

How does democracy function as a tool for multicultural Europe?

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Speech for the conference “The Conscience of Europe”
Finnish Parliament, Arkadiankatu 3, Helsinki
March, 18th 2014

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this conference, in particular Mr. Veijo Baltzar and Ms. Nina Castén with whom many of you will have had email contact, prior to this illustrious event. I also want to extend my gratitude to the Dutch Embassy which facilitated my stay here in this wonderful city.

With the organizers of this conference I agreed upon the title “How does democracy function as a tool for multicultural Europe?”. Mr. Baltzar’s initial suggestion was a more gloomy title, to wit: “Why democracy *does not function* as a tool for multicultural Europe?” I protested a little bit because this would presume that democracy does not function. And is that true, I was thinking?

On further consideration, I decided that perhaps Mr. Baltzar was right: yes, democracy does not function as a tool for multicultural Europe. Or: democracy does not function *very well* as a tool for multicultural Europe. But then, again, the question is: whose fault is this? Democracy’s fault? Or is there something wrong with “multiculturalism” as a concept?

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Questions abound, and I will try to raise (and hopefully answer) some of these questions today.

I hope you do not mind I will do this with Mr. Veijo Baltzar's excellent book *Towards Experiential Philosophy* (2012, 2014) in the back of my mind.² What I will try to do, is make some comments on his findings and compare these with my own ideas on democracy and multiculturalism.

Democracy

Let me start with democracy. This is, in a sense, the easiest part of my lecture, because "democracy" as, an ideal, is hardly ever contested nowadays. And yet, from Plato to the nineteenth century and even the beginning of the twentieth century, democracy was not a universally shared idea and ideal.³ It is, perhaps, only since World War II that the triumph of democracy as an ideal can said to have been realized. And nowadays, even dictatorial regimes pay lip-service to at least the *word* democracy.

With regard to multicultural society and multiculturalism the situation is completely different. These are severely contested concepts these days, and political leaders like Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy, David Cameron and many others (so-called "populist" politicians in the first place) have harshly criticized multiculturalism as a concept and leading perspective for the integration of ethnic and religious minorities in European societies.⁴ I side with Mr. Baltzar who seems to take multicultural *society* as an ineradicable fact of our times.⁵ Of course, Great-Britain with its colonial past is a more multicultural society than most Scandinavian countries, but I think that Baltzar is right that

² Baltzar, Veijo, *Towards Experiential Philosophy*, Translated from the Finnish by Jüri Kokkonen, Ntamo, Helsinki 2014 (2012).

³ See e.g. Lippincott, Benjamin Evans, *Victorian Critics of Democracy*, The University of Minesota Press, Minneapolis 1938.

⁴ "Merkel erklärt Multikulti für gescheitert", in: *Spiegelonline*, 16 Oktober 2010; "State multiculturalism has failed, says David Cameron", in: BBC News, 5 February 2011; "Nicolas Sarkozy declares multiculturalism had failed", in *The Telegraph*, 11 February 2011; "Le multiculturalisme est 'un échec', affirme Nicolas Sarkozy", in: *Le Point*, 10 Février 2011.

⁵ Baltzar, *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30, 51, passim.

globalism is on the rise and that the “multicultural condition” will very soon be a fact of life in many contemporary states and societies.

At least, in Europe and the West!

Why in Europe and the West?

