



**A Modern Concept of Tolerance**  
**basis for democratic interaction in pluralistic societies**

**Discussion Paper**  
**presented by**

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*Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference...*

*UNESCO Declaration of principles on tolerance 1995*

(Article 1 – Meaning of Tolerance, full text on CD-ROM with background articles)

## **1. The challenges of pluralistic societies**

The world is on the move – in May 2004 ten new states joined the European Union, and there are other states, such as Turkey, waiting in line or already negotiating their membership. Countries all over the world are considering the establishment or extension of free trade agreements and supra-national organizations. Companies set up enterprises in many different countries to take advantage of the economic advantages. These global trends influence the way individuals try to design their private and professional lives. The identity of coherent biographies vanishes as socio-economic shifts increase. Every day immigrants from Central and Latin America attempt to cross the Mexican border into the U.S.A. Construction workers from Eastern Europe find work in Spain. German nurses work in Norway. These are snapshots of a world in which mobility and communication are easily accessible. Such a development challenges our political institutions, the way we do business and also the way the arts are perceived.

The cultural framework of societies is challenged by mobility and migration, bringing groups with different value systems and norms into close contact with one another. Recent estimates place the size of the documented migrant population at 7.7 % or 56 million of the European continent's total population.<sup>1</sup> During the 1990s immigrants became the largest component of new population in most member states of the EU. In the year 2000 about 5 % of all EU residents were not nationals of the state in which they lived. More than 2/3 of these (3.4%) are third-country nationals, and only 1.6 % are EU citizens living in a second member state<sup>2</sup>. The majority of society as well as the immigrants themselves are challenged by these developments. A balance between defensive self-assurance and prospective openness has to be found, and a method of opening up a sustained dialogue should be actively supported.

Reactions to these developments differ across Europe. Attitudes towards diversity and cultural identity have been studied for the member countries of the EU-15. These reactions are ambivalent. In a comprehensive study, a "tolerance typology"<sup>3</sup> reveals four different attitudes towards minority groups. They show the basic patterns of dealing with diversity:

