



## **Start of a Dialogue Process**

In the summer of 2021, we embarked on a process which had not taken place in Hungary before, nor, to our knowledge, anywhere else in the world. We have started to find partners for a series of dialogues between young people with “extremist” and “radical” views, on the one hand, and the social groups that are constantly and systematically targeted and harassed, namely LGBTQI, Roma, and Jewish communities, on the other. The aim of the process was to establish a link and facilitate a new form of communication, a dialogue, between them.

In this context, dialogue is understood as a communication where the participants with strongly opposing and conflicting views, with the help of a dialogue facilitator, listen to and learn about each other's views and motivations in a patient and tolerant way, putting aside their prejudices. According to international practice, as a result of dialogue, human relations between the participants change and they start jointly reflecting on how to settle problems that were previously considered as absolutely taboo and where the possibility of cooperation was ruled out in principle.

In international practice, dialogue is a well-known method for preventing extreme and violent conflicts, healing the wounds of tragedies that have already occurred and creating the conditions for lasting reconciliation.

### **What gave us the idea?**

Since 2010, our organization has been working to put into practice the principle of the "responsibility to protect" aimed at preventing extreme crimes such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. To this end, since our inception we have been actively involved in international cooperation.

The point of departure in our activities is that perpetration of extreme crimes is not the result of sudden ideas, but of a long process that starts with discrimination and stigmatization, continues with intimidation, exclusion, and then leads to hate speech punishable by law, and finally to the hate act itself. From the very beginning, the process is accompanied by hate speech, the growth and escalation of hatred and radicalization of the individual or group. Therefore, the key issue in prevention is to halt the process of the growth of hatred as soon as possible. To that end, the most important first step is to identify the objective causes of hatred and understand the subjective, personal motivations.

A significant number of international and domestic social actors see the solution in raising awareness, stepping up risk-mitigating activities - for example, increasing the effectiveness of rhetoric and debate - or even isolating the radicalized individuals, legally restricting their activities or silencing them.

We place the emphasis on education, development of the relevant skills of youth and teachers in handling and countering hatred and we consider dialogue as the main tool for addressing the challenges across controversial values and identities.

In our previous projects aimed at deradicalization, we tried to learn the attitudes, views and positions of young people classified as "radical" and "extreme right-wing" or "extremist" in the Hungarian public

discourse, so that we could apply methods to stop and counter negative trends as purposefully and effectively as possible.

In our informal discussions with some young representatives of the 'far right' we noticed that their views and positions on a number of issues are much less 'militant' and 'extremist' than their public statements manifest. There are objective elements in their arguments, but these are drowned out by their strong and militant rhetoric. Furthermore, it was surprising that they also put themselves in the category of the 'oppressed', of 'minorities', and feel unequal, excluded and marginalized by the majority of the society.

During our communication with the young activists, their typically harsh language, including stigmatization and even demonization, was difficult to listen to, but we temporarily put our objections on the back burner in order to give more chance for dialogue and to get a better insight into the statements later. Throughout the process, we got the impression that they were using harsh rhetoric as a tool to better distinguish themselves from other political actors, gain more public attention and perhaps more support, and recruit members into their communities.

By engaging more closely with the representatives of 'extremist' communities, we felt it was important to offer them the opportunity to also explain their views in more detail and, more importantly, to explore the reasons and motivations behind their values and actions.

During our communication with the 'target groups' of the extremists, the communities that are known in the jargon as 'vulnerable', we also realized that, similarly to the 'extremists', in most cases when they had been exposed to extreme and radical manifestations, almost immediately “labelled” and rejected the content, without trying to objectively explore the motivations and causes, and address the cores of the problems.

Ultimately, it also became clear during the course of our activities that neither side of the conflict parties had in the past attempted to get familiar through personal consultations with the details of the divergent opinions and discuss and negotiate mutually acceptable settlement of the problems. One of the basic reasons for the reluctance was the fear of getting stigmatized by their own community, of being accused of having colluded with the “enemy” or of legitimizing the “enemy” by the pure act of contact.

