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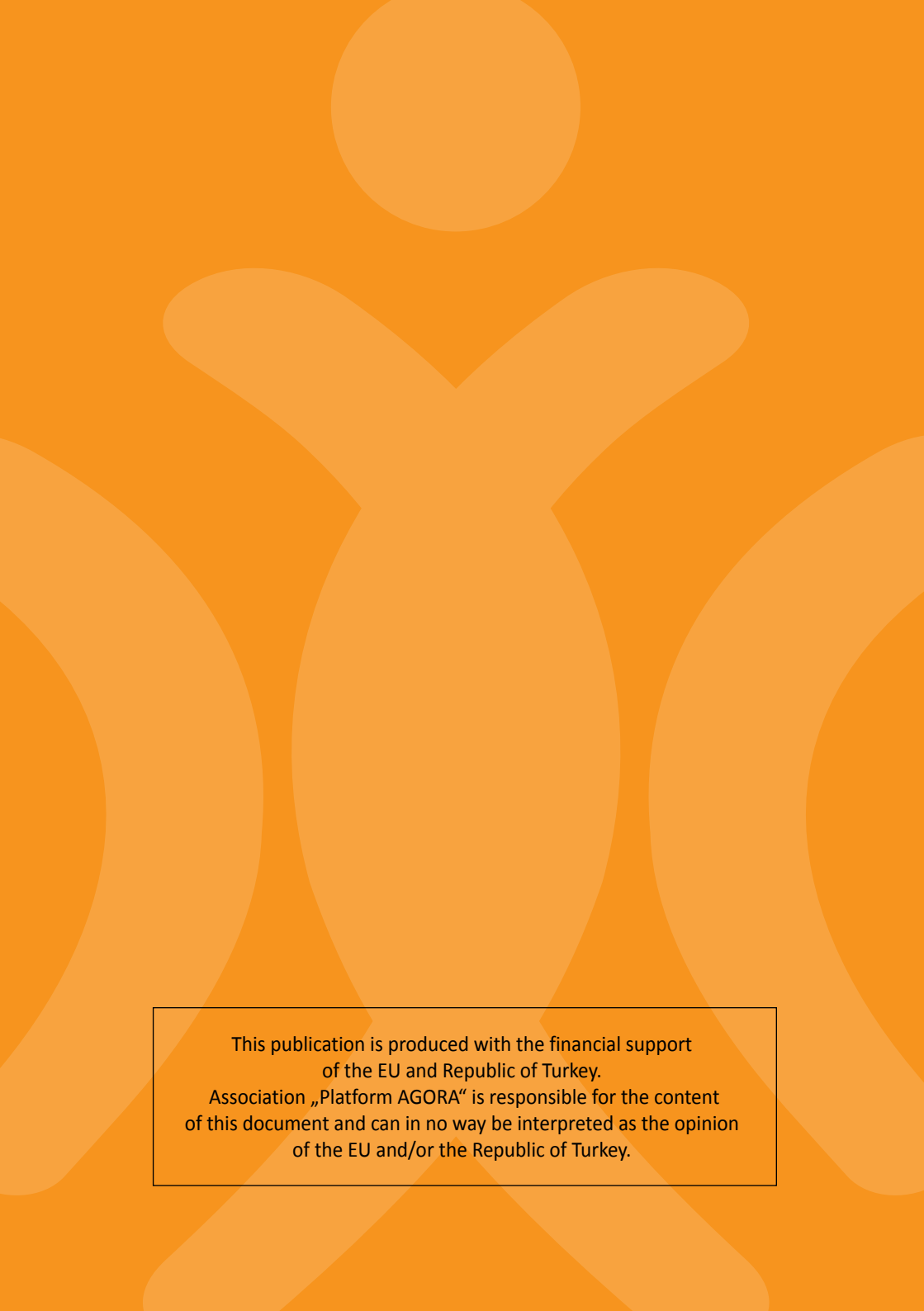
Civil Society Dialogue Programme
Unlock the Treasures Project

Human Rights, Antidiscrimination, Intercultural Dialogue

HANDBOOK WITH BEST PRACTICES

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Translated from Bulgarian to English by Daniela Stoyanova.



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Photo: Aylin Acargul



Unlock the Treasures Project

This handbook was developed under the *Unlock the Treasures* Project in October 2014 – June 2016 with the support of the *Civil Society Dialogue between EU and Turkey – III* Program, Political Criteria Scheme, Lot 2: Antidiscrimination, and the financial support of the EU and the Republic of Turkey. In July 2015 the Association for Culture and Solidarity of the Romelian Turks – BAL-GOCH, the city of Bursa, which is the main host to the project events in Bursa, Turkey, joined the team of the Platform Agora in the successful implementation of the project¹.

The goal of *Unlock the Treasures* is the transfer of knowledge and experience from Bulgaria, as a new EU Member State, to the civil organisations in the Republic of Turkey, regarding the political criteria applicable to the legislation in the area of antidiscrimination and the right to cultural expression, and the application of this legislation. The project can be regarded as an investment in human capital and development, knowledge enrichment and capacity-building among individuals and institutions involved in this topic in Turkey.

1 <http://www.agora-bg.org/bg/news.html?newsid=443>.

The objectives of the project are:

- enhancing the institutional capacity of Turkish NGOs to contribute to developing and carrying out policy reforms;
- ensuring a dialogue and the exchange of information and know-how with a view to overcoming prejudices in Turkey and Bulgaria in terms of the political criteria;
- building a sustainable network of Turkish and Bulgarian NGOs committed to promoting intolerance to discrimination and fostering an efficient dialogue between cultures, religions and beliefs².

² http://www.agora-bg.org/bg/project/csd_program.html



Photo: Dobrina Andreeva



Photo: Boyan Ivanov

Purpose of the Handbook

The contemporary global world is increasingly characterized by communication and contacts with representatives of cultures with various traditions, norms and values. Fast and cheap communication and the internet allow us to travel easily, live at various places worldwide, be citizens of the world, study and work in an international environment and for global multinational companies or institutions. While this is a source of numerous benefits for us, such as unprecedented possibilities for development, it also implies being in touch with representatives of various ethnicities, nations, and cultures. Hence, we must get to know “the other one”, develop skills for communicating with the “different one”, and respect their rights. Having knowledge about potential conflicts and instruments to smoothly tackle such conflicts proves to be particularly important. In parallel, our environment obliges us to seek ways to preserve our identity and specific features under the conditions of globalization.

The handbook is based on the understanding that the encounter and communication among individuals with various ethnic, national and

cultural backgrounds is subtle and often challenging, but also enriching and beneficial.

