OSCE Conference on Racism,
Xenophobia and Discrimination
Vienna, 4-5 September 2003

PC.DEL/985/03
4 September 2003

ENGLISH only

THE ETHICAL EDUCATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS A WAY TO COMBAT RACISM AND OTHER INTOLERABLES

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Most of you, I assume, have read Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Those who have read it, will, probably, remember the story about the discovery of the planet where the Little Prince came from, 'the asteroid 612' discovered in 1909 by a Turkish astronomer. This astronomer had reported, in detail, this discovery of his at the International Congress of Astronomy, but nobody gave an ear to him, because he was dressed in a strange fashion. "So do grown up people usually", comments the narrator. Fortunately a good statesman got the power in Turkey, who made his people wear European garments. Thus the fame of the asteroid 612 was saved. When in 1930 the same astronomer, in modern dress, made the same communication, everybody in the congress affirmed the truth of his discovery.

Though discrimination has received new faces in the second half of the Twentieth Century in Europe, we can learn something from Saint-Exupéry's criticism and especially to put our finger on the comment of the narrator.

In this Conference on "Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination" we are expected, among other things, to "examine the causes and manifestations, with a focus on the common grounds related to discrimination and look at [for] ways of combating them".

Racism, i.e. the claim that a human "race" is superior to all other human "races", in itself constitutes a violation of human rights. It is curious that racism, though empirically falsified, has shown an increase in the past few decades. In Europe many acts of violence find their origin in racism. Racism is an intellectual cause of discrimination, while xenophobia a psychological one.

Besides racial discrimination, different interrelated discriminations against ethnic, linguistic, religious groups have increased as well. Why?

Here I shall confine myself to saying only a few words on the c o m m o n intellectual causes, or on the intellectual background of this increase, and though interrelated I shall leave aside its social, demographic, economic and other causes, because everything starts in our minds. We have to combat racism and all ideas that cause discrimination, in our minds first of all.

The intellectual background

Two main but discrepant tendencies characterize the intellectual climate of our world at the turn of the century. We promote, on the one hand, "respect to human rights", i.e.

to certain u n i v e r s a l   n o r m s, but on the other hand, we equally promote "respect to all cultures", which are differentiated among themselves by their different world-views and p a r o c h i a l   n o r m s. Not rarely we see that the demands that such parochial norms bring are contradictory to those of human rights.

We are not sufficiently aware of this discrepancy. Still our simultaneous promotion of these two discrepant tendencies appears to be one of the main causes –and perhaps the main intellectual factor– behind the spread of religious fundamentalism, nationalism, racism, and ethnic prejudices, whose "embers of hatred" were "rekindled by the winds of freedom", as the former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, observes in one of his papers connected with the proclamation of the year 1995 as "Year of Tolerance". We have to put our finger on these "winds of freedom" as well.

In order to combat these intolerable facts, all of which are direct or indirect violations of human rights, we have to be well aware of h o w this "rekindling" occurred.

So far as I can see, this rekindling can be traced back to the nineteen seventies, when the promotion of cultural identities and of the equal respect to all cultures was brought on the agenda of the international community, after it was realized that "development" put as main objective of national policies in almost all the countries of the world and understood only as "economic development" –and in fact in two different senses: as unlimited quantitative increase of industrial production and development of technologies in so-called developed countries and as increase of *per capita* income, industrialization and import of technologies in so-called developing ones– had created results contrary to the expectations of its introducers. Certain global problems we are faced with are the result of these policies –e.g. pollution, to mention only the most obvious one. Migration of large groups of people from countries with cultures quite different from "European culture" is directly related to this developmental policy in Europe.

To face these unforeseen results the idea of "cultural development" was introduced, yet also understood in two different senses: in developed countries as "access to and participation in culture", i.e. activities which help people to develop themselves as human beings, such as artistic, philosophical activities; while in developing countries as identification and resurrection of their cultures, i.e. of the world-views and norms, prevailing in them before their encounter with the "developed West". The demand concerning the equal respect to all cultures, which was subsequently brought on the agenda of the international community, is a well-minded, but proved to be a very problematic, attempt to compensate historical injustice done to the "strangely dressed". This is an attempt to correct an error by committing another error, because it looses sight of a very simple point: that object of (ethical) respect are human beings, independently of the culture they belong, and n o t cultures –i.e. world-views and norms which sometimes hinder individuals who adopt them and believe in their "truth", from actualizing their human capacities and from developing as human beings.