In more general terms, it could be observed during the past ten years, that the practice of conflict politics has gained space in Hungary, with the rise of hatred and radicalization in the public discourse. The process is moving towards extremism. The tendency towards consensus building and common thinking and joint action is in short supply.

For all these reasons, we decided to show an alternative political attitude and introduce some cooperative spirit and peaceful way of thinking as a possibility for settlement of conflict situations.

## **What did we want to achieve?**

The original aim of the initiative was to connect young people of communities that are considered as “far-right” in the public discourse with those of the 'vulnerable' communities, and to offer them a “safe space” where they could be helped to express their views and opinions on sensitive issues that create high tensions between their communities, sharply divide the entire society, generate hatred, foment hostility and potentially lead to extremism in the society as a whole.

We have started from the premise that dialogue as a tool for preventing conflicts leading to extremism and violence can

- change human relations, create new qualities of human relationships;
- reveal the roots and drivers of hostility and prejudice;
- promote better understanding of each other;
- develop trust, tolerance, respect and empathy;
- help overcome prejudices;
- mitigate and eliminate hatred and incitement from communication;
- reduce fear of the other;
- help identify the factors that strengthen and weaken radicalization;
- promote shared thinking and responsibility;
- shape a common will to strengthen social peace and cohesion;
- contribute to halting trends towards extremism.

We wanted our facilitation to break down barriers in personal relationships and open the way for communication, joint thinking and then joint action. The dialogue series was conceived as the first stage of a multi-year and multi-stage process, in which the knowledge and experience gained could be applied in the next stage, in a more “official and expanded form”. We hoped that at the end of the day the process would reach the point where a formal relationship between the official representatives of the concerned communities could be established, where the communication would be free of hatred and give priority to social peace.

This project also intended to contribute to the international efforts for countering radicalization, hate speech and other negative sentiments that hinder the development and well-being of a society, and to prevent and halt extremism.

The dialogue process sought to present a practical way which may complement and even overwrite the “traditional” methods used in liberal democracies, where mainstream parties as a general rule seek to reduce the influence of “extremists” by isolating, marginalizing and/or proactively countering their communications. In our view, however, the weak point of these activities is that they miss to explore the objective causes of the attitudes, therefore, they prove superficial from the perspective of elaborating long-term solutions.

## **How did we wish to achieve the objectives?**

We developed a specific dialogue methodology which combined known but different methods. It consisted of the following stages:

1. "Indirect dialogue" where we explored and confronted openly and honestly the views and positions of the participants through preparation of separate interviews. We recorded the interviews which were circulated among the participants and we provided the possibility to react to each other in three rounds;
2. "Direct narrative dialogue" where the participants shared face-to-face their personal motivations and experiences ("storytelling") during bilateral meetings which were also recorded and circulated and we provided the possibilities to react to each other as well. This stage consisted of two rounds;

3. “Forward-looking dialogue” which took place in plenary format with the participation of each participant where we stimulated joint reflection on how to move forward and advance the dialogue process.

The separate interviews during the first stage lasted one hour each, the "narrative" bilateral sessions two hours and the plenary sessions three hours. It proved very useful to set a time limit for each event, as that helped to focus on the problems and challenges, at the same time prevented long monologues and repetition of messages. We paid particular attention to ensuring that all participants had an equal opportunity to speak, although this was not always successful.

One of our innovations was the preparation and circulation of video records (with the permission of the participants) on each event that took place. It was agreed that the recordings will never be made public. That ensured “safety” for expressing views and responding to confrontational, provocative and sometimes even offensive communications in an open manner.

The indirect communication during the first phase also provided opportunity for “projection of power” and helped significantly to “let off steam”. At the same time, it prevented, to a certain extent, that during the face-to-face meetings - which mainly aimed to highlight human feelings, emotions and motivations and exploring the commonalities - the participants talk to each other in a confrontational manner. Therefore, the atmosphere and language of the dialogue became soft in the second phase compared to the first phase, and friendly and constructive in the third phase.