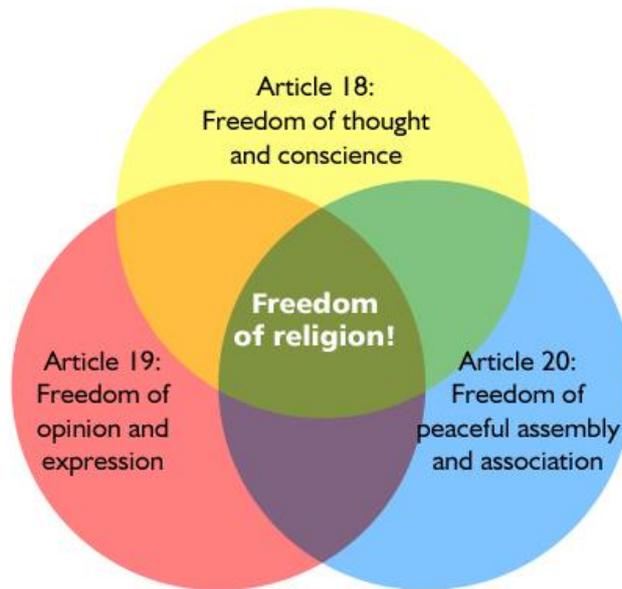
Because Europe has committed itself to religious and cultural pluralism. It has done so in the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) as the founding document of European societies. The European Convention – as interpreted by the European Court in Strasbourg – and also ratified by Finland in 1990, accords freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and other individual human rights to individual citizens. Now, it is an established fact that once you give people the *right* to freedom of belief, they start to believe very different things indeed. Europe and the West has therefore shown an extraordinary variety of cultures, different points of view, different religions, et cetera.

And for those countries who have not yet experienced this variety of views it will be a living reality, to be sure, in the not too distant future.

Here Europe and the West show a marked difference with *e.g.* the Middle East. While Europe becomes more and more “multicultural”, “diverse”, “pluralistic”, the Middle East becomes more “monocultural” and less pluralistic (the Arab Spring, autumn or at some places even winter, does not seem to have changed this).

Managing diversity: multiculturalism

So freedom of religion and its cognates *create* religious diversity.



But this religious diversity⁶ has to be “managed”. Religious cultures do not only interact peacefully but also clash.⁷

Here “multiculturalism” as a concept comes in. Baltzar writes (and now I quote): “Multiculturalism is an inescapable fact of life”.⁸ Here I tend to adopt a different view, or rather: I use the words “multiculturalism” and “multicultural society” in a different meaning (which still makes it possible that we agree about the essence of the matter). I make a sharp distinction between “multicultural society”, which I, as Baltzar does, consider a fact of life in the contemporary western world. But “multiculturalism” I am inclined to see as an *ideology*. It is a specific ideology, adopted by political leaders and political theorists in the seventies and eighties of the previous century, in an attempt to manage the religious and cultural diversity of its populations. The general idea of those favoring this ideology (the so-called “multiculturalists”) was: the concept of ordinary or individual rights as enshrined in human rights documents is not enough. The focus on the individual citizen as the ultimate locus of dignity and respect does not function. Multiculturalists claim that introducing rights for *groups*, more in

⁶ The three rights in the figure above refer to the Articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued by the United Nations in 1948. These are similar to the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights issued by the Council of Europe two years later.

⁷ Samuel Huntington’s emphasis on the “clash” of civilizations has provoked an equally one-sided reaction that civilizations and culture never clash. See: Huntington, Samuel, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

⁸ Baltzar, *Ibid.*, p. 51.

particular for minorities, is essential. We have to protect the “culture” of minorities in the way we have to protect the natural environment.

This created many problems, so I will try to argue. And these problems are the reason why nowadays European leaders so massively disown “multiculturalism” as an ideology like the few examples of Merkel, Sarkozy and Cameron demonstrate. Let me try to present some of these problems. But first, I have to spell out what is the ideological or philosophical foundation of human rights.

Individual human rights versus multiculturalism

Human rights are rights pertaining to the human individual on the basis of the inherent dignity of the human person. Because the human person exemplifies an inherent dignity and worth he/she can claim certain inalienable rights. These rights and freedoms have been laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) but also in the Finnish Constitution which came into force in 2000 (Chapter 2).

Multiculturalism actually amends the classical human rights conception. Three of the most important corrections multiculturalism makes⁹ have to do with:

- (i) individualism,
- (ii) the importance of “culture”,
- (iii) the revival of religion.

First individualism. Multiculturalism does not focus on the human individual but on the group. According to multiculturalism it is not the human individual who prevails, but the group. The individual is nothing without the group. The idea that an individual can flourish without the group is deemed to be a myth. And if the group is so important, why not grant the group certain rights (instead of the human individual)?