The emergence of what is called at present multicultural (multiethnic and multireligious) society in Western Europe is a result of these historical developments, as the promotion of "multiculturalism" in Europe is a result of the intellectual developments underlying them.

Rekindling of the embers of racism and of ethnic and religious prejudices in the multicultural societies of Europe, seems to be one chain result of this well-minded promotion of equal respect to all cultures –i.e. equal respect to discrepant world-views and to conflicting norms– s i m u l t a n e o u s l y   w i t h   the promotion of certain fundamental freedoms, i.e. freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, etc.

Instead of trying sincerely to find out the implications of clearly conceived human rights for the various cultural minorities –in fact their different implications for ethnic and for religious minorities[1]–, postmodernism was adopted, which, in its incapacity to evaluate p h i l o s o p h i c a l l y world-views and norms, claims the equal value of all world-views, *ergo* also of those which prevent individuals from thinking for themselves, and the equal value of all norms, *ergo* also of polygamy and blood feud.

Thus, if we leave aside antisemitism which is an old calamity in Europe, cultural differences of non-European groups living now in Europe were ascribed –erroneously– to their ethnic origin and racism, lurking in the thick forests of Europe, has invaded towns and cities, and gained ground not only because of xenophobia, but also because governments, though they are against racism, have not prevented its propagation, fearing to be accused of violating the freedom of expression of the citizens. This is why the introduction in some European states of legislation aimed at combating hate speech and incitement to racial and religious hatred, mentioned in the "Overview" of this Conference, is an important step in fighting against racism and ethnic or religious discrimination, though not a way that could eradicate them.

How to combat them?

A way to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination was, and is still, considered to be "intercultural education" and "education for tolerance". "Intercultural education" is indeed a promising way to combat xenophobia which is a psychological cause of discrimination of the "stranger", but it is not, I think, a way to combat racism which is an intellectual, or ideological, cause of discrimination and violence. We need another kind of education to combat it.

As far as education for tolerance is concerned: in order to train young people in tolerance, it is necessary that we, grown up people, are tolerant and to have a clear concept of tolerance. Just a few words on this issue[2]:

So far as I can see, it is possible to deal with the issue of tolerance from at least two different perspectives: with tolerance as a personal attitude, which education for tolerance is expected to shape, and with toleration as a principle in the arrangement and administration of public affairs.

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At present the most widespread understanding of tolerance as a personal attitude is expressed as the demand to "respect the views, beliefs, behavior and practices of others, which are different from our own". This is also a very problematic understanding of tolerance, because it demands something in itself impossible: to "respect" things which –rightly and wrongly– we think to be false or "bad".

So far as I can see, what marks the tolerant person is that in concrete situations related to a given issue, he d o e s n o t g i v e d a m a g e, though he is in a position to do so, t o t h e r i g h t s[3] of another person who possesses a view-opinion-norm radically different from that which the tolerant person possesses o n t h e s a m e i s s u e, and/or who takes an attitude, acts in a given situation or behaves in general, in a way radically different from that he approves. This understanding of tolerance as a personal attitude implies that education for tolerance can not be made directly, but through a kind of education whose one result would be tolerance.

As a principle of public affairs toleration –which is also closely related to the issue of so-called cultural rights –can be conceptualized as the demand that the transmission of collective views and norms, and the collective exercise of practices, which are different from the prevailing ones in a given place and which d o n o t c l a s h, d i r e c t l y o r i n d i r e c t l y, w i t h k n o w l e d g e o n t h e s a m e i s s u e a n d w i t h h u m a n r i g h t s, should be permitted, as well as the implications of knowledge and human rights –how divergent from the prevailing relevant views might be– a t l e a s t should not be prohibited in public life. On the other hand views, norms and practices which clash with human rights, even if prevalent, should not be object of toleration.