The video recordings allowed each member of the community to “actively listen”, “digest” and analyze the statements and attitudes of the partners and develop “best fitting” responses. Sharing the video recordings also allowed participants to follow the communication between the other communities. That helped draw further conclusions and generate new ideas and thoughts. The recordings were also useful from a facilitation point of view, as they allowed us after the sessions to assess what was said, we could also analyze the participants' behavior and messages in a "calm context", formulate our "clarifying questions" and design the follow-up accordingly.

At the end of the project, feedback from the participants indicated that the idea of interviews and the possibility of monologues was not welcomed by everyone at first. From the very beginning, most participants wanted to meet their partners face to face and "jump into the middle" of the dialogue. Later, however, looking back on the whole process, they found the interviews useful and mindful.

As an organic part of the methodology, after the first phase, we informally consulted the participants from the respective communities on their experiences, based on the video recordings, and asked for their views and suggestions. These consultations allowed for a coherent interpretation and clarification of any ambiguous or sensitive points which have emerged during the interviews and strengthened the partnership with the participants in further shaping the dialogue process. It should be stressed that, as organizers of the process, we did not seek to influence any of the parties to change their positions or views. In the first phase, we explicitly encouraged all participants to express their views, clarify positions and react if and when they felt that the messages of the partners were offending.

An important additional element of the method was that all consultations were followed by informal, “coffee sessions” or dinners without cameras though. The informal setting also offered an opportunity - and the participants took advantage of it - to explain their thoughts better to us, and to talk with their partners, even in private, to discuss issues and clarify controversial topics, or even touch on issues relating to their private lives. That has helped to strengthen human relations to a significant extent.

We also see it as an important element of the method that we deliberately did not seek to “sensitize” the participants, and explicitly avoided the appearance of any sort of training. With the view to raising awareness of the substance of the exercise, we have “merely” confined ourselves to presenting the essence of the culture of dialogue and highlighting the differences between debate and dialogue in terms of content, objectives, method and style.

## **How did we prepare the dialogue process?**

The first step in the preparation was to identify and select potential partners.

Recruitment was done in the “far right”, LGBTQI, Roma and Jewish communities through benefitting from our organization's network and personal contacts.

We were looking for individuals who could authentically represent the values of their own communities, while being communicative, psychologically strong, resilient to negative emotions and possible offences, tolerant and flexible. They were also expected to be aware not only of their own community but also of the prevailing views and political conditions in Hungarian society. It was always stressed that participants in the dialogue were taking part in their private capacities and their views should not necessarily reflect those of any political organization.

The recruitment process was complicated by the confidential nature of the project. We were aware, and also raised the awareness of the candidates that establishing contact and trust between traditionally conflicting partners, excluding publicity and ensuring no leaks in the information net was a risky operation. It was further difficult that the project's objectives, including the culture and ethos of dialogue, were novel for the candidates. Dialogue sounds rather illusory, a wishful thinking in Hungary even now, that is why, understandably, the implementation of a dialogue-focused project seemed a pipe dream for many candidates, with a relatively high chance of failure.

During the preparations, we had to demonstrate optimism about the success and the entire implementation, whilst we had to be also honest about the anticipated difficulties, challenges, risks and potential problems, and possibly even the failure. Nor did we hide our uncertainties. Honesty and openness are prerequisites for a good and close partnership with the participants, without which the success of any dialogue series is inconceivable.

Overall, being aware of the trends of hatred and hostility within Hungarian society and recognizing the importance of addressing them, the candidates understood the significance of our initiative and clearly supported its implementation!

After establishing the first contacts, given the outbreak of Covid, we organized online meetings with the candidates where we clarified the conditions, expectations and commitments, agreed on the objectives and details of the project and answered all questions of the partners.

We then signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Confidentiality with all participants. Through that document we sought to ensure their active participation and respect of confidentiality in the course of the process.

## **How did the dialogue process progress?**

The process consisted of a total of twenty-four meetings and a number of informal meetings and consultations. All twenty-four meetings were video recorded. All participants were strongly requested not to distribute the recordings or reveal the names of the participants.

