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TACKLING INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS

– FINDING APPROACHES TO SOLUTIONS

**Information and experiences,
overview on aspects to be considered**

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5. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SOLUTIONS

1. REASONS

To ensure the peaceful living together of people from different cultural or religious origins is one of the most important tasks of society and politics in Europe. The rise in anti-Semitism and also in Islamophobia lent extraordinary emphasis to the question "How does Europe deal with cultural, ethnic and religious diversity?". During the past few decades our societies have become more diverse. The number of minorities migrating within Europe is constantly rising and the freedom of movement here has become part of our everyday life. The worldwide migration movements have also penetrated Europe. The international economic interdependencies and modern ways of communication have influenced our lives ever more strongly over the last few years, the breakdown of political, social and economic systems in Eastern Europe having contributed to society as being too complex and no longer comprehensible. People are not certain how to deal with different cultural influences. Many of them have "fear of future".

Additionally global developments have also a strong impact to our "living together in diversity": Our societies are undergoing a profound transformation due to deep and simultaneous changes in almost all areas of life. To name just a few: Climate change, globalisation, digitalisation, polarisation in society, inflation, changes in the roles of men and women, ageing societies, the after-effects of Covid, the war in Ukraine and Gaza. The gap between rich and poor, the lack of equal opportunities and the loss of social security for an ever-increasing proportion of our society is also causing many to doubt the value of democracy and coexistence with other cultures and religions. Many people feel overwhelmed and unappreciated and so social media platforms have become places of abuse, hate and hate speech, often making them a hostile environment for users. In addition, too few positive images of the future in regard living in diversity are conveyed, which we urgently need in order to overcome the defence that always accompanies change. All these developments lead to increasing "fear of foreignness", intercultural conflicts which have to be addressed.

Over the past few years many positive approaches have been developed to improve understanding between cultures; initiatives which advocate legal equality of majority and minority have gained in strength particularly at the European level, issues of rightwing extremism and xenophobia were tackled more offensively and broadcasting corporations and public services integrate migrants increasingly in their work. New approaches for intercultural learning have been developed in school-related and extracurricular activities for young people. In general, however, these initiatives do not relate to situations in which conflict already exist. In most cases, the following questions are left out of consideration: "How can we succeed in removing existing conflicts between different, cultural and religious groups? What ability do we have, and which aspects do we have to take into account in order to find approaches to solutions for conflicts? How can we mediate in a more productive way between different cultures? In different social groups and vocational areas, a new way of living and working together is necessary in order to tackle these questions in a responsible way. We will have to make use of experiences and findings from

the most different areas of life not yet taken into account sufficiently today, such as the findings of peace and conflict research, the experiences of societies that have gone through a peace process (South Africa many years ago), the findings and forms of perception of systemic thinking and psychoanalysis.

It is for this process of mediation that I wish to offer ideas and incentives. These come from my many years of experience dealing with racism, xenophobia and cultural diversity, and are based on systemic thinking and psychoanalysis. It is my goal that knowledge and experiences gained in completely different fields of life, e.g. consultation to organisations, should also be applied in solving intercultural conflicts. Since this has hardly been done up to now, the transfer of little used knowledge could pave the way for new approaches to solutions for intercultural conflicts with which people and organisations from the field of "migration — integration — minorities" will increasingly be confronted. The intercultural conflicts in our society are varied and diverse. Examples include conflicts between young "native" right-wing extremists and young immigrants who fall back on their ethnic or religious origins ever more strongly, e.g. Muslims, Turks and Kurds. Especially the war in Gaza, the terrorist murdering of the Hamas with its consequences, the destruction of living conditions of thousands of civilians has contributed to a dramatic increase of violence, anti-Semitism but also Islamophobia. Therefore, intercultural conflicts are of relevance in completely different ways of life, for instance at school, in clubs and companies — where groups of different cultural origins work together, in neighbourhoods and towns.

