

## **Europe for a Meta-Dialogue**

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For the title of this proposal, which I will describe as “lazy,”—surely, a Mendes-like adjective—I have relied on an almost readymade phrase that, so it seems to me, speaks for itself: a “meta-dialogue of cultures.” Europe indeed commonly conceives herself as a space for dialogue between her States and the people. However, there often remains the feeling that, in Europe, any dialogue between States is a dialogue “beyond” the people, therefore, at least philologically speaking, a “meta-dialogue” between European nations, her human groups, and cultures. This meta-dialogue is only the first issue of a whole series and I would like, if you please, to further explore multiple “meta-dialogical” aspects, which the European entity now and then experiences. It is indeed possible that Europe does generate a dialogical complexity, which may be useful and transferable toward other areas of the world.

### **1. From Dialogue to Meta-Dialogue**

Dialogue between people, North-South dialogue, dialogue between cultures, or cultures’ dialogue, these are many

metaphors in which the word dialogue seems to amount to a stable pivot. In addition, it is clear that these expressions should be interpreted as a number of assertions, if not injunctions. “Dialogue between people,” for example, is all about saying No! To reciprocal ignorance, and to war, at the same time affirming that people must be able to live together. The phrase “North-South dialogue” points out to the inequality between people distributed throughout vast zones. “Dialogue between cultures” or “multicultural dialogue” underlines the need for comprehension amongst those very people.

It is noted that the same actors often interpret the same roles in the same fields. Southwise, one observes countries that mainly claim their cultural, religious, institutional identities as well as equal treatment. For both South and North, these expressions resound with a categorical imperative: dialogue concerns people, i.e. different stories and memories. But sometimes they resound as expressions telling us that those dialogue-facilitating instruments are not available.

Let us initially recall that one only dialogues with one’s equals. This is the first condition to be satisfied. Without it, nothing goes. But this difficulty is not insurmountable. People’s difficulty in their search for dialogue is elsewhere. It is rather in the need for a research without a predetermined discovery goal. It is rather in the curiosity and desire to know our neighbours’ habits, in the feeling that we do have much to learn from the others, and they can learn from us. However, the history of each people, in their own eyes, seems to have been solely made of determinations—under

every sense of this word—i.e. of collective wills and achievements. An authentic dialogue thus starts by setting such certainty between brackets. Consequently, how would you build such exchange when there is no roadmap and your interlocutors remain in the illusion, having to guess it by their rear mirror? The answer is not an easy one.

This difficulty is even greater because the larger the actors' proximity is, the stronger the stereotypes opposed to such coming together are. It is often the nearest difference that is most visible. This is what nourishes collective imaginations, which, for their turn, nourish division and hostility, by propagating fears and maintaining, in every sense of the word, the major media avid for reproduction in a space of global supply and demand. Europe is made of such closest differences, but she knew how to dissolve the old stereotypes that used to oppose Frenchmen to Germans, to Englishmen and so forth, as a number of stable categories. She can thus dissolve contemporary dichotomies such as Islam/Christianity, East/West etc, as the concomitant disappearance of the old, bipolar worlds has returned the so-called yellow and red perils to the folklore of long forgotten pulp fiction.

Europe is multiple. She is made up of various peoples. Europeans consider that their diversity, the multiplicity of their languages, very soon the lingual diversity of their children, their diversity of ways of life, all these are major assets in the European construction, which certainly predispose them to best know their immediate neighbours around the

Mediterranean and even beyond. But can she claim the counselling role of an expert, even of a judge, as regards dialogue? Can she pose herself as a meta-place for dialogue, at the service of people usually kept to themselves? Before trying an answer, one can note the existence of a form of agreement in Europe that may be thought of as the product of freely accepted constraints, and, based on such understanding, one can indeed see at work, in that part of the world, a specific form of dialogue, which I will readily describe as meta-dialogical.

### **Meta-Dialogue 1: the Dialogue of the Europe States**

I will initially note that meta-dialogue seemingly does remain a form of dialogue. When European States engage in a “meta-dialogue” on behalf of the people, their dialogue takes place through their representatives. They find thereby a priori conditions for any possible dialogue: recognition of the other as one’s equal, since one only dialogues with his equal in rights and duties. That implies passing the collective discipline of an effective multilingual system, maintained and defended in its unique richness.

However, contrary to the type of international relations practised by the ordinary diplomacy, these dialogical liaisons are based on a Charter, which constitutes such equality ratio before any dialogue. The option for the levelling relation is therefore not an expression of the will—i.e. the precise “entry into dialogue.” It is pre-built. This dialogue is

therefore not a complete dialogue because such relation, established between two European States, is never simply binary; it is underlain by the whole equality relations stated by the Charter. Consequently, this is rather a live “multilogue” within what it is commonly called multi-laterality. Such “multilogue” constitutes today the *modus operandi* of the Union’s democratic life. And whenever the pulsation of interactions is simplified into a simple relation between a State and the Union, incarnated by the Committee—or, even worse, limited to two States of the Union—, we are no longer far from complicity or illicit liaison and, in any case, we are touching the lowest level of the citizens’ life in Europe.

