

**Intercultural, International and Interconvictional Group
(G3I)**

Suggestions for establishing a

**European Charter of
Interconvictionality**

A Mobilising Project for Developing European Citizenship

The G3i, Intercultural, International and Interconvictional Working Group, is a group that works and reflects as an organised legal French organisation (Law of 1901) since the end of 2009. It is composed of women and men who want to shape European citizenship by favouring exchanges of that triple character evoked in its title.

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One of the fundamental features of Europe is the political, social, linguistic and cultural diversity of its constituent peoples.

Lightening the internal borders of the continent, the intermingling of its native populations and increasing migratory movements, contribute today to highlight this ever more strongly. To this evolution is added the expression of an increasing variety of «convictions» of all kinds: philosophical, religious, political, social or cultural. To achieve full support of citizens to official institutions, with delegated decision-making powers, implies recognising the legitimacy of these differences and allowing for their expression.

In order to associate citizens more closely with this work, the Council of Europe created, one year after its foundation, a Conference of International Non Governmental Associations (INGOs), promoted in 2003 from the rank of «consultants» to that of «participants». Various associations or federations of associations, such as the European Civic Forum, themselves work to organise such cooperation.

With regard to the European Union, these current functioning conditions are still the subject of much questioning. Even if the 2009 Treaties of Lisbon «give citizens and representative organisations, by appropriate ways and means, the possibility to make their views known and to publicly exchange their opinions in all the Union's areas of action.»¹ The Union does not organise «regular»² contacts with all families of conviction in conducting European affairs.

Furthermore, if the 1950 Convention, which founded the Council of Europe, and the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognise the importance of convictions and specify the conditions for expressing them, they say nothing as to how their diversity is to be taken jointly into account.

Thus, the G3i suggests that the Council of Europe and the European Union register, as one of their major projects, the recourse to the concept of interconvictionality, in other words, the simultaneous recognition of convictional diversity, of their potential reciprocal contributions and of the possibility of overcoming their different purposes in order to act together.

An *Interconvictional European Charter* might then be both a theoretical and an operational support for this concept. We shall find hereafter a sketch. Once this Charter is written and then ratified, it would be desirable for each institution concerned to be invited to implement it.

Such an implementation would imply specific training, facilitated by drafting a *good practice guide* on the subject.

¹ Art. 11 of the European Union Treaty.

² Art.17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

I - Formal Grounds for the Charter Project

Considering that all human beings constitute a generic unit with an extreme plurality of living conditions and of exchanges,

Considering that the history of humanity, doubtless from its origins, bears witness to multiple forms of solidarity as well as to conflicts whose violence, in our day, is capable of leading to the extinction of the species, and even of all life on earth,

Considering that, faced with these risks, nations have provided international legal instruments reaffirming the equal dignity of all members of the human family, in order to ensure their equality of civic, social and cultural rights, both individual and collective, respect for fundamental freedoms and in favour of social progress and world peace,

Recalling that, with that in mind, the United Nations Charter of 1945 proclaims in its preamble that *"the peoples of the United Nations are determined to preserve future generations from the scourge of war, to practice tolerance, to live in peace with each other in a good neighbourly spirit"*,

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, in its articles 18 and 19 states that: a) every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which implies the freedom to change one's religion or conviction as well as the right to manifest one's religion or conviction, whether alone or with others, both publicly and privately, by teaching, practices, worship and rituals; and that: b) each individual has the right to freedom of opinion and of expression, which implies the right not to be interfered with for these opinions, and also the right to seek, receive and disseminate, without regard for frontiers, information and ideas by whatever means of expression desired,

Recalling that the European Convention of Human Rights of 1950, in its article 9, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000, in its article 10, similarly express themselves on the subject of "liberty of thought, conscience and religion",

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Unesco on cultural diversity of the 2 November 2001 affirms that: *'culture must be considered as the set of distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it includes, in addition to arts and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs'*. And also that: *"Culture lies at the heart of contemporary debates on identity, social cohesion and the development of an economy based on knowledge", and also that "the respect of cultural diversity, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of trust and mutual understanding is one of the best guarantees for international peace and security"*.