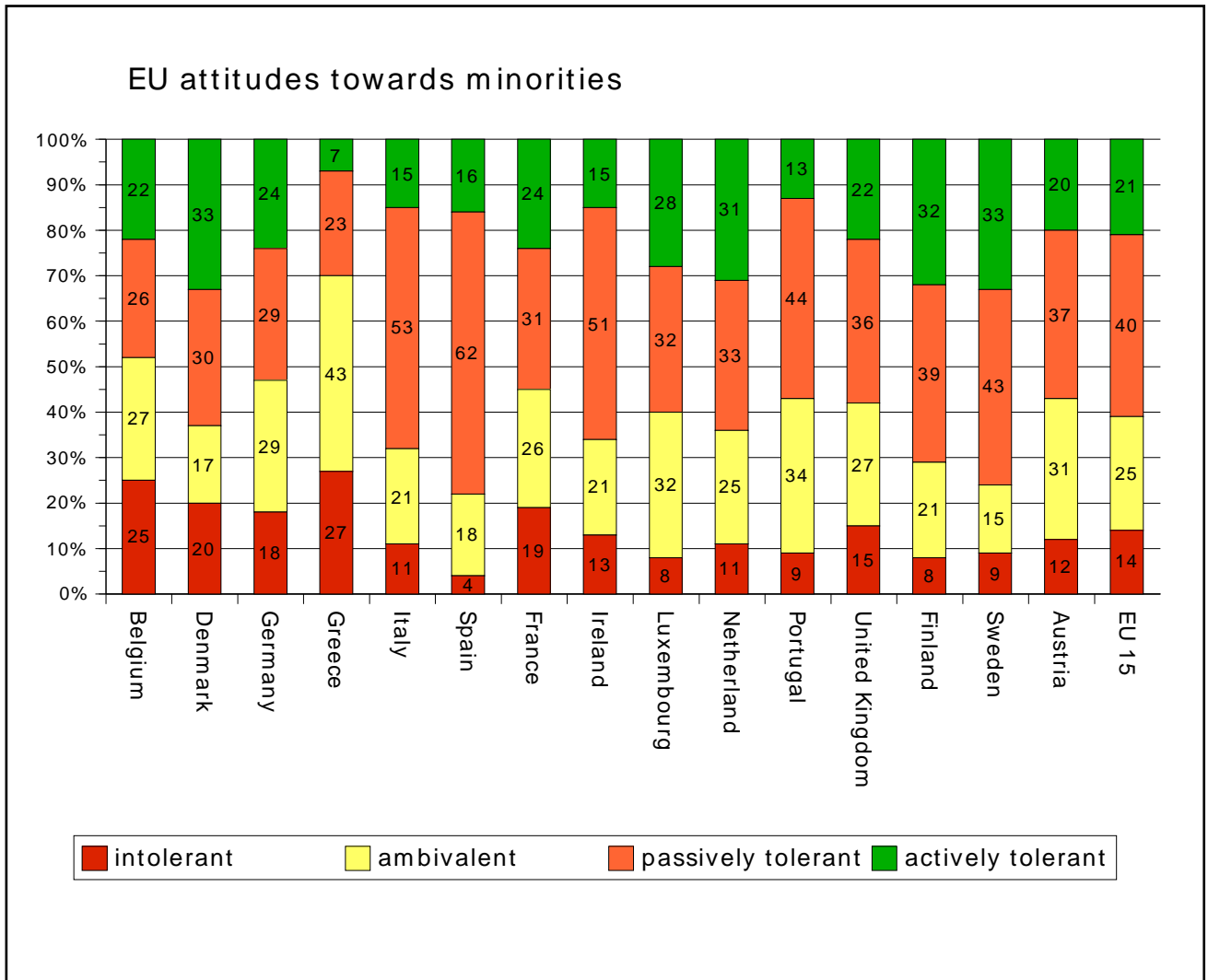
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<sup>1</sup> Suessmuth / Weidenfeld. "Challenge Integration" in *Managing Integration* (CD-ROM), 2004: p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Bauboeck. "Civic Citizenship" in *Managing Integration* (CD-Rom), 2004: p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> SORA. *Attitudes towards minorities in the European Union*. 2002: p. 24.

- Actively tolerant - minority groups are regarded as having an enriching and positive influence on society. Assimilation of culture is not favoured, and active policies of integration are supported.
- Passively tolerant – minority groups are welcomed insofar as they can enrich society, but they should not be actively supported. A restricted acceptance and the attitude of laissez-faire predominate.
- Ambivalent – minority groups make no substantial contribution to society and should be assimilated into the majority society, yet they do not disturb majority society in any problematic way.
- Intolerant – Minority groups are a source of disturbance and have no positive effects on society. Limited access, assimilation and repatriation are necessary measures to be taken.



Typology of attitudes of people in the EU towards minority groups.

Differences of 6 % and more are statistically significant

(SORA. *Attitudes towards minorities in the European Union*. 2002: p. 24)

While there is a significant minority of 14 % being intolerant and 21 % actively tolerant, almost 2/3 of the EU population are uncertain about the chances and risks of diversity. There are greater amounts of freedom found in society, politics and the economy that are appreciated. Options for individual, social, political and economic opportunities are increasingly accessible. But plurality not only opens up choices, it also forces choices upon individuals and societies. This can lead to stress and the inability to design the future proactively. Tensions and conflicts resulting from plurality are met by reactions trying to prevent them instead of embracing the opportunities they offer. A defence of a once established or chosen identity as an act of self-assurance bears a variety of dangers. It can, for instance, result in the cutting off of every channel of communication between two parties. Action is needed to strengthen those factors leading to actively tolerant attitudes that shape a pluralistic society. Even more importantly, measures have to be taken to show the majority of Europeans in the EU how the uncertainty concerning pluralistic societies can be converted into creative opportunities for living "harmony in difference".

