

8. The European Values Dilemma: Laicity and Religious Cultures

The terms “laicity” and “religion” are closely related to European Enlightenment, and they are very helpful for understanding the diversity and characteristics of Europe as one of the cultural spaces of the world society. But we should be careful enough to avoid the traps provided by terminological dichotomies. According to recent research, neither is laicity a French specificity, nor do the two terms indicate two clearly distinct features of what is European reality today. The usefulness of the two terms lies mainly in their function as tools for de- and re-constructing existing interpretations of the European cultural space, in relation to history as well as to relations with other cultural spaces.

There are more than 200 years of dynamic development of all sciences, emancipated from religious limitations or directives; but there is also dynamic development of theological science, and of the various scientific approaches to religion – a shared space for theology and other social sciences.

Since Renaissance and the quest for discoveries and colonisation of other regions of the world, there are more than 500 years of shaping the European cultural space in permanent interaction with other cultural spaces. Enlightenment gave this interaction its fundamental values: Napoleon and his temporary Prussian allies were soon defeated in their quest for dominating the European continent; but their innovative model of using “enlightened” universalism of thought (in terms of civic rights, modern governance and free trade) as justification of conquest became the blueprint of almost all subsequent relations between Europe and other regions. Ironically, even the style of Christian mission outside Europe tuned into the pattern of “spreading civilization and culture”.

The ongoing development of the European Union provides an extremely important platform for transforming the heritage of 19th and 20th century of nationalisms and fixation at “national cultures” into a broader understanding of “unity in diversity”. The increasing reference made in political discourse and in the media to “European values”, however, implies heavy ideological backpack: EU-Europe has developed a – mostly subconscious – tendency of presenting itself as incarnation of universal values. Building new cultural

frontiers puts the international contract on universal values, marked by founding the United Nations and progressive agreement on human rights standard setting instruments, at risk.

I advocate new efforts for reconstructing our understanding of the European cultural space. Laicity is neither specific to France nor to Europe; we need more knowledge about the diversity of cultures and cultural, including religious, expression. In Europe, universal values are usually taken for granted as fruit of Enlightenment. We need a better informed understanding of such values, to quote from the preambular paragraph of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as “common standards of achievement for all” the international community, notwithstanding specific cultural and religious heritage. And we need a new commitment to a European cultural space, rooted in openness to and permanent interaction with the whole world, and, thus, not in need of excessive self-reference.

1. “European Values” – the Ideology of Fortress Europe?

The term “European values” has lost much of its innocence during the so-called cartoon crisis early in 2006. One out of numerous examples to indicate the problem is the press release issued by the European Commission on 15 February 2006, echoing statements of almost all EU Governments: “Freedom of expression and press freedom are ranking very high in our European values”, is the core message addressed to the public both in Europe and in Arab and other mostly Muslim countries. Is the value base of Human rights a specificity of Europe, marking a civilizational frontier to other regions? Many had hoped that the use of human rights as an ideological weapon during the Cold War would have come to an end with the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993, solemnly declaring all human rights as “a coherent whole”.

The recent debate about “European values” highlights two alternative options – a *substantive option*, insisting in deeply rooted cultural differences between Europe and other regions, and a *commitment option*, focusing on Europe’s commitment to the implementation of universal values which are – at least on paper – shared by the international community.

The first option guides the new European values network, established by Czech, Polish and German civil society organizations. It insists in the specificity of “European values”

vis-à-vis other regions and, especially, vis-à-vis Islam (for details, see the network's website <http://www.europeanvalues.net>).