I have intentionally formulated my ideas in a very abstract way so as not to relate them too much to a specific situation. Depending on the particular circumstances, the individual aspects I have mentioned therefore take on a different meaning. Furthermore, we should be ready to supplement and adapt them to the specific concrete situation.

2. PREREQUISITES FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF CONFLICTS

To tackle conflicts means one must consider the attitude and position with which one approaches them.

2.1 Learning to see conflicts as a chance

Findings from conflict research show, like theoretical approaches and concrete experiences, for instance from South Africa in times of reconciliation, that conflicts can be solved, and it is often our negative concept of conflicts which prevent this. Conflicts can be more easily solved if one realises that although they cannot be avoided, they are not necessarily destructive. Even painful and destructive situations can be turned into creative and

productive processes — into dialogue. Conflicts are constructive if they clarify important objectives, and this clarification helps to solve them. To name them makes communication between groups of different cultural origins authentic, reduces stress of fear and allows the individual to grow — on the basis of new experiences, dealing with conflicts should therefore be governed by the idea of letting creativity grow and of limiting and removing destructive elements and violent consequences. In general, conflicts tend to renew themselves and simultaneously consolidate themselves. The chances for a solution are, as a rule, better if problems are recognised at an early stage and if they are not repressed or left alone to sort themselves out.

2.2. Do not expect panacea or make too great demands

There are no specific recipes or simple answers to the question of how intercultural conflicts may be solved. One thing cannot be denied, however: to be able to develop viable and long-term approaches to solutions means giving up high unattainable ideals. Such demands often lead to aggression, which may prevent anything from happening at all, making anything feasible become blocked. Attempts to replace a destructive attitude of groups by a productive one requires skill and energy. To be able to develop a "policy of small steps", patient efforts to persuade are as necessary as perseverance and continuity. There are no easy or simple shortcuts in the process. What is needed is the ability to limit oneself to what is feasible. Thus, it is a question of steering a middle course between fatalistic pessimism and Utopian dreams.

3. PREREQUISITES FOR CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

Both the major problems (which may act as an obstacle to a solution) and the aims to be achieved have to be clearly identified from the outset. Only then can methods and strategies be decided upon and used to attain these aims.

3.1 To analyse the situation: to see different aspects

Each intercultural conflict results from different historic, psychological and social circumstances. The conflicts between Jews and Muslims have causes other than the tension between men with a strong leaning towards Islamic fundamentalism and women advocating equal rights. There are a number of aspects and criteria which are of relevance and should be taken into account in almost all analysis of conflict solutions.

The conflict should be seen in its whole dimension. Simplifying it may lead to negative results. When analysing the conflict, one should ask oneself whether the problem that is described as the conflict by the different parties is indeed the real problem or whether it is used as pretext behind which completely different aspects are hidden.

It is not possible to finish the analysis at a certain point in time and it must be reviewed again and again. A reliable assessment of the situation is often only possible at a later stage. Therefore, it has to be taken into account that the analysis may undergo decisive changes during the whole process.

The analysis of the conflict situation requires a thorough examination both of the objective circumstances and of the motives, values, misunderstandings, different interests and tactics that characterise the parties to the conflict. In pluralistic societies, conflicts normally build themselves up in several dimensions concurrently the economic, political, social and psychological dimensions. Objective and subjective reasons for conflict must be clearly separated from each other. Social conflicts involving migrants normally have another background than, for instance, prejudices that go together with rage and hatred. The two aspects have to be tackled in different ways and call for different approaches to solutions.

An analysis of the situation should also include the social structure of the present environment of the conflicting parties. The basic understanding counteracts unrealisable wishful thinking from the outset. It becomes evident that only a limited share of the wishes and ideas can be influenced by the mediators and the respective parties. Often the possibility for change is simply non-existent. When analysing the situation, one should always concentrate on the task and the question: "Which are the concrete conflicts that have to be tackled?" The task ensues from the nature of a matter or — in case of a mediation task — from the way in which it is worded. Recognising these aspects puts the problem on an objective basis and eases the burden on the mediator: he or she is not overtaxed, and the parties are repeatedly reminded of the factual circumstances.