## **2. Tolerance**

What holds pluralistic societies together? Are today's societies destined to fall apart, leaving only isolated individuals behind? There is no question that to be able to function at all, pluralistic societies must rely on people with a sense of community. These people must trust one another and the welfare of the community. This involvement in social affairs is essential to social cohesion within a pluralistic society. Tolerance is a key concept and basic value aimed at using the positive effects of plurality and dealing with conflicts in a creative way. Tolerance can be comprehended as a procedural framework to actively convert the risks of diversity into opportunities for all.

Historically, tolerance has come to prominence in Europe as an emergency concept to settle religious differences in view of the Reformation and to end the bloodshed of religious wars. The toleration of religious beliefs was regarded as a prerequisite for peace. The Enlightenment secularised and individualized the notion of tolerance and universalised it by using it as a claim of the freedom of conscience. The American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution derive their ideas from this concept of tolerance. Today, tolerance can be comprehended as an ethical framework for dealing with diversity. Tolerance is a mediator between identity and difference. It is the pre-condition for the establishment of new values, norms and identities that can no longer simply be derived from tradition.

### **A modern concept of tolerance**

Tolerance must not be misunderstood as an expression of indifference or *laissez faire*. If no confrontation with otherness occurs, tolerance loses its essential meaning as a frame for integrating difference and becomes irrelevant in its productive function. Tolerance as an active concept requires an

interaction with others. It becomes relevant only in cases where there are conflicting differences between individuals, groups, ideas and structures. Tolerance is not substantially normative in dealing with difference. It must not be confused with a call for charity, solidarity or appreciation. It does not want to assimilate or eliminate difference but negotiate it for the development of new values and visions. Tolerance is a core value of pluralistic societies that enables it to establish an interaction between and integration of a great variety of cultures and opinions.

Tolerance is motivated by recognition of the equal right to freedom. Individuals and groups compete for acceptance and resources in pluralistic societies. A fundamental rule of dealing democratically with difference is that everybody has the same right to develop his or her abilities to the fullest extent. The recognition of this right is fundamental and establishes the basis for tolerance. An essential precondition for achieving this goal is the creation of a successful communication process that assumes equal access for participation. Participation requires a stable sense of identity of the conflicting parties. Strong identity helps acknowledge 'otherness' without sensing that one's own foundation is being shaken or that one must give up one's rights. Also, participation needs an equal footing in terms of access to resources, power and status. Provisions have to be taken to assure that in the event of conflict minorities are respected and have an equal opportunity to articulate and negotiate their perspectives.

In summary, tolerance as a modern concept is a maxim that is based on the following three criteria:

- Precondition: The issue of tolerance is only raised in situations of conflict where values or norms are questioned, violated or confronted.
- Procedure: Tolerance is marked by the absence of violence in negotiating a case of conflict. This non-violence can be unilateral or be shared by both sides.
- Motivation: An equal right to freedom is essential for tolerance, granting individuals and groups the same right to develop their abilities to the fullest extent.

Tolerance is a common basis of understanding that can be established before a common meaning of certain values is agreed upon. The consequence is an active involvement of individuals, political institutions, businesses and artists to negotiate differences and find a framework for a basis of living together in a pluralistic society. The diversity reached in this way is not predetermined or static; rather, it is actively negotiated, shared and ever changing.

### **Goals of tolerance in pluralistic societies**

Tolerance in democratic and pluralistic societies has four basic goals:

- Fostering social integration and cohesion as the foundation for any democratic system,
- Legitimising democratic systems by developing a comprehensive culture for dealing creatively with conflicts,

- Ensuring the system of checks and balances as a democratic principle for the whole of society,
- Creating, increasing and defending respect for difference and diversity.

Taken together, these goals increase the security of pluralistic societies while at the same time keeping a spirit of openness for new ideas, values and visions. They must be pursued together in order for tolerance to be a comprehensive guideline for democratic interaction, neither merely celebrating difference nor misunderstanding integration as a glossing over of conflicts.