An alternative option was developed by the European Parliament Democracy Caucus together with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and several political Foundations such as the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The proposal for a "European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership" promotes intercultural dialogue as a key dimension of co-development of Europe and "all regions with which Europe maintains relations". "The values of the European Union" are seen as commitment in terms of support for democracy, integration and social development rather than substantive cultural differences between Europe and other regions. This "commitment option" was developed in the context of the debate on the social agenda of the European Union, with focus on pluralism, social cohesion, quality of life, solidarity and justice.¹

Given its anticipated outcomes, including public support for or rejection of Turkey's accession to the EU and the relations with Muslim communities, the debate on Europe's specificity in terms of cultural values can be considered an essential dimension of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue 2008. "Preservation of the 'European way of life' and opposing Turkish membership in the EU" are listed among the objectives for campaigning of the new European values Network. The – failed – European Constitution project included a definition of European values much more in line with the above-cited "commitment option". It seems worthwhile checking references to European values in the new EU agreement approved under Portuguese Presidency.

20 years ago, Jacques Delors as the then President of the European Commission promoted the idea to "give Europe a soul", quoting almost forgotten words of Robert Schuman. Delors saw the need to overcome the image of EU institutions as mainly bureaucratic entities. This opened an ongoing dialogue between the European Commission and civil society, including churches and religious organizations. It seems as if many contemporary actors in this field would prefer – consciously or not – sealing off a whole package of cultural self-references for Europe, rather than building on Europe's tradition of shaping its diversity and pluralism in constant interaction with other regions of the world.

1 See the relevant communication "European values in a globalised world" by the European Commission to the EP, COM (2005) 525 final under <http://europa.eu/cgi-bin/etal.pl>.

At the early stage of the Cold War, the – then mainly Western – Council of Europe (with Turkey as founding member) took up the task from United Nations to define in more detail the Human Rights listed in the Universal Declaration of 1948. The 1950 European Convention of Human Rights was instrumental for forging a common understanding of civil, political, social and cultural rights of European citizens. This Convention is now – with all its implementation tools – the value base of all geographical Europe. In elaborating on the right to cultural self-determination, the convention reflects an understanding of culture that is not limited to heritage but remains open to creativity and change. It seems, however, that many voices in today’s value discourse in Europe are not as well informed as necessary: 1966, more than 40 years ago, the whole substance of the European Human Rights Convention was adopted by the United Nations, under the format of the two covenants on civic and political, economic, social and cultural rights. The specificity of Europe does not rely in values which would not be shared by the international community. The characteristics of the European cultural space lie in instruments for their implementation, such as the European Court of Human Rights.

As regards public commitment, I would not subscribe myself to an assertion that Europeans would be always *avant-garde* in defending human rights and their values. When the press release on the cartoon row was issued in Brussels in February last year, I was invited by Arab Press Freedom Watch – an association of journalists’ unions in all Arab countries, for their meeting in Cairo. Let me quote from their communiqué, March 2006: “We are defending daily freedom of expression. Other than most of our colleagues in Europe, many of us go to jail in defence of this right, are often victims of severe punishment, and are constantly threatened by political and economic power suing us for libel. Our core values are not different from those of our European colleagues. We hope, therefore, that our appeal to respect religious feelings of Muslims will also be shared by European media.”

It seems as if the two discourses on human rights and on culture would very often not share a common framework of values and understanding.

2. Deeply rooted: unfinished Enlightenment

European Enlightenment is an unfinished project. The most convincing arguments have been provided by European emigrants to the United States, from Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s quest for “Dialectics of Enlightenment” to Hungarian born Agnes

Heller's appeal for a "second Renaissance" (1990). There is a widespread feeling of a serious lack of self-criticism in this fundamental tradition of European identities. The problem, in short, is the mostly unreflected connotation between universalism of scientific thinking and ethical universalism. Ironically, the promotion of new secular universal values follows an apologetic pattern quite similar to religious traditions: as much as religious leaders insisted in the distinction between moral values and the weakness of human beings, preventing them from always following ethical standards, the secular thinkers were almost all far from considering so-called "abuse" of universalist values for colonial purposes/domination as a problem for the concept itself. The idea of uni-linear progress was, too long, preventing deeper reflection on the fundament of universal values and ethics.

