

## **Development as an idea of culture**

Dear Maggy NAGEL, Minister for Culture of Luxembourg, with EU Presidency,

Dear Romain SCHNEIDER, Minister for Cooperation and Humanitarian Action

Dear Tibor NAVRACSICS, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports

Dear Silvia COSTA, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament

Dear Speakers, Moderators and Participants in the Conference

I would like to start by congratulating Maggy Nagel for the active, determined and consequent way she has faced cultural policies in the context of the Luxembourg Presidency. This seminar is a result of her positive attitude.

The concern expressed by the Luxembourg Presidency on the informal meeting of the Cultural Affairs Committee (July 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>) in order to enhance the contact between the ministers of culture of the European Union in the European Council and the priority given to the link between culture and development as a referential element of the Luxembourg Presidency on the cultural domain are important signs of a major alliance: pragmatism and strategic vision.

I share Maggy Nagel's concerns and goals and I thank her for the opportunity and invitation to be here today.

I hope the Luxembourg Presidency can achieve the priorities of its agenda on the cultural field, with which Portugal agrees.

Since I took office in 2012 as the responsible for the coordination of the cultural field for the Portuguese Government, on behalf of the Prime-Minister, I have always considered essential to develop a link between the politicians of the cultural area on the European Union. Our formal meetings, twice a year, are not the arena of relevant results, our mutual knowledge is low, our links are tiny and our mutual learning almost doesn't exist. I believe that we all could benefit from an improvement on the European Union's methods of work. Bearing in mind this perspective, I tried to strive towards a goal that I consider important to support - to place culture in the center of the European Union's decision agenda, along with politics, economy and social concerns. Many of the internal and external issues being discussed in the European Union have a cultural root and must be read and understood taking into account a cultural reading of reality. The political, economic and social readings must be complemented with the cultural reading. The lack of perception of this fact has important

consequences for Europe as well as the lack of cultural understanding of reality is the cause of many current wars, radicalisms and integration problems in multicultural societies.

That is why I am very happy to notice that the Luxembourg Presidency considers this topic relevant. I believe that Maggy Nagel's willingness and her leadership on this work will lead us to a good outcome!

The development topic has influenced, on many different ways, the political history on the period after the II World War. I will not recall the different moments or ways this topic was covered. I will focus on the present time and will only highlight a few safeguards:

1<sup>st</sup> safeguard: Immanuel Wallerstein says the concept of development had been stated through the second half of the twentieth century as an operative concept to justify a certain reading of the world, or, if you wish, of the "world-system": there are countries who are more developed and others less developed<sup>1</sup>. By creating this simplification, which avoided a conflict with big civilizations like China, India, Japan or the Persian

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<sup>1</sup> WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. *El moderno sistema mundial*. Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979.

and Arab worlds, and by considering the Australian Aborigines, Africans or Indian-American as primitive people, it would be possible to state the western world as the most “developed”, with all the political, economic and social consequences that come from such a statement.

2<sup>nd</sup> Safeguard: There are thousands of ideas about culture. The topic is so broad that we hardly can define, on a consensual way, the concept of culture.

Having explained these two safeguards, you can easily understand that I consider necessary to clarify not only the concept of development but also the concept of culture.

For this communication purpose, I consider development *every process and outcome that improves the complex life conditions of a certain community.*

And I take culture as *the set of values and practices that inform the thought and the emotions of people, individually and collectively considered in a certain community, on a certain historical moment and geography.*

We can easily understand that these concepts are so wide that they can embrace lots of different others. Actually, they are meta-concepts, which mean that we need to explain, in each and every moment, the meaning we want to give to each one of them.

Therefore, when I called this communication “Development as an idea of culture” I wanted to focus on a certain idea of development and on a certain idea of culture.