The challenges before the respect for human rights, antidiscrimination and intercultural dialogue are often triggered by deeper historic and cultural phenomena over time, such as prejudices and stereotypes, fears, negative attitudes of open and hidden intolerance reaching the dimensions of violence. Practice shows that the radicalization and segregation of various ethnic and social communities has further aggravated these challenges, which increasingly emphasizes the need for the inclusion of those who are different, vulnerable, excluded from the society.

Therefore, the handbook pursues two aims. *Firstly*, it defines “stakeholders” in the context of human rights, antidiscrimination and intercultural dialogue ranging from the individual to the society, the state and supranational institutions. *Secondly*, the handbook presents models and best practices and policies regarding tolerance and non-discrimination at the individual and everyday level, and at the institutional level. Best practices is herein used as meaning practices that we can learn from, i.e. practices which either achieve their own objectives and/or have proved useful in the relevant area or (which matters more) provide useful experience that can be instrumental in fostering creativity, resourcefulness and individual achievements for those using these practices³.

3 <http://www.beep-eu.org/>



Photo: Georgi Petrov



Photo: Aylin Acargul



Stakeholders

This chapter, on the one hand, makes an overview of the main institutions in the EU and in Bulgaria, as well as other *stakeholders* involved in the process of implementing antidiscrimination measures. On the other hand, it presents *procedures* applied in cases of discrimination. For the purpose of this publication, discrimination practices relate to infringed rights on cultural, religious and confessional grounds.

The types of “stakeholders” and the procedures are presented at the European and national levels, in a historic and modern perspective. They cover all the relevant actors, not only the parties concerned in the particular case study. Therefore, stakeholders could be the police, courts, parliamentary committees, non-governmental organizations, media, local leaders, local communities, civil servants, lawyers, etc.

We and “the other one”

It should be born in mind that “foreignness” is not a permanent feature, it is an attitude. It does not exist on its own, but requires the existence of “another one” who perceives you as foreign and different. Therefore, “foreignness” is noticed through one’s own culture, traditions and values. The perception of belonging to one’s own culture is the determining factor on the way to intercultural competence, which cannot be achieved without one’s reflection in the eyes of the other one. The other one is often “foreign” in appearance, as the first thing individuals look out for is the difference between their own appearance and the “foreign” one. This distinction between individuals in physical and cultural terms serves as the basis for the emergence of stereotypes and behaviors. Our perception of the “foreign”, “other” and “different” one helps us develop our social and cultural identity, as well as our group identity – regardless of whether it is about rap music or football fans, ethnic groups or nations. This is the way for us to create boundaries, visible and invisible, with respect to the others in our environment. It is in the process of comparing with the others and communicating with them that the value of our culture stands out⁴.

Studying intercultural dialogue pursues to identify the correct strategy for communicating with the other one. It often happens that while spending our holidays abroad we find ourselves in embarrassing situations as a result of our encounter with unknown cultures and their norms of behaviour.

Taking into account the deep changes in the European societies as a result of migration and globalization, European policies recommend tolerance and consciousness in communicating with the “other one”. We should bear in mind, however, that the ongoing need to put up with “foreignness” may become an issue for some individuals. “Foreignness” is felt particularly strongly in our direct surroundings – the

4 <http://www.emil.ikk.lmu.de/bulgar/Brochure-exercises-BG.pdf>.



kindergarten and the school, the neighbourhood, the hospital or the workplace. For example, immigrants from Eastern Europe in Germany or the United Kingdom are often intolerant in their attitude to immigrants from Africa and India.

The emotional impact of “foreignness” also depends on our perception of cultural distance. While there are no methods to measure cultural distance, it is obvious that the difference between French and Chinese students is bigger than the difference between German and Dutch students. The emotional distance among the members of various social groups is subjective, and can be influenced both by nationality and many other factors⁵.

“Foreignness” as a distance, however, has positive aspects which should not be underestimated. It has important social functions ensuing from the need to communicate.

The Organization of the United Nations

The need to overcome the fear of the “other one” acquired particular relevance after the World War II. It is then that the Organization of the United Nations (UN) was established as a global peace regulator.

The UN concept of tolerance is about recognizing the other’s right to have both their personality and identity respected.

By building upon this process, the UN mandated this function to UNESCO as a specialized institution. In 1995 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance. The Declaration defines tolerance as respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures and our forms of expression worldwide.

5 <http://www.emil.ikk.lmu.de/bulgar/Brochure-exercises-BG.pdf>.

Right after the events on 11 September 2001, in a rather specific context, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. By means of this Declaration, the Member States once again reaffirmed their belief that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee for peace, and strongly rejected the idea about inevitable conflicts between cultures and civilizations. This is the first document to recognize cultural differences as a “common heritage of humanity”, an inseparable part of the dignity of the human personality. This allowed the legal protection of cultural identity and individual dignity as a fundamental human right.

A part of the methods to ensure the observance of human rights are the mechanisms of monitoring and reporting within the UN, the measures for prevention, investigation, and punishment of offences with a discrimination element, hate speech, and violence against minorities and religious communities in individual Member States.

The Council of Europe

As regards the region of Europe, the cooperation among the European states in the area of human rights, democratic development and cultural cooperation after the World War II has been coordinated by the Council of Europe established on 5 May 1949.

One of the most important achievements of the Council of Europe was the adoption of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) in 1950. It was followed by the establishment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) which supervises the application of the Convention. Any person who is a citizen of a Member State that has ratified the Convention or is under the jurisdiction of a Member State is entitled to lodge an appeal with this court if he/she considers that his/her fundamental rights have been violated.

The Convention provides for the protection of fundamental human rights, including the right to ethnic, linguistic, cultural identity (Art.



8), as well as the rights to the freedom of religion, conscience, and beliefs (Art. 9). Each and every individual is guaranteed the freedom to have or change their religion and beliefs, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to externally manifest them, for example by means of studying/training, wearing distinctive attire, celebrating holidays, ceremonies, etc. This freedom of external manifestation, however, is not absolute, as can be restricted by the state authorities, provided that such restrictions are legitimate and are in the interest of public safety, the protection of public order, health, ethics, and the protection of the rights and freedoms of the others. These restrictions are admissible provided that they do not infringe non-discrimination⁶.

The European Union

Non-discrimination is among the core values of the European Union. In 2000 the EU and its Member States proclaimed the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. It contains a catalogue of human rights which has the status of a “declaration”. As soon as the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force in 2009 the Charter was amended and became a legally binding instrument.

Title III “Equality” of the Charter stipulates that the EU shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, and that any discrimination based on grounds, such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any

6 According to the European Court of Human Rights, in a democratic society the state has the right to impose restrictions on wearing the Hijab if it is incompatible with the objective pursued – the protection of the others’ rights and freedoms, public order and public security, and if this restriction does not constitute a violation of non-discrimination. One can cite judgements of the Court whereby it holds that the individuals’ right to behave in a way as prescribed by religious rules should not be made absolute, and the Court has not established violation of Art. 14 in conjunction with Articles 8 and 9 of the Convention in cases where these rights are restricted by the Member States.