3.2 To tackle unvoiced conflicts

Unvoiced conflicts have a burdensome effect. Mostly they become obvious in the course of the conflict analysis or even later in talks with different parties. They may have different causes repressed, sometimes even traumatic experiences, historic events whose reality and significance are kept away from or even repressed in the group's consciousness, differing value concepts which are not so clearly articulated in the first place. Lastly there are aspects which because of a different cultural background, are of a completely different relevance for the other party. It may be another way of dealing with shame and pride, with rationality and emotionality. It may be the concept of religion and society, of time, of honour, of family and of the roles of men and women which shape for example Christian, Islamic and Judaic

societies in different ways. These aspects play an important part when intercultural conflicts arise but usually, they are not adequately perceived by the parties to the conflict. During the whole process one should ask oneself often whether such conflicts do not exist at an unconscious level.

Unvoiced conflicts may also result from a lack of knowledge about the specific nature of and the differences between organisations or institutions in which one of the parties to the conflict lives and with which the other is not familiar. Each organisation and institution have its own structure, and this affects — often unconsciously — attitudes and behaviour. Often certain practices or patterns of behaviour have developed over the years, and it is therefore a question of identifying the pattern upon which a certain behaviour is based. It often determines the present in an unconscious way and has a disturbing effect, but when tackled and put into words, can be changed.

3.3. To recognize the importance of affects and emotions

Many are not aware of how relevant emotions and affects are for the attitudes and behaviour of the people, but they should be taken into account as decisive factors in the assessment and solution for conflicts. Due to the enlightenment, we are extremely knowledgeable, above all, in technical areas and in the sciences. However, concerning emotions and affects and in dealing with jealousy, guilt and shame we have in general, little knowledge. Too few are aware of the fact that a large proportion of human behaviour is irrational and, in the end, extremely subjective. The facts are not decisive but our ideas of the facts and the meaning we give to them are more important how psychological studies show since many years. Our ideas are influenced by emotions and by defensive attitudes, which is why many projects and initiatives which solely concentrate on objective information when trying to remove xenophobia, miss the real issues. In a situation which is heavily burdened by negative emotions a group is normally not prepared to change its behaviour. Emotions often act as an obstacle to an objective solution to a problem. As long as emotions are not recognised and understood and dealt with in a competent manner, it is usually not possible to tackle objective questions. Constructive work and the development of viable approaches to solutions for the future makes it necessary to initially deal with affect. This requires that the needs of the individual parties to the conflict are recognised. In this context it helps to ask the following question: "How is something experienced? How do people react to it? How do I react to it?".

If one takes a person's affect seriously one does not reduce him to a certain function. One makes him or her feel that someone is "standing by his or her side" asking about the situation and about the way of experiencing things, and that one is not fighting him or her. This

behaviour shows respect for the other person. If this is sufficiently expressed, objective aspects may be tackled, and conflicts reasonably dealt with.

On the other hand, affects must not be overrated. It is true that emotions are always present — and this has to be accepted basically but on the other hand there is a corrective which avoids a purely emotional perception and makes it possible to deal with objective problems. To see the whole range of different emotional and rational aspects is a basic prerequisite for the solution of conflicts.

3.4 To deal with the “fear of foreigners”

In case of intercultural conflict, it is also a question of realising their effects and the way in which they are being dealt with. To meet what is "foreign" and foreign cultures is always ambivalent. On the one hand, there are exotic and fascinating aspects that always go together with foreignness often prevail. Too little support is given to people to help them deal with ambivalent emotions. It should be made clear that it is always a mixed, ambivalent experience to cope with foreignness. The fear of foreigners is inherent in all of us, and this fact must be accepted. In my experience, it is precisely this point that is so difficult when mediating between a national majority and migrant minorities.