Beginning with the idea of development: the development cannot be identified as a kind of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian aid is certainly a priority element on a development project. However, to restrict the idea of development to humanitarian aid is wrong. The idea of development is connected to other two words that have been following the history of ideas in the West: the idea of civilization and the idea of progress. Thus, the development should inform any community, including the European communities. The development, as a patronizing idea of a rich country helping a poor one, doesn't work. In Europe and the World we are all equals in dignity. The human condition value doesn't vary depending on the latitude. The human condition is the meridian itself, the line that allows us to structure the idea of

development beyond a, conscious or unconscious, idea of superiority that sometimes the West express on the so called *cooperation actions*. Therefore, the word *cooperation* itself can be replaced with the word *relation*. Because the word *cooperation*, despite the changes on the mentality of the European countries after the statement of the post colonialism, is still associated with a certain way of looking to Africa or to other world regions where the poverty levels are higher or the human development index is lower. We cannot fall into that trap.

Historically, the activities of the so called *development aid* have contributed to improve many critical situations, however they revealed a series of weaknesses that we quickly need to overtake. With the ending of the period for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, Europe needs to have, in the United Nations, a common position about development. For that reason, the Luxembourg Presidency, by considering this topic a priority on the same period United Nations is preparing the agenda post-Millennium, has undertaken a strategic decision. By linking the idea of development with the idea of culture, the Luxembourg Presidency undertook a precious position.

In Europe we have rich and poor people. Indeed, the gap between rich and poor has increased in the last decades. We have many unemployed people and many elderly with no occupation, with nothing to do. We have ethnical conflicts more less disguised and religious differences that sometimes result in antagonisms. We have debates about the role of the State and the meaning of Nation; about the concept of borders and the ways of integration. All these topics, central to the present and the future of the European Union, relate themselves with the ideas of development and culture.

Before we try to apply in third-countries the importance of culture and its relation with the idea of development, we have to find settings to enable the integration, in the *acquis communautaire* and on its ideas and treaties, of the perception that development is a common value on the European life and that, in order to achieve a smart, inclusive and sustainable integration, it should be part of the national and European policies, in the internal market and structural funds and in the circulation of people and assets.

Before we take the European culture outside the Union, we have to accept that it is one of Europe's greatest treasures, an element that distinguishes us and, at the same time, brings us together.

European Union, with its plurality of cultures, needs to defend its own identity.

Only the acknowledgement and the defense of an identity enable us to develop a relation with the others. There is no relation with the Other if there is no definition or identification of the Self. This is one of the critical problems of the European Union- the difficulty in having an agreement about an “European identity card”. It is true that one of European Union’s greatest assets is our cultural diversity, which we need to defend and promote, however we also have common values that should be used as foundation for our plural identity and cohesion. Only with this acknowledgment we are truly prepared to have a common external policy within the Union duties and to establish the role of culture in external policy.

The Preparatory Action “Culture in EU External Relations”, implemented by the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, with the support of a Consortium of eight cultural institutes and organisations and its document from May 2014 is a reflection that we should take into account. But it is symptomatic that it doesn’t mention subjects like European common identity; religion; radicalism; refugees or emigration.

I believe we all have the awareness that we cannot ignore these subjects when we discuss development and culture, whether it is inside the European Union or on its external relations.

Development is a part of an idea of culture. An idea that sees Man as the beginning and end of all the policies. In the 21st century, we must realize that the demand for a new humanism, anchored in the contemporary scenario and aware of the eternal values of the respect for human condition, is central in the political thought, organization and action.

Institutions like the Council of the European Union are, by nature, political institutions. The technical services of the EU, particularly the ones who support the Council and the European Commission, exist to materialize the ideas and values that became rules through treaties and decisions, based on a power agreement on a common destiny.

Therefore, politics need to return to lead and feature the European path, beyond the technical decision. The technical decision is essential to support the political decision but doesn't have neither the basis nor the intrinsic value beyond a common political project.

At a time when the European Union's borders are, every day, under the pressure of refugees and migrants, there is no directive, decision, procedure, European Commission service or Border Authority that can solve the situation. Only a political vision for Europe and the world can prepare and materialize decisions in the short, medium and long term and put this subject on a context that goes beyond the simple circumstance reaction. That is why the goal to host 800.000 refugees in 2015 set by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel is a courageous decision and reveals a vision that all Europeans must take into account.

You can say this specific subject doesn't have any relation with the topic of this conference- "Culture and Development: towards a more strategic approach to cultural policies in the EU's external relations". However, refugees' subject is, without a doubt, one of the issues that can relate with the development topic as an idea of culture.

The political decision is central for the contemporary societies' processes and culture is one of the elements that should be taken into account on the strategic political decision.