⁹ Or tries to make, because according to a considerable contingent of critics multiculturalism failed dramatically. See e.g. Waldron, Jeremy, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative”, in: *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, Vol. 25, 1992, pp. 751-793; Barry, Brian, *Culture & Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Polity, Cambridge 2001; Hasan, Romy, *Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths*, Politico’s Publishing Ltd 2010.

By operating in the manner indicated, a whole new approach to human rights is coming to the fore: “group rights” or “collective rights”.

Second, there is the importance of “culture”. Multiculturalists stress the importance of “culture” for the human individual. Man is a cultural being.¹⁰ Even if culture (or some parts of culture) is oppressive, it is always better than no culture.

The two elements in combination imply that one of the most important political aims is to *preserve* the culture (or cultural identity) of the group. This is even more important than safeguarding individual human rights. Usually, multiculturalists focus on the “good news”. They do not like to stress the tension between the rights of the human individual and the collective right of the group to maintain its culture. But, of course, there are countless situations where individual human rights clash with the collective identity of the group (and supposedly protected by collective rights to preserve the culture of the group). I will elaborate on some examples in what follows.

Third, multiculturalism focuses on religion, which turns out to be *traditional* religion.¹¹ The maintenance of cultural identity is difficult to distinguish from the reaffirmation of traditional and orthodox religious ideas. I underline the idea of “traditional religion”, because the kind of religion multiculturalists empower, is not the highly individualized religious culture that one finds in *e.g.* New Age religiosity. What gives cultural identity to the group is not the woman (or girl)¹² who chooses her own religious path (she rather *undermines* the group identity), but the

¹⁰ The work of Melville J. Herskovits (1895-1963) is generally considered to be of great importance in this field. See: Herskovits, Melville J., “Some Further Comments on Cultural Relativism”, in: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Apr., 1958), pp. 266-273.

¹¹ Multiculturalists, like postmodernists and cultural relativists, are usually not firm believers themselves. See on this: Girard, René, & Vattimo, Gianni, *Christianisme et modernité*, Entretiens monés par Pierpaolo Antonello, Traduction par Renaud Remperini, Champs actuel, Flammarion, Paris 2009. But they *reinforce*, unwittingly, the position by the traditional religions on their believers. Not in the last place by debunking standards of rationality and critique. See on this: Searle, John R., “Rationality and Realism, What is at stake?”, in: *Daedalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Fall 1993, Vol. 122, nr. 4, pp. 55-83.

¹² The most well-known girl is undoubtedly Malala Yousafzai, whom the Afghan Taliban tried to kill because of her liberal religious convictions. See: Crilly, Rob, “Islamic hardliners announce fatwa on Malala Yousafzai”, in: *The Telegraph*, 19 November 2012.

group developing a religious orthodoxy under the guidance of community elders.¹³

The trouble with multiculturalism as an ideology

The three central elements of multiculturalism as outlined before, also put us on the track of what I like to call “the trouble” with multiculturalism. Let me comment on these three elements in the order I presented them.

First, multiculturalism’s preference for the group to the individual is based upon a metaphysical and moral mistake. There is no inherent value in “the group”. There is one, and only one, thing in the universe that has an inherent and inalienable value: the human person. So here is the root failure of the whole enterprise of placing the group before the individual. The whole notion of “group rights”¹⁴ or “collective rights” is therefore deeply problematic. No classic thinker stressed this so severely, perhaps, as John Stuart Mill when he wrote:

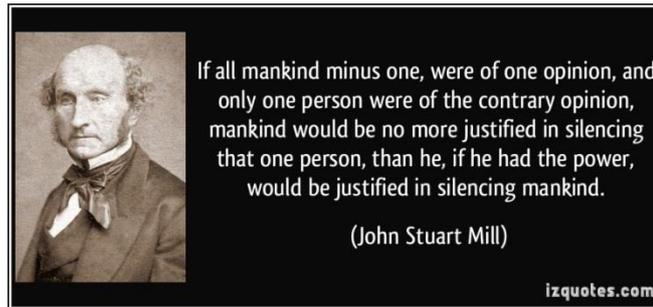
If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.¹⁵

Mill said this in his book *On Liberty* (1859), one of the most evocative vindications of freedom of speech and individual liberty that have been produced in western political thought, and perhaps political thought in general.

