Council of Europe 2017 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue “Migrants and refugees: challenges and opportunities – What role for religious and non-religious groups?”

Round Table on Sub-theme II: “The role of religious and non-religious groups in the development of migration policy”

November 7 (Tuesday), 09.00 – 11.00

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“Bridging Cultural and Religious Fault Lines Following Dialogue of Civilizations Principles: Aspects for Migration Policies”

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank the esteemed Co-chairs of the Exchange and Moderator of the round-table for the opportunity to address the audience with short remarks concerning the role of non-religious groups in the development of migration policy.

The Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute (DOC RI) is an international think tank, which was founded in year 2016. The Institute’s headquarters are located in Berlin, Vienna, and Moscow. The Institute builds its work on the legacy and heritage of World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations”, which had been operating since 2002 and celebrated this year the 15-th Anniversary Rhodes Forum event.

In the presentation I will focus on three points: how the dialogue of civilizations initiative contributes to bridging the religious and cultural fault lines; what could be the activities of secular non-governmental organizations in supporting migration policy; and what are the examples of practical policy recommendations developed by Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute in the field of migration.

**Dialogue of Civilizations to Bridge Fault Lines**

The assumption of an inevitable clash of civilizations was tabled at discussions about the development of the world community at the end of the previous century. It was over 20 years ago, when Prof. Samuel Huntington stated the idea that “for peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the potentially most dangerous enmities occur across the fault lines between the world's major civilizations.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Since then the idea of enmity, spreading along the civilizations fault lines, became a major point in international discussions until 1998, when UNESCO established the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations[[2]](#footnote-2). In 2001, the UN General Assembly announced the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations[[3]](#footnote-3), thus giving strong foundations for the Dialogue of Civilizations initiative to be established. During the last decade the world has substantially moved from a clash of civilisations model of interaction between different nations and cultures towards a dialogue of civilisations model. The methodology of dialogue of civilizations, developed by Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, has become a critical component in bridging in practice the “cultural fault lines” of Prof. Huntington’s’ theory. Today, dialogue of civilizations confirms its relevance.

The core principles of Dialogue of Civilizations are openness, diversity of opinions, inclusivity, mutual respect and equity of parties engaged in dialogue. These principles correspond to fundamental Council of Europe values – respect for human rights and furtherance of democracy and rule of law – in order to foster mutual respect and awareness, tolerance and mutual understanding within European society. The world is at a critical crossroads, and there still remains a possibility to restore a world balanced order, to bring back the values of solidarity development, a dialogue of mutual interest by way of holding an open and an equitable conversation on an interactive platform of different civilizations. The Rhodes Forum, as a public non-governmental platform, and the Council of Europe Exchange – as the profound intergovernmental initiative involving representatives of religious and non-religious convictions and the other players in civil society, represent such opportunities for designing and debating effective policy briefs and recommendations.

A dialogue of cultures based on the values of mutual interest, compassion, and peace-making represents the most effective vehicle for supporting the diversity of civilizations and bridging the cultural fault lines that separate civilizations from one another. The concept of Dialogue of Civilizations recognizes the understanding of intercultural dialogue expressed in White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, “as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.”[[4]](#footnote-4) This understanding provides profound basis for further research to be implemented by think tanks and research institutions in migration policies in particular.

**Secular NGOs to Support Migration Policies**

The secular NGOs, that share the principles and values of Dialogue of Civilizations, could address and support the multicultural and communitarian approach to integration based on a pluralist concept of democracy and a management strategy between different ethnic and religious groups. The practical steps in this direction may be made by establishing special research projects and multiple civic fora that will engage representatives of migrant communities and concerned parties of the host countries, thus debating all sides and problems which stem from the policies of inclusiveness and openness. As the Co-Founder of the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute and Secretary General of the Council of Europe (1999–2004) Dr. Walter Schwimmer argues in book “The European Dream”: “Making immigration work is a two-way process. People in host countries must learn to see immigrants as asset, economic and social, and immigrants must familiarize themselves with the rules applying in host countries and accept them.”[[5]](#footnote-5) End of quotation. In a way, the possible practical recommendation could be also suggested to design and research cultural and religious integration and assimilation programs for migrants in host countries.