Each session was facilitated by the BCDMAP director possessing expertise in the issues of conflict prevention, dialogue and deradicalization and by an expert in mediation.

Each event was carefully planned, designed and prepared. Already at the end of each event as part of the session, the participants were consulted on the content of the next session.

We informed the participants about the structure and content of each meeting several days before the event and tried to ensure sufficient time for preparation and share of comments and suggestions. The close partnership and open and transparent communication between our facilitator team and the participants were important elements of the dialogue process.

Given the unusual composition of the dialogue team and the specific method of dialogue, as part of the project, we consulted with some international dialogue experts during the planning of each phase and we sought to learn as much as possible about best practices and relevant experiences.

## **First, "exploratory" phase**

We started the whole process with one-hour video presentations where the two members of the "far-right" community talked about themselves and their views based on a list of questions shared with them prior to the interview. The aim of our questions was to get the interviewees to summarize the main points of their values and interests, their views on the trends of polarization and radicalization in the Hungarian society, their attitudes towards these phenomena, and their relations with the communities the members of which they would engage with in dialogue. They were encouraged to talk openly about past problems, the roots and causes of tensions and hostilities within society, current challenges and their views on the role of the 'other' in the society. The list of questions is provided in Annex 1.

The questions sought to explore the diverging views in a constructive way, from the perspective of promoting social peace and strengthening the eroded cohesion of the society. These aspects were emphasized regularly throughout the process. By maintaining a positive and constructive approach and perspective, we feel to have succeeded in exploring the objective elements in the positions, softening the sharp and abusive tone and promoting a language and spirit of cooperation rather than focusing on conflict and hostility.

The same list of questions, together with the record of the interviews made with the "far right" persons, was sent to the members of the other three communities. We asked them to respond in a similar way to the questions and express their views on the relevant issues. In parallel, they were also invited to respond to the questions and problems raised by the "far rightists". This is how the process of dialogue was launched.

As a next step, the interviews with members of the other communities were shared with the "far rightists" and they were also offered the opportunity to respond to the points raised by their partners. The new interviews were shared with all participants again. All participants were encouraged to also react to any points which emerged in the other interviews.

Our assessment of the very first, introductory interviews, was that the participants expressed their views in a rather modest and cautious, "politically" restrained way. Therefore, as a priority for the further rounds during this phase, we kept on encouraging the participants to be more incisive/clear and articulate their ideas even more clearly than during their introductory interviews. For the subsequent rounds of the interviews, new questions were also developed and sent out in advance with reference to the content of the previous interviews.

Informal consultations with participants were organized after the completion of the first phase. Our aim was to gauge their impressions and opinions on the added values and drawbacks of the first phase prior to the face-to-face meetings, and to get at least a rough idea of the dynamics of personal relationships and feelings. The consultations were also used to collect ideas and suggestions for the design and preparation of the second "narrative" phase.

## **Second, "narrative" phase**

The aim of this phase was to help the participants to better understand the background and drivers of the "other's" point of view, especially the "human dimensions", why they think and behave differently, in a disagreeable way. We sought to help the participants to jointly interpret the conflicts and problems and their consequences, and to identify more precisely the causes of disagreements. They were asked to justify their views with personal experience, and by putting aside their own concerns, to listen more closely to the concerns of the others. That approach led them to discover the roots, meaning and content of some statements or observations that have been rather offensive at the first stage. In other words, instead of "proclaiming", persuading or arguing, they were invited to focus on listening, understanding and accepting the grounding of personal feelings. Given the face-to-face encounter, participants were particularly encouraged to behave without stigmatizing or insulting others. They were also reminded not to generalize, qualify, blame, label the others. Instead we asked them to respect the dignity and feelings of others.

It should be underlined that while the first meetings of the second, "narrative" phase were mostly conducted in a spirit and atmosphere of "neutrality" to each other, the second meetings within this stage aimed to generate a spirit of partnership; as a result, the language of the participants became increasingly friendly, even if the content of the opinions was sometimes very difficult to digest and tolerate.