Between the 16th and the 19th century, there was not much systematic reflection on the ideological potential of European modernity. Michel de Montaigne's lucid distinction between the evolution of thinking (where he saw Europe far ahead of "barbarian peoples") and "barbarian" morals (where Europeans were more prone to cruelty than most colonized populations) is among the few non-religious reflections of contradictions between knowledge and ethics, at the end of the 16th century. 300 years later, Emile Durkheim's reflections on "chauvinism" which would be an appropriate term for European colonial policy, are another rare example. It is part of our European history that romanticism (Germany and Poland) and early nationalism contributed critical perspectives at the Enlightenment project. Let me quote one of the most eloquent arguments formulated by the German writer, composer and civil servant to the Saxonian court E.T.A. Hoffmann. In one of his animal stories, he writes: "In seeking his own benefit, the clever man pretends to act always on behalf of others who, in return, feel obliged to do whatever the clever man had intended them to do."

The lack of self-criticism in Europe's intellectual and moral roots led to myriads of sterile confrontations between proponents of universalism and relativism which include contemporary disputes about social cohesion and integration. There is much room between the two seemingly opposed classical European types of dealing with cultural diversity: the traditions of French "republican" integration policy, which sometimes is accused of disregarding cultural specificities of ethnic or religious groups, and the UK model of different communities living side by side, which sometimes is accused of communitarism. There is not only one way of pursuing universal values, as much as there is not only one standard of measuring progress towards democracy and pluralism.

The political discourse on Europe and its values would benefit from the intellectual instruments provided by modern philosophy and social sciences. Among the common denominators of so-called pragmatism or constructivism (hermeneutics/analytical philosophy) from John Dewey to Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas (despite their significant differences) are the position of “observers”, including the social actors themselves, and the critical reflection of communication on truth and what is right and what is wrong. If our “concepts are real in their consequences” (Dewey), there can’t be any longer a pre-established code of universal ethics and moral values without substantive questioning. Our construction of reality must be open-ended and subject to reconstruction and change. The corresponding concept of values is that of agreed standards to be achieved rather than the deadlocked opposition of universal values versus culture-specific morals. As much as claims for scientific truth must be contested, claims for “moral rightness”, for ways to achieve agreed normative standards, must also be subject of discourse and reconstruction.

Public and especially political discourse in Europe still seems to be guided by the simplified “enlightened” dichotomy of secular knowledge versus religious faith. Both – formerly opposed – sides have changed, and focus on claims or beliefs replaced former insistence in possession of truth. The much criticized Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict XVI (12 September 2006) is a good indicator of such changes. His main message was addressed to his own constituency. He warned against excessive pride of human reasoning. He qualified reason as a “spark of divinity” in every human being, thus reconciling secular and religious traditions. His secondary message was classical apologetics against Islam, accused of insisting in “total transcendence” of God, and thus de-valuing or making totally contingent individual reasoning on truth and moral rightness.

The ensuing debate both in Christian and Muslim communities was fascinating. In my view, it provided a number of extremely important arguments for animating intercultural and interreligious dialogue beyond sterile preaching of common values. The message to the Pope by 38 Muslim leaders (September 2006) insists in the principle that “there is no coercion in religion”, and that, therefore “belief” is an act of free will. Other contributions referred to everyday religion in contrast to dogmatic differences, thus highlighting internal diversity of all religious communities, which include varieties of fundamentalists, spiritual movements, believers in strict hierarchy, and openness to critical (“prophetic”) currents. Concerning the issue of relations between religion and violence, the arguments converged into addressing the attitude of those claiming to be in possession of truth versus the more modest believers, across different world views, secular as well as religious.

3. Knowledge Base: Research on Cultural Diversity and Religious Pluralism

The origins of modern sociology, in particular the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, provided a good theoretical framework for research into cultural diversity and pluralism in Europe. It took, however, until the end of the 20th century to accumulate a sound empirical basis in this field (the most comprehensive analysis of research is provided in Charles Taylor's "Secular Age", 2007). Too often, and this indicates the dangers of the trap established by the dichotomy laicity versus religious cultures, the "religious factor" (Gerhard Lenski) was given the status of an independent variable, and religion was "isolated into a separate cultural sphere" (Farley 2005, p.7).

