By Dialogue
Against Hate

In public discourse, "dialogue" used to be understood as a polite form of communication, exchange of views, consultation, "patient" negotiations and deliberations. These sorts of "dialogue" aim to discuss societal challenges, handle conflict situations and in many cases, arrive at compromises. These structures, instances and modes of communication are organic elements of societies featured by share of power and inclusion.

But little known is that there is a specific mode of communication in "dialogue" which is aimed at addressing identity-based conflict situations, transforming hostile human relations appearing irreconcilable into peaceful coexistence and laying down the foundations for mutual respect, equality, trust and cooperation. This sort of communication targets prejudices, stereotypes, helps better understand the perspective of the 'other' and find common perspectives that may lead, over time, to some compromises. During the process of "dialogue", the participants patiently listen and hear that means attempts to understand the "other".

"Dialogue", its spirit and culture facilitate cooperation with the 'other' and promote cohesion and peace in the society, whilst allow for the pursuit of 'our' values and interests. Hence, dialogue represents an alternative to identity politics which is based on 'us-versus-them' set up, group enmity, exclusion, stigmatization, enemy-making and hatred. The better are the capabilities of social actors to engage in dialogue with each other, the greater are the chances to arrive at sustainable solutions for societal challenges which combine both the values and interests of the widest range of social actors. That approach strengthens social stability, at the same time, weakens hatred and division. This is the direction in which, in my view, democratic thinking, democratic practice and social skills must be developed.

The institution of 'national dialogues' is well known for the international community, particularly in developing countries. After civil wars and mass atrocities, national dialogues with a wide range of actors, including government and opposition politicians, economic, social and civil society organizations used to be convened to help processing the pain, promoting reconciliation,

facilitating peaceful social transitions and preventing further tragedies. The culture of dialogue is also embedded in the daily life of many 'Western' democracies.

Globalization has generated and amplified identity-based conflict situations. Let us think about the challenges of migration, climate change, online communication or the pandemic recently. Similarly, the conflicts over the issues of ideologies, religions, ethnics, nations, sovereignty and universal human rights have forged ahead and sharpened, exacerbated the human relations in many places. For the last few years, tensions and hatred have been in rise and undermined the cohesion of societies which is, as we do know, a basic precondition for progress and development. One of the challenges of the next decades is how the peaceful coexistence between different identities could be reached. "Dialogue" looks as an appropriate tool for addressing these challenges. Therefore, the longer it takes to plant and disseminate the culture and practice of "dialogue" the higher the level of hatred and the risk of violence will be and the more 'expensive' it will be to find peaceful solutions for identity-based conflict situations.

A significant part of the population and politicians consider the values of patience, tolerance and respect for the views of the 'other' which are "requisites" of dialogue, and the relatively slow outcomes of "dialogue" as weakness, hesitation, chaos, limited capacity or in worst cases, total incapacity for action. The dialogue mode is often contra positioned to the speed and effectiveness of monopolistic-dictatorial mode. Unfortunately, however, in comparing the two approaches it is ignored that, while dialogue generates societal peace, the latter accumulates tensions and conflicts, leads to social crisis and extremism.

In Hungary, in the years 1989-90 the change of the one-party system took place through the negotiations of the "oppositional round table" which resulted in an agreement on a common perspective. Some practitioners characterize these negotiations as a sort of "dialogue" that I share partly only. Indeed, the consensus achieved by the round table ensured relative social peace for about ten years. However, it has not transformed in merit the human relations in the society where prejudice, stereotypies, discrimination, altogether the preconditions of hatred have remained latent and flared up time by time.

Over the next two decades, social cohesion gradually eroded. The "Hungarian anathema" took hold: division, discord, hostility, hatred and unilateral assertion of will. As early as 2002, Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy spoke of the need to "fill in the trenches". Since then, the trenches have become gaps. Society is divided. The tone of hatred prevails. The process is likely to intensify till next spring's parliamentary elections. Many predict it will continue even after the elections. This trend leads to extremism and violence. It may even result in tragedy.

This may not happen! The political class, both leaders and their loyalists have particular historical responsibility to stop the process of hatred and prevent a looming national tragedy.

Following a possible electoral victory, today's opposition can demonstrate its will and capacity to institutionalize dialogue, launch reconciliation and thus restore social peace. The planned constitutional process could offer a good opportunity to do so. However, the widest range of social actors including the representatives of the present ruling parties must also be involved in the

process. Otherwise, the desire for a revenge and the radicalizing rhetoric will remain in tailwind, keep on fueling polarization and hatred, conflict, with all its risks.

It is not those representing "different", "other", horribile dictu "extreme" views who should be excluded from this dialogue and the shape of social processes, but those who incite hatred and conflict, those who oppose collaboration with the "others"!

I am aware that for many, the concept of "dialogue" is a naive, illusory and vain dream. Many feel that the engagement in dialogue with the "other" can undermine the representation and pursuit of 'our' values and the hard-won unity of "our" camp. Certainly, the process of dialogue is fraught with pitfalls, bitterness and failures that are not yet foreseeable. Definitely, the road leading to social peace and progress is bumpy.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that dialogue is the only way to halt and eliminate the growing trend of hatred, rebuild social peace and cohesion and put an end to the historical factionalism in Hungary.

Dissemination of the culture of dialogue, formation of physical and legal "safe spaces" for dialogue and development of dialogue skills are of strategic significance and constitute cornerstones of the national interests in Hungary.

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