Karaduman v. Turkey (no.16278/90);

Leyla Sahin v. Turkey (no 44774/98);

S.A.S. v. France (no 43835/11)

other opinion, membership of a national minority, etc., shall be prohibited.

The EU institutions are legally bound to abide by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, including its antidiscrimination provisions. The Member States must also abide by the Charter when applying the EU law. This is an obligation for any public authority, regardless of its position in the hierarchy. The individuals affected have the right to lodge complaints in cases of infringement of the Charter.

Stakeholders at the European Union level

The European Union has a number of bodies involved directly or indirectly in upholding intercultural dialogue, promoting equality and respect for human rights which are incorporated as horizontal principles in the founding treaties of the European Community. The European Parliament, the European Commission, the EU Court of Justice, the European Ombudsman play a leading role.

One of the supervision functions of the **European Parliament** is examining citizens' petitions and requests. Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht any European citizen has had the right to submit a petition to the European Parliament in the form of a complaint or a request on an issue falling within the EU's fields of activity, including human rights. The right of petition aims to provide EU citizens and residents with a simple means of approaching the European institutions with requests or complaints.

The EU Court of Justice, in its capacity of a politically independent body of the EU, is another stakeholder. The Court of Justice interprets EU law to make sure it is **applied in the same way** in all EU countries, and settles **legal disputes** between national governments and EU institutions. It can also, under certain circumstances, be used by **individuals, companies or organisations** to take action against an EU institution, if they think it has infringed their rights.



Photo: Kremena Hristova

If a national court is in doubt about the interpretation or validity of an EU law, it can ask the Court for clarification. The same mechanism can be used to determine whether a national law or practice is compatible with EU law. Another type of cases are initiated against a national government for failing to comply with EU law. The Court can also annul EU legal acts (*actions for annulment*). If an EU act is believed to violate EU treaties or fundamental rights, the Court can be approached by a government of a Member State with the request to annul it. Private individuals can also ask the Court to annul an EU act that directly concerns them.

The Court of Justice is also competent to sanction EU institutions (*actions for damages*). Any person or company that has had their interests harmed as a result of the action or inaction of the EU or its staff can take action against them through the Court.

The **European Ombudsman** is also one of the stakeholders. Its main role is examining complaints against institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies of the EU. Complaints can be filed by citizens or residents in

EU Member States or by associations and undertaking established in the EU. The Ombudsman investigates various cases of maladministration, such as administrative irregularities, unfairness, discrimination, abuse of power, failure to reply, refusal of information, unnecessary delay, irregular procedures.

The Ombudsman initiates investigations either on the basis of a complaint or ex officio.

The Ombudsman can resolve the matter by simply informing the relevant institution. If this proves insufficient, the Ombudsman does his best to ensure a solution by mutual consent. When such a solution is not reached, the Ombudsman can submit recommendations to the institution. If the latter does not accept the recommendations, the Ombudsman can draw up a special report to the European Parliament which shall take appropriate measures.

The EU has a **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** established in Vienna by force of Regulation 168/2007 of 15 February 2007. The purpose of the Agency is to provide the relevant EU institutions and bodies and its Member States with expert advice on the fundamental rights in relation to the application of EU law, and support in taking measures and developing appropriate guidelines for action. FRA gathers, analyses and disseminates information regarding the state of the fundamental rights within the EU, carries out research and surveys in the field of fundamental rights, and publishes conclusions and opinions on specific matters.

The **European Institute for Gender Equality** is another European agency providing support to the governments and EU institutions in this area. It collects and analyses databases on topics pertaining to gender equality, designs methodologies, and facilitates the exchange of best practices and the dialogue among stakeholders. In addition to being a fundamental right, gender equality is a crucial achievement for the EU in view of pursuing its goals for economic growth and social integration. While inequality still exists, the EU has achieved consider-



able progress over recent decades. This is mainly due to the legislation and gender equality mainstreaming, as well as the specific actions for providing benefits to women.

Networks

A substantial contribution to designing policies for promoting and respecting human rights at the European Union level has been ensured by the emerging thematic networks which function as informal organisations or non-governmental organisations. The most relevant ones are: the European Network of Ombudsmen, EQUINET – the European Network of Equality Bodies (42 organisations from 32 European states which have antidiscrimination competences at the national level as national bodies for equality on the grounds of various features), the European Women's Lobby <http://www.womenlobby.org>, Age platform Europe <http://www.age-platform.eu/>, European Network against racism ENAR <http://www.enar-eu.org/>), European Disability forum <http://www.edf-feph.org/>), International Lesbian and Gay association – Europe (ILGA Europe) <http://www.ilga-europe.org/>, Roma Information Office (ERIO) <http://www.erionet.eu/>.

The above non-governmental organisations are permanently involved in the consultation process for developing EU policies by the competent institutions, and in the legislative procedures.



Photo: Aylin Acargul



Law enforcement authorities in the Republic of Bulgaria

EU law provides for the establishment of national equality bodies. The Bulgarian law-maker has designated, by virtue of a special law, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination as the independent state body for the prevention of discrimination, protection against discrimination, and ensuring equal opportunities⁷.

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) as an independent and specialized body exercises control over the application and observance of the Bulgarian legislation guaranteeing equality, and the international non-discrimination standards. CPD examines complaints and alerts, establishes violations, imposes administrative sanctions (fines) and coercive administrative measures aimed at prevention and restoring the initial status quo. Furthermore, the Commission issues mandatory prescriptions for abiding by the law. It has the competence to appeal discriminatory administrative acts before the court; it either lodges claims or joins in civil proceedings instituted on discrimination matters. The Commission can submit recommen-

7 Art.40 of the Law on Protection against Discrimination

dations to public authorities for discontinuing discriminatory actions and repealing acts issued. The Commission draws up positions on draft legislation and makes recommendations in terms of adopting, amending and repealing legislative acts. CPD renders independent support to victims of discrimination, conducts independent surveys and publishes independent reports⁸. The Bulgarian authorities, the courts included, are obliged to take into consideration the decisions issued by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. CPD submits reports on its activity to the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The Commission has regional representatives whose task is to raise awareness and disseminate materials among citizens, thus fostering the general will for tolerance and equal treatment in the interaction among various groups of the population.

In addition to filing a complaint to the Commission, any person affected by discrimination can use yet another remedy – lodging a claim with the court. When CPD establishes that a court procedure has been instituted on a specific dispute, it does not initiate a procedure. Any person whose rights, as laid down in laws regulating equal treatment, have been infringed, is entitled to make a court claim. The victim of discrimination has the right to request from the court⁹: (a) ascertaining the violation; (b) sentencing the respondent to discontinue the violation and restore the initial status quo, as well as refrain from further violations in the future; (c) reparation of damages (compensation for the damages suffered as a result of discrimination).

