

## Introduction to WG on European dimension/identity

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European societies are becoming increasingly multicultural, multilingual, multireligious. The same is the case with our HEIs. This is due to immigration, student mobility – attracting foreigners to Europe in view of decline in and aging of European population. Our societies also face a rise in religion.

What can HEIs do to better serve these increasingly complex societies? What is their societal role in this context (and next to the serving the economy and knowledge-society)?

HEIs can play a special role in promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Academic space is per definition free of ideological choices and built on freedom of inquiry and search for “truth” based on dialogue and rigorous scientific research. As such it can and it should further articulate its mission helping students of ALL disciplines to develop understanding that they are *products* of cultural, ideational and value traditions and *active members* in shaping these traditions. Study programs and processes should help students to develop knowledge, skills and habits of mind to be able to reflect on their own beliefs and choices they make as well be aware and critical to assumptions and motivations, engage open-mindedly with different cultural forms and historical moments. There may be a need to help students also to unlearn some things already learned and to uncover what is in the background of the immediately apparent.

### GOALS:

- I. Developing understanding of **traditions of culture and belief** in our societies; examine the ways in which these shape individuals' and communities' identities and perceptions of “others” and (inter)actions.
- II. Developing **intercultural competences** as abilities to act effectively in multicultural environment. It is important to remember that intercultural competences are one of the competences that contribute to graduates' employability.

### How:

- Introduce students of **all disciplines** of fundamental civilisational texts and works of art (e.g. John Stuart Mill's On Freedom and On Subjugation of Women; Plato's Republic; Aristotle's and Kant's writings on ethics; writings of Luther, St. Augustine, St. Aquinas; selected readings from the Bible and the Koran).
- Introduce students with **primary texts** in any language, linguistic structure and works of art in different media and analyse these works in view of historical, cultural, social, political, economic, religious context of their production, dissemination in influence.
- Make **explicit connections** between the study material and cultural, religious, political, economic, social issues that arise in their immediate societies and world-wide.

With increase in religious schools, there might be students entering universities that have primarily interacted with people of own religious (or ethnic) background. In such contexts these students might not have been exposed to learn about products of European renaissance or other religions or to reflect critically on their own religious and value systems. One could propose that not to expose students to do so is not exercising “a respect for diversity”, as sometimes argued, but a perpetration of intellectual and cultural “ghettoisation” of minorities. Again, if anyone, it is HEIs that are best placed to provide a forum for critical and intellectually honest discussion of often contentious and emotionally-charged issues pertaining role of religion in our societies. There are also some evidences of emergence of taboo topics – even in academic surroundings – especially in the case of some of the religious claims and the practices that claim to have religious authority. This is a very dangerous development and needs to be acted against it if witnessed.

- III. Developing an understanding of **different societies** within and outside Europe – the connections between these societies in different contexts (political, economic, historical, environmental, and linguistic), relationships between institutions, practices, behaviours in these societies.

How:

- Through **student mobility** and reflections of the experiences gained in foreign countries.
- Through studying material that will help students to understand different societies in variety of perspectives (mentioned above).

- IV. Developing abilities of students for **ethical reasoning** i.e. make students aware of ethical dimensions of their words and deeds and able to reason, deliberate and assess claims about moral, religious, political beliefs, practices and issues.

How:

- Introduce students with theories and conceptions of ethical reasoning (concepts such as justice, liberty, right, freedom, duty).
- Help students to understand different value systems – stemming from different religions or different historical periods.
- Help students to apply these to examine concrete ethical dilemmas arising in political, business, academic environment in which they live and act.

## QUESTIONS?

What should/could be done within the Bologna process in order to promote the above goals? Is there need for structural changes? Can/should we introduce “core education” courses in undergraduate curricula of all disciplines and offer/require students to acquire a number of credits from such courses? Can we include intercultural competence development in teacher training as our academic staff is dealing with an increasingly multicultural student population? Should we promote more research on intercultural dialogue, communication, etc.?