states might have other goals for ICD. It can offer a safe framework for discussing these varying objectives and finding ways of reaching a mutual agreement without diminishing the force of universally negotiated, fundamental agreements already in place, like those mentioned above.

The overall result of the end of the Cold War and the deepening of globalization is that "soft power" is being increasingly favoured over traditional, material "hard power." Moreover, there have been attempts in many countries by non-governmental actors to influence state foreign policies through soft power activities.

Almost 20 years ago the American international relations scholar Joseph Nye coined the term "soft power."⁴ His analysis generally focuses on secular sources of soft power and their effects on international relations, but attempts by various religious actors to influence state foreign policies must not be ignored. Today, a growing number of researchers are examining how religion engages with international relations and many authors are speaking of a resurgence of religion in global politics.⁵ At the same time, other scholars posit that a good balance of the

⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York, Basic Books, 1990.

⁵ Cf. Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century. Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2011; Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, 2nd ed., Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2013.

topic of religion in international relations is required.⁶ “Indeed, if our brief forays into the Reformation era elucidate anything, it is that fetishizing religion is as much a danger as not taking it seriously enough.”⁷

Nye’s definition of soft power is relevant for understanding the concepts of power underlying the approach of ICD.

The basic concept of power is the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to pay them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted, to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks.⁸

Nye’s claim is that soft power co-opts people, it does not coerce them. Certain attributes such as culture, values and ideas represent different, not necessarily lesser, forms of influence compared to “hard power.” In many aspects, the US government, for example, did not apply soft power to the extent that is needed to build secure democratic foundations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Another example would be the new field of encouraging religion and religious actors in peacebuilding matters,⁹ or the various attempts to legally ban defamation of religions by a diverse set of non-state actors.¹⁰

When we consider today’s refugee crisis and its accompanying discourse on integration, many look through the lenses of culture, religion and values while discussing possible solutions and measures. This sort of “culturalization” is currently applied by many European right-wing politicians who make cultural or religious particularizations about refugees from the Arab world, holding them responsible for a putatively higher crime rate or even terrorism. As a reaction, the

⁶ For example, Olivier Roy’s writings about the crisis of the secular state and the new forms of religious expression found between secularization and the deculturalization of religion. Oliver Roy, “The Disconnect between Religion and Culture”, in Eurozine, 20 August 2015, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2015-08-20-roy-en.html>.

⁷ Daniel H. Nexon, “Religion and International Relations: No Leap of Faith Required”, in Jack Snyder (ed.), *Religion and International Relations Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 161.

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, transcript of a discussion with Joanne J. Myers, 13 April 2004, http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/en_US/studio/multimedia/20040413.

⁹ E.g. Current KAICIID regional focus on Nigeria, Central African Republic and Myanmar.

¹⁰ E.g. United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, promoted by the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief”, adopted in 2011, <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/16/18>.

other end of the spectrum of the political landscape completely ignores or denies the existence of culture and religion as factors relevant to political discourse; for example, they might choose to overlook the rise of political Islam and concentrate instead on ICD activities focused on communalities and harmony.

In other words, talking about culture and religion in the debate on refugees has been so thoroughly monopolized by extreme right-wing voices that, for the rest of the political camp, discussing these things has become a taboo. Intercultural research is significantly threatened by this. Here, social and political discourse passes up the chance of gaining insights into how cultural and religious identities are co-constructed, and how their construction can be activated in co-operative as well as discriminating ways. In short, a careful consideration of the role of culture and its force as a discursive construction, south of the Mediterranean as well as in Europe, might help in finding ways to transcend the trappings of the current discourse; yet, at the moment, these ways seem to be blocked by that very discourse itself.

Gianluca Solera, expert on Euro-Mediterranean partnerships and initiatives, highlights that it is not just the difference of cultures or religions that identifies the problems of achieving a peaceful co-existence: the reasons for social struggles and revolutions of the past years shows that, in reality, the factor that generates conflicts is not that of identity or religious differences, but in different access rights to social and political life. The question of the politics of intercultural dialogue has often been used by previous regimes, especially in Arab countries, to divert attention from this. It replaced instead, a reflection and a basic policy on access rights, social justice, on the allocation of resources and civil liberty.¹¹

Social anthropologist Gerd Baumann, tried to solve the “Multicultural Riddle” by rethinking national, ethnic and religious identities, and stresses the fact that the value of recognition being given to an ever-widening variety of mutually exclusive types of identity has its limits:

We cannot bury our ethnocentric heads [...] but neither can we recognize indiscriminately that any culture is as good as any other. We cannot outlaw cannibalism or racism and at the same time “recognize” the cannibal’s or the racist’s culture.¹²

¹¹ Gianluca Solera, “Beyond Borders: What is Next for Mediterranean Civil Society”, in *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, No. 22 (2015), p. 39-54, http://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/qm22/3Quaderns_BeyondBorders_GSolera.pdf.

