

## Intercultural Dialogue

The Enlargement of the European Union, coupled with increasing mobility linked to the Common market, new and old migratory flows, the new trade ties with the rest of the world, the education, leisure and globalisation in general, have led to increased contacts between cultures, religions, ethnic groups and languages. Against this backdrop and in the context of an increasingly multicultural European Union, the development of intercultural competences and the promotion of intercultural dialogue is fundamental.

Intercultural dialogue contributes to a number of strategic priorities of the European Union. such as respecting and promoting cultural diversity; favouring the European Union's commitment to solidarity, social justice and reinforced cohesion; allowing the European Union to make its voice heard and realizing new efficient partnership with neighbouring countries,

Over the years, intercultural dialogue has become an important element of Community action. Indeed, the European Union has for many years encouraged intercultural dialogue -inside and outside the European Union- through various programmes and initiatives. However, it appears necessary today to respond to the need for a deeper and more structured dialogue of cultures, which would involve not only public authorities but also civil society as a whole. This is the reason why intercultural dialogue needs to become a lasting and visible priority for the European Union. To realise this objective and to reinforce Community action, a first step would be to identify, promote and exchange experiences and best practices that would illustrate the possibility, value and efficiency of intercultural dialogue. The European Commission will initiate this process of valorisation *via* projects supported by Community programs.

A second step would be to treat intercultural dialogue as a horizontal priority for all relevant Community programs, especially for those related to Culture, Education, Youth and Citizenship. Finally, the European Commission has proposed that 2008 be declared the year of Intercultural Dialogue. Intercultural Dialogue events will complement existing community programs and raise awareness of citizens, especially the youth, as to the importance of intercultural dialogue.