Each dialogue session was structured in a way that, after the 'warm-up' and introductory questions, participants were given the opportunity to feedback on some of the issues identified during the evaluation of the video recordings of the previous session. The video recordings also helped us to trigger some discussions on issues which we found that remained open in the previous session. Chiefly, however, our questions addressed some timely, general and social issues that indirectly generate tensions between the concerned communities, and in that context, we facilitated the dialogue on issues that affect the relationship of the communities directly.

Importantly, also at this stage, participants were invited to respect the rules of dialogue, which we shared with the participants at the beginning of each session in order to remind them again and again of the respect of the agreed rules. The in-person dialogue sessions took place without any insults. Each potentially offending remark was immediately clarified on the spot. The focus of the meetings was closely tailored to the profile and specificities of each community upon thorough assessment of the previous meetings.

It was striking that the least intense conflicts arose during the dialogue with the Jewish community. The most intense dialogue took place during the sessions with the Roma community. The dialogue with the LGBTQ community was sensitive and emotional at the beginning but then the tone changed to a more friendly one, despite the differences in the views remaining between the parties.

At this stage, facilitation of the dialogue became practically unnecessary as the communication between the parties was fluent and smooth. The "facilitation activities" were gradually confined to moderating the conversations, advancing the agenda according to the plans and ensuring that each participant had equal opportunity to express their views. Even the need for facilitating "clarifications" decreased gradually, as

participants themselves became able to raise the most sensitive issues in an appropriate form and style, and tolerated the "piquant" comments from participants. In our view, by the end of the second narrative session, participants had learned to conduct the dialogue in line with the rules.

In the case of the Jewish community, the discussions centered around the identities: what does it mean to be "Jewish" and "anti-Semitic", what sort of concerns, fears, personal or "inherited" experiences prevail in the participants' direct and wider environments, what is the possibility for coexistence of the "far-right" and Jewish communities that is free from fear, hatred, stigmatization and exclusion, and what could be done to prevent the escalation of the conflict situation. A recurring theme of dialogue was the conflict between nationalism/traditionalism vs globalism/liberalism. The main conclusion we drew from the dialogue sessions was that members of the Jewish community feel potentially threatened, despite the fact that their community is not in the focus of attacks at present; moreover, any expression of exclusion or violence against other minorities may also be a cause for concern for them regardless of the target group of violent communication or actions. Participants agreed that both the government and public media should play a positive role in reducing the sense of threat rather than fuel hostility.

In relation to the LGBTQI community, the first narrative session focused on the content of the interviews, clarified personal motivations, human feelings, concerns and the background of behavior. The second session attempted to clarify feelings and aspirations for equality. It focused primarily on explaining the motivations behind the actions and attitudes that trigger conflicts. It also focused on justice, sensitization in education, "lobbying" and psychology. It is noteworthy that, although the LGBTQI community was initially perhaps the group most rejected by the "far rightists", by the end of the process communication and contact had softened the utmost among them.

In the dialogue with members of the Roma community, the issues of discrimination against the Roma community, the struggle for equal treatment and the fight against racism in all areas of social life were given a prominent place. Members of the Roma community rejected and expressed their strong fear of the "marches" organized by extremist groups in municipalities where tensions between Roma and non-Roma populations are high. Members of the "far right" community stressed the perceived problems in the field of education and coexistence and argued for the "necessity" and even pointed to the "preventive effect" of the marches.

It is worth mentioning that during the dialogue with the Roma community, the participants agreed that if current trends continue in Hungary, the conflict situation could deteriorate and escalate, especially due to the fact that the proportion of the Roma community in the population increases gradually in Hungary. The participants considered the prospects for improving the situation as rather vague.

In the narrative phase, it was repeatedly stressed that the dialogue at this stage was not aimed at finding solutions to the problems, nor did we seek in this process to explore options for the settlement of any problem. However, based on the experience gained so far, it is necessary to continue the exploration of possible solutions in a pragmatic manner.

It should be noted that members of the "far-right" community, similarly to their counterparts, complained about feelings of oppression, isolation and exclusion and stressed the need for equal treatment.

