

NATIVE REALM, EUROPE OF BRIDGES

Intercultural Integration Workshops

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East Poland House

- 1. The challenge:** European Union cohesion and community-formation in the European society.
- 2. The idea:** The stagnation, if not crisis, in the deepening of the European integration process can be observed on the international level of the Members and it manifests itself in such phenomena as the crisis of European institutions. This overlaps with a deeper phenomenon – the crisis of multicultural society, leading to the strengthening of the division lines within society. This is accompanied by increasing cultural tensions and integration difficulties experienced by immigrants. Europe is beginning to resemble an archipelago of separate cultures. In view of this, “Native Realm”, a book and vision of Czesław Miłosz, reconstructing the community European identity on the post-war ruins, becomes a highly topical issue once again. For Miłosz this is a problem of a Central European’s being rooted in the common European heritage, sparse knowledge of the eastern part of the Continent in the West and the demolition of the Cold War wall. Today the East-West dialog and rapprochement are much more advanced, yet a lot remains to be done in this domain. A much more important problem, however, seems to be the community character of Europe as a whole, all the Europeans’ feeling at home in the new Europe, their intercultural competences permitting them to live together in a world of open borders, people’s migration and establishment of new cultural borderlands. To set this process in actual motion, it is necessary to take actions which can be jointly called “The Europe of Bridges”. It is not only about the advanced process of opening the borders and removing the barriers. It is about something more – the next step necessary in the integration process – merging, unobstructed flow, communication, establishment of a community without denying the *raison d’être* of any of the “banks” that the bridge joins (to say even more: they are necessary for its existence). The bridge has something really concrete and solid about it. To build it in today’s realities, a new competence is needed, which means that we would have to set up European workshops of intercultural craft, assisting in the establishment of institutions and long-term ventures in the difficult European borderland, educating the staff for these ventures, etc. As regards “Native Realm, Europe of Bridges”, this would be about a new strategy which no longer is just opening up nor is based only on one-off and short-lived events, but forms the “connective tissue” of Europe (Miłosz’ expression) on the basis of new tools and forms, such as intercultural competence, specialized institutions to form and implement it and a network of initiatives operating in specific communities, where the absence of a bridge results in the deepening of inner borders.

- 3. The Priority:** culture and education for “Native Realm, Europe of Bridges”. This obviously is just one of the possible priorities which may crystallize. The coupling of culture and education with building up the community of the European society is not obvious at all. The multiculturalism crisis is also caused by the fact that both culture and education are unable to keep up with the dynamics of changes and cultural tensions in Europe. There is a shortage of schools, methods and tools to create modern intercultural competence. The “multi-culti” model, popularized in Europe – which is only a “festive”, and so event-like and representative meeting of cultures – turned out to be too superficial and poor in terms of outlook. For similar reasons, Europeans more and more often react with irritation, or at least distance, to projects organized under the slogan of “intercultural dialog”. Europe badly needs a new movement, precisely a movement – similar to the human rights movement – defending in the new century not only the rights of others, but also the communing – and living – with others. Now it is time to start European debate on the new approach to intercultural competence in education and culture. This debate should generate critical reflection on the past decades, which have led to the crisis (the constant lack of such an approach in Europe prevents actual implementation of the changes which are seen by so many people as necessary today), a new vision of the cultural integration of Europe created thanks to the participation of outstanding European and non-European humanists and politicians, specific initiatives and undertakings to practically start a new phase in the development of “Native Realm”.
- 4. East Poland for Europe:** the European dimension of the Polish traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism. By becoming involved in one of the greatest challenges of contemporary Europe, that is the increasing cultural tensions and the need to develop a new intercultural competence, the regions of East Poland get a chance to present in the European forum their multicultural heritage, Jagiellonian federation traditions and the extraordinary achievements of socio-cultural communities in the long-term effort of building good neighbourly relations with the nations separated from us by wars, prejudices and totalitarianisms. These traditions still are not sufficiently known in Europe. First of all, however, they provide East Poland with excellent legitimization of this particular formulation of one of the priorities of its presence in the EU.
- 5. EU for the world:** the initiation by the EU of the movement for community-formation in multicultural societies affects the most significant challenges that other parts of the world are also facing today. The new intercultural competence project responds to the real needs of societies living in the post-modern, post-industrial or post-colonial world and it will undoubtedly make it possible to create a network of co-operation between the EU and other parts of the world.