Neither Durkheim nor Weber should be held responsible for this delay. The mainstream interpretation of Max Weber's famous essay on "Protestantism and the spirit of Capitalism" simplified it into an argument stressing religious roots of profit-seeking investment and corresponding hard work. A more careful reading of Weber reveals that, rather than stressing causality, he restricted himself to elaborating similarities in the mindsets of Calvinist believers in divine pre-selection becoming visible already during their lifetime and early protagonists of American Capitalism. In terms of later theories (Parsons, Luhmann), Weber's argument elaborates functional equivalents between secular and religious motivation, thus providing a bridge between secular and religious cultures rather than isolating them from each other.

A large part of knowledge about cultural and religious pluralism is assembled in Jean-Paul Willaime's study "Europe et religions" (2004). He defines "laicity" no longer in formal terms of complete separation between state and religion but in terms of pluralism, based on constitutional guarantees of freedom of thought, dissociation of citizenship and religious affiliation, with corresponding levels of autonomy of public and religious or other belief or world view associations. Such laicity, according to Willaime, is shared by European countries having a so-called State religion (Nordic countries), provision of recognition of religions by the State – with a diversity of contractual relationships originating in secularization of properties formerly owned by churches (Germany, Russia, UK, Spain, Italy), or complete separation between State and religion (such as France). None of those types is "pure" (e.g. the special case of Alsace, and public subvention of church projects including publications in France). Consequently, Willaime appeals

for leaving behind historical contentions such as traditional secularized mistrust against religions, and advocates public policies of integrating religious contributions to social, cultural and ethical developments in society.

Willaime maintains the argument that religions are providing structure to the life of many citizens, including those defining themselves as “non-religious”. His research on cultural and religious pluralism supports his recent recommendation to the Council of Europe to refrain from engaging itself in inter-religious dialogue (which would affect the autonomy of religious communities) but to seek increased contribution of such communities to the secular endeavour of inter-cultural dialogue (Willaime 2007).

Another sociologist, Ghalioun Burhan, Director of the Orient Research Centre at Sorbonne-Nouvelle Paris III University, enlarges Willaime’s laicity argument beyond Europe. He describes the 20th century developments in the Arab world as “secularization without laicity”, referring to modernization of public administration vis-à-vis attitudes and behaviour of individuals and social groups. His explanation is interesting, insofar as he presents modernization of Arab societies essentially as combating external domination, and not – as it happened in most European societies – combating internal oppression. This way, he provides a social science perspective which contests the popular argument that secularization would be specific to European cultures or religions (Burhan 2000).

Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, complements such argumentation in his analysis of obstacles to democratic practice in an environment where “the principles of democracy have been accepted”. He recalls the “many agonies” through which the US, the UK, France, Germany, or Italy had to go “before they achieved not only their current systems of democratic government with their distinctive characteristics, but also the broad based support of their people in the exercise of that democratic system” (Serageldin 2007, p 13). Europe, only recently abandoning the conceptual isolation of religion into a separate cultural sphere, should not repeat this historical error in assessing other regions of the world.

Mark Lilla, professor of Humanities at Columbia University in New York, has accumulated historical evidence against the myth of the “great separation” between religion and secular political systems. In his recent book “The stillborn God” (Lilla 2007), he argues eloquently about similarities between “enlightened” Hegelian political theory and the development of Protestant as well as Jewish liberal theology into a kind of “deification” of authoritarian governance, with protestant support to Nazi regime and

Jewish support to Stalinism as extremes. He left out parallel developments with Catholic support for Spanish and Italian fascism. The core argument is that Christian or Jewish leaders in American and European history of the 20th century have in large numbers misused their religious authority for declaring undemocratic governance as instruments for implementation of God's will. Such political theology, according to Lilla, has more resemblances with political Islam than most Westerners would be aware of.