One implication of this conceptualization of toleration directly related to the issue of our Conference, is that governments should not hesitate to prohibit the diffusion of views contradictory to knowledge on the same issue and of norms contradictory to human rights, as well as to prohibit the exercise of practices which violate, or are causes of violation of, human rights, for fear of being accused of violating certain "freedoms", provided that these views, norms and practices are evaluated philosophically –i.e. they are n o t   evaluated from the view-point of other cultural views and norms on the same issue, but they are evaluated epistemologically and axiologically, by taking also into consideration their foreseeable consequences for the protection of human rights of individuals in the existing conditions of the given country. We can perhaps learn something in this respect from the collective suicide in the USA, which happened a few years ago: members of a sect committed suicide –by their own will– in order to get the comet that was approaching the Earth and go to paradise. I am well aware of the difficulty of such prohibitions in a "democratic society", but I also think that sagacity is a virtue that politicians are expected to possess.

To fight against racism and discrimination radically and especially to prevent such ideas from having an impact on the minds of young people, we need a different kind of education of human rights.

The ethical education of human rights

At present human rights education in Europe is provided either as "intercultural education", or as "citizenship education" and as the teaching of international human rights instruments.

In a pamphlet published by the British Council in the year 2000 an attempt is made to distinguish between the concepts of citizenship education and human rights education –a distinction which is absolutely necessary–, but in the following way: "Although citizenship education (CE) and human rights education (HRE) are interrelated, there are clear differences between these concepts. One difference would be that the former would be taught more within a contextual framework..., while HRE can be based on conventions which have been translated into multiple languages"[4]. Here we see an intention to express that citizenship education is made within local frameworks, while human rights education must be done within a "universal" framework –a very important remark indeed–, but on the other hand we also see that human rights education is reduced to the teaching of international human rights instruments or "human rights law", as jurists like to call it.

In order to combat racism and all ideas that lead to discrimination and eradicate them from the minds, and especially in order to prevent that other young people become racists, we need an education of human rights based on the spirit which has produced the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. We need what I call the ethical education of human rights.

This is an education aiming at awakening in the trainees the s i n c e r e w i l l to protect human rights, by helping them to become conscious of their human identity, our only common identity. Unless we look at ourselves as human beings, whatever our other identities might be, we can look at the other as a human being, whatever his/her other natural or contingent specificities might be. The idea of human rights originates from the knowledge of the identity –of the sameness– of human beings as h u m a n beings, not of their differences which are obvious facts, while to get an insight in the sameness of all human beings, which is not obvious, training is necessary.

This aim makes necessary to equip the trainees with the c o n c e p t u a l k n o w l e d g e o f h u m a n r i g h t s: the knowledge of what they are, because this knowledge includes also the reasons why they should be protected.

But in order that we become able to decide and act in given situations in accordance with the demands of human rights, something more and indeed crucial is necessary. And this is t r a i n i n g i n e v a l u a t i o n, which is the most difficult part in the education of human rights –a training that helps us to become able, as much as each of

us can, to find in most situations that we have to act the implications of the relevant human right in t h a t given, singular situation, i.e. to find what we must do so that human dignity –our dignity– can be protected. Tolerance, in the sense I mentioned a few minutes ago, can be one result of such a training.

We need to train young people in order to become able to protect human rights while exercising their professions and not only in order to defend their o w n rights which people easily confuse with their interests.

This is –put very briefly– the conception of human rights education underlying the programme and activities of the National Committee on the Decade for Human Rights Education of Turkey, established in 1998, and also of the MA Programme of Human Rights conducted in Hacettepe University –i.e. the conception of human rights as ethical principles for the treatment of individuals in public life and as ethical premises for the deduction of law at all levels.

Notes:

[1] For this difference, see: Ioanna Kuçuradi, "Universal Human Rights and Their Different Implications for Multiethnic and Multireligious Societies", in *World, Islam and Democracy*, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Ankara 1999, pp. 42-52.

[2] For a more detailed analysis, see: Ioanna Kuçuradi, "Tolerance and the Limits of Toleration" *Diogenes*, n. 176, Berghahn Books 1996, pp. 163-174.

[3] Carefully distinguished from the interests.

[4] *Citizenship Education and Human Rights Education 1, Key Concepts and Debates*, The British Council 2000, p. 14.