

Distinguish authorities

Dear colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour and a pleasure to be in the legendary city of Izmir, participating in an event hosted by its University, and having the opportunity to produce some reflexions on this occasion about “Universities and the dialogue between civilizations”.

My very first words are addressed to the Rector of the University of Economics of Izmir, Professor Atila Sezgin, who has hosted us so generously and graciously. We are all familiar with the effort and risks involved in the organisation of such an important meeting, and the fact that the Rector is ultimately deemed responsible for its success or failure. Therefore, it is only natural that he should be the first person to receive words of gratitude and regard from his guests. On addressing the Rector, I equally address the organising Committee, especially its Chairlady, Professor Gulsun Saglamer: these days will reward the long and arduous effort that required so much practical imagination, accomplishment, and optimism. Experience has taught us that no international conference is identical to another. For having organised this meeting, you deserve our heartfelt applause.

I also greet all my colleagues, whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting: through them it is the Mediterranean Universities members of the CMU (Community of Mediterranean Universities) and of RMEI, I extend my fraternal sentiments to, on behalf of the University of Coimbra.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Portugal is generally regarded as a decidedly Atlantic country. It is the Ocean that explains our destiny, associated with the maritime routes that led us, five centuries ago, to the East, the West, and the South, to India, China, Japan, Africa, and Brazil. One might say that Spain geographically curtailed our access to the Mediterranean, because when we historically “turned our back” on her, we also turned our back on him. However, it was but a political contingency. Taking a deeper look at geography and history, at language, climate, trade, culture, the Phoenician, Carthaginian, and Roman legacies, and the profound interaction with North-African peoples, we proudly bear, in the recesses of our genetic code, the marks of all this inheritance. Portugal is undoubtedly part of the Mediterranean family, with whom it shares the bread, the wine, the olive oil, the suntanned complexion and dark hair as well as a southern fatalism, almost always counterbalanced by good humour.

As to Coimbra, where I come from, I always take the opportunity to recall the grandeur of its Muslim past. The oldest part of my university occupies the site of a former citadel, or *alcáçova*, erected in 994 by the famed Caliph Al-Mansur. My office is located over a huge Arab gate (horse shoe) concealed underneath a later covering, that has not succeeded in obliterating the *alkabar*, built by the eleventh century-Mozarab *Al-Wazir*. Despite being a latin language, Portuguese bears testimony to the influence of Muslim customs in everyday life, through specific construction techniques or ironware, not to mention the hundreds of place names and family names. The Technological Campus of the University of Coimbra, for instance, was built on a site usually known as “Moroccan Pine

Tree Woods”, which is a modern symbol of our long relationship with our southern neighbour. Exclusively entrusted to philologists and historians for too long, this cultural legacy is now studied at the Faculty of Letters within the scope of Eastern Studies, which clarify the affinity between our civilizations as well as the capacity for synthesis in which the Portuguese have always set the example. I believe that Portugal and Turkey, situated at the two far ends of Europe, share this aptitude for establishing a dialogue between the East and the West, which may be found throughout the Mediterranean world.

After this brief approach between two extremes – in Portugal we say that extremes touch each other – the role that our Universities may play in the context of Mediterranean Universities will be clearer. It is one of mutual understanding between nations, and in favour of the preservation of an asset, without which nothing really makes sense: peace. This meeting and this community of Universities do not focus alone on the strengthening of ties of scientific and technological cooperation. The ultimate goal, the ethical justification for our network, is that of promoting concord and friendship among the Mediterranean peoples within the university spirit and through university means. In other words, and drawing on a well-known theoretical concept, but seldom put into practice, our objective is to facilitate and practise “the dialogue of civilisations.”

It is pointless to enumerate all the obstacles and hazards we are confronted with. The complexity of the Mediterranean problem is comparable to the wealth of our common history. The meeting point of three continents and three religions also represents an eventful crossroads of civilisations. A pessimistic historian

would be justified in considering that the Mediterranean Sea, so radiant and blue, is a sea of blood. The most beautiful region in the world is also the one where men have behaved more savagely, ever since Abel was murdered by his brother.