***Considering* lastly that, if international relations have been organised by numerous charters, treaties or pacts, if cooperation and intercultural dialogues have also been the object of many international conventions or directives, interconvictional relations between individuals or communities, with diverse convictions have never been the subject of legal provisions or institutions intended to explain them, to define their role and objectives, to determine their forms and organise them on the various levels where they are nonetheless indispensable,**

To remedy this omission, the G3I suggests that a *European Charter of Interconvictionality* be drawn up and implemented, whose provisions, applicable to the States and peoples of Europe, might inspire the following elements.

II - The Possible Contents of the Charter

Title 1: Convictions

Art.1. Dealing with interconvictionality, as the present Charter does, also and primarily makes it possible to explain in depth what can be meant by conviction. As a first approximation, a conviction is a personal agreement of the whole mind: reason, will and feeling. Its meaning and intensity are different according to whether it is more philosophical, religious, political, social ou cultural. What distinguishes it from a simple opinion or a prejudice is that it is not only developed reflexively in each of the fields in which it is expressed and, in particular, it is not asserted only by confrontation, explicit or implicit, with other convictions.

Art. 2. Personal convictions are the essential components of freedom of thought and of conscience.

Art.3. Each person has the inalienable right to hold convictions in the fields of his or her choice and, if necessary, to communicate or to change them.

Art.4. No conviction can be imposed as a truth that cannot be contradicted.

Art. 5. Personal convictions stem from multiple factors, constituting human diversity. Some of these factors, first and foremost education, are designed to be liberating. Others carry risks of confinement and intolerance, even of violence towards those who do not share the same convictions.

Art. 6. A personal conviction can be acquired, internalised or expressed with various degrees of commitment and of intensity, which gives it a potential for evolution and enables various compromises.

Art.7. Communities may freely establish themselves on the basis of shared convictions provided that they respect human rights and, in particular, that they adopt the rules of non-violent coexistence with holders of other convictions.

Title II: Interconvictional Exchanges and Personal Identity

Art. 8. Throughout one's existence personal convictions are constituted and tested in confrontation with other convictions.

Art.9. School is the first place where one becomes conscious of the diversity of convictions, the reflections to which this gives rise and the learning process of interconvictional dialogue.

Art. 10. Two attitudes may be adopted towards the existence of convictional diversity: they may be considered as obstacles to sustaining personal identities or, on the contrary, as factors helping to allow them to evolve and to be enriched by contact with others. The first attitude tends to lead to identitarian closure and to a risk of rejecting the other, possibly violently. The second attitude, the one to adopt, implies not only recognising the equal dignity and the equal rights of all human beings, but also their potential contributions to others just because of their differences.

Art. 11. Practicing interconvictional exchanges, in particular by "non conclusive" debates, makes it possible to know oneself better and to know others better, while

heightening our desire for our deepest convictions to be recognised by them. It leads to a necessary mutual recognition.

Title III: Interconvictional Exchanges and Collective Life

Art. 12. Diverse convictions in a society imply, at the collective level, the existence of interconvictional exchanges which strengthen mutual understanding and which may lead to common actions, or at least actions deemed acceptable even if they raise reservations.

Art. 13. Interconvictional practices are the foundation for dealing responsibly with liberties. They help to manage conflicts in a non-violent manner.

Art. 14. Interconvictional practices are intended to structure or to advance the functioning of private or public collective organisations, such as associative networks of civil society and of non-governmental organisations.

Art. 15. Interconvictional practices, spaces and structures are a support for the regular participation of citizens in the political, social and cultural life of the community, for conceiving and controlling decisions made by the authorities delegated for this purpose at different levels of the political organisation of society.

Art. 16. Particularly in developing local and regional policies, interconvictional practices demonstrate their usefulness, indeed their necessity: they guarantee the best chances for equity and efficiency. Citizen consultation, at the required level, is a component of all democratic government.

Art. 17. Interconvictional debates are not intended to challenge the delegated authority of the political decision-making powers: they intervene legitimately upstream of decisions made by those authorities whose mission it is to decide in the name of the citizens, and then in the follow-up of their implementation.