Lilla is strongly defending the idea of separating church and state. But he is also strongly opposed to a Western hypocrisy that sees political Islam as the exception in an otherwise successful history of secularisation. His research helps better understanding the so-called revival of religion. President George W. Bush's religious affirmation of his policy as much as widespread syncretism of superstition and religious feelings (Lilla gives as an example the publication of "The Da Vinci Code" and subsequent public enthusiasm in discovery of so-called religious "secrets") are not at all new elements in the history of so-called secular Western societies.

4. Normative Instruments are available

The discovery of diversity as a cultural resource was a long process for the international community. Today, we can observe increasing acceptance of cultural diversity being a value rather than a threat to modern societies. The first Earth Summit in Rio 1992 resulted in normative action and public awareness of the fact that bio-diversity is essential for the survival of nature. Similarly, cultural diversity has become a central theme for international standard-setting in a more and more open public environment. "Unity in Diversity" was chosen as central theme for the European Union with, however, some focus on diversity between Member States. Internal diversity in each country is not considered among the fields of EU competence. The Barcelona Declaration agreed upon in 1995 between the EU Member States and their Southern and Eastern Mediterranean neighbours marks an important step, insofar as it includes a political commitment to "ensure cultural diversity and religious pluralism" in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region.

The Report by the UN/UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, chaired by former UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuéllar, in 1996, was given the appealing title "Our Creative Diversity". Endorsed by the World Conference on Culture

and Development 1998 in Stockholm, this report paved the way for the first world-wide normative instrument recognizing “diversified, multiple and dynamic cultural identities” of individuals and social groups – the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity approved in November 2001 by the General Conference of UNESCO. It was preceded by a similar document of the Council of Europe in February 2001. The new UNESCO Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expression which entered into force in May 2007 is the most recent standard, reflecting national and international commitments to – in terms of earlier codified Human Rights – the right to cultural self-determination. The new UN Alliance of Civilizations project can build on refined common standards for bringing together the discourse on Human Rights with that on Culture – and we can leave behind not only the obsolete dichotomy of laicity and religion but also its offspring, a cultural determinism which has been deeply rooted in European history long before Huntington.

5. Pragmatic Proposals for overcoming religious and cultural illiteracy

The tensions after 9/11 were aggravated by widespread protests among Muslim communities against a perceived discrimination of Islam in Europe (not to the same extent in the US), related to the cartoon issue early in 2006. Political and media messages from Europe insisting in “our European values”, as being very different from those in other regions of the world, ended up in a communication disaster. Three consecutive confrontations between “the West against Islam and the rest” in the UN General Assembly and in the UN Human Rights Council over the issue “defamation of religion”, the recent one in April 2007, indicate the extent to which both sides have developed an attitude of digging in their heels.

The cartoon row revealed the low level of mutual knowledge about cultural and religious realities in different societies. It is not the absence of abstract knowledge about Islam in Europe; it is rather the absence of quality interaction with Muslim communities. One typical example: Educational materials prepared by well-resourced German pedagogical institutions for use at German schools in the aftermath of the cartoon disaster invite young Germans to learn that “it is not in the Qur’an” that pictorial representations of Prophet Muhammad are not allowed. How could this help intercultural understanding? Should young Germans teach lessons about the Qur’an to their fellow Muslim students?

It has become obvious that public education in Europe does not provide a sufficient level of cultural and religious literacy, with religion – still in the tradition of the laicity-religion dichotomy – largely being considered a matter of those concerned by specific beliefs only. Most of the European countries which offer religious education at public schools divide students for such lessons according to their religious affiliation. Catholics learn about Catholicism, Protestants about Protestantism, Jews about Judaism, and Muslims about Islam. Ironically, the best resourced group are often students that do not have a religious affiliation, since they can benefit from so-called alternative secular lessons about comparative religion, morals and ethics.