Our hope as academics is to contribute to resolve through science, technical cooperation, and inter-cultural dialogue, what are seemingly unsurpassable difficulties at political level. Idealism alone will not be enough. It was idealism that, some time before World War II, inspired academics to create in Nice the Mediterranean University Centre, anticipating our association by decades. The poet and philosopher Paul Valéry was in charge of drawing up the institution's "chart". I would now like to quote some brief lines from the original text, which is worth reading in its entirety:

“Rien de plus admirable que de voir en quelques siècles naître de quelques peuples riverains de cette mer les inventions intellectuelles les plus précieuses, et, parmi elles, les plus pures: c'est ici que la science s'est dégagée de l'empirisme et de la pratique, que l'art s'est dépouillé de ses origines symboliques, que la littérature s'est nettement différenciée et constituée en genres bien distincts et que la philosophie, enfin, a essayé à peu près toutes les manières possibles de se considérer elle-même”.

He summarised his arguments by proposing a truly interdisciplinary programme, which would focus on the Mediterranean as a «civilisation-producing machine». I believe that those pages written in 1933 encompass concepts and intuitions which may enrich and guide our own discussions. Due to some cruel irony of

history, that text, permeated by the highest idealism, was written at the time when Hitler's demented theories, as expressed in *Mein Kampf*, were being put into practice. The generosity of the great thinkers of that time, Valéry, Thomas Mann, Unamuno, and Huxley, among others, was not strong enough to withstand the culture of violence. The Mediterranean University Centre, where the "dialogue of civilisations" was already suggested, was a premature and aborted attempt.

The mistake made by its founders must not be repeated. The Mediterranean world has changed a great deal since 1933, but today's political arena sadly reminds us of that time. New tensions have un-expectedly emerged, and we feel powerless! A new community of academics is assembled with a view to creating bridges and asserting the supremacy of humanity over irrationality. But new invasions are being carried out, and the possibility of a new holocaust is blatantly announced as a way to resolve conflicts and alleviate tensions. I believe that the profound reason why populations are led to accept, with some indulgence or even connivance, proposals of violence against others nations, is rooted in prejudice and ignorance. I learned at school that the Muslims invaded the Iberian Peninsula in successive waves of extreme violence after 711 AD, fighting the Christians and imposing them their religion and their rule. This biased approach to History is not naïve; nor is it exclusive to Portugal. We know differently today. Cláudio Torres is an imminent expert on the Muslim civilisation in Iberia and is being responsible for the archaeological site of Mértola, in the south of Portugal, for 25 years. In his presentation at the University of Coimbra at the Seminar "Dialogue of Civilisations: travelling to

the bottom of History in search of lost time”, hosted by the Rectorate in October 2003, Cláudio Torres wrote:

“I will not be talking only about Islam. After all these years at Mértola searching for Muslim traces, digging, combing through the remains, looking for the invading forces under the command of Tarik, what we encountered was the Mediterranean in all its diversity and consistency. Islam is in fact inseparable from the old civilisations that preceded it, and it is closely linked to our past, to our present, and – hopefully in a creative and beneficial way – to our future.”

What may then Universities do, to help nations and individuals socialise, whilst respecting their differences? The editor of *L'Éxpress* Magazine, Jean Daniel, has recently spoken about the “universalism of values within the diversity of cultures”: this expression has the advantage of reconciling metaphysics and anthropology, human rights and human reality in its infinite variety. Universities should work towards the materialisation of that model and use their specific means of mediation. Thus, let us create the Mediterranean Higher Education Area.

I envisage three ways in which dialogue may be achieved: first, through scientific and education cooperation, then through the horizontal and international communication, allowed for by the university network, and finally through the participation of universities in the community to which they belong, and which is represented in the spelling of the word “univer[sc]ity”, written with both an *s* for sapience and a *c* for citizenship.