Trade union organisations and legal non-profit entities working for the public benefit (e.g. foundations or associations with activities in the area of human rights) are also entitled to lodging claims.

8 Art.47 of the Law on Protection against Discrimination

9 Art.71 of the Law on Protection against Discrimination



Organisations can file lawsuits both on behalf of the victims with their consent or on their own behalf in the event of violations of the rights of many individuals. The latter case does not require the consent of the victims. It suffices to prove that the persons affected are either many in number or with an indefinite number. In addition, organisations have the right to step, together with the victims, in proceedings already instituted in their capacity of a stakeholder with a view to assisting the victim in the course of the procedure. Their claim is for ascertaining the discriminatory actions and sentencing the respondent to remedy the consequences and refrain from further discrimination. The Law on Protection against Discrimination also provides for the possibility of collective claims.

Raising awareness and promoting knowledge among the community and overcoming prejudices plays a crucial role in antidiscrimination. This can be achieved by means of targeted actions by state institutions, such as the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, and the specific expertise and actions of various non-governmental organisations.

Promoting the ideas about equality, tolerance, respect for and preservation of diversity, non-discrimination, the protection of human rights and dignity can also be delivered by means of publications in the mass media, conferences, public debates, campaigns, rallies, films, training programs, including by making these topics part of the curricula, exhibitions, competitions, sports events, awards, creating networks and other associations of organisations for the purpose of uniting their efforts. This is the constructive interaction with the different ones which recognizes the right to self-determination and cultural identity by fostering intercultural dialogue.



Photo: Dobrina Andreeva



Best practices from Bulgaria, the Balkans, and the EU

“Kremikovtzi” and intercultural dialogue

Kremikovtzi metallurgic plant is the largest industrial undertaking in Bulgaria established during the communist rule. Its history dates back to 1954-1955 when Bulgarian geologists discovered an iron ore field near the village of Kremikovtzi. Discussions about building a metallurgic plant started after the April plenary assembly of the Communist Party in 1956 – an event of paramount importance for the development of the totalitarian state. Upon the request of the then socialist leader Todor Jivkov, the Soviet Union sent some specialists to explore the field. Their findings, however, showed that the ore was of a complex type for which they did not have the necessary processing technology; thus, the proposal was that if a plant were to be constructed, it should only be steel-milling, the USSR supplying steel blocks for processing. Moreover, the assessment showed that the plant would be operating at a loss and would be detrimental to the environment¹⁰.

10 <http://desebg.com/-a-/1737-2014-03-07-12-08-05>, published on 14 March 2014, viewed on 1 August 2015.

Nevertheless, those in power insisted that the plant be constructed. The building of Kremikovtzi started in 1960 as a result of the ambition of the Bulgarian communist elite to carry out an industrial revolution in the country and thus overcome the agrarian focus in the economy. The plant was inaugurated in November 1963 by Todor Jivkov in person as one of the latest achievements of socialism and as the site of pride for the Bulgarian metallurgic industry.

Over 35,000 persons from all over the country were employed at Kremikovtzi. Amongst them were people with various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Residential buildings were constructed for the thousands of workers, and thus new neighbourhoods emerged on the city outskirts. The metallurgic plant and these new neighbourhoods set an example of various ethnic and religious minorities living together. These neighbourhoods were inhabited, due to the circumstances or certain privileges or legal requirements, by people with different ethnic origin, education, qualifications or social status. Living and working together was often influenced by the socialist ideas which shaped their communication, good relations, building of a common value system. For example, the stereotypes in terms of the various groups were overcome within the neighbourhood, Gypsies being spoken of with admiration

In the postmodern context, a similar example are international companies which employ people from all over the world. It often happens that their staff is a mixture of various ethnicities, religions and cultures. They often live in the same area. Working together requires respect for cultural and confessional specifics. It is not by chance that such companies organize training on intercultural dialogue and living together in order to avoid tension and ensure a peaceful working environment.

Understanding cultural variety in business stems from the belief that management and work are strongly influenced by principles rooted in the culture of your working environment or the culture of the organization which has hired you. The relevance of products and services in individual cultures is highlighted.



Everyday communication among ethnic and religious communities in settlements with mixed population in Bulgaria

In the period following the changes in 1989 a “Bulgarian ethnic model” became a topic of discussion. This model contributed to Bulgaria’s image as a stable state safeguarding interethnic and interreligious relations and carrying out a policy of respect for the rights and freedoms of minorities who enjoy equal treatment and prospects for independent development within the Bulgarian state. This model would rather be referred to as an “ethno-confessional model”, as it concerns settlements whose population has different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The model has a focus on *tolerance and good neighbourliness (komshuluk)* in the relations between two main religious communities in Bulgaria – Christians and Muslims. The system of coexistence of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria is based on tolerance imposed by history in the context of regulating the relationships among individuals from different religious communities. It facilitates overcoming contradictions and living in a common space. Communication on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect among individuals in everyday life is linked to the exchange of experience in economic and household activities¹¹. Interethnic understanding is traditionally nourished by similar socio-economic living conditions. The majority of the representatives of the two religions are concerned with the policy-makers’ interference in this area, and believe that building their relations on their own will help prevent conflicts. Neighbourliness encompasses specific concepts and ideas which do not result that much from the religious tradition but rather from the common value perspective and everyday communication. It is in everyday life that one gets to know the “other one”. The differences between religions and their cultural

11 Krūsteva, Ivanka, Ivan Iliev. 2001. Research on interethnic relations between Bulgarians and Turks, coexisting in the villages in Northeastern Bulgaria). Varna: Open Society, p. 51.

models are overcome, and people get reconciled in their relations. Knowing each other's confessional roles is a prerequisite for the easy settlement of any conflicts.

The idea about the mutual recognition of the existence of the two religions plays a very important role in achieving tolerance between their representatives. Good neighbourliness is based on accepting both the religion of the other one and the customs and traditions related to that religion.

Due to the specifics of its historic development Bulgaria has many settlements with mixed population of Christians and Muslims. They maintain good relations in their immediate neighbourhood. The best evidence for this is the exchange of gifts during major religious holidays. Gifts are regulated and expected. At Easter Muslims offer decorated eggs and Easter bread to their Christian neighbours, and vice versa – at Eid al-Fitr Christians offer sweets or meat to their Muslim neighbours. Accepting gifts is obligatory and is always accompanied by verbal congratulations: "Happy holidays!" This has become part of an annual ritual which regulates the good relations between the two religious communities. It was disrupted only during the so-called Revival Process (1989) when celebrating Islamic holidays was banned. Following this dramatic event, the exchange of gifts was soon resumed as a way to overcome the crisis of temporary mistrust and get relations back to normal. The ritual is part of a model existing both in villages and cities which have neighbourhoods with mixed population. This is a way to accept the other one and ensure good neighbourly relations. Coexistence is also maintained through daily contacts among representatives of the two groups. Examples often quoted are "drinking coffee" with representatives of "the others" and "soirees" with music and songs. The latter are often used to celebrate holidays of both religions. "Keeping an eye" on the properties of the Turks who emigrated during the Revival Process should be quoted as an example of good neighbourly relations.