Another practical step for supporting migration policy in Europe could be founded on the co-management approach to dealing with migration. In his capacity as Secretary General of the Council of Europe Dr. Schwimmer declared that it is purposeful to create a structure that would facilitate dialogue between countries of origin, and transit receiving countries. It would actively promote co-ordination with ministries and non-governmental organisations from the countries concerned, and establish co-operation in fighting the economic, political, and sociological causes of migration[[6]](#footnote-6). Such a structure could be well supported by secular NGOs as well as by faith-based humanitarian organisations.

**Policy Recommendations by DOC RI on Social Mobility and Migration**

To illustrate the possible work that could be carried out by secular NGOs I would like to refer to the results of panel on “Social Mobility and Migration: Through the Prism of Values and Cultures,” which was less than a month ago (on October 6) convened at the 15-th Anniversary Rhodes Forum[[7]](#footnote-7). The panel was moderated by Former Director General of International Organization for Migration Brunson McKinley and Co-Chair of Association for International Mobility Anne-Marie Buschman-Petit.

The panel participants stated that international migration has a major impact on societies, and that impact is likely to grow as rates of population growth and relative prosperity vary enormously between richer and poorer countries. The panelists specified that nowhere these differences are more dramatic than between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Migration can have economic benefits for both receiving countries and countries of origin, but uncontrolled flows of people typically fuel political polarisation and the rise of xenophobic movements. The panel stated that all around the world, questions of cultural and religious identity, multiculturalism, communitarianism, assimilation, and border control have reached the top of the political agenda.

There were policy recommendations elaborated at Rhodes Forum, and further research and recommendations will follow. The results as well as proceedings will be published at the DOC Research Institute web-site and may be well accessed.

Meanwhile I will provide couple examples of such recommendations. To determine how best to make decisions on migration and integration, the DOC Research Institute, following the panel results, gives recommendations:

* The European Union should acknowledge that different member states have different interests and approaches in the field of migration and integration and should have the right to develop their own policies democratically.
* Screening for asylum admission should take place in the vicinity of refugee-generating countries rather than in the country of destination, a practice already in place for many traditional countries of refuge.

On the costs of mass migration and the challenge of integration the recommendations are:

• At a minimum, Europe needs to develop a consensus view regarding massive flows from the south. Is it Europe’s duty to welcome all comers or should filters be imposed? What categories of migrants should be preferred – asylum seekers, the highly skilled, persons with existing ties to the country of destination?

• European governments need to make migration and integration prominent issues in their foreign and domestic policy thinking, rather than leaving the subjects to human rights activists.

There remain more 6 trend lines of recommendations developed at the Rhodes Forum 2017 panel on migration, but given the short time limit, I wish to direct all the interested persons to the DOC RI website <https://doc-research.org/en/>, where this information will appear.

In conclusion, Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute will be holding its next conference on Migration in Europe and Eurasia in Berlin on December 12-13. The conference participants will in particular analyze migration dynamics in Europe and Eurasia; and highlighting main trends in the migratory communities evolution, tendency of migrants to assimilate and their desire for ethno-religious consolidation, as well as radicalization among them. We encourage all interested persons to register at the event, following the DOC RI website announcement .

Thank you for your attention.

1. Huntington, Samuel P. The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order / Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996 p.20 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.un.org/press/en/1998/19981104.ga9497.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.un-documents.net/a56r6.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living together as equals in dignity” / Launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs at their 118th Ministerial Session (Strasbourg, 7 May 2008) P.17 <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub_White_Paper/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Schwimmer, Walter. The European Dream / Continuum, New York, 2004 p.204 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Schwimmer, Walter. Putting the pieces of the migration puzzle in the right place / Speech at “Migrants in our societies: Policy choices for the 21st Century" - Conference of European Ministers responsible for Migration Affairs - Helsinki (Finland), 16 – 17 September 2002. <https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/migration/archives/Ministerial_Conferences/Migration_Sept2002/Disc_SG_en.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://doc-research.org/forum/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)