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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, MEDIA LEGISLATION AND MEDIA
CULTURE OF PEACE, ETHNIC TOLERANCE AND STABILITY

**ETHNIC INTOLERANCE AND CULTURE OF
COMMUNICATION**

BY

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The group of organizers and supporters of this conference follow the aim of making credible that an interethnic peace at the Balkan is not only an utopic, but – at least after somewhat ten years of transition - a practical and reachable horizon. And they trust by that in freedom of expression, in media legislation, and in media culture. Freedom in general is a qialitativ status of living and is based on tolerance. Freedom of expression is a way of constructing a peaceful environment, is a method of realizing political and cultural moral and by that a way of accepting difference and contradiction, even dissens of meaning. By the way, that is “just” a basic human right and has nothing to do with sophisticated arrogance or social luxury.

I was asked to give an analysis of this topic out of the framework of an communication scientist, who I am in a sense of cultural theory. Also I was requested to do that in consciousness of being an Austrian, who might understand the multicultural challenge out of a framework of a multicultural history and out of the present transition of becoming a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, which Austria not always is able to manage sufficiently. But there is some multicultural competence and capacity of multiethnic holding together in Austria, not only by its history, but also by its present struggles to keep the mind open and to

learn for the future by verifying the idea of social unity by cultural variosity. There is a measure, which makes it possible or even more senseful, which is future. People who are afraid of “alienation” are seeking for their welfare and for their identification in the past. This view makes nervous to lose, makes angry on news and depressiv. This past-oriented view hinders to learn. People who are looking for their hail, their identity and their place in the world in the future, have to open their eyes and their minds, are interested in learning, are not afraid of contradictions and develop by that an emancipativ stratgy of life.

So I suggest to follow me first in thinking about, where peace has its place in a multi-ethnic society, then we may look for possibilities of cultivating the climate of peace – and last not least we should contextualize those ideas with the phenomena of a media-culture and communication society.

1. The dialectic challenge

The starting point in search of ways, which lead to a solution of inter-ethnic conflicts is quite dialectic: the fact of ethnic intolerance demands the development of culture of peace. The development of peace has to count with the fragility of tolerace. Tolerance of others always has to do with the conditions of own auto-stability, with the character of relations between neighbors, which have to be approached on different levels and in different thematic contacts between closeness and distance.

Sometimes there is a psychological need of distance in order to give a close view onto the other, and sometimes it is necessary to be in a close disposition to the other, in order to be able to accept desires of distance.

The dialectic challenge within the question of what could be the way from ethnic intolerance to inter-ethnic peace goes even farer: we all know, there is a way to overcome conflicts, which is communication. The problem is, that what is the objectiv and the scenario of solution is also the scenario of how to do it and how to come there. The aim defines the way to go and the way to reach there includes and anticipates the thruth and the quality of the aim. So there

is no possibility of tricking, no place for lies and no sense of rethoric drama. Clearness, honesty, fairness, acceptance, tolerance of difference and variosity are the principles of commujnicative ethics as well as they are the criterias of coming there.

There is also an other speciality within the relationship between the goal and the way of peace. As the goal defines the way, the way to do it is the goal, but also: the goal is the way, the goal has the character of coming, being and remainig on way. There is no end and there is no station to rest and to make it oneself comfortable.

Those more or less philosophical assumptions to the dialectic character of peace-work are at least moral conditions of the constitution of a culture of inter-ethnic understanding. The solutions are just there, where the problems are. More: The problems are the expression of what never has been solved, or of what never has been cleared in a sufficient way. There were always too many tricks, too many cultural lies, too many rethoric dramata mixed into the cultural expression of ethnics and into the definitions of ethnic identity.

When we assume the solutions to be found, where the problems are, we also may assume, that the problems generally are the troubles to deliberate and to develop the solutions. Problem and solution are the two sides of one coin. You find the solutions by clearing up the problems and then the solutions are just the troubles, one has to overtake in knowing what problems one has to face and to make in realizing solutions.

If we may think , the problems to be the getting-lost objectivations of somehow anthropologicly spritualized solutions, the solution in general is the correcture of how to deal the problems. Problems are not exstinguishable, but they are challenges to change the view – in the case of ethnic conflicts: to change the view of oneself and of the other - and they are also the challenge to understand the conditions of life by a new paradigm.