Fear of foreignness and of dealing with people who have different cultural background is often tabooed and is therefore repressed. It is not right and proper to display a "fear of foreigners". The "stranger" has to be accepted and liked; high moral demands which often overtax people. In such cases it is a prerequisite for the understanding of conflicts to tackle the fear of foreigners and to make cultural differences clear — without debasing them or classifying them as "good" or "bad". In this way, cultural variety can be acknowledged.

4. POSSIBILITIES TO INFLUENCE AND CHANGE

The mediators and parties of conflicts must have a clear view of the aim to be achieved by solving the conflict in order to seek possibilities of development, change and the ability to work out concepts and strategies. It is also necessary to decide whose participation in the process is required and which groups should be involved.

Apart from general aims, concrete contents to be realised have to be laid down. The aim of the mediation may be a better functioning of the organisation in which people of different cultural backgrounds work. This perspective of development may already have a positive influence upon the work and the working atmosphere and rectify a blocked situation and passiveness. The problems are depersonalised and freed from blame. In this context a "better

functioning of the organisation" may also mean that the exchange and communication in the social environment or between the various groups of the organisation are improved and that ideological concepts are seen in relative terms.

A major objective may be to change the way in which the other group is presented in public, to make available teaching material for intercultural learning, to integrate the different perspectives and forms of perception of cultural minorities in radio and television broadcasting and to take account of them in a natural way in the cultural sector. A poisoned language and stereotypes, which degenerate into false and dangerous statements or even agitation, do not only affect our living together but often lead to a situation of hatred and one in which we do not talk anymore. In this way conflicts become aggravated as we have witnessed often in former Yugoslavia and especially in the Middle East.

To offer new perspectives and point out possibilities for change is a task many shy away from particularly in the case of conflicts that have become consolidated. What they forget is the fact that the mere experience of seeing that a conflict is being tackled and that possibilities of change are being sought may trigger off creative impetuses on the part of all parties concerned. Here it is a question of making use of the opportunities in a permanent walk on a tightrope trying to take account of emotional and objective circumstances. The following aspects may be helpful in the search for possibilities of solving conflicts.

4.1 To use a third person as mediator or negotiator

In general, the question has to be asked whether it is necessary to call in a third person to solve the conflict. This is quite helpful because often only a third person who is not involved can bring the different interests and forms of perception together and achieve a balanced strategy for a solution.

The possibility of solving a conflict depends in a decisive manner on the person acting as mediator, on his or her capacities, her or his sensitivity and on how he or she sees himself as mediator. He or she has to ask himself whether he or she is actually suited for this part since certain requirements have to be met.

Relations with all parties

The mediator must have emotional access to the parties' concern. To be open to both sides, to listen in a sensitive way and to try to put oneself in another person's place which is a psychological-psychoanalytical form of perception that normally requires training. He must also ensure that attacks from both sides do not touch him too much and deal with such attacks in a competent manner.

The same person acting as mediator must be credible to both sides. He must be open and at the same time able to state a clear opinion in public a balancing act which could fail at any time. It is also often difficult to bear in psychological terms. Finally, it has to be mentioned that a mediator's work can only succeed if the people involved really and honestly want change.

Distance

The mediator is required not to identify himself strongly with the different interests of individual persons or groups. Absolute neutrality is an essential condition. In general, this is not easy because most people tend to identify themselves with a person or a cause and take sides. Moreover, neutrality may be seen as negative, which is another impediment. The mediator may be accused of having no feelings or of not seeing the interests of the others. To avoid this, the mediator must time and again convey to the different parties that their concerns are seen, that their interests are taken into account and that their feelings are shared.

Mediation team

To maintain a distance and convey to others that one remains neutral and perceives the various difficulties is psychological achievement which normally requires a lot of experience. Since it is not easy to accept everyone in his or her special role and at the same time adopt a neutral position more than one person is normally required. Moreover, conflicts are frequently complex, and one person or party alone is often not able to solve them. Many people feel overtaxed by their complex nature. To admit one's own incompetence and accept at the same time that these are the situations in which almost everybody becomes aware of their own limits and has to resort to perspectives, experiences and the knowledge of others may serve as a basis for next development : the joint efforts of all those concerned to work out a concept for solutions and form a team. A continuous joint reflection on a concept can then take place. It may make sense to formulate a concept only after joint meetings. This reduces resistance and leads to a higher degree of general acceptance.