An important element of the second phase was the informal dinner which ensued each session. It took place without any agenda or facilitation. Admittedly, however, the informal conversations greatly helped improve human relations and contributed to creating an atmosphere of honest and open communication.



Based on the positive results of the two rounds of the narrative phase, instead of organizing a third “narrative” meeting, we decided to extend the third phase by one round.

### **Third, "forward-looking" phase**

This part of the dialogue process was intended to facilitate collective reflection. The focus was placed on evaluation of the dialogue process, brainstorming on the way forward, constructively exchanging views on ways to prevent and halt radicalization trends, and promoting a culture of dialogue at national and international levels.

The main objective of the third phase was to develop and adopt a joint and publishable "final declaration" which evaluates the dialogue process and makes recommendations for the way forward.

Unfortunately, three of the participants decided, for different reasons, not to participate in this final phase, so neither their evaluation of the process nor their ideas for its future are included in the final reflections.

During the first session of this phase, participants were rather positive about the results of the process. They emphasized the importance of getting to know and understanding more deeply each other and the conflicts, problems and causes. They appreciated the methods used and the structure of the process, despite their initial dissatisfaction with the online interviews.

They stressed that the dialogue helped their self-reflection and highlighted their preconceptions. This greatly improved their empathy and encouraged them to listen more carefully and with greater interest to their fellow human beings in the future. All of them appreciated and stressed the importance of informal dinners.

During the second session, the options for the continuation were discussed. A strong consensus emerged on the need to launch a new dialogue process. There was support for the creation of three to three-person "dialogue circles", where some influential people from the communities concerned would engage in dialogue with each other and try to develop common points that could help to consolidate the existing conflict situation at the community level and to find a peaceful solution for the issues that are causing tensions. They stressed that confidentiality as an important element for success should be respected in future initiatives, too.

In the final session of the dialogue, we finalized the joint declaration and reflected on future cooperation and possible personal contributions from participants.

Participants also expressed their wish to send some exclusive, personal messages which, alongside the official text, constitute an organic part of the document. The declaration and the personal messages are included in Annex 2.

### **What is the outcome of the dialogue process?**

The initiative proves that dialogue is a useful tool to change attitudes between people who hold different, controversial or even hostile views to each other. It enables them to discuss the causes of tensions and conflicts objectively and constructively, reflect jointly on ways and means of handling the risks and work together to create conditions for peaceful cohabitation free from discrimination, exclusion, hatred and hostility.

One of the main outcomes emphasized by the participants was the value of getting connected with each other and learning each other's views and motivations personally. The prevailing opinion was that the

dialogue process did not significantly change their initial views. However, their views on the partners and the human attitudes towards each other had changed significantly, and their initial assumptions and stereotypes had become more nuanced.

As a result of this process, they have come to see each other through a different lens that greatly helps them in assessing future conflict situations and preventing escalation.

The whole initiative was seen as a series of actions that led to significant improvements in their behavior and human relations, and in how they saw themselves and their role in interpersonal relationships.

One of the main outcomes of the process was that participants recognized each other as "human beings", understood the depth of problems, conflicts and tensions, and realized that there is not only one "truth". They also appreciated that the process allowed them to get to know each other's way of thinking.

There was a general feeling that many taboos could be lifted if in the future such dialogue processes could take place between representatives of the concerned communities.

The participants considered it as a sort of development of their personality and awareness that they recognized that they often think along prejudices and stereotypes.

An important observation throughout the project was that members of the "far-right" community also feel "discriminated" and "oppressed" by mainstream parties and social media companies. Similarly to the "vulnerables", they also feel the need for "justice and equality".

Participants shared their experience that the process had not only affected them personally; the environment where they talked about the project had shown an unexpected interest in their personal impressions and opinions. They felt that this had a positive impact on the attitude of their environment towards the culture of dialogue.

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Nowadays, in Hungary, "fight" and confrontation – peaceful for now - are the main ways of addressing social challenges.