2. New Paradigmata

The paradigm of ethnic intolerance is power as a means of a violent distinction between the we-group and the group of the others, it is also power as a strategy of surviving to the one and powerlessness as a condition of existence to the others. In that climate grows destructive interest of the social and cultural neighborhood, mutual hate, arrogance, abhorrence and detest for each other. The degrading behaviour among neighbors might be the compensation of a humiliated self-estimation under the condition of cultural similarity. Soemetimes – to the eyes of an outstanding person - it seems, the ethnic groups of the Balkan are culturally too similar and too close – or they were forced to become that close, so that the desire of difference has not correspondence of distant rooms and not enough space for cultural autonomy.

The paradigm of an order of peace is autonomy. Which is not only and not first a political or an organizational status, but more and first of all a status of mind and a cultural status of self-generating. Autonomy is the psychological condition of partnership. It enables for empathy and social sensitivity. To be one's own and appropriate gives enough generosity to let others be their own and appropriate. Under the conditions of autonomy grows identity, personality and – constructiv interest of the social and cultural environment and curiosity of the other. Autonomy in that socio-psychological context is not a question of political structures, it is a question of mind and mentality, it is a construct of authenticity.

Authenticity is the expression, but also the condition of constructing and developing identity. Identity consists of, what I think about me (I-Identity) and what others express to think about me (Me-Identity). So the treatment by others is a paramount decisive factor in the constitution of subjectivity and self – especially when there are already relationships of similarity, neighborhood or competition.

Where that consciousness of identity and auto-existence is not given, or where it got lost over times of being treated by lies, stereotypes, copies, or masks, there the communicative competence is that demoleshed and smasched, so that this people hardly is able to help itself

coming out of the circle of self-deception, self-forgetting and selfviolation by deceiving, destructing and violating others. In this case one needs help from outside, one needs the mediation , in order to find a meta-communicative position and to realize, that the destruction I do against others is the destruction of my own.

Once more we are - in search of peace - rimended of the redeeming factor of communication. Empathy and Authenticity are the two sides of the coin which is identity-consciousness. Identity is one of the conditions, in the same time, one of the effects, which describes the quality of communication.

3. Communication for what?

But what is communication and whit is it for? What do we mean, or what do we mythologize by that terms of communication or understanding?

Without any critical interest we normally use a model of communication, which assumes, that communication is done or has reached its aim, when people comes into the situation of understanding each other. And normally we think everything to be in order, when both partners in communication come to the decision to see the same or to see a thing from the same point of view.

So we learned – living in societies, which organize and arrange the problem of power by hierchies of competence – that communication has to succeed as a model of congruence. That model just works in arrangements, where the sharing of power is regulated and agreed. Insofar communication is a construction of reality and sense, we learned to agree with a way and a model of construction of reality which is in search of congruence and correspondence. And we learned that situation to take for an order of peace.

But what happens, when the relationships are demolished, when there is no interest in regulation or in construction of competence-arrangements,

or when the desire of understanding each other has died, and when not love is the paradigm of happiness, but hate?

Then a model of corresponding and consensual communication comes to its theoretical and practical border of explanation. Facing the everyday-experience, that communication always is happening to fail as it happens to succeed, makes it thinkable, that communication is in power to arrange correspondence and connection as it is in power to create difference and disconnection, that communication is in power to organize clearness, structure and disburden as it is in power to cause complexity, chaos, and burden.

Theorizing this experience, in order to find a functional model of analysis, and remembering, that the social reality is a result of communication – wherein failing might lead to a success and succeeding might lead to fail – such abstracting from experience, communication has to be seen as a resource of surprise – maybe the only one, which is left in an organized environment.

The dynamic force of communication is non-linear, because its structure is biotic. There is somehow teleology, but not determination. Life is, what creates life and keeps life living by increase of difference. So communication, as the resource of social reality, develops social life by creating difference and not-expected views.

There is somehow a teleology of peace in communication, but no determination. Peace can be done by searching congruence and correspondence, but also by finding and arguing difference.

4. Unity by Difference

So, what could we learn from that theoretical analysis for the question, how the Balkan-region can overcome from ethnic intolerance to intercultural peace? And what could be the role of means of communication in that process?

First: Peace makes Difference :

Difference in constructing social signification of reality is as important as correspondence it is in modelling a peaceful world. Under the conditions of multi-ethnicity, multi-culturality and multi-religiosity dissens and difference are not a catastrophe, but an enrichment of realization of cultural contingency.