¹² Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle. Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, New York and London, Routledge, 1999, p. 118.

When ICD is used as a strategy for the integration of migrants, as it is these days centred around the discourse of integrating Muslims into European societies, it gains a specific political dimension where the political gets culturalized and religionized in order to suppress core political issues such as access rights, social justice or the allocation of resources and civil liberty, both north and south of the Mediterranean. Fear of political dimensions ignoring power discourses and contexts limits ICD to a superficial level and because of this it is not going to be able to trigger any change that tackles ongoing problems. Quite the opposite: “In an era of globalization, the very currency of dialogue as a way out of our present impasse should make us wary. All too easily it can be pulled into the service of the existing world order.”¹³

Again, ICD at its best has clearly defined objectives and fundamental principles that cannot be discarded. These principles are rooted in the universal acceptance of human rights, human dignity and equality and they are made manifest in the political challenge to practice good governance according to democratic principles, rule of law and civil participation.

2. ICD IS TO OFFER A SAFE FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The challenges for ICD lie in providing a safe space and framework for dealing with controversial issues, including those over which controversies and even political conflicts have emerged. ICD is a soft measure to address those issues which are not possible to deal with through political systems, but one which remains political in itself through its objectives and mechanisms and must negotiate within the limits of its fundamental principles. Whereas ICD must not be allowed to become a boxing ring, often the positive notion of conflict in social studies being used to trigger a learning effect is rejected. Frequently, ructions and dissonances in ICD projects are perceived as an absolute no-go area, and so a general “Kumbaya” attitude at the end of a project is more likely, with the project being reported as a success rather than having contained a controversial debate.

Tackling and hopefully solving controversial issues constitute an important part of community experience, especially in multi-ethnic societies, and are key for social change. But controversies require cautious and wise management by working out different perceptions or interpretations, and also allowing these to be expressed and then hopefully achieving an agreement as to next steps. The more clearly the

¹³ Phillip Darby, “Finding Appropriate Forms of Dialogue for Engaging with the Politics of Security”, cit., p. 134.

objectives of ICD are defined, together with the target groups, activities, expected results and lasting effects of a project, the better controversies can be mediated and jointly solved.

Conflicts are context-driven and so responsible moderation and a considered method have to be aware of these contexts and their power balances. It is important to note at this point that moderation or splitting up of larger groups into smaller workshops is not a method per se. A thematic approach focusing on concrete problems is a method for dialogue for example.

The overt harmony of certain dialogues that stop at the level of personal encounters within the frameworks of ethnic food, arts, museumized artefacts, ethnographics, cultural and religious tolerance and non-violence can even be counterproductive in some contexts. This form of ICD suggests that difference can only be tolerated from an external point of view, without ever properly entertaining certain elements of otherness. Here, we are entering slippery ground about where to draw the line between different lifestyles and fundamental human values. Self-reflection about one's own subjective perceptions and becoming the "Self" through the "Other" are key aspects of a fluid process of identity formation, which is both never ending and never static. By learning to understand the other, one learns to better understand one's own reactions, aversions and sympathies. This, in turn, might lead to a transformation and change of habits, attitudes and perceptions.¹⁴

Therefore, concepts of ICD should call for an honest reflection about existing discrepancies between different access rights or levels of civil participation. In this respect, it is questionable if the current globally perceived threat of the termination of peaceful co-existence between people of different cultures and beliefs is a result of fundamental ethical-religious differences or rather because of an increase in perceived or experienced social and political discrimination in the daily life of many people. As we are learning today through the analysis of factors that trigger violent extremism, and why Europeans are becoming foreign fighters for the likes of Da'esh, religion – and Islam in particular – is not the only key reason. There is a kaleidoscope of factors that lead to violent extremism. Consequently, it would be worthwhile also to consider political and conflict issues in ICD activities that move beyond the Islamophobia-Westernphobia discourse and towards concrete social problems.

¹⁴ Cf. Ashis Nandy, "Terror, Counterterror, and Self Destruction: Living with Regimes of Narcissism and Despair", in Michális S. Michael and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Civilizational Dialogue and World Order. The Other Politics of Cultures, Religions, and Civilizations in International Relations*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2009, p. 174 et seq.

