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ACCEPT PLURALISM project

***Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion:
Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century
in Europe***

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the lens of the concept of tolerance and the practice of toleration, ACCEPT PLURALISM has explored a set of contemporary diversity challenges mainly in the fields of education and politics in 15 European countries. Toleration is a contested concept that is subject to disputes and challenges that change over time. There exists a plurality of concepts and terms as regards the possible ways of dealing with cultural diversity and the challenges that it raises in Europe today. These include terms such as integration, accommodation, insertion, assimilation, equality, respect, recognition, and acceptance. These terms vary in their meanings and uses from one country to another, as well as from one language to another. They usually are embedded in related conceptions of the nation that can be based on ethnic and cultural elements or that emphasise a common civic culture and a common territory. Conceptions of the nation may either emphasise unity and homogeneity, or be inclusive of internal cultural diversity and the existence of minority groups and/or even minority nations within a multi-national state. Similarly, conceptions of citizenship and more open or restrictive citizenship acquisition policies and histories of emigration and immigration are also important factors that inform the debates and the concepts used in each country to speak about cultural diversity and the way through which minority groups' and immigrants' claims may either be accommodated or rejected.

In relation to these conceptual concerns, the conflation of tolerance along with more demanding concepts (such as respect) may be both normatively problematic and analytically unhelpful. While we are sympathetic to the strategy of developing a more demanding normative vocabulary, we believe that there is a risk of conceptual confusion, which may result in losing the normative value of toleration. More specifically:

The forbearance of toleration is of normative and pragmatic value – as many minorities know historically and today – and, to disparage toleration because it falls short of, say, respect is politically short-sighted. 'Gritted-teeth tolerance' is the most practical solution in many circumstances, and it makes little sense to denounce it in situations where more demanding notions are unavailable. Thus we should view tolerance and acceptance/respect not in a hierarchical relation – i.e. as if respectful accommodation is always better and tolerance a lesser solution – but rather *as fit for different purposes*.

There are indeed things that we should not tolerate but we should be able to discuss in the public sphere. These include racism and sexism but also more specific issues that have been at the forefront of public debates on cultural or religious diversity such as clitoridectomy, marriage at the age of puberty and/or under duress, polygamy and so on. There are also issues that should be tolerated, and hence should not be outlawed, but for which it is not necessary that we all come to agreement and afford recognition and substantive equality. We need in other words to be clear about *what we do not tolerate, what we tolerate, and what we agree to accept, respect and accommodate in public life*.

The limitations of tolerance need also to be acknowledged. Tolerance involves power, the power of the majority to suppress the minority. And it also implies non-acceptance or non-respect. To tolerate means to live and let live but it may also mean to look down upon and disapprove. In other words, in some cases tolerance hides inequality and domination. In seeking a form of equality in a context of diversity, we may prefer a non-evaluative respect for others in which people, especially fellow citizens, have a right (which is not a gift of the powerful) to be included. We need to find ways to agree on those cultural and religious differences for which minority groups may require these more advanced forms of acceptance and find the appropriate forms of institutional accommodation.

In all cases where intolerance, toleration and respect are possibilities, we need to acknowledge that positions are not beyond contestation, and that the objects and boundaries of toleration are historically changing. We must also acknowledge that a *political* concern with the relationship between tolerator and tolerated is required in order to even out elements of power, authority and domination. This is a particularly urgent task in light of rising intolerance across Europe in recent years. This rising intolerance is being expressed both through liberal or ethno-nationalist arguments, and the 'common sense' character of these arguments make pragmatic solutions for achieving tolerance or acceptance appear less tenable and difficult to achieve.

The case studies undertaken in the ACCEPT PLURALISM project have argued that there are two groups that mostly attract negative attention in the public debate because of their presumed inability to integrate into mainstream European secular, modern, democratic societies. These groups are the *Muslims* and the *Roma*. Interestingly, while Muslims are for their most part a post-immigration minority, the Roma are natives of Europe (or indeed are supposed to have immigrated to Europe from India about a thousand years ago). During the past decade, the fact that Muslims in Europe should largely be seen as European Muslims and particularly also as (for example) French, British, German, Dutch, Swedish, Italian or Spanish natives has gained recognition. As the second generations have been growing in various European countries, Muslims have come to be accepted as an ethnic minority, as citizens that demand certain rights or raise certain claims. The Roma, who have suffered discrimination and exclusion as a native minority, have attracted negative attention during the last years mainly because of their status as intra EU migrants. Their EU citizenship has been overshadowed by the questioning of their right to freely move and establish themselves in other EU member states.

