

4. How to promote tolerance and respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity

The communication technology provided the means for the transformation of our planet from an open place of unlimited horizons to a universal neighbourhood. At the same time globalisation is intensified by the gradual lifting of barriers and obstacles in economic activity. Furthermore in this context, the migration currents have grown, being affected by the political changes worldwide during the last decades and the violent conflicts currently going on in many places of the planet.

The outcome of the present situation is that, every day, different people of different beliefs and mentality communicate, live together and contact each other -as a group or individually. Therefore, the question that inevitably arises is thus, how to establish tolerance and respect between people who have different cultural ethnic and religious backgrounds, in order to promote creativity and not to cause tensions and conflicts.

Progressive governance is thus called upon to provide a solid answer for the promotion of diversity, for the need to constantly reinforce the rights of all in an open society based on freedom and solidarity. Diversity is seamlessly joined both with fundamental rights and social cohesion. The respect of “otherness” in a society of rights and solidarity is not a “concession”: it is a vital condition for its continued existence and we all have to realize that.

Diversity appears to be at risk because of globalisation, due to its homogenisation of communication codes and practices. The spread of a uniform language, of uniform codes and uniform standards reflects clearly the threat posed to the unique features of each culture.

The antagonistic relationship, however, of “diversity *versus* globalisation” may be transformed into an essential link, especially if we outline a crucial element: Communication, nowadays, can especially be creative if it connects those who are different; those who have developed distinct identities and ways of life and have something new to offer to each other. Diversity creates the barricade against the flattening communication practice in which personal autonomy does not fit.

This argument leads to the conclusion that, while in the past diversity was the outcome of isolation, today it constitutes a clear policy target. Diversity should serve the kind of communication that differs from a simple exchange of information within

a common cohabitation space. Diversity therefore, should be defended and promoted because it enriches essential knowledge and experience and opens up new possibilities necessary for societies in a world that is constantly changing.

Globalization challenges diversity because it is an uncoordinated, rapid process powered by market dynamics. On the other hand, regional integration is a political process consciously planned and controlled and thus, it could constitute a positive factor for the promotion of diversity. Another positive factor is the incorporation of expressions of different cultures, made easy by the possibilities of modern technology. On the other side, the conversion of the different culture into current fashion does not lead to the reinforcement of diversity. Ethnic fashions, however, even if they cannot actually establish a multicultural society may familiarize which the unfamiliar different.

Another danger to be taken into account is the creation of circumstances of isolation due to the collective claim of the right to diversity. Placing claims collectively is expected when facing a dominant culture. This practice nevertheless, should be prevented from leading to the formation of separate “ghettos” which essentially reproduce isolationism.

In order to encourage the respect for cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism, it should be noted that the principle already exists in international treaties and that principle should therefore, be further integrated and defined by national legislations. Additionally, a criterion should be drafted for the point beyond which diversity becomes isolationism. This criterion needs to be general but not totally vague, since the point of focus is that diversity should serve and enable communication.

Educational programs are also of an essential nature for the promotion of cultural diversity and they should run for multicultural audiences of children. It is generally accepted as pointless to promote relevant policies if only addressed to culturally homogeneous audiences.

The encouragement of cosmopolitanism will associate diversity with personal autonomy if only actions are disengaged from associations, organizations etc that promote a logic of cultural “supremacy” and, ultimately, of isolationism. Therefore, they should be related with NGOs that are especially active in the field of human rights and also with National Committees for Human Rights.

In order to ensure respect for ethnic and religious diversity, legislation has to be closely monitored and examined in order to be purged of vestiges of ethnic and

religious isolationism. Initiatives need to be taken, particularly in cooperation with NGOs, for discussion and development of common action in sensitive social fields by representatives of all known religions and dogmas.

Religious diversity is also sometimes connected with the practices of closed groups that operate with insufficient respect for the autonomy of their members. The appropriate reform of the manner in which religion is taught at schools could discourage extreme expressions of fundamentalism, by associating religious freedom with the other fundamental rights and democracy.

On the other hand, the common characteristics of the various faiths should be highlighted in order to aid the realization that, notwithstanding any differences, there is a common underlying theme, which ultimately points towards tolerance.

The extent and pressure of migration currents worldwide is due to the need for survival and the quest of better living conditions away from ancestral lands. This reality gives rise to an explosive demographic, social and political dynamic.

Every immigration policy must in the first instance take into account the causes that underlie and fuel the phenomenon. The restructuring of economic functions, created by the lifting of barriers in the movement of goods and capital, is a root cause of the intensity of the phenomenon. Successive waves of immigrants head towards countries where economic activity and wealth are concentrated. Political instability and the international crises cause also the exit of a large number of asylum seekers who congregate in the countries that can offer more guarantees of security and liberty.

The first care is to face up to the problem of illegal immigration, as well as to the related illegal activities, such as the trafficking of human beings. For this purpose, cooperation with the source countries is essential and every policy therefore, should steadily aim towards the creation of organized, legal immigration channels.

Progressive governance must aim to an anthropocentric approach when dealing with immigration. Both the state and the society should be supplied with the appropriate mechanisms to deal with unforeseen changes, tensions and reversals in the economic, social, cultural and ultimately political structure of our society.

The main task for progressive governance lies in the definition of an appropriate policy for the integration of foreigners in a country's society and the guarantee of a minimum status for enjoyment of rights by immigrants. Bearable

conditions and tolerant behaviour on the part of the host country's citizens are vital factors for the success of immigration policy along with the positive assessment of the benefits of a pluralistic society. The host countries, having secured the consent for integration on the part of the local social partners, will be in a position to manage the migration flows and respond satisfactorily to the needs of the labour market for skilled and unskilled workers and also to create the opportunities of communication in a multicultural society.

The basic axes of a modern policy for migration in the context of progressive governance are the following:

The management of the migratory flows must be planned in such a way as to contribute to the economic and social development of both countries of origin and destination and to minimize adverse effects on the labour market. Moreover, it should operate as an important development factor on regional basis.

Bilateral or multilateral initiatives that can positively influence migratory flows ought to be given priority.

The legal status of migrant workers should be well-defined and visible, to facilitate economic participation in the country of destination and to lessen the influence of those exploiting the weak position of the immigrant. We should also compose charters with the rights of immigrants.

Social security rights accumulated by immigrants can frequently not be transferred in the case of return. Their transfer could be organized through the signing of bilateral agreements, in order to avoid unjust discrimination and further problems.

Labour legislation is sometimes used as an exclusion device, while the avoidance of labour standards is frequently the reason for employers to engage immigrant labour. Minimum labour standards may be enforced for the benefit of all workers, both local and not.

Housing is a critical area for immigrants, which frequently gives rise to discrimination and problems. The authorities should re-examine practices, which may lead to the creation of ghettos.

The legislation of the country of destination must re-examine the issue of acquisition of citizenship, especially for those who live in the host country with their families. Citizenship awards should be easier for second-generation immigrants.

In the management of trade unions the participation of immigrants on the basis of specific quotas should be examined.

We should work towards safeguarding to legal immigrants a minimum of civil rights, especially of rights to participate in local government.

Finally, it is obvious that we need to develop cohesive practices, which will help the immigrant learn the language and the culture of his new environment. His rapid familiarization with that will have multiple positive effects, both for himself and for the society in which he lives and works.

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