However, as our project has shown, there are also other peaceful and consensual ways and practices of solving problems. Given the clear move towards extremism in our domestic society and the escalating international situation, the need to spread a culture of dialogue and put this concept into practice is greater than ever if we are to find a truly long-term solution to the rising tide of hatred.

The positive results and experiences gathered during the dialogue process described above provide a solid and tangible basis for extending the dialogue framework established by the project to further disseminate and apply the concept.

By implementing initiatives of this kind, we are not only taking a step towards raising awareness of the culture of dialogue, but also helping restore social peace and prevent potential tragedies in Hungary.

## **Annex 1**

### **Questions for the first round of interviews**

Introduce yourselves and your activities.

What are the ideas, principles and views that should become predominant in Hungary and in the international community?

In which country would you like your children to live? What kind of society would you be proud of?

What are the areas and problems where you would like to see social change?

How would you like to see these changes achieved and sustained?

Do you feel that radicalization and extremism is on the rise in Hungary, especially among the younger generation?

To which political structures, organizations, population groups or to whom do you attribute the negative trends and phenomena?

How do you think hostility and hatred can be eliminated and the weakening social peace restored in Hungary?

What are the issues that you are considered as “extremist” or criticized for?

Where should you/your organization/your circle of friends change in order to achieve social peace and cohesion?

What can we do together?

In today's political context, do you see an opportunity to develop future options together with "others"?

## **Annex 2**

### **Questions for the informal discussion ensuing the first interviews**

What surprised you?

What did you find frustrating?

What did you find upsetting that increased your dislike?

What might have increased the so-called intellectual distance between you?

What brought you closer to your partners?

What did you experience during the interview that gave you confidence and made you feel worth working on?

Is there an element of the interview that you agree with, even though it is critical?

What was said in the interviews that made you think to yourself "I understand what you are saying and why you are saying it"?

What questions would you, in the context of the next interview, ask your partners?

Do you have any constructive criticisms or ideas on how to continue the process?

What are the points of view where there is total disagreement between you?

What are the views or ideas in the interviews that you do not sympathize with but you are able to “live with”?

Did you find any elements in the interviews that could offer an opportunity for joint action or to change your current position?

## **Annex 3**

### **FINAL DECLARATION**

Unofficial translation

#### **Dialogue between "extremists" and "vulnerables"**

The Budapest Centre for Dialogue and Mass Atrocities Prevention organized a series of personal dialogue processes between groups of two persons from radical rightists/traditional nationalist citizens (in the public discourse "extreme national radicals"), on the one hand, and from the Jewish, LGBTQ and Roma community (in the public discourse "vulnerable social groups"), on the other; each individual took part in their private capacity.

The aim of the initiative was to make some headway towards defusing hatred between radicals and the Jewish, LGBTQ, and Roma communities, prevent extremism and promote peaceful cohabitation.

First and foremost, the participants stressed the importance and benefits of the opportunity per se to get connected and enabled to communicate with each other directly. Some, however, opted out of the process.

During the dialogue process, participants exchanged views, explained and clarified their positions, also shared personal experiences, and defused fundamental misunderstandings in an open and honest manner, without taboos, stigmatization, or demonization.

The initial resentment diminished considerably, gradually giving way to a genuine interest in each other. The relations between them, originally hostile and conflictual, have evolved in a positive direction and undergone an unexpectedly positive change in most cases.

Participants experienced first-hand that it is possible and could result in surprising and positive outcomes when people with widely different, even conflicting views engage in personal dialogue within a given and supportive framework. Today, they understand better what the other people are saying and why they say it; also, they have a more nuanced view on the “others” and on themselves and have become more empathetic in general.

The dialogue process helped to reduce the prejudices of the participants, to better understand the objective

causes of the conflicts between communities and opened up their own bubbles of thought and discourse. Moreover, through the dialogue sessions, the participants gradually created personal conditions for a joint reflection on pathways to more peaceful cohabitation.

Equipped with these experiences and have become aware of the social conditions, tensions, and potential conflicts in Hungary, the participants find it important to continue the dialogue on a broader scale.

They also see the need and value of involving some more influential representatives of their communities in order to amplify the dialogue process more widely.