¹³ This thesis is defended by: Bennoune, Karima, *Your Fatwa Does not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight against Muslim Fundamentalism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London 2013 and Malik, Kenan, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Legacy*, Atlantic Books, London 2009.

¹⁴ Stapleton, Julia, ed., *Group Rights: Perspectives since 1900*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1995.

¹⁵ Mill, J.S., *On Liberty*, 1859, in: J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and other writings*, ed., Stefan Collini, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004 (1989), pp. 5-115, p. 20.



From the perspective of group rights, or collective rights, this expression would be sheer nonsense. If the freethinking individual jeopardizes group culture or group identity with the free flow of ideas, multiculturalists consider this deeply problematic. They think they have to find a “balance” then. Especially when the individual can be accused of “offending” the group. The Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, Salman Rushdie, the British Sikh writer Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti¹⁶ and many other “freethinking individuals” have experienced that the classic foundations of free speech are no longer self-evident for the European elites.

The individualist approach of J.S. Mill is also prevalent in some (but certainly not all!) judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The most famous is the *Handyside*-case, dating from 1976. Here the Court proclaims that freedom of expression “is applicable not only to ‘information’ or ‘ideas’ that are favorably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population”.

Nota bene: we see here that the Court realizes that ideas can (and may) be *offensive*. The classical doctrine on the limitations of free speech emphasizes that incitement to physical harm cannot be accepted (something also Mill endorses as a limitation for the freedom of speech). But a limitation in the sense that the group may not be “disturbed” in its mental indolence is deemed to be illegitimate. In other words: real

¹⁶ A Sikh writer whose play *Behzti* (dishonour) was cancelled in Birmingham after violent protests against the play by radical Sikhs and death threats towards the author who went into hiding. See: Bhatti, Gurpreet Kaur, *Behzti (Dishonour)*, First Performed at Birmingham Repertory Theatre on 19 december 2004, The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham 2004. Contrary to the title of the book, the play was *not* performed.

violence is to be excluded but a fierce exchange of words is something the state should not interfere with.

That brings me to the second element of multiculturalism: “the cult of culture”.¹⁷ Multiculturalists underline the supreme importance of culture. When certain habits or ways of thinking are deemed to be “cultural”, they are almost considered to be holy, something that should not be criticized, especially not criticized “from without”.¹⁸ One tends to forget that “culture” is often cruel, nasty and something that needs to be improved. The practice of burning widows on the funeral pyre of the deceased husband is a cultural habit. But it has to be eradicated, for sure. The practice of female circumcision is a cultural practice. But there is no reason why that cultural dimension would make the practice quasi-legitimate. Yet, even a notorious feminist writer as Germaine Greer has great difficulty to condemn female circumcision because it’s part of “culture”.¹⁹ It is especially the concept of “identity” which plays a harmful role here. Once a cultural custom seems important for what is called the “identity” of the group very vicious practices are condoned.

Third, there is the element of “religion” which plays an important role in the multiculturalist mindset. One may put it this way: the type of “culture” that multiculturalism tries to favor, is often “religious”. Now, religion can be good or bad. Religion is the Sermon on the Mount, but also the stoning of the heretic and blasphemer.²⁰ It is the proclamation of

¹⁷ See on this: Sandall, Roger, *The Culture Cult: Designer Tribalism and Other Essays*, Westview, Boulder/Colorado 2001.

¹⁸ The norm that a culture may not be criticized “from without” is an important element of “cultural relativism”, which, in its turn, mixes with multiculturalism. See: Donnelly, Jack, “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights”, in: *Human Rights Quarterly*, 6 (1984), pp. 400-419.