### **Limits of tolerance**

Tolerance has its limits. This holds true even if it is not a normative concept itself. Actions aimed at undermining the basic rights or human rights of all people cannot be counteracted by tolerance but only by the monopoly of power of the state. In this case, the state has to take intolerant action in order to secure the greater good of a culture of tolerance that provides for freedom and creativity. Tolerance needs the basic willingness to engage in dialogue as well as a foundation of guaranteed rights as a basis for negotiating values. If both are neglected, the limit of tolerance is reached.

Violent actions against individuals, groups or states need to be countered by standing up for the basic values of democracy. Civil courage is needed in the name of defending freedom when the non-violent principle of tolerance is undermined. Sharp social, legal and power imbalances between conflicting groups must be met by supportive and affirmative actions of the state in order to ensure that tolerance does not become a repressive means of the majority to dominate the minority.

### **3. Fields of conflict and the responses of tolerance**

Where do we find this modern concept of tolerance today? The following chapters identify varieties of tolerance in politics, business and the arts. In each case, there are specific challenges ahead with regard to dealing with identity and diversity.

#### **Politics: Chances of a European Policy of Integration**

The EU is confronted with tolerance on many levels. The raising of awareness for issues such as anti-discrimination, the right to religious freedom and gender equality are only a few examples that demonstrate the multi-level engagement of the term "tolerance" in the multi-national European framework. The EU defines itself as an open system that has to find a way to manage the balance between the host society and immigrants. Therefore, the question of the development of a common European immigration and integration policy is a question about the values and norms of its future. There is no doubt that no single country can manage migration and integration through unilateral policies. Nevertheless, immigration as an integral part of social and economic reality is often not yet accepted as such. Instead short-lived reactive measures with an emphasis on control predominate.

A shift from defensive and control-centred politics to a future-oriented approach is needed. **If social division is to be avoided, integration and negotiation processes characterised by tolerance and a more proactive stance have to be adopted.** A central issue in the enlarged European Union is how to successfully organize pluralistic, open societies with growing multicultural and multinational elements. The focus of activities and measures will be on the European Union, keeping in mind that the issue of integration and tolerance is one for the continent of Europe as a whole and even beyond.

A recent poll commissioned by the European Commission on politics of integration in the member countries (EU 15) identified four **basic elements for successful integration**<sup>4</sup>:

- respect for fundamental values in democratic societies
- the right to maintain one's own cultural identity
- rights comparable to those of EU citizens and corresponding obligations
- active participation in all aspects of life on an equal footing (economic, social, cultural, political, civil)

In order to foster this framework under which the concept of tolerance in the context of integration can come into effect, the European Union has introduced the idea of a **"civil citizenship"** (Tampere conclusions 1999) for third-country residents. The EU defines itself as a community of citizens. Civil citizenship offers a common baseline of rights and obligations shared by all residents in the Union irrespective of nationality. Participation on the local level should be fostered since it is in local contexts that integration occurs – integration courses can prepare immigrants as well as majority society for this task: economic and social rights, access to social security, legal and political rights as well as consultative structures are part and parcel of civil citizenship. Public agreement on the political participation of minority groups ranges from 11 % to 40 % across EU countries<sup>5</sup>. This enormous variance in figures reflects the diversity of integration policies and approaches.

A European civil citizenship could provide a secure and common basis for all residents of the European Union. It is an important tool for integration and for fostering social cohesion. The notion of civil citizenship is conceivable only on the basis of some common understanding of what it means to be European. The latest Eurobarometer showed that currently 58 % of citizens of the EU feel very or fairly attached to Europe as a whole, and 61 % feel very or fairly proud of being European. 44 % have a very or fairly positive image of Europe. Integration needs a stabilized sense of a common European identity so that diversity is not met by insecurity and subsequent rejection.

