

Editorial: Do you understand me?

Some days ago I read an article called „End of a dream couple“ („Ende eines Traumpaars“, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 13th of September 2011, p. 21). It wasn't about the crisis in the relationship of famous actors or singers. It reported on the imminent separation of Volkswagen and Suzuki, two big automobile enterprises from Germany and Japan. „The story of VW and Suzuki is above all the story of a big misunderstanding of two proud business concerns.“ („Die Geschichte von VW und Suzuki ist vor allem die Geschichte eines großen Missverständnisses zweier stolzer Konzerne.“) VW was angry, because Suzuki bought motors from Fiat. This would be a violation of their cooperation agreement. The Germans, though holding only 20% of the Japanese enterprise, affirmed publicly to have an important influence on its decisions. This, on the other hand, enraged Mr. Osamu Suzuki, who is not at all amused having the impression that VW is considering his empire being its daughter company. Now he advises the Germans to finish the partnership, but VW doesn't agree, because it wants to expand in the Indian market through Suzuki; billions of dollars are hanging in the balance.

In his 2010 book „Deutschland schafft sich ab“ („Germany Does Away With Itself“ or „Germany Abolishes Itself“) the German politician Thilo Sarrazin denounced the failure of Germany's post-war immigration policy. It became the most popular but also widely criticised book on politics by a German-language author in a decade, sparking a nation-wide controversy about the costs and benefits of the ideology of multiculturalism.

Many other examples could be added. But only the two of them are showing the major importance of the relationships between people from different cultures. These relationships *do exist* - on the economic level, the professional, the political, the social and on the personal one too, nowadays more than ever. So the question that arises is *not* whether this process of Globalization can be reversed, but *how* it can be shaped in the best way. That is why we, some teachers from different European countries, wanted to establish intercultural learning already *at school*.

So we applied for a European school project, a so called Comenius Project, and in 2009 we succeeded. In order to give answers to the main question „Do you understand me?“ (from 2009 till 2011) we worked mainly on two levels:



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„Intercultural Driving Licence“



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1. by choosing „Do you understand me?“ as the general topic of this *trait d'union* issue, with its various aspects of language/s, communication and mutual understanding
2. by creating the virtual platform <http://traitdunion-online.eu> as an Editorial Office for our intercultural communication and teamwork, and as an online magazine at the same time. Its use and also the immediate cooperation during the project students' exchanges were designed to enable the participants to gather experience in the area of international cooperation and to improve this way their intercultural competence/s.

The final aim was to compile a catalogue of well-defined intercultural skills providing the basis for the „Intercultural Driving Licence“, an individualized certificate of each student's intercultural competence/s. Even if different catalogues with such skills have been proposed during these two years, the way to that final aim turned out to be rather stony, and so several steps still remain to be done. Maybe in the new Comenius Project (2011-13) called „The world is changing“? It will be coordinated by our Polish partner school *VIII Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego*, Kraków. And there are already some prestigious universities in Poland and Spain being interested in cooperating with us, not to forget the important network „Schulen: Partner der Zukunft“ (PASCH) („Schools: Partners of the Future“), an initiative of the German foreign ministry. Insofar, the chances are not so slim.