¹⁹ See: Greer, Germaine, *The Whole Woman*, Anchor Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York 1999, p. 101 ff.

²⁰ Following the injunction of Deuteronomy 13:6-11 (New Revised Standard Version): “⁶If anyone secretly entices you—even if it is your brother, your father’s son or^[b] your mother’s son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend—saying, “Let us go worship other gods,” whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, ⁷any of the gods of the peoples that are around you, whether near you or far away from you, from one end of the earth to the other, ⁸you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. ⁹But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. ¹⁰Stone them to death for trying to turn you away from theLORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹¹Then all Israel shall hear and be afraid, and never again do any such wickedness”.

the golden rule, but also the almost-sacrifice of Isaak by Abraham.²¹ There is the freedom of religion as an individual right, but one has to be extremely cautious that the freedom of religion is not misused as a freedom for the elders of the community to discipline their younger, often female, homosexual or dissident members. In a time when religious fundamentalism is on the rise²² the “freedom of religion” is a dangerous freedom: it can be used as a pretext to justify harm to human individuals.²³

These and other considerations make that my central question “how does democracy function for multicultural Europe” is not so easy to answer. I’d like to put it this way.

Democracy in the sense of the primacy of the human individual to rule himself is a great and important ideal. The realization of that ideal is still unfinished. We think, perhaps, we have realized democracy, but we have not. Democracy is a permanent calling. The human individual has to be protected against the sometimes massive forces that try to abolish it.

One of these forces is “multiculturalism” which is, in a sense, a *dangerous* ideology, precisely because it is so ill understood. It has the ring of something positive. It seems to be “open to diversity”, on the barricades for “equality” for all. But the reality is more sober.²⁴ Multiculturalism has, undeservedly, a very good reputation. It has been quipped that the Music of Wagner is much better than it sounds, and I would like to add: multiculturalism is *much worse* than it sounds.

Needless to say, this is not meant as being negative on “multicultural society”. I consider, like Mr. Baltzar, multicultural society to be a fact. But “multiculturalism” is probably one of the worst ideologies one can adopt to *manage* this diversity.

²¹ Kretzmann, Norman, “Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality”, in: Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray, eds., *Philosophy of Religion. The Big Questions*, Blackwell, Malden / Oxford 2001 (1999), pp. 417-429.

²² See on this: *Freedom of Thought 2012. A Global Report on Discrimination against Humanists, Atheists and the Nonreligious*, International Humanist and Ethical Union, London 2012; *Freedom of Thought 2013. A Global Report on Discrimination against Humanists, Atheists and the Nonreligious*, International Humanist and Ethical Union, London 2013.

²³ This is the central theme of: Berg, Floris van den, *Philosophy for a better World*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York 2013.

²⁴ See on this: Waldron, Jeremy, “One Law for All? The Logic of Cultural Accommodation”, in: *Washington & Lee Law Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2002, pp. 3-34.

Let me close with some very concrete examples, referring to the experiences with multiculturalism in several European countries, like my own country, the Netherlands, Great-Britain, Denmark and Norway, more close to you own experiences, perhaps.

Before introducing these examples it may be helpful to begin with a distinction between what I would like to call “shallow diversity” and “deep diversity”.

Shallow diversity and deep diversity

What I mean by “shallow diversity” is that people with different religious backgrounds have their own ways of greeting each other, eating habits, raising their children. Most of the cultural diversity between people is of this “shallow” kind. Here exerting “tolerance” towards each other’s habits is the most wise and just attitude to adopt. Advocates of “multiculturalism” are usually concerned with this shallow diversity and they advocate tolerance, forbearance, patience, dialogue and respect in situations where this shallow diversity manifests itself. And rightly so. We should not be provincial, narrow-minded, the world is larger than our own petty preoccupations would make us to believe. European history is full of great thinkers who stressed the importance of cosmopolitanism like the French thinker Michel de Montaigne and others. And we should heed their calls.

But there is also “deep diversity”, and some countries have had experience with a clash of cultures or clash of civilizations of that kind, notably Great-Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands.