The second most important factor for good neighbourly interreligious relations are invitations to family holidays, such as weddings, and



postpartum customs. The official nature of such celebrations makes the invitation and attendance an expression of respect for the persons, the family, and the religious community. Those with a different religion attend these celebrations as friends. It often happens even that representatives of the other confessional group take part in the preparations.

The third most important factor is participation in the funeral rites of the other community. The requirements in conformity with the religious norms of “the others” are met during these rites. Male Christians take part in the procession to the grave, while female Christians stay at home in accordance with the Muslim norms. And vice versa, at a Christian funeral both men and women attend the religious service at the grave.

This coexistence is often manifested through visits to sites of religious cults for the other religion. Numerous examples have been documented of Muslims visiting churches and lighting candles for health, and of Christians visiting tekkes and turbes. Such practices stem from the belief that the other God could also help cure a serious disease or infertility. Coexistence rules are strictly observed, as violating them might result in the collapse of the equality of the two groups which has been built up in the course of centuries.

The concept of culture takes us back to history while preserving the link with the present. The evolution of intercultural dialogue is brightly illustrated on the map of the Balkans where groups and individuals from various communities, including the Balkan Turks, have international citizenship – bipatrites (persons with dual citizenship) – and live “between two cultures”. The protection of dignity and cultural identity is a challenge they are facing almost every day; this is why they need a particularly broad support, understanding and the possibility to exercise their rights. The path leading to this is knowledge.

The subtle nature of protecting identity (cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) becomes obvious when a dispute reaches the court, as

settling the dispute always requires striking a subtle balance which is crucial to peace and understanding.

This everyday peaceful communication among ethnicities and religions achieves yet another important goal. It boosts the appreciation of one's own culture, as one becomes aware of its value by comparing it with the other ones. Last but not least, the model helps to preserve ethnic and confessional diversity both within the country and within the European Union. It should be noted that it is not typical only for the Bulgarian territory but also for many settlements with mixed population across the Balkans.

S.A.S. against France

The subject matter of the case is an application filed by a Muslim French citizen who complains about the impossibility to wear a full-face veil in public places due to the ban imposed by a law enacted on 11 April 2011. As a person practicing the Muslim religion, she argues that wearing a burqa and niqab is in conformity with the religion she confesses, the culture and her personal beliefs. Women affected by this ban are forced to relinquish an important element of their identity, of their way of expressing their religion and beliefs.

The ECtHR has found a “permanent interference” with the exercise of the applicant's rights under Articles 8 and 9 of ECHR, as the applicant is faced with a dilemma: to either conform to the ban and give up dressing in a manner in line with the religion confessed by her or not conform to the ban and, thus, risk prosecution.

In parallel, taking into consideration the fact that the face plays an important role in social communication, the Court, therefore, holds in its judgment that wearing a full-face veil in public is an act of closing oneself to the others, which could constitute a violation of the principles and conditions of “living in a community”.



Photo: Nikolinka Nikolova

The Court notes that it is able to understand the assumption that people would not like to witness the emergence of practices and behaviours in public places entirely undermining the possibility for open communication which is beyond any doubt one of the conditions for “living in a community”. The Court holds that persons wearing a full-face veil get isolated from the others, which infringes their right to live by observing the principles of communication inherent to living in a community.

In conclusion, the Court holds that while the ban introduced by virtue of the law of 11 October 2011 for certain has some specific negative consequences for the situation of women confessing the Muslim religion who, due to religious considerations, wish to wear a full-face veil in public places, the introduction of the ban is objectively and reasonably justified, as it is in conformity with the legitimate aim pursued – the protection of “living in a community”.

The Court further clarifies in its decision that the grounds for imposing the ban do not stem from the religious nature of the attire, but only from the fact that the veil fully covers the face of the person wearing it.

ECtHR recalls that any statement containing clear and unambiguous messages against a specific religious or ethnic community is contrary to the values of tolerance, social peace and non-discrimination enshrined in the Convention, and cannot be considered as part of the right to freedom of expression laid down in the Convention.

The Court calls for the need to always carefully examine the need to introduce a similar measure and justify its legitimate purpose by noting that any state undertaking similar legislative initiatives runs the risk of facilitating the consolidation of stereotypes inherent to specific categories of people and encouraging manifestations of intolerance, thus achieving an effect which is the exact opposite to the aim pursued in promoting tolerance.

Hate speech on the basis of religion and ethnic background

On 21 January 2012, two Bulgarian media which have with the same publisher (a newspaper and an electronic medium) published an article entitled: “A Secret Ritual Sends Young Turks into the Grave”. The article describes the amazement of some local inhabitants of a Bulgarian village at the fact that in less than two years four young men from their village committed suicide. The youngest of them was aged 11. The description of the incidents makes assumptions about mysterious ethno-religious rites resulting in suicide.

The publication tells that this village in the Eastern Rhodopes and the nearby villages are inhabited mostly by Turks – Qizilbash (Alevi) described as a closed religious community whose Islam differs from the one of the majority of the Muslims in Bulgaria who are Sunni.



According to the article the Qizilbash revere their strange holiday Maje when “tens of calves and sheep are slaughtered as a sacrificial rite”. This holiday is celebrated every year on the first Saturday of September and ends with a strange ritual. The author notes that the ritual has never been witnessed by outsiders and the Qizilbash never talk about it; the other Turks, the Sunni, however, have heard from older people what it is all about.

The article continues to describe this custom – only married couples and the chieftain stay after the sacrificial rite at the Maje celebration. The chieftain points at a woman who is to be his for the night. The remaining men and women shuffle their trousers. The chieftain picks out a pair of male trousers and a pair of female trousers thus coupling them at random. What the man and the woman do afterwards, it is only them that know.

The author suggests that this ritual, as described, can easily result in incest which causes deterioration of the next generation, and, subsequently, predisposition to all kinds of mental diseases, including suicidal ideation. This explains the sad incidents in the Rhodopes village. The author also clarifies that the Alevis are rebellious people who love free life, which explains to a certain extent why young people and children in the region take their life.

This publication aroused indignation, feelings of insult and humiliation amongst groups of people from the same region who determine themselves as Muslim by religion and Alevis by ethnic origin. They convened a general village assembly to express their insult with the article. Subsequently they approached the Commission for Protection against Discrimination with a complaint that the data and suggestions in the relevant publication regarding suicides of young people from the Qizilbash community anathematized the religious rites of their community as socially unacceptable and reproachable in ethical terms. The Commission was approached by a local MP, the complaint being against the medium and the journalist, the author of the article, in person.