On the level of the European Union, this is happening through the new European Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. They are tools for the establishment of a European identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Urth. "Draft synthesis report on policies concerning the integration of immigrants (MIGRAPOL 21)" in *Managing Integration*, 2004: p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> SORA. *Attitudes towards minorities in the European Union*. 2002: p. 30.

These instruments cannot and should not replace negotiation processes on other political and societal levels. As the experience of the United States shows, courts are increasingly appealed to for regulating discrimination cases. In many appeals, courts are handing the cases back to lower levels of politics. In this way they ensure that they are not establishing new normative value-systems; instead they maintain the framework for an unfolding of negotiations in social interaction. The principle of subsidiarity brings issues of tolerance closer to the citizens and creates awareness for the importance of tolerant procedures instead of static norms. The European Constitution and the European Court should only maintain a facilitative function – they are the last resort when it comes to the assessment and implementation of tolerance. Local integration policies that build on an active interaction between immigrants and local society must be given the highest priority. Local governmental bodies must be given more instruments and sufficient room to act in ways suitable to the local community. New means of participation for migrant communities, the building of bridges between different cultures and the negotiation of a common understanding of a democratic, pluralistic society have to be fostered. The educational system comprising pre-school, school and out-of-school approaches has a crucial role in building up social competencies in this context. Communication skills, civic education and dealing with prejudice and discrimination are topics to be pursued on this level.

### **Business: The advantage of diversity**

Tolerance allows the individual to develop one's abilities to the fullest extent. The business community went through various stages to assimilate different groups of society into its realm and to address the diverse needs of employees. Today it is common knowledge in business that people shape an enterprise and its success. This is why a creative and productive workplace must be one that is free of prejudice and any kind of discrimination.

The process of integrating people with various ethnic, religious, social backgrounds, as well as older employees, in a corporation is called diversity management. That this concept of human resource management has not always been a given is shown by the way women were integrated into the workforce in Western cultures after World War II:

- Equal opportunity for women – actions taken to ensure that women could also become part of the workforce. Especially, equal access to education has developed in this phase;
- Interaction of private life and work – actions taken to account for the formal and increasingly practical equality of men and women being able to share burdens of educating children;
- Management of diversity – accepting the actuality of a diversified workforce. Negotiating the respective needs concerning the various dimensions of diversity such as religion, age, education and ethnic origin.

A tolerant **interaction of family and workplace** on an equal footing can lead to motivation, identification and a higher participation in the company's concerns as well as increased health. In the



same light, the company benefits from people taking responsibility in their family life, being endowed with higher social competence than singles and, especially, using the qualifications of women wanting to combine job and family. A representative study amongst middle-sized companies in Germany suggests an increase in revenue of more than 25% if costs and benefits regarding new offers aimed at better integration of workplace and family (Project Balance: PROGNOSE AG, p.16). Last but not least, the state gains by increased tax revenues and a highly motivated young generation passing on their good experiences to their children. Concrete results of such a creative negotiation between family and job lead to higher returns after the parenthood phase, an earlier return to work after having children and the acceptance of a greater workload after returning to one's job.

Societal effects on the whole are a higher legitimacy of corporations taking on social responsibility. Social stability is one of the results of a good balance between family and work and should therefore be supported by the public sector. Social stability is in this sense not static, but oriented to the necessities of a plurality.

**Managing diversity** is an even more general extension of the topic of work-life balance: plurality as such has come to be taken as the key to success: employees from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are no longer seen strictly in terms of their professional contribution to the company. Dimensions of diversity such as age, education and ethnic origin are consciously taken into account in negotiating the requirements of companies and their employees. The focus on various dimensions of diversity also prevents the fixation of individuals according to one criterion of identity only – such as family. An all-too-linear call for diversity can lead to a reproduction of oppression or a zoo-like exhibition of difference. One criterion might be marked as "normal" or "successful", while others are underprivileged. In this approach, each individual comprises a variety of layers of identity, which are sometimes even in internal tension. Harnessing the collective genius of people – tolerance for individual ways of doing things, for planning and structuring work, can lead to unforeseen solutions in companies and satisfy the sense of personal responsibility of employees. Diversity training instead of affirmative action helps employees from diverse backgrounds to work together.