To formulate clear objectives

A mediator should always keep in mind that he can only suggest things that are feasible and that he must obtain the parties' voluntary approval given different starting positions. She or he must be prepared and able to recognise genuine differences, not to cover them up or reduce them. To see the dimension of the conflicts is a task which the mediator to take on in concrete terms repeatedly. The role of the mediator is already extremely difficult because she or he is often eyed with suspicion by both sides unless he meets with strong support from both groups from the outset. The position is also further burdened by the fact that we are used to polarity

and clearly differentiate between "good" and "bad" rather than trying to find a middle course – a "mediating" course. This is a course which often appears to be mediocre but is nevertheless one to be ventured on in an attempt to integrate the different perspectives and not simply categorise them.

To act as a mediator or negotiator

Mediation and negotiation are two different forms of behaviour. A negotiator normally works in the interests of one group and has a foothold in his own group in almost all cases while a mediator tries to be a neutral "third person" and does not have any personal interest in the result otherwise he endangers the process of mediation. A mediator makes proposals of his own. A negotiator, who only supports the communication processes, is not required to do so. It is more important that he keeps up communication than works out concrete strategies for the solution of conflicts. To actually initiate conflict-solving processes it may sometimes be easier to make use of the services of a "negotiator" rather than those of a "mediator" in the first place. A negotiator may be more successful in involving the most different groupings from the outset since the demands made on him are not as high as those made on a mediator.

4.2 To establish a balance of power

A solution to conflicts which is meant to have a long-term effect must not be achieved at the cost of a weaker party. It must not be brought about at any costs. A strong imbalance of power may easily lead to a situation in which a position of power is abused to "impose" one's own position on the other side. A balance of power is therefore an essential factor of any attempt at mediation. If both parties feel strong it is easier for either side to make concessions at its own expense. Negotiations are a basic prerequisite for the establishment of a balance of power. They are to be seen as problem solving processes in which individuals and groups discuss their differences on a voluntary basis. Together they can try to come to a decision on those matters which are burdensome to themselves. They may experience that both sides enjoy advantages and that neither side is the "winner" or "loser".

4.3 To encourage self-help

If the ability to solve a conflict grows from within i.e. on the part of the individuals themselves the prerequisites are in the long term more viable than in cases where the process is externally controlled. In the latter case the situation remains unstable. This is why everything has to be done so that the parties themselves discover alternatives that may exist to the present situation and the changes that are required in politics, in the structure of

the organisation or the individual groups to make sure that the objectives are really achieved and that the needs of the other sides are adequately met.

If one succeeds in helping the conflict parties to come to positive results by themselves, discussions and the process of moving towards each other normally continue more intensively. If the parties themselves succeed in improving the possibilities for solving a conflict they often also realise that the failure to recognise the values and needs of the other side is to their own detriment and that this will rebound on themselves in the end. It may help to use questioning techniques. To ask questions means to give incentives to try and find solutions on one's own. In this context the mediator avoids appearing as someone who knows everything. A group may be asked, for instance, which possibilities or solutions it wants to seek on its own, or how it would realise that the problem is solved. These are incentives to fantasise or imagine in certain situations. Using conditional clauses is another form of approach which may pave the way for solutions. "What would happen if... ", "What effects would this have?", "Imagine the problem is solved: What would be different?", "How would you notice?". Progress may be achieved by asking future-oriented questions: "How should life be in one year from now?" Here, too solutions are worked out in the realm of the imagination.