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination examined the complaint and issued a decision establishing discrimination. The Commission holds that the drafting and the publication of the said article and its content constitute an infringement of the Law on Protection against Discrimination, which has damaged the dignity of an undefined but definable group of people, citizens of the relevant villages in the Eastern Rhodopes in Bulgaria, who consider themselves as belonging to the Muslim religion and to the Alevi ethnic group. According to the Commission's findings, the method used has created, by verbal means, a hostile, degrading, humiliating and insulting environment, which amounts to multiple discrimination under the form of harassment on the grounds of "religion" and "ethnic background", an act which is absolutely prohibited by law. Therefore, the Commission issued a compulsory prescription to the medium instructing it to design and implement in its operational arrangements self-control mechanisms in order to prevent any discrimination, as well as compulsory recommendations that the medium should observe ethical requirements, the right to privacy, and avoid confrontation of various groups of the society on the basis of ethnic background or other reasons with a view to preventing intolerance or confrontation.

In order to reach the above conclusion the Commission used, in the course of examining the complaint, expert opinions of specialists in the area of ethno-sociology, anthropology and art studies whose findings point to the conclusion that the article disseminates negative stereotypes in respect of the Qizilbash community and strengthens them through the media prestige.

The experts clarify the Maje ritual by explaining that it is dedicated to the life-giving power of water ("ma" means water in Arabic). It stems from the belief that water has healing power, which explains why it is used mostly for treating children and for rainfall prayers in situations of prolonged drought. The rite is always accompanied by feasts with ritual food which attribute a sacrificial nature to it; the feasts are organized in the open – meadows, near water fountains and springs. The question whether committing suicide by hanging oneself and sui-



cides of young people as a whole is typical for the Alavi community is answered negatively by the expert who explains that any form of suicide is considered an unforgivable sin in the cultural and historic (traditional) value system of the Qizilbash.

The example quoted from practice is a clear illustration of the need to know the ethno-cultural and religious traditions and customs of individual groups who coexist in our geographic regions.

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination reasons its decision by considering that the article “A Secret Ritual Sends Young Turks into the Grave” constitutes harassment against a certain group of people who determine themselves as belonging to the Alevi community.

Last but not least, the Commission draws attention to journalist ethics. In parallel with the right to freedom of speech, mass media have obligations and responsibilities. A leading principle in their activity is avoiding confrontation between various groups within the society on the basis of characteristics protected by law (race, ethnic background, religion, etc.) with a view to preventing discrimination and incitement to intolerance.

Hate speech against refugees

In the autumn of 2009 the Bulgarian President G.P. had a meeting with the President of Malta during an official visit. Bulgarian electronic and on-line mass media reported on the visit with the heading “Malta wants that Bulgaria take over a part of the refugees from Northern Africa”. The publication reveals that during the official visit Malta requested that Bulgaria should assist in solving the issue with illegal immigration from Northern Africa by insisting that the other Member States also take over a part of the refugees. Malta had developed a pilot project for the relocation of refugees and was looking forward to Bulgaria’s answer whether it will take over a part of them. The Bulgarian President confirmed that the Bulgarian government was preparing the answer to the request regarding refugees’ relocation; in response

to this the President of Malta declared that he would support Bulgaria with its accession to the Euro zone and the Schengen area. This news was disseminated in other leading Bulgarian national media – television, radio, and internet media.

In October 2009 “Malta wants from Bulgaria to receive refugees from Africa. Shall we consent?” was the leading topic in a popular show of an influential private electronic medium. B.R., leader of a nationalist fraction, and a representative of the State Agency for Refugees, took part in it.

After the broadcast two young men, active human rights advocates, approached the Commission for Protection against Discrimination with a complaint that B.R. had presented and defended his thesis against receiving refugees by using discriminatory language – racist and xenophobic – which instigated prejudices and discrimination against individuals with a different race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or confession, including with respect to refugee communities that had already become a part of the Bulgarian society. According to the persons submitting the complaint, the words used by B.R. amounted to discrimination, namely: he had confused the concepts of refugees and immigrants in order to suggest that refugees would deprive Bulgarians of their jobs; he had depicted refugees as exotic representatives of unknown nations who were a risk factor for growing criminality; he had described refugees from countries outside Europe as incapable of integration due to their genetic nature.

When examining the complaint, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination requested expert opinions from a number of governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in the reception and integration of refugees in the country. They confirmed the opinion of the two applicants that the statements made are discriminatory.

The legal question that CPD answers by issuing its decision on this case is whether the right to expression is absolute or is subject to re-



strictions, respectively, if this right allows for the use of racist and/or xenophobic expressions. The reasoning of the Commission is that promoting hatred, hostility or humiliation on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion and other features does fall within the scope of this right. The expression and dissemination of opinions is limited by non-discrimination laid down in laws, namely penalizing manifestations of racism and xenophobia.

Expressing and reasoning opinions by means of racist and/or xenophobic ideas amounts to hate speech. Hate speech does not have a legal definition in the national legislation of Bulgaria. The definition is contained in Recommendation No 20 of 1997 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Hate Speech, in the Appendix to the Recommendation, position “Scope”¹². According to this definition, hate speech shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

Based on the content of the statement, CPD has concluded that it contains humiliating assessments with regard to black-skinned people anathematized by its author as “criminals”, “culturally backward”, “extra-terrestrial”, “genetically incapable to integrate”, “agents of revolutions”. The words used are clear and insulting enough to create an offensive environment for any dark-skinned person of African origin. The origin and the dark colour of the skin are characteristics belonging to the protected attribute “race”. Therefore, the Commission draws the conclusion that the statement constitutes harassment on the ground of race as an attribute.

Judging by the live comments made by listeners and viewers at the end of the broadcast, CPD has reached the conclusion that B.R.’s state-

12 http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media/4_documentary_resources/CM_en.asp#TopOfPage



Photo: Georgi Petrov

ment has *de facto* contributed to an attitude among the public for not accepting dark-skinned refugees due to the threat suggested – these individuals are different to the extent of being dangerous and will be a burden on the Bulgarian people. The opinions expressed in support of B.R.'s position have produced a damaging effect on the recognition of the right of any foreigner to seek protection in Bulgaria, which in itself constitutes racial discrimination. Therefore, there is no doubt whatsoever that the statement made by the respondent has resulted in incitement to discrimination.

The above has served as reasons for the Commission to reach the conclusion that, in addition to harassment, the statement constitutes incitement to discrimination on the ground of race/colour of the skin and nationality, thus resulting simultaneously in two forms of discrimination: harassment and incitement to discrimination.

The Commission imposes a financial sanction on B.R. for both violations and issues a prescription thereto to refrain in the future from



statement damaging the honour and dignity of the personality on the grounds of race and/or incitement to discrimination.