To connect this section about dissonances in ICD with the preceding one concerning political dimensions, it is suggested that we ascribe a new concept of all individuals being “*Homo politicus*,” with greater political awareness, and think of ICD as an approach that appreciates “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations.”¹⁵ As opposed to politics, “being political” describes the area of power and conflict in social fields when “acting together or acting in concert in public spaces.”¹⁶ Thereby, every action in a social order is political. In other words, controversies in and of themselves are not problems to be overcome, but rather represent a force to be channelled into political and democratic commitments. And for this translation, ICD can be a helpful tool. Looking at the emergence of various protest movements in Europe and elsewhere, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Pegida, the Italian Five Star Movement or the American President-elect Donald Trump, analysts perceive a tendency towards an “antipolitical” attitude derived from political and systemic discontent. French political scientists Jacques de Saint-Victor explains that despite the fact that European history has never before reached such a high level of democracy, peace, justice and prosperity, political frustration and “antipolitics” are prevailing in many European societies.¹⁷

3. ICD IS ABOUT CO-OPERATING, PROBLEM SOLVING AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

What actually is dialogue? Is it really a dialogue initiative if a church or mosque community invites the public to an open house day? Or, is this actually an attempt – as some critics might say – at *da’wa*/conversion? Is it dialogue when community activists organize a multicultural festival celebrating food and music? Is it really about dialogue when supranational organizations call for more negotiation beyond cultural borders, or when states come together to establish an international organization committed to dialogue? Hence, can we understand every encounter between different cultures and/or religions or every discussion about pluralistic world- and religious views already as a dialogue, or a dialogical situation?

At the University of Bremen in Germany, sociologist of religion Gritt Klinkhammer analysed, through quantitative and qualitative methods, 132 interreligious dialogue activities between German Christians and Muslims that took place from

¹⁵ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London and New York, Verso, 2000, p. 101.

¹⁶ Cf. various writings by Hannah Arendt, such as “Truth and Politics”, in *The New Yorker*, 25 February 1967, p. 49-88, <http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/truth-in-politics-hannah-arendt>.

¹⁷ Jacques de Saint-Victor, *Les antipolitiques*, Paris, Grasset, 2014.

2008 to 2010.¹⁸ In this study she focused on two questions: What types of concrete activities are taking place under the banner of interreligious dialogue? And what kind of influence do those activities have on the wider public and on integration-related issues in particular?

The most popular forms of German interreligious dialogue activities are, according to Klinkhammer, mutual visits to each other's praying houses (89 percent), followed by lectures and information sessions (87 percent) and discussion groups (87 percent). Joint workshops and internal further education rank lowest, at 27 percent to 29 percent.¹⁹ These data show how many practitioners misunderstand the concept of dialogue as something that prioritizes learning about the unknown, and not necessarily a place to trigger mutual changes of habits, attitudes and perceptions.

With regard to the impact of these activities, Klinkhammer summarizes that the influence is mainly effective amongst the direct dialogue participants (74 percent) within the project and that the dialogue projects analysed face challenges in rolling out the effects to a broader public, as in religious institutions, public opinion and public administration. Another interesting finding of this study is to do with structural distortion between Christian and Muslim dialogue practitioners. This aspect can also be seen reflected on a global level, in dialogue projects between North and South: Project participants come from different social and educational backgrounds which do not provide the same levels of capacity. Klinkhammer describes how participants that come from the German Muslim community are often voluntarily engaged and lack any institutional background, and even that they may have to expect difficulties with their own peers when attending interreligious dialogue activities. Whereas their German Christian partners are either academically or professionally dedicated to dialogue theories and project implementation.

In the context of migration and integration, Klinkhammer concludes that dialogue needs to be driven by socio-political motivation, and brands the notion of dialogue as a "co-operative action of problem solving" (*kooperatives Problemlösungshandeln*).²⁰ So, her suggestion for meaningful dialogue is that it requires concrete problems to be solved instead of essentialist discussions for the sake of dialogue alone.

¹⁸ Gritt Klinkhammer et al., *Interreligiöse und interkulturelle Dialoge mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland. Eine quantitative und qualitative Studie*, Bremen, University of Bremen 2011, <http://elib.suub.uni-bremen.de/peid=P00102006>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

If we look at what Klinkhammer summarizes from her study as dialogue topics to be examined, we see how different the various entry points are: the Christian project participants have very different expectations from the Muslims living in Germany and vice versa; also, what the Muslims request of the Christians comes from a very different angle.