Only in October and November 2006, two international high-level expert groups provided recommendations on the need for all educational institutions to provide learners with a minimum knowledge about cultural diversity and religious pluralism: one group was the expert group established by the Arab League and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures², the other was the High-Level Group established by the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations project.³

Their recommendations gave renewed attention to the report on “l’enseignement du fait religieux dans l’école laïque”, prepared by Régis Debray in 2002 at request of the then French Minister of national education Jack Lang. This report advocates substantive efforts in overcoming “religious illiteracy” through dealing with religions as “elements of civilization” in all related subjects such as history, geography, languages, and arts. Debray characterizes the prevailing attitude of laicity in France as “laïcité d’incompétence” which would need to be replaced by a “laïcité d’intelligence”.

Debray does not limit himself to a critical review of French schools. With reference to practice in countries such as Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, Belgium or Turkey, he notes the absence of convincing standards and models for learning about religious pluralism: “Each collective mentality muddles through its specific heritage and reflects home-grown relations between symbolic forces” (Debray 2002, p.23). Debray’s recommendations are very rich in arguments for the need to learn more about historical and present relations between religious and secular expressions. He advocates a way

2 See section 3.4 of this book for the full text of their recommendations.

3 Alliance of Civilizations. Report of the High Level Group, 13 November 2006 (the full text can be downloaded from the website www.unaoc.org); Recommendation 3 on Education.

of learning about religious pluralism which is not confined to dogmatic or catechism knowledge but deals also with everyday religious life and practice. He insists in the need to provide a non-denominational learning about religious pluralism as part of cultural diversity. Debray has elaborated further his approach to religion in his study “Le feu sacré: fonctions du religieux” (2003) where he reconciles the Feuerbach-Marx view at religion with elements of sociological systems theory. He qualifies religion as “vitamin of the weak”, thus still reflecting a French tradition of “laïcité”.

A visible result of Debray’s report is the European Institute for Scientific Studies of Religions, established at the Sorbonne only two months after the presentation of the report. This Institute, chaired for more than two years by Régis Debray, is now recognized as an avant-garde institution for social studies of religions in Europe, and it has helped revitalising this field of academic study. Less visible are changes in schools. Such changes need time, especially if they should follow the interdisciplinary approach advocated by Debray.

A recent bibliography prepared by the new institute and partners in 2006 on “education and religion in Europe” presents more than 100 new publications in French language alone, which is an indicator of increasing attention to the problem. Ten years ago, the international community imposed on Bosnia and Herzegovina the inclusion of the subject “culture of religions” into the core curriculum for all public schools. There is hope that the challenge of overcoming religious illiteracy will not be limited to one country in Europe that has witnessed neighbours turning over night into enemies along religious dividing lines. Quality education is among the key factors in preventing abuse of religion and culture for political or economic interests.

6. Challenges for the 21st Century: Reconstructing our Understanding of Culture

Culturalism can be seen as an offspring of 19th and 20th century nation-building, which, as a rule, relied heavily on extolling national pride through re-writing history and constructing “national cultures”, as an instrument for national cohesion. European unification provides a frame for Europeanization of such culturalism. Weighed against the nationalist excesses of the past, such cultural Europeanization can and must

be appreciated. But from looking at Europe from outside, such new culturalism is catastrophic. Enlightenment is still unfinished. Huntington was never an outsider; his scenario fits into the mainstream of a Europe that seeks self-assertion by insisting in the specificity of European values. Moral opposition to a “clash” and expressing preference for good relations or even an alliance between civilizations does not mean escaping a culturalist scenario. Fortunately, the members of the UN Alliance of Civilizations High Level Group addressed the bias of culturalism.

Pluralism requires using the plural as much as the singular. European identity is based on pluralism; we should, therefore, speak more often about European identities. And such pluralism is not limited to the diversity between nation states. European human rights policy insists in all international fora that the decisive step towards accepting diversity is done within each society. The Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, in his manifesto on “murderous identities” (1996), did not only explain the mechanisms for transforming stereotypes into bullets; he also developed very convincing arguments for respecting the right of each citizen to cultural self-determination. Our Governments, he argues, invest tremendous resources in personal ID documents indicating the uniqueness of every person, but they do not recognize the unique mixture of cultural orientations and identities of the same person. Creating “cultural ID cards” is one of the most revealing techniques for intercultural workshops. It is an educational tool for promoting the new international standards on cultural diversity – which recognize multiple, overlapping and dynamic cultural identities of the individual and of social groups.

