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Migration, Euro-Mediterranean Relations and Intercultural Dialogue

The June 1995 *Scientific American* included the article *From Complexity to Perplexity* by John Horgan. It was dealing with the situation at Santa Fe Institute, where – as Horgan said – “complex people ponder complex things”. The title, referred originally to a very concrete situation at a research institute, could be applied to some issues which have become relevant in the last years in the European scene. Three of them have been selected as topics for this session: Intercultural Dialogue and Euro-Mediterranean Relations are probably provoking positive connotations in the citizens’ mind, whereas migration probably has to deal with a more complex reaction. But also both Euro-Mediterranean Relations and Intercultural Dialogue can be the point of departure for difficult debates.

Introductory remarks should of course not substitute the experts’ presentation, but give only some remarks as frame for the following statements, some reflections, some questions too, maybe also the expression of a certain perplexity in front of such difficult and at the same time relevant topics.

Migration as challenge

In fact, the “Migration” issue is one of the most relevant challenges Europe faces since more than a decade. The situation in the different Member states is by no means comparable: there are countries having a long experience in receiving migrants, whereas other countries are nowadays experiencing the inverse stream. Countries like Spain have reversed the tendency in the last few years, being now a receiver country whereas it has been during decades an emigrating society.

The emergence of a space without controls at the internal borders, a space in which free movement is guaranteed not only for European Union citizens and the consciousness that migration – like all human phenomena – has not only positive consequences has caused an awareness for the need to develop a coordinated reaction with political measures which probably cannot be named as a common policy but which have fostered an impressive evolution in the last decades. When the European Union was established, the image of the “three pillars” was very common. It was expected that the third pillar would have a slow evolution taking into account that it was touching sensitive point of the States’ sovereignty, aspects in which the sensitivity in the different States was clearly differentiated. But things have evolved with an unexpected acceleration also due to the pressure of the events since 2001. On that way, the possible inclusion of aspects of an internal policy into the mechanisms and rules of the European Community – and not only of intergovernmental cooperation – can be seen as a revolution in the history of European integration.

But migration is not only a “technical” issue that has to be regulated from a legal point of view. It is moreover a question to the European societies - or a set of questions that affect the core of the “European identity” – if it exists – or of “European culture”, if culture in fact includes values, attitudes, patterns, mental worlds.

Many questions arise, for example: Should migration be seen only from the perspective of the European countries as recipient countries? Shall be taken into account mainly the needs of the labour market? In what relation should be migration policy and development policy?

These are questions for the politics. But in front of migration also the societies in Europe are addressed. Europeans have been during centuries so often migrants, due to political prosecution, economic misery, missionary zeal and so many other motivations. They have stayed in different countries all over the world; their descendents are still living there. Now, when their continent has become attractive for so many citizens from other parts of the world (and from some parts of Europe itself), how will they react?

The debate around the veil in different countries shows that the answer is by no means simple, that a relatively collateral question can provoke debates and struggles around the topic how much integration has to be demanded, how much diversity can be accepted.

Intercultural Dialogue: an experience and a style

Intercultural dialogue is intrinsically connected with the migration issue. Intercultural Dialogue is often understood as the European strategy in international relations, especially with those cultures with which a conflict could happen. Intercultural dialogue is therefore sometimes seen as the European answer to the clash of civilizations which has been announced by Samuel Huntington and has been seen in the tremendous attacks from September 11 and later on in Madrid and London. Some remarks are needed.

On one hand, Intercultural Dialogue starts as a specificity of the European attitude towards third countries prior to these terrible events. It is in the frame of the Barcelona Process and the development of a Euro-Mediterranean politic that Intercultural Dialogue became a key point in the Community's external action. And it has to be fixed with the year 1995, long before the terror attacks.

On the other hand, Intercultural Dialogue has been underlined within the external action precisely as a counter-action to the United States' reaction to the threats and attacks. In a world that, after September 11, seemed to fall in a new period of dominance of one power in the world concert – instead of the desired multilateralism – the European Union has tried to be present in international relations precisely via dialogue as an instrument of the soft diplomacy as which the Union's external action has been described.

But Intercultural Dialogue is not only a style in the external relations. It should also be the guideline for the action inwards, in societies which are becoming less homogenous. Nevertheless, Intercultural Dialogue is putting also the question of the values which have to be respected in any dialogue, because they are essential to the constitution of a society (all the European societies) that has established a system of constituent principles as a lesson from the own history. This is the case in all European societies: after the terrible experiences of previous centuries, culminating with the two great European wars we know as World Wars, after the collapse of the political systems and the substitution of political normality by human beings depreciating extremists who have succeeded to govern the States – after all this negations of any kind of humanity the new start was done under inclusion of "Ewigkeitsklauseln", as they are called in the German Grundgesetz, it means, under inclusion of values and fundamental rights which can never be moved. It is not by chance that in the years in which Intercultural Dialogue has been one of the prioritarian items in the European political agenda – culminating 2008

with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – also for the first time values are *expressis verbis* mentioned in a fundamental treaty.