Thus we note that what matters probably is not the migrant or native minority quality of each group but rather the ways in which it is perceived to be culturally, ethnically or religiously diverse and thus put to the test social cohesion and society's dominant norms and practices.

Our project results suggest that Muslims and the Roma acquire a renewed significance in the post-1989 period in Europe. With the implosion of the Communist regimes and the re-unification of Europe particularly after the 2004 Enlargement, there is a need for new Others against whom to reassert a positive identity for this reconnected and enlarged Europe. Muslims and Roma people offer this convenient Significant Internal Other (Triandafyllidou 1998; 2001) against which the unity of the European nations can be reasserted and their cultural distinctiveness emphasised. These two Europe-wide minorities present in most EU countries, offer a mirror against which Europe can assert its common values. This is particularly important as these values are relatively universal (peace, human rights, equality, freedom) and hence do not offer a strong enough emotional basis on which to forge a political *community*. Thus these "Others within" offer the necessary outgroup that makes the commonality among Europeans politically and symbolically relevant.

One of the aims of the ACCEPT PLURALISM project has been to compare tensions arising in different countries by different types of minorities, notably native historical minorities vs. migrant populations, with a view to highlighting common features and possibly common practices and policies for addressing such tensions. In other words, we have aimed at facilitating exchange of *good practice* and *policy learning*. Such cases have been identified albeit in a small number of countries. For instance, a tradition of autonomy in education and the possibility to set-up "free schools" in Denmark or the Netherlands that satisfy the request of parents to have their children educated according to their own philosophy and beliefs, have opened up the possibility for setting up Muslim faith schools in both countries. In Sweden, the tradition of minority dialogue and exchange of good practices and the longer and more successful experience of some minorities as regards integration in the school environment and combating discrimination has spread to the Roma people. Minority organisations' meetings sponsored by the Swedish state have facilitated cooperation and mutual learning among different minority groups helping them to learn from each other's experiences as well as unite their voices for issues of common concern.

Our studies have also shown that perhaps the form of cultural diversity that presents the highest challenges is that of religious diversity. The question that often agitates politicians, policy makers or also lay people pose is how much – or indeed what kind of – religious diversity can be accommodated in European moderately secular democratic societies. The findings of this project confirm that there are no simple "threshold" answers as to how many immigrants, what percentage of minorities, or what kind of claims should be accepted or should not be exceeded. One finding that emerges rather clearly is that the 15 European countries studied moderately secular as the presence of a dominant religion unavoidably frames discourses, institutional structures and norms if not in direct often in indirect and subtle ways. However, the question of secularism or *laïcité* in France arises mainly in relation to minority religions, and particularly Islam, and not in relation to the expression of a majority, institutionalized religion which is often rendered invisible because it is the "default" option. Thus, for instance, school children in Italy have to ask to attend "intercultural classes" instead of catechism, or in Greece they have to ask to be exempted from religion class. There is no automatic provision that would render the majority religion also an option.

Examples of Muslim minority mobilization from the UK and France actually show that Muslim activists ask to be treated like any other minority rather than as an exceptional case. They want to be seen as 'normal' political actors with broad interests and motives that are not exclusively Muslim. In France, many

Muslim-based activists contend that Islam should be treated like any other minority religion much like Protestantism and Judaism is instead of being seen as alien to French values.

The study of different countries and cases however shows that not all minorities demand the same type of solutions. Thus, while some Muslim or Roma students in Sweden, Germany, the UK or Bulgaria may ask for special accommodation for their religious dress code, in cases studies in France or Greece, immigrants (Muslims in France, but not Muslims in Greece) ask to be treated on the basis of equality and secularism, asking however that concessions are made neither for the minority nor for the majority religious faiths.