Jacques Derrida, with his philosophical reconstruction of “hospitality”, has completed Immanuel Kant’s enlightened reflection about perpetual peace, based on a “cosmopolitan right”, which is “limited to conditions of universal hospitality”. Derrida’s (1997/2000) analysis results in the argument that sovereignty of the recipient host about his house is essential for hospitality. This was so persuasive that “hospitality” could enter, as a shared positive objective, recent proposals to revitalize the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EuroMeSCo, 2005). We could go one step further than Derrida: So-called specific European values such as anti-racism or anti-xenophobia are incorporated in the hospitality concept which, then, would be a value shared between Europe and other regions.

All modalities of culturalism – from the excesses of the Nazi and the Apartheid ideologies to armchair reasoning about cultural or religious differences being root causes of conflicts – are in opposition to human rights. We need to reconstruct our understanding of culture. The term has its roots in human interaction with nature. When the first UNESCO World

Conference on Culture (1982 in Mexico City) adopted such an “extended definition of culture”, the mainstream of cultural policies considered such broader understanding as not very practical, or even a product of romantic dreamers. The new international standards on cultural diversity indicate the objective: A human rights-based understanding of culture gives as much attention to creativity, to culture as an activity, as it gives to cultural heritage in which every individual is raised. Culture, in this understanding, is both: it is shaping the individual, and it is created by the individual.

In terms of intercultural dialogue, progress beyond shallow conclusions concerning shared values – the typical product of dialogue symposia – relies on new modalities of dialogue: We should no longer afford investing human and financial resources in representative dialogue – with a Jew, a Muslim, a Protestant, a Catholic, and – if we are generous – a non-believer on the podium. We need to address substance in the cultural dialogue, especially between Europe and its neighbours.

Tariq Ramadan, one of the most brilliant advocates of recognising Islam as part of European identities, formulated recently a very persuasive argument: “Never forget that ‘the others’ are as complex as we are.” There are never people who are completely different. ‘The others’ are “all equal, all different” in terms of the Council of Europe’s recent youth campaign.

Following good arguments of Régis Debray, we are invited to have a new look at religions, as part of our cultural history and present diversity. Further to Debray, we need to reconstruct our understanding of culture in re-asserting the intrinsic links between human rights, democracy, and the pluralism and diversity of cultural expressions.

Modern history textbooks apply the method of multi-perspectivity. Readers are invited to consider history from the viewpoint of different actors, to consult original documents rather than a ready-made harmonizing interpretation. My hope for Europe is that a uniform European way of looking at culture and values can be avoided. I would like to see, in Austrian, Hungarian or German classrooms, not only the one-sided interpretation of “defending the Christian occident against the Turks” in Vienna (1529 and 1683) or Belgrade (1688) in history lessons on the 16th and 17th centuries. The other side of the coin is equally interesting: the cultural achievements of the Ottoman Empire, including civil rights, economy, and other cultural aspects, shaping large parts of the European continent. In human rights lessons, I would like to see an analytical and not mainly exotic view at Al Andalus, large parts of Spain under Arab rule with living together of

Muslims, Christians and Jews long before religious freedom was even considered in other parts of Europe. The competition between political systems, culture and science of the Castilian kings and Al Andalus in Spain between the 12th century, the early stage of the reconquista, and the fall of Granada 1492, is one of the most fascinating chapters of European history.

Lord Byron was largely considered a romantic when he visited Ali Pasha Tepelene, the Ottoman Governor of what is today southern Albania and Northern Greece in 1809 because he wanted to learn about a perspective at the Ottoman Empire from within. I would like to see more Europeans today developing an active interest in discovering the wealth of cultural diversity of Europe, past and present. This includes the decisive role which Muslim communities and Islam continue to play in our continent. And I would like to see European visitors to Arab countries expressing a keen interest in discovering more than touristic places when they are guests of our hospitable southern neighbours.

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