

ABSTRACT

Introduction to the Dialogue between Cultures *by Professor Dusan Sidjanski*

The dialogue between cultures is vital to Europe and to the main cultures in the world. Europe in itself embodies the idea of “intercultural dialogue”. The first *Dialogue between Cultures* was organised in Geneva in 1961 by Denis de Rougemont, at that time Director of the European Cultural Centre (ECC), which was followed by the conference “Europe World” in Basel in 1964.

Recently, the *Dialogue between Cultures* was revived by the ECC in January 2004, followed by a conference in Lisbon during the same year which was convened under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Portugal, José Manuel Barroso.

The basic condition for the dialogue between cultures is the recognition of the notion of human beings, and consequently mutual respect between different cultures. On this basis, it is possible to envisage dialogue amongst “coherent areas of study” as defined by Toynbee. Around the pole formed by Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, European culture developed through contact and exchange with other cultures in the Mediterranean world with its Arabic-Muslim and Jewish aspects. The main contribution by Europe lies in its experience of democracy and legal system, based on the principles of human rights, and through the expansion of science and technology.

Today, in the world of globalization, the mutual understanding among different cultures and traditions is a prerequisite for *sustainable peace*. In fact, today’s conflicts and wars are in some way reproducing the “clash of civilizations”, a theory referred to in a book by Samuel Huntington. The main merit of this study is the fact that he pointed out the dangers of the cleavages and cultural frontiers which are re-emerging today. As a response to this new challenge, Europe is promoting the *era of dialogue*, more specifically between the Muslim, Christian and Jewish cultures. The dialogue amongst great cultural regions has to be complemented by myriads of micro-dialogues inside Europe.

With Denis de Rougemont we always stressed and insisted on the fact that culture does not only mean religion, philosophy and the arts; it also encompasses political principles and systems, ideologies and behaviour, traditions and innovations, as well as science and technology, which are becoming universal. Culture is a global concept.

In conclusion, I will highlight the importance of basic values and principles and the role of education and communication as vehicles for better mutual understanding and peaceful cohabitation.