With regards to integration issues, the things that Christians request from Muslims in Germany are:

- human rights: more concrete commitments and less lip service;
- equal rights for women; dialogues about different forms of veilings in public spaces: forced – voluntary – political attitudes; girls' sports; Muslim family conceptions in general;
- explicit positioning against global violent Islamic extremism.

And what the Muslims request from the majority Christian German society is:

- full political participation;
- Islamic religious education at public schools;
- Islamic representation and institutionalization;
- freedom in exercising of religious practices (building of mosques with or without minarets, halal slaughtering, cemetery laws, education of Imams).²¹

Are these really topics to be solved through various forms of civil society dialogue? Clearly not; these are political challenges that have to be put forward to all parties involved, demanding political solutions for these issues. The political participation of minorities is less a question to be solved by dialogue projects than political authorities, in terms of granting equal access rights or educational systems that shift the possibilities of translating political visions into programmes that can compete in fair elections. It is the role of ICD to address and support these legitimate wishes when political systems fail to do so. But in the end, ICD should not offer opportunities for politicians to circumvent their responsibilities.

For a future-oriented and sustainable result, it is definitely recommended to turn towards concrete existing problems and their solutions, leaving essentialist concepts of dialogue aside, which often tend to assert official positions and only result in feel-good harmony without any further progress.

²¹ Cf. Gritt Klinkhammer, "Der Dialog mit Muslimen: Interessen, Ziele und Kontroversen", in Gritt Klinkhammer and Ayla Satilmis. (eds.), *Interreligiöser Dialog auf dem Prüfstand. Kriterien und Standards für die interkulturelle und interreligiöse Kommunikation*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2008, p. 38 et seq.

Another interesting aspect to look at more in-depth is the differing concepts and structures of the respective civil societies in Europe and South of the Mediterranean. A colleague from Poland once told me:

The Western concepts of civil society and state social-welfare systems do not work south/east of the Danube river. Coming from the East of Europe, something like social work for youth done by police officers is bizarre. No way! The police and the state cannot be trusted.²²

In other words, the practicability for European-tailored civil society initiatives cannot be applied in large parts of the world. And a co-operation between two structurally different partners often hits empty targets after the high engagement of one well-intentioned party.

CONCLUSION

In order to attempt an outlook on how the current crises faced by the Euro-Mediterranean region can be eased through new, revitalized concepts of ICD, the following reflections, derived from the three hypotheses postulated in this paper, may be taken into consideration.

Both in Europe and the Arab world, ICD should serve as a set of instruments to develop and cultivate political literacy and democratic resilience. We all face different challenges and must train our ability to read the political, cultural and religious landscape, both in its contemporary configuration and its historical genesis. In other words, everyone must learn to read the social order in political terms, that is, in terms of conflict about the interpretation of liberty and equality and the hegemonic social relations that should shape them.

The fear in the various dialogue actors of touching upon political questions constitutes an unfavourable influence on the quality and impact of ICD, and in the worst case allows ICD to just become a goal in itself or a harmless placebo for when real issues are too difficult to be discussed. We have seen the likes of this in the emergence of many high-level ICD initiatives (including those backed by the UN) that run in parallel tracks to or even attempt to replace fundamental rights. ICD must be rooted in human equality and core freedoms and must not relativize basic human achievements because of a false cultural or religious relativism. This

²² On the occasion of a seminar organized by the EU's Radicalization Awareness Research Network in May 2016.

argument around highlighting the absoluteness of universal human rights often risks the accusation of being Eurocentric.

Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese-born French author, asserts in his book *Murderous Identities* that, when dealing with so-called “under-developed” or “culturally different” nations, where human rights are seriously violated, the Western world often practices a questionable tolerance.²³ Behind this Western attitude, he argues, as well as economic calculations and political diplomacy, stands a patronizing condescension.

This principle of “anything goes,” be it in the form of religion, culture or ethos, cannot be applied to the idea of ICD, which should be deeply rooted in fundamental principles, and where the problematic term “tolerance” will eventually come to a natural end. In practice, ICD is often demanded to acknowledge the authenticity of opposite positions in specific regions. With regards to geopolitics and the spirit of pursuing power-related goals, Eurocentrism is to be rejected. But when we are concerned with the inviolability of human dignity, good governance and rule of law, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms,²⁴ these principles cannot be treated as regional (Eurocentric), cultural or religious particularities. Ethics are about global humanity and it is of key importance that these remain universal and non-negotiable, neither through an assumed softer version of ICD, nor through specific regional or religiously justified varieties.

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²³ Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*, Paris, Grasset, 1998.

²⁴ As enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, 2nd ed., Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2013

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