While this decision cannot be believed to have resulted in eradicating hate speech on the grounds of race, ethnicity, skin colour, it has contributed to establishing a progressive case law which condemns and punishes similar phenomena as prohibited by the antidiscrimination legislation.

The Roma language

In 2003 the St. Kiril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (UVT) opened a new educational-and-qualification degree (EQD) in the professional profile of Pedagogy: “Primary School Pedagogy and the Romani Language” (“PSP and Romani”). Its purpose is training specialists with higher education – primary school teachers qualified to also teach the Romani language as an optional electable subject matter or an obligatory electable subject matter. The training consists of four academic years; the first alumni graduated in 2006-2007 with an average score of 5,53 (excellent).

In 2007 the **National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation** conducted an evaluation and issued its evaluation of the relevant program at UVT. In March 2007 the university received a “Report of the Expert Working Group for the Program Accreditation of the Professional Profile “Pedagogy” – EQD “B.A.” and “M.A.””. On the basis of this report the National Agency, did not recommend accreditation and enrolment of students in the said program.

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination received a complaint in relation to the recommendations in the report. According to the applicants the report contains statements of an obvious intentional nature *implying a discriminatory attitude on ethnic grounds* to the program “PSP and Romani” which is defined as institutional racism. The following examples from the report are quoted in support of the claim:

1. The educational qualification provided by this program is not specified and cannot achieve its aim – the integration of Roma minority in Bulgaria;
2. The status of the Romani language referred to in the report as “Romani dialects” or an “invariant” Romani language is not clarified, which in the applicants’ opinion is a belittling and degrading attitude toward this language as compared to other programs in the profile “Pedagogy”;
3. The finding that this program does not have sufficient habilitated academic staff is not true, according to the applicants, and is an expression of a depreciative attitude;
4. The finding in the report that this program is a hybrid between Romani Philology, if such a philology exists, and primary school pedagogy with a foreign language is an expression of institutional racism;
5. The recommendation in the report that the Agency should seek an expert opinion on whether it is possible to learn the Romani language which does not have a well-defined written form is, according to the applicants, unacceptable and discriminatory, as the issue with the Romani alphabet has been solved on a global level;
6. The statement in the conclusions of the report that Roma children have difficulties learning the official alphabet used in Bulgaria is, according to the applicants, inadequate and belittling, and places Roma children in a less favourable and degraded position in comparison with any other school children.

On the basis of the evaluation report, the National Agency does not recommend accreditation and enrolment in the relevant program. As a result of this decision, by an oral order of the Rector the Veliko Tarnovo University terminated the enrolment of students in this program in the 2007-2008 academic year.



The applicants claim that this is a case of discrimination on ethnic grounds and a violation of a number of national and international instruments, such as the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from National Minorities approved by MES in 2004, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, etc. ratified by the Bulgarian government. They insist that the Commission for Protection against Discrimination should establish that the opinions expressed in the evaluation report and the decision, as well as the practical results thereof constitute discrimination on ethnic grounds, and should apply coercive administrative measures for discontinuing the discrimination.

In its activity the Commission refers to the citizens' basic constitutional rights, such as the right to learn one's mother tongue of any person belonging to an ethnic minority in Bulgaria. In addition to having its own relevance, this right constitutes one of the main prerequisites for guaranteeing and ensuring the effective exercise of other rights, for example the right to preserve and develop the cultural ethnic identity of individuals from ethnic minorities and implementing the prohibition of assimilation¹³, the right to freedom of expression in the minority language¹⁴, the right to use freely his/her minority language, in private and in public¹⁵. The complaint notes that the discontinuing of enrolment in the program "PSP and Romani" affects, on the one hand, the right to learn one's mother tongue at an academic level, and, on the other hand, is an obstacle to the training of teachers who can teach primary school children the Romani language as a mother tongue.

CPD considers that discontinuing the enrolment of students in the said program amounts to a less favourable treatment on the basis of the ethnic background of individuals from the Roma community, as it

13 Art. 5 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Art. 29 (1) and Art. 54 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.

14 Art.9 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

15 Art.10 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

directly affects the right to learn their mother tongue, and the right to preserve and develop their cultural identity in comparison with the Bulgarian ethnic community. The Commission has established that this constitutes direct discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity in respect of any person belonging to the Roma minority.

The Commission for Protection against Discrimination is of the opinion that both subjects bear responsibility in this case. The university is the perpetrator of direct discrimination as established above, even though it acted in implementing the recommendation of the National Agency for the termination of enrolment, as perpetrating an act of discrimination does not require the presence of intent. The recommendation for terminating enrolment has the nature of an instruction in relation to the perpetration of the discrimination established; however, bearing in mind that the Agency's recommendations are compulsory for the university and the failure to meet them serves as grounds for the withdrawal of program accreditation, the conclusion is that the National Agency is able to influence the university by withdrawing its program accreditation for failure to fulfil this recommendation. In view of the above, the Commission considers that the Agency, by means of its recommendation for discontinuing enrolment in the program "PSP and Romani" *has committed an act of incitement to discrimination*, the latter being equal to discrimination.

In response to the complaint lodged, the Commission has established that the Agency committed an act of racial discrimination, and orders restoring the initial status quo as of the time before the infringement by prescribing to the Agency to take measures to revise and repeal the recommendation made. In order to avoid similar violations in the future, the Commission imposes coercive administrative measures on the Agency by prescribing to it to encourage the participation of persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in the decision-making process of its bodies.



Survey of textbooks

During the 2010-2011 school year, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination conducted a review and analysis of the content of the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science for the 2010-2011 school year, with a focus on elements of discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, race, and ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. In implementing its competences, the Commission carried out a national independent survey of textbooks on the topic: “Stereotypes and Prejudices in Curricula, Syllabi, Plans and Textbooks for Pre-schooling and Primary Education”.

The survey was focused on the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) of Bulgaria for students at the pre-schooling and primary education levels, as well as an analysis of the legal framework regulating the process of assessment and approval of textbooks. The purpose of the survey was to establish if there are discriminatory practices in the content of textbooks, if the textbooks ensure civil education and non-discrimination, equal opportunities, human rights, knowledge about cultural diversity, and if they meet the requirements and standards in terms of characteristics, such as gender, disability, race and ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation.

An expert group of 17 experts with representatives of all stakeholders – experts from CPD, MEYS, from non-governmental organisations, independent educational experts, researchers and professors – conducted a review and analyses of the content of the textbooks approved by MEYS for the 2010-2011 school year for the pre-schooling and primary education levels.