When this desire of difference is – or in case of the Balkan was for a long time – under the pressure of equality or even indifference, or under pressure of the tension between a hopeless and wide poverty of the citizen and small but strong exploiting aristocracy, or under the pressure and dependency of hegemonial fights between leading oligarchies, it must be considered within democratic frames, that for the constitutional building of ethnic or cultural identity distinction and difference have more appeal than similarity or mistakability.

So there should be lot of sensitivity accepting the expression of ethnic difference – which is also “just” a social construction - by means of cultural, religious or even national-political peculiarity. This space is needed to get out of everyday- fight for selfunderstanding and to come to the point of missing the others for a social completion of the own identity.

Second: Peace needs Mediation:

There is a way from counter-culturality via multi-culturality to interculturality. The way is transcultural communications. To come to that competence of mutual transcultural attention, the ethnic groups at the Balkan need help. Not a help of ones who know it better, but a help of ones who came upon a learning process by similar experiences. The help is on the one hand to give enough support, in order to give space for structural development. On the other hand there is need of mediation.

Mediation is a strategy of giving space for expressing the positions, which nourish the conflict, without the pressure to solve it, but with the interest to make visible the difference and to deliberate indoctrinations and cramped positions.

Mediation also tries to empower the motivation for social and cultural interrelations, in order to create platforms of interchange of different positions, where common solutions may be found.

Mediation is a concept of subsidiarity. It is a concept of giving conditions to the ethnic or cultural or social parties to find their own authentic way of intercultural attention. So interethnic peace is also to live with the difference and to learn, that difference in a multicultural world is better protected by communication and interrelationship than by isolation or separation.

There exists a debate on the role of media in a democratic and public society. And often it is said: the journalists obligation is just to inform, to deliver opinions, but never shall try to educate by their own opinions. I follow this position insofar we are facing an audience which has competence of public communication. Insofar societies always have to learn to be competent of their own and of themselves, we may accept, that sometimes some societies are in need of a learning process and in need of instruments to become a learning society. In situations like that an impetus of self-education has to be mobilized by mediation, by confronting each other with confronting positions in a climate of rationality and within an environment of de-escalation. The media are in exact that position of doing so and serving the cultural transition from the status of counterdependence to a culture of interrelationship. As this transitional process needs decomplication and deschaotisation, it is a practicable way to oblige experts in media and communication. Needless to say, that this experts have to be in a moral advantage as they are in a professional advantage of information. That is just the view concerning the massmedia-culture. Facing the net-media-culture, the situation is changing and challenging for a new round of democratic peace.

Third: Multi-discursive understanding:

In that context the role of the media has to be stressed. The media overtake more or less consciously an important part in public mediation – maybe more than politics are able to.

The media are not only a place of exchanging informations, ideas, positions or meanings. They are a platform of sharing meanings and of constructing social reality. As they overlook all the cultures and social rooms of the world and as they are interconnected all over the world, the media are a global marketplace which can be visited by anyone despite its ethnic, cultural or social convenience.

The media are the place, where the intercultural communication creates a multidiscursive understanding of world and of ones own relational position within this world. The power of media is their function of mediation. They make us learn, that conflict and crises are dispositives of communication. They bring us to the attention of others, even or especially when they could be a threat for our own interests.

Differences, failures, crises, surprises and conflicts are societal counterparts of congruent understanding, which have to be included in a consideration of organizing a communication society.

The chance of peace is the communication society. And the chance of peace at the Balkan is to integrate all ethnic or cultural groups to their special need of selfpresentation. A democratic communication society must have space for the crisis, for the conflicts and for the failures of selfpresentation and interaction, otherwise – as it has to be organized technically - it would just be a technology-society.

The aim of technology is perfection by excluding sources of failure and empowering sources of success. The aim of communication is to create a livable world, in which the imperfectness makes sense.

To make this clearer: I believe in the power of media in this context, as far the media are not constructors of reality against a non-medial construction of reality, but as they are a resource of construction like any

other system is just a resource of construction of reality, it could be science, arts or politics. The media-made-reality is – though, of course – constructed under the conditions of technology, organization, economy and culture- is a resource of an approach to the own identity as it is a resource of understanding others. The non-media-discourse, often called the everyday-discourse, is in a wide range an annexion of media culture, and is not less interrelated to politics, economy or other organized systems.