Development is part of an idea of culture, the idea that culture gives us the keys to understand, criticize and create opportunities for the human development, on a personal and social level. Culture, beyond economy, science or technology, is the baseline that gives us the possibility to understand the Man and its personal and social conditions. Statistics, economic trends, technological materials and scientific discoveries help us to arrange our knowledge and prepare our decisions. They help us to understand how to act and intervene in society. They are present elements and integral parts of contemporary societies 'progress and, as such, part of a development concept. Nevertheless, the values that should give the necessary information for statistics, economy, technology or science, go beyond these domains. Its interpretation on a macro level depends on the idea of Man, of society, of human condition, of identity, of plurality, of culture, which is the holistic element that enable us to systematize our understanding of the singular and plural.

There may have been historical times when Europe's situation allowed us to ignore the need of choices.

Today, reality doesn't allow us to ignore the need to define, to defend an idea of development, an idea of culture, an idea of Man. It is a definition that requires courage and comes with risks: antagonism and confrontation risks along with radical visions of the world.

Maybe is a risk to condemn the self-declared Islamic State, but we cannot stop doing it. This is a full example of disruptive and blinded radicalism, which, on behalf of an idea of the world, rejects and destroys any opposite idea, value, person or asset. We know that, in several moments of human history, there were other totalitarian projects with these features and we also know that none of those political projects were successful. However, during their existence, they caused terrible damages to people and heritage. This is happening all over again. The recent incidents in Palmyra, Syria, where the cultural heritage was destroyed, reveals a unnamed barbarism in the name of God. But whose God would want destruction on His behalf?

Today, we need to express our solidarity, in the name of our European common values, to all Christians and Muslims who suffer and die because of the Islamic State; to all the heritage

defenders who lost their lives trying to save heritage cultural assets belonging to all Humanity. And we need to deeply regret that we and future generations cannot have access to outstanding cultural heritage, destroyed in the meantime. We must say that all the different religions, beliefs or ways of life are respectable and that any totalitarian attempt in the European territory must be rejected.

Nowadays, to think of culture as the framework of development and development as a comprehensive element, inside and outside Europe, is to assume the defense of a project, of a vision for the world.

To give an example about what I am talking about: when Luxembourg and Portugal support cultural activities in Cape Verde, and allow me to greet my colleague and friend, the Minister of Culture of Cape Verde, Mário Lúcio, the underlying idea of this support is not the old idea of *cooperation*, or the idea of *development aid*, but the idea of *relation between nations and people*, where development is a mutual profit, a mutual learning, a path made together towards a common interest that is important to everyone. We are not talking about unilateral and hierarchical

interventions, but about networking and relational actions. A networking and non-hierarchical work is a big challenge because it requires pro-active visions in order to achieve common goals and to assimilate distinct ones. But that is the big challenge in the network society we live in. To understand how to apply this principle, also in the European Union's external cultural policies, is a step we need to take.

Keeping the principles and values that guide us, this joint model defines the relational process and can contribute for a more balanced and comprehensive society.

We are watching the vanishing of a certain idea of financial capitalism, an idea that led us to a situation where 1% of the world population has the equivalent wealth of the remainder 99%. I believe I don't have to explain how this unacceptable distortion from the wealth distribution systems can only lead to conflict.

Without neglecting the role of merit and of competition and market value, we need to consider the fact that all the actions in society must lead to justice and equity. But justice and equity can never be confused with egalitarian visions or with Karl Marx's project of a society.

What we need today is a new vision of the human, beyond capitalism and communism as we know it. But we don't need to rush to find the answers. As Rilke says, we can learn to love our own doubts.

Every day, through public and private institutions, artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers, museologists and archaeologists, historians and actors, dancers and designers, Europe present itself to the world. We are the richest economic region; we are an extraordinary cluster of culture and well-being. But all of this is under threat and we know it.

It is essential to find a European response, based on an operational concept of culture and development as part of the *acquis communautaire*. It works for inside Europe as well for external relations.

And it is essential to support the idea that cultural fruition and creation must be considered basic rights for all the men, women and children, on the United Nation's goals for the 2015 period. This is a common task that should engage all of us.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Jorge Barreto Xavier