

Initiative

“Institutionalization of Dialogue”

Summary

The new world is marked by global challenges, competition, and increasing violent conflicts. Managing societal changes, extreme views, inequalities, and fostering social cohesion is critical, especially in the digital age of amplified polarization and radicalization.

To address these issues, we need systemic tools to enhance multilateral diplomacy and national decision-making, respecting the diverse values of all groups. Dialogue, both a communication technique and life attitude, bridges controversies, prepares for complex issues, and improves hostile relations by exploring the motivations behind opposing views. It builds trust, turns polarization into creative tension, and fosters a culture of understanding and peace.

Despite progress, a gap remains between ambition and practice in integrating dialogue into decision-making. There is a growing need for systematic, structured dialogue at international and national levels to manage conflicts effectively.

This initiative proposes stronger institutionalization of dialogue by integrating dedicated structures into decision-making mechanisms and building capacities related to the culture of dialogue in education and society. "Dialogue Rooms" in multilateral institutions and national governance will involve experts representing diverse values, free from political mandates, to investigate societal challenges and prepare recommendations.

An "Alliance for Dialogue" will be established to promote dialogue culture, support institutionalization, pool resources, build capacities, and include dialogue in education and research.

This initiative supports the UN's "Our Common Agenda" and "New Agenda for Peace," UNESCO's "Intercultural Dialogue," and the Club de Madrid's "Shared Societies" concept.

Challenges in international affairs

The post-Cold War era and unipolarity are over. The rising new world brings a wide variety of values in the forefront of international relations and increases the risks of conflicts and wars. There are more wars (including intrastate wars) happening now than at any time since the Second World War. The peaceful shaping of the new world order, growing competition and rivalry, the emerging global challenges to be faced by humanity and addressed by the United Nations' "Our Common Agenda"¹ and the "New Agenda for Peace"² demand the systemic application of tools to boost multilateral diplomacy and improve the multilateral decision-making mechanisms with the view to take account of the diverse values of all actors, including the new poles of influence. That will assist the international community in sustainably responding to the security threats and preventing escalation of conflict situations.

Challenges in societal affairs

Regardless of social systems, the toolkits of states and decision-making mechanisms in place are not sufficient to sustainably manage complex societal transformations, halt and prevent polarization, respond to tensions emerging inevitably in the course of societal developments and rising inequalities.

Further efforts are required to effectively handle differences and extreme views, address adverse sentiments, support cohesion, trust and peace in societies, and improve understanding between citizens with conflicting values.

Further social arrangements and education policies are necessary to improve capabilities within population, including youth to enhance skills of dialogue, also in tense situations, and build up inclusive societies despite division of identities.

Dialogue

"Dialogue" is a specific communication technique used to handle complex issues which likely generate friction, sometimes even hatred, polarize communities, undermine cohesion and may potentially lead to radicalization and extremism.

"Dialogue" always promotes personal relationships and creates more trust through share of thoughts and experiences, which leads to a better understanding of oneself and of the other, even and especially when these experiences do not immediately correspond but reflect different walks of life.

"Dialogue" may help to bridge controversies and establish communication links, explore the objective core and motivations of the views represented by diverse and conflicting identities, the background of adverse sentiments and improve hostile human relations.

¹ https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

² <https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace>

“Dialogue” is a process consisting of numerous “dialogue events” which lead to a peaceful environment and co-habitation, and prepare the soil for constructive negotiations to find sustainable solutions of complex problems when the conflict of identities fails to reach consensus.

“Dialogue” helps communicating different perspectives and thus build shared understanding and shared society!

“Dialogue” is a tool to respond to early warning signs and prevent violent conflicts and toxic polarization!

“Dialogue” is available in the toolkit but for strengthening a resilient culture of multilateralism and addressing national challenges it should be applied systematically, properly and early enough!

There are enormous costs of not pursuing and cultivating “dialogue”!

Not all polite and peaceful communication is “dialogue”!

“Dialogue” is neither a panacea nor a quick fix!

Strengthening Mechanisms and Interaction for Institutionalized Dialogue

There have been made notable efforts for enhancing the culture and practice of integrating dialogue into processes and initiatives within multilateral and international institutions. For example, the Single European Act (Article 118b) allowing for the ‘Community-wide social dialogue’, the Social Dialogue Committee (SDC), the Lisbon Treaty and the Porto Social Commitment, the “Shared Society” have emphasized the key role of social dialogue.

Despite the achievements, there is still a gap between ambition and practice. Dialogues are initiated and conducted randomly, on an ad hoc basis at both international and national levels. There is a growing demand of structured dialogue between institutions-governments and civil society as well as between groups of society. Moreover, where there is limited, or no practice or methods of dialogue, there is a significant risk that controversies can get out of hand and escalate resulting in further instability and conflict. Development of local dialogue-related capacities at the individual and organizational level is paramount. This includes the training of teachers/trainers (TOT), which is the exception rather than the rule.

Dialogue practitioners act in relative isolation, the international dialogue community is fragmented.