4.4 To make a positive approach possible

Conflicts may be solved much more speedily and easily if positive aspects are reinforced, and negative aspects are not placed in the foreground. A burdensome factor in almost all campaigns against right-wing extremism is, for instance, that already through wordings, such as "against right-wing extremism" the negative aspects are reinforced, and any positive aspects are not sufficiently noticed. It is the task of the mediator to "turn around" negative situations by means of applying a positive viewpoint and thus offer perspectives.

In this context a "positive connotation" may be helpful. A "positive connotation" means to acknowledge an event in a positive way. Resistance from the other side, for example, may also be regarded as a responsible attitude — if it is seen in a positive way. To take this resistance seriously and approach it positively shows respect for the other side's attitude. This makes it possible to stay in contact with the other one and to prepare the ground for further developments. A "positive connotation" mostly starts by asking oneself the question "Why is this happening?". The other side normally has good reasons for it. It is possible to see the situation in its whole dimension and to react adequately to it if one asks oneself about it. In concrete terms this means "I see things differently now". Thus, it is often not possible to simply enforce certain objectives since people "are what they are". This too, helps to remove confrontation. In the next step solidarity is shown with the "good intentions" of all those involved. Their problems are taken seriously, one does not adopt a superior attitude and does not let one's own value concepts determine everything. In this

way influence can be exerted more easily and one can consider the reasons that have led to this situation. In this context the problems of hurt feelings should not be forgotten either,, When a conflict arises feelings are normally hurt, and this has an oppressive effect. Hurt feelings may be taken up and reinterpreted "in a positive way". Their "positive connotation" may be: "They are the results of an emergency situation". The other one was in such dire straits that he could only lash out and hurt. It was his way of dealing with his distress. If the mediator conveys this message to the other party to the conflict it may be easier to accept any hurt that occurred. It makes it easier for the first party to the conflict to save face.

4.5 To understand and accept different perspectives and interests

Perceiving the different perspectives and interests of the parties to the conflict can have positive consequences: differences may be turned into a creative process, in a productive way. A dialogue may ensue. We are interested in the subjective experiences and perceptions of people and the members of another group. If we consider their experiences and perceptions, we will also be able to understand their unvoiced value concepts and expectations. It helps if those involved in the process of solving a conflict ask themselves about their own attitude: "Do I really take the perception of the other one seriously? Am I open in the way in which I see the conflict, or do I want to continue to see the conflict in the way in which I want to see it?" If one is prepared to review one's own attitude a fruitful exchange may follow. This reduces one's own tenseness considerably, a tenseness which results from sticking "firmly" to an opinion. Now one recognises the positive process, seeks to remove misunderstandings and is prepared to learn.

To be open an exchange with others and to review one's own perception make the other one feel that he is perceived. This is a prerequisite to overcome any one-sided blaming: if I realise that there is no more blame, I can think about my own role in the conflict. Criticism is not dismissed, and different perceptions and experiences can be collected. It means to leave ideological solutions behind and not to involve ideologists in conflict-solving processes. Strict ideological convictions lead to intolerance, to undue simplifications and to polarisations between "good" and "bad". They rather intensify conflicts.

Apart from different cultural perspectives and forms of behaviour, different interests should also be recognised. Experiences from research and practice have shown often that people are guided more strongly by their interests than by moral appeals. If their economic, cultural, social and moral interests are not ignored but taken into account in the development of concepts and strategies, it is easier to reach out to them and influence them positively. As a result of the clarification process, discrepancies are not hidden but give incentives to further developments. The acceptance of differences may change the way in which

regulations and forms of work are seen and facilitate the introduction of new forms of dealing with others.

4.6 To conduct talks

Talks are normally required to convey a message of confidence which is needed. If one talks to each other intensively and for a longer period of time different aspects may be elucidated and explained and their contents may be conveyed. The other one learns that his situation is recognised and that his achievements are realised. Talks may make people open to other aspects, they may motivate them and make them ask questions. A different preparedness to listen develops. As a mediator one can support this by saying for instance: "I am interested". "I would like to know what you are doing". As a result, ears are opened and the willingness to listen develops. In this context a so-called "paradoxical intervention" may be helpful: one tells the other that one approves of him or her and describes to him or her at the same time the situation in which he or she is. One tells him or her that one is convinced that he or she has done everything possible. One acknowledges that there are really no failures on his or her part. This form of approval leads away from all blame. In this way the "paradoxical intervention" may give incentives to the other one - paradoxically — to consider whether there might not be any failure on his or her part after all.