So my hope is, that the media discourse arranges the ethnic discourses to become a forum of conflictual positions and by that way a bridge of intercultural awareness as it – the media discourse – is also a welcome irritation of tendencies of overestimation or isolation. The intercultural communication is the challenge of creating a transmission of a multiphrenic order of doing the world.

What has to be done in searching peace in the relation to the media, is to develop the media-infrastructure, or more- regarding the new media: the net-infrastructure, in order to complete the everyday-discourses and the special milieu-discourses on ethnic assessment with counterparts.

Fourth: Initiatives for Emancipation:

Societies are in general selfreferential systems. They are in possession of critical dynamics by themselves. They are in possession of competence, even when they are short of sources of rational development. In times of totalitarian regimes a know-what of emancipation is growing. In times of liberation a know-how of emancipation has to be developed. There are several institutions and organizations within the sector of culture, communication, and media at the Balkan working according this strategy.

In that context it is a remarkable event, that there already exists an institution working for the culture of peace by expertness in media and communication, which is the Balkan Media Association, which is now going to run the Balkan Media Academy. This organization has

developed by own competence, by own critical perspective and by international support to an institution, which analyzes the media-culture at the Balkan, and which now undertakes the professionalization of people working with media, and which empowers the qualification of media organizations all over the Balkan region, including all ethnic, cultural and social groups. This Balkan Media Academy is a model of cooperation between originating competence and international support in order to develop structures of peace-making. Journalists and PR-experts, who learn to use the media as means of mediation and encountership of people as long as there are conflicts, intolerance, resentments and diffuse hate, are an incredibly important investment for democracy and peace.

So this could be an opportunity to thank all the persons, who worked with tremendous personal motivation and self-confidence to raise a personal idea to a huge internationally interconnected project, also to thank the persons and representatives of the international, European or national institutions, who gave a lot of motivation and support to the BMA and in the same way understood the sometimes different way, how the Balkan works.

Let us hope, this and other initiatives will make school at the Balkan

Last but not least: Balkan – a synonym for future:

The culture of interior and interactive peace at the Balkan region has to do with and is somehow dependent from the view or even the stereotypes Europeans keep about the Balkan. The identification of the Balkan by Europe is on the one hand the affirmation and construction of the identity-feeling of Europeans, on the other hand a way to keep the Balkan in distance. In order to break those distances, there are sometimes intentions within organizations of the Balkan itself to substitute the denomination “Balkan” by a new mask, named “South-East-Europe” or at least by a denomination which is not as burdened with stigmatization and which not mediates a problematic image. The history of the Balkan gave a lot of opportunity to equate it with

incalculability, inweighability, interior split and inpenetrability. This image makes it difficult to make friends or form an alliance. But this is – of course – very important exactly in the present transition, where the Balkan needs alliances to overcome. Regarding what I tried to point out with my analysis just before, I can not find the psychological and not the practical sense of a renunciation of the label Balkan. The history is a part of the present and of the future. The authenticity of the future is given by mastering the past. Besides that the term “South-East-Europa” is just a technical and economical term, while Balkan is a cultural symbol. If it is important to develop new trust of the other European societies into the Balkan, you must give to Europe the chance of changing the meaning and not of replacing one opinion by another. But first it is important, that the Balkan countries themselves estimate the denomination Balkan as a future criterion. Maybe that is, what the Balkan mentality has to develop with more creative consciousness, with more control of mind and with more postulation of itself. So the decision to use this name as a label of future, as a challenge for openness, clearness, brotherhood, and culture of neighborhood is the chance to present the Balkan as a surprise of not affirming the stereotypes, which develops the European interest of re-asking the Balkan much more than anything, coming from a nameless region. Such mobilizing the interest of Europe brings new feedback to the Balkan, which might again be re-invested in the search of an intercultural interaction of a multiethnic region. There is no reason to be ashamed of an identification, even if it is burdened by history, when there is the intention to rebuild it from inside to outside. If one refuses the identification from outside by putting on a new mask, there is no guarantee that the purification of the identity will be done from inside. Exactly because of the fact, that Europeans have strong stereotypes of uncalculability of the Balkan, convince them by confusing them, according to the sentence of John Tucker: “If you can't convince them, confuse them.”

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