Not only are minority claims of different order in different countries, but the level and type of accommodation that each country can make are also different and respond to their specific historical experience (for instance of colonialism or slavery in the case of the United Kingdom, or an ethnic and even at time still irredentist nationalism in Greece). Thus, while in the UK concrete steps have been taken to discuss the recognition of slavery in British history and education curricula (on the occasion of the 200th anniversary from the abolition of slavery), in Greece the revision of an elementary school history textbook has caused a major political debate as the authors were criticised of trivialising the national struggle for independence in the 19th and early 20th century.

This makes clear that the general principle of equality of treatment for minorities and immigrant groups “translates” into different practices and policies with a view to accommodating national sensitivities without however compromising the principle as such. It is here that we see the notion of tolerance as holding particular promise as it guarantees a first step towards non-discrimination and neutralises power inequalities. The question of accepting and accommodating cultural, ethnic and religious diversity comes then as a second step and in line with the history and claims of each minority group or migrant population.

However, as if matters were not complicated enough, our study has shown that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between ethnic or religious discrimination on the one hand and socio-economic disadvantage on the other. In the case of Roma populations, the question for alleviating poverty, improving access to basic services (housing, health services, education for children) and employment appear as a first step of any policy aiming at combating ethnic discrimination and actual segregation of this group. Indeed, in countries like Hungary, Poland, Italy or Greece we have found attitudes and practices not only of intolerance but also of segregationist acceptance (arguing that by leaving the Roma to their own devices one respects their way of life and their culture). Indeed, these are hard to disentangle from socio-economic inequality (poverty, illiteracy, unemployment) and any policy aiming to address the situation needs to tackle both dimensions simultaneously.

Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity challenges play out at local, national and EU levels. Indeed the importance of the local level cannot be over-emphasized. *Integration takes place at the local level even if policies are national and guidelines are European.* Nonetheless, our case studies have shown that sometimes not only integration and accommodation but also intolerance and exclusion are promoted at the local level by local political groups (as in Italy and Spain for instance) with the aim of gaining votes by blaming immigrants for urban decay, insufficient welfare resources, or simply the economic crisis. Especially in the case of the Roma, local authorities and actors actually more often than not hamper national policy efforts for integration and accommodation. In fact, despite repeated decrees and circulars and policy programmes promoting the integration of Roma children in mainstream schools, local authorities and parents associations strongly resist such de-segregation efforts. Such problems were documented in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Poland.

Alongside the local level, the national level remains most important for addressing cultural diversity challenges and proposing solutions. Indeed the relevant civil society actors, experts, politicians and policy makers see the national authorities and the national legislation as the most important arenas where such claims are addressed. The EU offers opportunities for networking for civil society actors and public administration, funding and an additional political arena for mobilization (e.g. for native minorities like Silesians in Poland, Circassians in Turkey or

Hungarians in Romania, the European Parliament and diaspora politics become relevant political arenas where to promote their claims). Minority organisations seize the opportunity of framing their claims for equality and justice in relation to “European standards” and European values counteracting “national security” discourses.

Our project has also clearly suggested the need not only for exchanging good practices and policy learning among countries and between the wider fields of migrant and native minority integration policies. It has also clearly pointed to the *need for effective monitoring and assessment on how each policy measure, targeted programme or grassroots initiative contributes to a more tolerant and more cohesive society*. The project has thus created the **Tolerance Indicators Toolkit**, a set of indicators that can be applied in specific policy areas (mainly in school life and in politics) within different countries, with regard to specific periods of time and/or with regard to specific issues, providing an overview of how a country is doing in that specific field, by comparison to other states, or by comparison to itself in the past.

All project reports and material are available from the project’s following web pages:

Project reports

(including reports on concepts and theories of tolerance; country reports on national discourses of tolerance; tolerance in everyday school life; tolerance in political life)

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Index.aspx>

Handbook on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx>

New Knowledge Highlights

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/NewKnowledge.aspx>

The ACCEPT PLURALISM Tolerance Indicators

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/ToleranceIndicatorsToolkit/ToleranceIndicators.aspx>

The project’s country specific policy briefs as well as the European policy briefs

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Dissemination/Index.aspx>

Related academic publications

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/RelatedAcademicPublications.aspx>

In addition, the project’s core publications are presented in a specialised brochure which can be downloaded from here: <http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Projects/ACCEPT/Documents/Dissemination/AcceptPluralismPamphlet2013.pdf>