4.7 To emphasize common concerns

To emphasise common concerns creates possibilities of influence — particularly because polarisations are often predominant in relationships and too little stress is laid on common concerns. It is important to identify a common concern that might lead to a joint action between the groups. This may be achieved for instance by very general questions which are concentrated on the common aspect. This also helps to identify the unvoiced, subliminal but effective common concerns of both parties and jointly develop alternatives taking account of the different perspectives and interests.

4.8 Orientation given by members of the public

Public support from leading figures in politics and society may be conducive to reducing tensions between different groups and to creating possibilities of influence: people learn from important multipliers that each form of intolerance on the part of members of their society is publicly denounced. If this is not clearly conveyed by discussions in public or discussed too little in public, taboos - for instance anti – Semitism - may cease to be unambiguous. This may create an impression of acceptance in the general public. The biggest enemy of tolerance is often a discernible lack of public consensus of the fact that cultural variety is a positive aspect of each democracy.

4.9 To render a conflict situation less dramatic

To render a conflict situation less dramatic and to see it in relative terms may bring relief to all those involved; demands which the parties make on themselves are seen in relative terms, and the burden on the mediator is eased. If one sees things in relative terms, one is also more open to one's anger, to one's imperfect approaches, one's mistakes. They may no be a source of learning. The causes of rage, hatred and anger are thus discovered. An objective approach is made possible, and one recognises that one is not able to solve all problems in such a way that everything ends well.

4.10 To try and find some adequate regulations

When working out solutions to conflicts an essential aim may be to formulate viable regulations. The experiences of consultants have shown that the largest share of all conflicts in institutions is due to lacking, poor or obsolete regulations. Strong emotional tensions or conflicts in a social system or organisation often indicate that the relevant regulations are either no longer adequate, interpreted in different ways or not sufficient. A basic prerequisite for change is that regulations are accepted as being necessary and that their appropriateness is reviewed. They have a dynamic of their own and must be permanently adjusted to the changing situation.

To facilitate this process, it helps to review them at a fixed date or draft a written text that may be referred to. Thus, one reacts adequately to any changes and limits regulations to what is necessary without infringing upon the scope of action needed for creative development.

5. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SOLUTIONS

One aspect must be clear to us all: in cultural, economic and political terms our societies depend on a permanent exchange with people of different origins, cultures and religions. An ever-increasing number of people of different cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds will live in Europe and its Member States. This will not be possible without intercultural conflicts. To be able to come to terms with these conflicts creatively and productively, we have to change our concept of conflicts and increase our competence. Conflicts may lead to painful situations. However, they may also be turned into creative and productive processes — into a dialogue. Dealing with intercultural conflicts must not make us ignore the positive aspects of the intercultural dialogue, however: other cultures have given the arts and cultural sectors in Europe and its Members States vital, creative and enriching impetuses and thus influenced them. A "homogenous" society - as it is conjured up by many

- never existed. Our cultural pluralism has to be acknowledged legally and socially. We must strive to see ourselves as a society that integrates ethnic, religious and cultural minorities as equal partners. We need more intercultural approaches e.g. in the fields of politics, education, training and media. The different cultural needs have to be taken into account in this context. At the same time, it must be clear, however, that certain basic value and basic regulations of society - such as the recognition of Human rights, liberal democracies and legal system are binding for all of us without exception. A broad intercultural dialogue with the aim to reach a consensus in society on the issues of immigration and living peacefully together with different ethnicities, cultures and religions gives new impetuses in this respect. Dialogue helps to develop new viewpoints and perspectives and positive images of the future: for the future of Europe on the basis of Human rights. For all of us.

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