The concept of diversity management is widely discussed especially among multinational corporations. For them this concept comes naturally since they have employees and customers from all around the world and all walks of life. For the issue of tolerance to become a framework in business, it must not be limited to these multinationals and to the managerial elite, who are able to easily communicate in most international contexts. Especially small and mid-sized businesses must consider a more diverse population within their own local community as an opportunity. Corporate social responsibility can be one way of providing such a link between a company and the life of its employees. In this sense, entrepreneurs and managers can do a lot to foster tolerance in their organizations. Valuing diversity is not easy since it means mediating between different expectations and norms over and over again. Still, in the end it will lead to organizations which will use the diversity of their staff as a resource for creating benefits both socially as well as economically.

## **The arts: Sensitising for appreciation**

The arts have a unique opportunity to overtly advocate tolerance. Initiatives aimed at enhancing music, painting and writing on the topic have been widely popular during the past few decades. Musicians, painters and authors are taking a stand in favour of pluralistic societies, celebrating difference. These actions have impacts on social, economic and political visions of how tolerant coexistence can be achieved. They are models for successful integration of difference into identity.

Yet, more importantly, the arts themselves are dealing with the issue of tolerance in their very structure. The arts reside in a triangle of tensions and conflicts, offering the chance of expressing tolerance uniquely in a coherent and creative way:

- the established tradition – the acquired canon of forms, genres and works of the past
- present challenges – contemporary modes of thought and world-views impacting on the arts
- public acceptance – reception of the arts according to the appreciation or rejection by their target groups

The arts can be seen as a field of experimentation on which plurality and identity are brought into a fruitful exchange with showing the respective consequences by stressing one or the other.

The **established tradition** comprises different aspects and derives in Europe mainly from Greco-Roman origins as well as the Judeo-Christian tradition: firstly, genres such as writing, dance, music and painting can be counted as relevant. Within these genres various forms, for example novel, ballet, symphony and portraiture, have come to form specific identities with a range of varieties that are still present today. Secondly, craftsmanship has become an important element of the arts across various genres. The way of building instruments, of constructing a novel and of knowing how to handle colours have formed the establishment of an apprenticeship and educational tradition with specific access requirements and institutionalisation.

The established tradition had been put into question by challenges of the Reformation, societal change and technical development. Today **present challenges** confront the arts in a more radical way than ever: the plurality of society, the technical presence of the tradition via modern means of communication and the absence of any closed religious or philosophical framework make for an upheaval of the self-understanding and certainty of the arts. Dissolution of genres, forms and craftsmanship has been one of the possible answers that could be observed in the early second half of the last century in Europe. The identity of the arts was dissolved, and plurality, without wanting to appeal to tradition, was one consequence. In this sense, the arts demonstrated what on a political, economical and societal level has not been realized in such a radical way.

At present, the interaction between past and present is one that frequently attempts to use parts of the

forms or canon of the established tradition and put them into a new context which is closer to present societal, political and economical developments. In this way, a more fruitful interaction between the identity of the arts and the plurality of the present is possible and offers the creation of new visions and insights into our present condition. Post-modern approaches of citing the tradition as well as utilising traditional craftsmanship for very different genres can be observed.

In the best cases, the arts, in their negotiation of tradition and challenges of plurality, offer a role model for tolerance in that they show a democratic interaction between identity and plurality, finding new and creative ways of offering future perspectives.