It is clear that Europe has, on the other hand, learnt the lesson which has conducted to the harsh criticism to Eurocentrism. It has no intention to appear as the preacher of the European values around the world. But the effort not to repeat errors from the past cannot be the reason for making new mistakes. Europe's legitimacy for demanding the maintenance of human rights also when trying to improve Intercultural Dialogue is based on the own history, on the capability to have been able to overcome the own past with its darkness and to have found a new paradigm of acting together based precisely on Intercultural Dialogue, on the creation of rules and institutions for guaranteeing that this dialogue, which has many elements of interculturality never can be abandoned.

The Mediterranean world between myth and challenge

It already has been mentioned that there is an intrinsic link between Intercultural Dialogue and the Mediterranean space; it has been seen as a privileged area for applying the methodology of Intercultural Dialogue, an area which has a decisive relevance for Europe's future.

The Mediterranean world has played a very special role for the development of the cultural elements which can be considered the roots of the "common cultural heritage" which is mentioned in the Treaty. The further European history has moved away from the Mediterranean area, and world history seems to move nowadays to other spaces which probably will become the decisive spaces in the future decades. Nevertheless, Europe should not neglect the Mediterranean dimension: in this space, problems, challenges, synergies and opportunities can be developed which will be decisive for the next generations.

In history, the Mediterranean has sometimes been mystified as a very special space, 'un espace magique' (Thierry Fabre), including the encounter of cultures as a specificity of this area, considered sometimes as 'une communauté de destin des peuples', but also 'un terre d'accueil et de rencontre' (Paul Rasse).

Two remarks are needed: probably, exchange and encounter is a characteristic of the whole cultural life everywhere. There is a tradition to consider culture as related to a national (or ethnic) entity; in these cases, culture is mainly as a closed world, a monolithic block experiencing influences (a process which can be described also as "suffering influences" – a loss of the own identity?) But a look to cultural history, at least in Europe (which is a small territory configured by many different cultures), shows that exchange, "métissage", mutual influence, common tendencies, imitation, transformation and all the other forms of contact are inherent to cultural life. The expression "All the other forms of contact" includes, of course, rejection, opposition, the feeling of being threatened...

And for the Mediterranean space also this broad sense of "encounter" has to be applied. In fact, it has been a space of exchange and of mutual enrichment, but it has been also a space of violence, experience of "the other" as a threat, a danger. With the Croatian author Melita Richter, the 'conflicting and contradictory character of the worlds which inhabit the Mediterranean' has to be underlined. When opening the eyes for the relevance of the Mediterranean space, "mythification" is not useful. The whole reality has to be included; the whole history has to be taken into account. Here also the question arises with high intensity how the European values have to be considered in the dialogue space in which the Mediterranean has to be transformed – and already is being transformed, because since the

beginning of the Barcelona process many highly valuable initiatives have been put into practice. Léonce Bekemans desire remains valid: the Mediterranean shall be 'an area of shared prosperity and conviviality between our peoples, cultures and civilizations; a zone of common values, where we can disagree in a civilized way and listen to the Other with respect for the differences, images and stories of the Other.'

The Jean Monnet Programme in front of the given topics

In all these three topics which are at the core of this session it has been worked intensively within the Jean Monnet Action – now Programme – since many years. I will focus in the field I better know because I had the luck to be involved in a relevant project: the organisation of three conferences on Intercultural Dialogue. In the Declaration after the first of these Conferences, authored by the Scientific Committee of Jean Monnet Professors¹, was established that 'A policy of intercultural dialogue, next to traditional economic and diplomatic relations, plays a vital role in the governance of the shared responsibility²'. The Union was invited 'to commit itself to an ambitious and on-going policy in favour of intercultural dialogue', that should be 'embedded in daily life'. But not only general remarks were content in this Declaration. The Scientific Committee stated also that 'the policy of an intercultural dialogue by the European Union should focus on youth, education and communication', whereby priorities are mentioned which remained valid also nowadays.

¹ The Scientific Committee was chaired by Prof. Hartmut Kaelble. Members were Bo Strath, Rostane Mehdi, Antonio Papisca, Léonce Bekemans and Enrique Banús.

² Symposium Intercultural Dialogue. Declaration. Brussels, 20-21 March 2002.