The mother of all cultural clashes of this “deeper sort” was the 1989 crisis²⁵ around Salman Rushdie’s book *The Satanic Verses*.²⁶ The “deep diversity” that we see manifested in this crisis is that there was on the one hand a British writer, publishing a book under British

²⁵ In a sense foreshadowed in 1987, as I have tried to make clear in: Cliteur, Paul, “The Rudi Carrell Affair and its Significance for the Tension between theoterrorism and religious satire”, in: *Ancilla Iuris*, 2013: 15, pp. 15-41, full text: http://www.anci.ch/paul_cliteur

²⁶ Rushdie tells his own story in: Rushdie, Salman, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, Jonathan Cape, London 2012.

jurisdiction, making a parody of things, considered holy by a foreign religious leader. The foreign leader, Khomeini, simply does not accept:

- (1) Parody of religion (this is considered to be blasphemous and apostate)
- (2) National jurisdiction (a principle held dear in the secular world of the post-Westphalian world after 1648)
- (3) The right to apostasy (i.e. that of a British writer with Muslim roots to relinquish his belief, to change his religion).

Here the whole vocabulary of dialogue, respect and tolerance does not help us in any way. What we are confronted with is a choice of principles.

A second example is the 2010 attempt to kill the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard for a cartoon he had drawn five years earlier.²⁷ Again, all respect for cultural diversity has to stop here: showing “understanding” for someone who tries to murder a cartoonist for a cartoon he writes, would be suicidal, as the prime minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, well understood and also defended against many critics.

This was a Danish example. Now a Dutch.

On 2 November 2004 a Dutch filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, was killed on the streets of Amsterdam for criticism he had exerted on a world religion.²⁸

Now, these are all examples of what you can call *deep diversity*. It is especially with examples such as these that multiculturalism as an ideology has proved to be not very helpful. A kind of “multicultural understanding” for those who react with murder on novels, films and cartoons would mean taking respect for “diversity” to absurd proportions.

Now we have to remind ourselves that these are very extreme cases. And we also have to emphasize that there is a danger in over-emphasizing the importance of these examples because they can cause a backlash against religious minorities. But it would be a mistake to *ignore* them as well. Under the present circumstances I consider the problem of

²⁷ Westergaard, Kurt, and Lykkegaard, John, *Kurt Westergaard: The Man behind the Mohammed Cartoon*, Mine Erindringer, Tilst, Denmark 2012.

²⁸ Cliteur, Paul, “Godslastering en zelfcensuur na de moord op Theo van Gogh”, in: *Nederlands Juristenblad*, Afl. 2004/45, 17 december 2004, pp. 2328-2335.

ignorance the greater risk. Governments tend to undervalue the importance of such examples for the public at large, and all the legislation on incitement to hatred and offense to religious groups have not been able to stem the tide of so-called “populist movements”. Prosecuting Brigitte Bardot or Houellebecq²⁹ in France or Geert Wilders in the Netherlands have – generally speaking – been strategic failures. The best way to stop the march of populism seems to me to remove the causes that make these movements so powerful. And especially multiculturalists have developed a special talent to make populist movements much more powerful than they would have been, if European governments had taken the threat of religious extremism more seriously.

Coming to the end of my talk, that leaves us with the question what to replace multiculturalism with. A better idea, perhaps, are ordinary “human rights”. Individual human rights. Democracy needs a reorientation of individual human rights, human dignity, and hospitality and friendliness towards one another in society. Multicultural society is something we can experience as an enrichment of our lives. But at the same time we also need a clear recognition of where the *limits* for cultural diversity have to be drawn. The deep diversity we have met in the examples I have given remind us of that central task. Appeasing extremist groups and individuals by making concessions on the importance of freedom of thought and freedom of speech is not the right course to follow. And ultimately, this is not in the interest of religious and ethnic minorities either.

Thank you for your attention.

²⁹ Masson, Sophie, “The Strange Trial of Michel Houellebecq”, in: *The Social Contract*, Volume 14, No. 2, Winter 2003/2004.