Take **intercultural exchange** as an example. Despite the paradigmatic changes in the global situation, intercultural exchange is still dominated by what one might call the shopping basket model: adding cultural ready-mades that are exhibited abroad to the shopping basket and then considering them as representations of a given culture. This approach of the 19th century is a model in which cultures could be easily appropriated, where cultures could be seen as the exotic other. Today, more and more curators are trying to translate other cultures by striving for an exchange of processes rather than an exchange of products. In other words, they are trying to involve the participation of artists and public from various backgrounds in the creation and perception of cultural exchange. The starting point for a process exchange is the growing encouragement of joint productions – whether artistic or curatorial, bilateral or, even better, multilateral. The arts then become demonstrations of a lively interaction that shows sources and challenges of conflict, but also demonstrates their potential for new solutions.

The arts are trans-national and intercultural in the sense that they have abandoned their national definition of the nineteenth century. Similar to the increased relevance of larger political and economic networks, the arts present a perspective that integrates human beings as such. **A sensitisation for the appreciation of difference while maintaining a sense of identity is what the arts are able to demonstrate comprehensively.** The arts do not reconcile difference, but demonstrate the brokenness of the plural world while at the same time putting this into a general context. Audiences then have the chance to derive examples of how to live more creatively and coherently within the tensions they face in their lives.

Concerning their role with regard to models of tolerance, the arts become vital not only in their works and products but also as concrete individuals living the tensions described above. Numerous artists have within their own lives the tensions and conflicts between established tradition, present challenges and the need for public acceptance. They have found individual and unique answers and have gone through remarkable development. They can be regarded as messengers of tolerance as they find themselves in a continuous process of establishing a balance between identity and difference. The answers they have found in the arts are often reflected back to their social and political involvement in the present world and provide new answers to existing conflicts. Outstanding messengers of tolerance should be used more extensively to foster a dialogue between politics, economy and the arts.

#### **4. Benefiting from the common heritage – strengthening tolerance for the wider Europe**

Europe provides us with the unique chance of using the creative potential of the cultural, economic and political sectors in a very diverse geographical area. There is high potential for converting difference into a pluralistic stability by fostering frameworks of tolerance in which fruitful interactions are possible. The European Union as a comprehensive project has the potential of realizing tolerance. The EU is often still associated with the regulation of technical and systematic problems. There are mechanisms for regulating trade and international law, political intervention and financial markets. The mechanisms for cultural exchange and the ability to know and understand the value systems of others are still not widely recognized.

The following steps should be on the **agenda** for the coming years:

- **Intensifying intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue must be accessible to as many parts of European society as possible. It must be construed as the mutual exchange of culture in its broadest sense, one which extends to the total set of value systems. These exchanges can be conversations, co-operative projects or artistic works. This leads to the creation of terms, symbols and metaphors for a world of diversity and the identification of common values.

- **Establishing a pluralistic European identity**

The new European Constitution should be understood as a chance to promote a sense of 'Europeanness' even more widely. The European Constitution will be a point of departure for developing step by step a European model based on a European identity. This identity should be one that values tolerance as a fundamental principle.

- **Opening up to the world's cultures**

There needs to be a deeper, more reflective understanding of the birth of a European identity and what the fact that the EU is based on western principles means. In a world characterized by globalisation, we can use our European experience to work more closely together with Asia, Africa and Latin America and avoid isolationism. This will allow people to value diversity not only within Europe but also to develop a deeper understanding of global intercultural differences and how they can be overcome.

- **Integrating business and society**

Companies around the world have a wealth of experience with regard to how diversity can become profitable. As part of their overall social responsibility, this experience should be systematically exchanged with stakeholders from politics and civil society. In this way a more flexible handling of the relationship between work and private life will be achieved. Society as a whole will realize the productive potential of diversity in local contexts.

- **Strengthening the arts as a role model**

The arts are a laboratory for tolerance. They are able to explore different scenarios of how identity and difference can be balanced. They have the chance to travel radical paths and to demonstrate in their works the opportunities and consequences of a pluralistic society. The arts are inspirational and offer a vision for pluralistic societies which at the same time increases security and safety beyond state mechanisms. This will enhance the prospects for European and global civil society being able to responsibly deal with its own affairs.