1. I will not over-emphasise how much we might profit from the collaboration between two or more teams of researchers, two or more laboratories. Scientists have the advantage of speaking a common language, the scientific language, especially that of algebra, that truly universal language whose origin dates back to the Al-Khawarizmi manuscript (9<sup>th</sup> century). The scientific ideal is one of rational and univocal communication; and, consciously or not, all men of science, all academics, practise Espinoza ethics, which holds that we all abide by the same prescription: that of (I quote) “being the greatest possible number thinking as much as possible” (*Ethica*, V, 5-10) (end of quotation). Therefore, the agreements and programmes that foster contacts between our schools and researchers must be developed, multiplied, and consolidated. Whenever three or four academics from different countries commit themselves to jointly resolving a problem, regardless of the discipline, communication has won a battle, and peace has prevailed.

2. As to the concept of university network, it incorporates a philosophy, a moral philosophy that is self-evident for every one of us. Of all the various dimensions that should guide the creation of any university network, I will mention but three, for their relevance to the particular case of CMU, our network. I will term them “cultural” dimension, “horizontal” dimension, and “physical” dimension.

Through the “cultural” dimension, which I use here as opposed to primitive (if anthropology is given dominance) or genetic (if biology is given preference), the network will enable individuals to see themselves as a synthesis of what is diverse, and the group as an analysis of what is universal. In this context, an

international university network will not amount to much, if it is only an administrative structure, a material device, a “thing”. Instead, it must be an inter-individual relation, as well as a group of groups, and become an university duty, both at intellectual and moral levels, whilst it abolishes borders without erasing differences, and preserves diversity without destroying what is universal in all human beings. Rather than being (just) models of scientific collaboration, university networks generate friendship and respect based on difference, without which they will be nothing but empty structures deteriorating rapidly. Against totalitarian rule that leads to war and annihilation of others – individuals and nations – culture, incorporated into administrative practice, may convert universities into a role model for pluralist societies.

The “horizontal” dimension entails a vision of university networks as eliminating the centres, which does not, by deviation or replacement, translate into the hegemonic enhancement of the periphery or margins. Nor does it mean the dismissal of organisation; rather, it implies it. In the network, all positions are nuclear and equivalent; they are all positions of exchange, where culture must be written in the plural.

Although networks do not exist without their nodes, the “physical” dimension of a network reminds us that its real purpose is not about what we may found or perform inside the nodes, but about what we may exchange and share in between them. For that reason, we need a constant current going through the network, a current of knowledge. And as the current must flow between every two nodes, the resistance of the environment must be reduced, the flow must be made fluid, and some energy must be supplied.



3. To conclude, I will briefly refer to the concept of “univer[sc]ity” (with both an s and a c), as I am convinced that only these universities are ready to make their networks play the role described above. Every time we give a lecture, publish an article, have a research project approved, a Master’s or Doctoral degree, begin an extensive activity, or organise a scientific congress, we add one more brick to the building, we move further along the road we call *Making Univer[sc]ity*. *Making*, because we favour the capacity to undertake projects at all times within a previously-defined strategy. *Univer[sc]ity* spelt with both an s for sapience and a c for citizenship, because the pursuit of the objectives and vocation of the university institution, the search for knowledge, is to be understood as the connection between the mind and the world.

Looking around us, enhancing cultural intervention, promoting scientific research, supplying qualified services to the community, and combining them with an educational offer, all these constitute opportunities and challenges that may be interrelated. They create a new relationship with society and build a new image of opening up to the world.

It is the University’s responsibility, by virtue of its nature, to maintain a close relationship with the community. This entails the dissemination of information about its activities, initiatives, and problems, as well as the strengthening of cooperation ties with other bodies. Being linked to the city and the world is an aspiration of the utmost strategic importance, not only because it will contribute to finally overcome psychological and physical obstacles associated with the concept of University as an Ivory Tower, but also due to the fact that it creates a

key element in the dynamic development founded on quality and innovation, the very basis for the generation of wealth and the promotion of the well-being of citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The links between universities, the sharing of experience and the participation in common projects, the consolidation of consensual strategies and orientations, is our best answer to an environment that does not always appreciate the social function that we fulfil. Networking is, therefore, also the way for us to answer the new prevailing paradigm of competition, to avoid that it could lead to the merchandising of education, the imposition of other people's culture and the stifling of our own.

All these issues and many others will be addressed and discussed in our meeting. I am sure that these discussion will be fruitful. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to you all.

Izmir, 8 May 2006

Fernando Seabra Santos

Rector