In the majority of the cases the analysis of the characteristic “**gender**” has not established direct but indirect discrimination based on the repetition of certain stereotypes determining different roles and representativeness of the two genders in the social world. Thus the ster-

eotype is transformed into a discriminatory category, as it provides for unequal spheres of activity for women and men. In the textbooks analysed men are predominantly presented through a broad range of public roles – men are very good at technologies, arts, science, history, etc., i.e. the main fields of social progress, while women are presented only through roles related to the household, the family, and agriculture. Such an approach nourishes and strengthens stereotypes which in reality do not encourage students to develop critical thinking. The conclusion from the survey is that the training material presented and the “hidden” suggestions it makes show unequal treatment on the basis of gender. The roles of women and men in society and their position in society are presented in a unilateral and stereotype way which facilitates the emergence of prejudices in terms of genders. The analysis of the textbooks for all educational levels should continue in order to establish whether their content contributes to deepening gender inequality, which is also a form of discriminatory practice. Requirements should be set to the authors and illustrators of textbooks, the publishing houses and the boards approving the textbooks with a view to avoiding gender-based discriminatory suggestions. CPD recommends that trainings should be organized for teachers on gender equality and the general topics of non-discrimination and equality.

The survey has a special emphasis on the characteristics “**ethnic background**” and “**race**”. The analysis shows that ethnic minorities are randomly present in the textbooks reviewed, while the specific contribution of the various ethnic communities to the ethno-cultural diversity in the country is not presented at all. Grounds for the socialization of students from other ethnic communities – Jewish, Roma, Turkish, Armenian, etc. – with respect to the Bulgarian ones are missing in many textbooks. Most of the textbook sets do not have books for bilingual children (whose family or mother tongue is not Bulgarian). The specifics of the development of mental process with children from ethnic minorities and ethnic subgroups is not taken into consideration. CPD recommends that the topic of tolerance to ethnic minorities and the different ones, equality safeguards, and messages for the prevention of discrimination against those who are different based on ethnic-



ity or race should be included in the textbooks. Assistant teachers of Roma or Turkish origin and assistant educators and the other auxiliary staff of kindergartens should be trained in pedagogical skills for intercultural education. The mother tongue is of particular interest as a topic. The recommendation in this respect is that the concept of mother tongue should be broadened with some explanations about bilingual children whose mother tongue is different from the Bulgarian language. The recommendations also highlight the need for a new approach to intercultural education in the teachers' activity. Teachers should be provided with training on working in an intercultural environment, and qualification forms of training on antidiscrimination should be introduced. Many of the textbooks also offer positive examples which should serve as a basis for creating a more favourable multi-ethnic environment in schools. The educational process should apply in a systematic manner positive, non-discriminatory measures, namely presenting the cultural and religious diversity of the individual ethnic communities – traditions, customs, creative works within the framework of exhibitions, festivals, and other school events.

The survey also analyses the characteristic “age”. Each curriculum or textbook has its own philosophy which uses various pedagogical and psychological approaches depending on the specifics of the environment, the child's family or mother tongue, its ethnic or national background, the customs and traditions of the relevant nation or ethnic group, the parents' socio-economic status, etc. The various textbooks, programs, program systems used by teachers in kindergartens and primary schools envisage different techniques of pedagogical interaction with children. Therefore, it is inadmissible that two different programs are applied in respect of the same age group of the kindergarten; neither is it admissible to combine programs used at previous stages of development of the society. The review of the textbooks and the curricula allows drawing the conclusion that the majority of training sets do not have a focus on multicultural education, multi-ethnic education or education in an interethnic environment. The prevailing part of the pedagogical approaches incorporated in the textbooks and programs are appropriate for a previous stage of development of the

society and for another generation of children. These approaches focus on the volume of knowledge, while a part of the cognitive content remains out-of-date. The analysis shows that a part of the textbooks do not have a clear concept for stimulating mental processes in line with the age specifics of the child. This creates prerequisites for the child having no cognitive interest and incentives to acquire a specific type of knowledge. The textbooks should be updated.

Another characteristic surveyed by CPD is “**religion**”. The experts’ findings show the absence of basic information about what is at the core of each religion. Knowledge should be provided about the fundamentals of the predominant religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism, the history and philosophy of religions in order for children to develop not as believers but as individuals who are conscious, who know, think and understand. The survey prompts the conclusion that a favourable multicultural environment should be created in schools and this should be based on positive, non-discriminatory measures, namely: presenting the cultural and religious diversity of the individual ethnic communities – religious traditions and customs – at exhibitions, festivals. This is the way to promote a positive, tolerant attitude among children belonging to different religious communities, and to help children develop an adequate, positive self-assessment of themselves, the community in which they live, the religion, traditions and holidays of their community. Children will be enabled to, firstly, get to know themselves, and then the cultural and religious diversity of the ethnic groups to which their classmates belong. This will contribute to overcoming a potential deficit in their communication, and to overcoming stereotypes and prejudices in terms of belonging to a different religion.

Using concepts and definitions of the various religions requires professional knowledge and skills in order to identify and understand the features at the basis of belonging to a certain religion. The concept of religion in itself, in spite of its complexity, should be described with a clear definition containing unambiguous and formal characteristics that are in line with the age capacity and specifics of children and students.



Photo: Georgi Petrov



Photo: Nikolinka Nikolova



Conclusion

Being concerned with the fact that our contemporary realities are still posing risks to cultural diversity and the freedom of speech, ideas, opinions and beliefs, the European Union took actions by adopting a European Parliament Resolution of 17 April 2014 on EU foreign policy in a world of cultural and religious differences (214/2690 (RSP)). The act is an EU instrument aimed at continuing international cooperation and support within and outside the UN system in order to secure peace and sustainable development.

The European Parliament (EP) recalls that in this era of globalisation, nations, states and civilisations are actively interacting with each other, and the rules and norms which guide the functioning of economic and political systems are becoming more closely linked and are facing common challenges, such as climate change, terrorism and poverty, while at the same time reflecting national identities and cultural differences, a proper understanding of which is crucial to international dialogue based on tolerance.

In the context of its foreign policy, the EP affirms that respect for cultural diversity and tolerance vis-à-vis different concepts and beliefs, combined with action to combat all forms of extremism and fight inequalities, remains a necessary integral part of the successful construction of a peaceful international order based on universally shared democratic values.

The EP places a special emphasis on the challenges on the international scene related to religious influence by noting with concern that the threat that terrorist networks represent for the Union and for the rest of the world. These extremist groups use violence as a means of promoting hatred and intolerance and influencing societies and legislation with a view to restricting people's human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The EP calls for promoting the intercultural and interreligious dialogues, as well as the principles and values of the EU. This can be achieved through the internet and communication technologies which are key enablers in facilitating freedom of expression, pluralism, exchange of information, education, human rights, development, freedom of assembly, democracy and intercultural and interreligious interaction and inclusion. This is the way to foster tolerance and understanding in order to ensure high sustainability of inter-human and international relations.



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