As one of the ways forward, they also consider establishing “dialogue circles” and launching a dialogue process with some focus on practical consequences.

Participants also hold that a follow-up of the dialogue process, after at least six dialogue rounds per circle, could lead to positive results which exceed the level of individual behavior and impact the community as a whole.

This document and the given personal statements reflect the collective views of all those that have completed this process.

## **Personal Statements**

"During the project, I think everyone has gone through an indescribable development. I can only make a try to portray it: from the point of sitting timidly in front of the cameras in the very beginning, knowing after all what sort and sharp persons I will be communicating with in the coming period, to the point in the last few face-to-face meetings when I was greeting my 'dialogue partners' as friends.

And for all that I did not feel I have to persuade anyone of anything or forcibly have to change my own opinion.

To put my thoughts in a nutshell, I would say that I have gone from being someone who thought I was empathetic to actually becoming empathetic.

I have come to realize that the future lies not in total consensus, but in not trying to invalidate and cancel each other's opinions and experiences.

Overall, progress requires not only debate but even more importantly needs personal dialogue. This, of course, also necessitates above all a safe space, i.e. a well-thought-through setting of dialogue and a facilitating medium, which the current project has provided and further developed in a sophisticated manner.

I would very much like to see people from my community that are more influential and important than myself, being able to sit down for a dialogue like this in the future, and if the project could be of use for society in this way."

- "It was very interesting to observe how much different the dialogue is when a meeting like this is completely confidential. How much easier it is to find common ground when you don't have to carry the perceived or real stereotypes of your social organization on your back, but you can actually behave as an

individual.

This kind of exchange of ideas brought people with quite different mindsets much closer together, it was more an exchange and a debate than a struggle or fight."

- "The importance and value of dialogue changed a lot for me personally during this process.

My initial attitude, which I thought was really a desire for dialogue, turned out to be rather a desire for revelation, justice, and compensation. It took some time and the others for me to realize that dialogue is not what I originally had in my mind.

In the course of the process, I sometimes found some commonalities, not much though, with traditionalist peers, who view things radically differently, while I found differences with those from my own group. I learned to accept their views and opinions without taking them as a personal attack. This way I can save myself a lot of headaches and anxiety in the future.

The personal openness of the participants and sufficient time are essential for dialogue, but when those are given, the questions of the others have a healing effect and can become quite intimate by way of the generated trust.

One thought that I took away from the process was: 'No problem if you think the other person is stupid, but walk the walk to see if you really think that!' If I follow that path, very few will be stupid."

- "It's a strange feeling when you share your own personal - and indeed personal - memories of life events with someone whom you not only didn't know before the dialogue process but from whom you seemed to be separated 'by an entirely different universe'. Despite the distance, it is a very productive skill to be able to frankly share experiences and observations which in turn opens up a dialogue process that can form the basis for a better understanding of each other. And understanding is essential for any dialogue to take place, which certainly reduces tensions even on issues where there is almost irreconcilable disagreement."

"Among many other things, the series of conversations has fully confirmed my conviction that dialogue or even moderated debate between groups and individuals with views that seem oppositional to an almost unbridgeable extent, should be a "must" for anyone who wants to express a stark public opinion on any social topics. For without this, one can almost only rely on the image and information presented in the media about the group in question, which is very little.

In this series, besides better understanding and getting to know each other's opinions, I have learned a lot about the motivations of others, and why they think the way they do and vice versa, an experience that I think is invaluable. To have such conversations, of course, you have to step out of your comfort zone, out of your opinion bubble, and that really demands a lot of effort, it's a difficult task. That is why most people do not even venture to sit down with 'opposing parties' for any kind of discussion.

I would particularly highlight the importance of 'informal' discussions after the facilitated dialogues,

which obviously, after due time, allowed for a really relaxed dialogue and exchange of views, all in such a way that, in my judgement, no one needed to give up any of their previous views, but could see and ‘assess’ those belonging to other groups or their views in a much more understanding, experienced and sympathetic way.”

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Budapest, 30 November 2022.

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