It is suggested to institutionalize dialogue

By “institutionalization” we mean

1. Establishment of a structure for dialogue
2. Inclusion of the structure in the decision making mechanism
3. Setting up rules for running the structure
4. Ensuring adequate resourcing

5. Including dialogue-related issues in national capacity building and education
6. Promoting scientific research on the practice of dialogue

Ad.1.

The possible name of the structure for conducting dialogues: „Dialogue Room”.

“Dialogue Room” is considered as an instrument operating like the “entry hall” for interstate negotiations where unbiased experts free of any governmental mandate

- explore the issues, motivations and backgrounds of official and unofficial views and tensions generated by diverse identities in polarized set up or conflict situation,
- reflect on options for settlement and design shared perspectives and approach across diverse values and identities,
- prepare recommendations for the governmental decisionmakers,
- facilitate greater understanding between official interlocuters.

The structure is a stand alone unit run by a permanent staff which

- organizes the dialogue processes: sets agendas on the basis of early warnings and working programmes of decisionmaking structures,
- identifies and invites both the participants across identities and ideologies and the dialogue facilitators,
- provides the technical conditions necessary for smoothly running the confidential dialogue sessions.

Ad.2.

„Dialogue Room”

- operates in the preparatory phase of the decision making mechanism and governance,
- is attached to the highest forum of decisionmakers,
- provides information and recommendations collected during the dialogue process for the decisionmakers (the dialogue in the „dialogue room” does not aim to reach agreements).

“Dialogue Room” at national level could be attached to different phases and fora of governance in line with the national law.

Ad.3.

The participants of dialogues

- are unbiased experts who are not mandated by any organization or government,
- represent a spectrum of identities and ideologies,
- represent personal views,
- respect diversity, equality and dignity of the individual,
- commit to speak confidentially,
- act under the guidance of dialogue facilitators,

The dialogue process is driven and guided by professional dialogue facilitators who are responsible for running the dialogue and respecting the rules of the dialogue sessions.

Dialogue facilitators participate regularly in the negotiations of the decisionmakers in the capacity of „observers”.

„External” experts of topics could be invited for some sessions.

The sessions are not public.

The summary of dialogue sessions to be submitted to the decisionmakers may be published pending the unanimous agreement of the participants.

Ad.4.

Member States will be invited to allocate dedicated resources for the establishment and operations of the structure.

Ad. 5.

Build up of national dialogue capacities should start from the early stages of national education. Youth should be made systematically familiar with the principles, values and various tools enabling the citizens to address societal challenges and respond to the risks of radicalization and extremism in line with the spirit and culture of dialogue.

In parallel, dedicated national capacitybuilding programmes should be developed and implemented for building up capacities of young activists to enabling them to incorporate dialogue in the national and local decision making mechanisms.

National authorities should be encouraged and supported to elaborate national concepts and dedicate resources for implementation at national level.

Platforms and channels for share of resources and best practices at international level should be established.

Ad. 6.

Promoting scientific research on practices and approaches of dialogue, especially in response to „everyday extremism” and radicalisation, adverse sentiments and group hatred in their various forms with the view to attune and mitigate them by forms of dialogue.³

³ <https://oppattune.eu/>

Establishing an „Alliance for Dialogue”

Institutionalization of dialogue is a long-term process demanding political will, expertise, consistency and persistence. It will, therefore, be established the “Alliance for Dialogue” with the view to create a driving force aimed at

- promoting the “culture of dialogue”,
- integrating dialogue in multilateral and national decision-making mechanisms,
- pooling the dispersed and isolated dialogue activities and resources, and
- improving relevant international and national capabilities.

The “Alliance for Dialogue” will:

- Advocate for and assist in institutionalizing “dialogue” in multilateral diplomacy;
- Advocate for and support the development of decision-making mechanisms at national level which include the institution of “dialogue” to help address complex challenges, manage societal transformations, counter conflictual attitudes and adverse trends, and facilitate building up shared and cohesive societies.
- Advocate for the inclusion of the culture of dialogue and the practice of “soft skills” (listening to each other, encouraging understanding, respect, appreciation for others, thinking together, co-construction of ideas etc.) in national curricula of education and build up capacities of national activists.
- Establish an international network to amplify the voice of the dialogue community and promote the culture of dialogue through
 - sharing knowledge, expertise, experience,
 - enhancing interaction among dialogue facilitators and
 - pooling the available resources in the field of dialogue.

The “Alliance” will start acting on voluntary basis as an open-ended movement composed of civil organizations and practitioners who are dedicated to the culture of dialogue and work with controversies. Over time, pending on the progress, political will and resources, the movement will be transformed into a legal entity.

This initiative seeks to contribute to and complement in particular the implementation of “Our Common Agenda” and the “New Agenda for Peace” launched by the UN Secretary General, the initiative “Intercultural Dialogue⁴” launched by UNESCO and the concept of “Shared Societies⁵” supported by the Club de Madrid.

⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/en>

⁵ <https://clubmadrid.org/work/programmes/shared-societies-project/>