This “multilogue dialogue” is thus built based on a European agreement that binds equal States in their rights and duties. But *est modus in rebus*: this equality, like others, is but formal, as it is the case with any formalism that ends up weighing up the reality of things and the product of effects. Essence is here: the “major members” of the Union well know that the union itself is indeed larger than they are. The “small countries” of the Union do know that they are minor parties of such vaster entity and that, beyond economic, political and, no matter what one may say, diplomatic inequalities, Member States are accepted like equal partners of a “multilogue,” therefore devoted to a new form of meta-democracy by means of interposed States. Let us call “meta-dialogue 1” this meta-dialogue, which rests on a number of freely accepted constraints. It develops itself among European citizens throughout their States.

This first meta-dialogical form is a question of treaties. It is thus within the range of many, provided the will of States relaying their fellow-citizens is sufficiently continuing, provided the texts are sufficiently constrictive, provided every one seemingly takes daily advantage and—I may add, as a strictly personal comment—as long as any business is relatively kept, for some time, far from the political sensitivity of citizenships, if we may judge from the state of opinions in Europe, and provided the stakes of national politicking are never involved.

## **2. Meta-Dialogue-2: Dialogue for a “Meta”**

I mentioned above that Europe could not set herself as a judge of good practices as regards dialogue. Nevertheless, I would keep her eyes bandaged like an allegory—that of Justice—which she cannot incarnate. Because Europe is at work, even if she cannot see what she is to become tomorrow. She is, therefore, blind. Also—to parody Galileo—I will say: “but still it moves.” With economic union and a single currency, Europe moved from lawful integration to gradual institutional integration. Currently, Europe is knowledge, development through knowledge, and brains. It is not an easy conclusion that contemporary European achievements and building sites did originate from the earlier integration of the coal and steel single market. It would be more reasonable to say that the current situation corresponds to a simply foreseeable result.

Europe, whose most tangible reality in the eyes of her fellow-citizens is certainly the history of her development, may be defined, in its beginnings as well as at each moment of her history, as a new form of an integrative process. No plan was designed because the term of the process was not preset. This is all about a project, not a plan. This curious object features something of a scientific laboratory, and something of a workspace driving at discoveries without an a priori plan. In this place, ahead of people's freedom, a new political reality is worked out based on the denial of Division and its corollary, Collective death.

Side by side with the preceding meta-dialogic construction, Europe thus presents a quite different experiment, that of an inbuilt meta-dialogue in progress. She dialogues with what she is not quite yet; she dialogues with her own desire for Europe. In this sense, she is definitely a meta-dialogue, thereby her true nature, a nature in permanent gestation, and a nature that, one wonders, contains perhaps its own end. This is an essential dimension of the European dialogical specificity that I would like to illustrate, at this stage of the reflection, with two European "meta-dialogic" experiments, namely the Bologna Process and Lisbon strategy, on one side, and the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, on the other.

### **3. Meta-Dialogues**

The Bologna Process of building a European space for higher education constitutes a perfect illustration of meta-

dialogue-1 and meta-dialogue-2, which we have defined. It is essentially a meta-dialogue-1 because it includes over forty countries. This is an area of the World that covers, eastbound, countries from Iceland to Turkey and, northbound, from Portugal to Finland. Economic shifts, cultural and linguistic diversities are considerable. Yet, starting with some simple directives proposed at the Sorbonne in 1997, which were set up and defined in Bologna in the following year—i.e. two major graduation cycles, Licensing and MBA (then, afterwards, Doctorate), a system of credit transfers (ECTS), quality-assurance and student-centred dispositions—Europe has taken a considerable step in her meta-dialogue with the States to build a common space for higher education. This *is* a meta-dialogue-1, since it is a multilogue between Europe and her States.

The next stage, a common space for research provided by the European Council of Research, completes the disposition of a European space for higher education, research, and development, because we now know that such triple aspect is a strategic axis of development. The Lisbon strategy, fitting in the European Council of Research, aims to transform the European economy, between now and 2010, into “the most competitively knowledgeable and most dynamic economy in the world, capable of durable economic growth, accompanied by qualitative and quantitative growth of employment as well as greater social cohesion, respecting the environment.” Let us emphasize, in such strategy, that it endeavours to build a European response to the new globa-



lisation data, and that such response is at the service of multi-polarity rather than alignment. Thereby, it builds a space of decisions and autonomy.

One finds herein something of the old clerk circulation space. However, this mobility is not reserved to an elite. It is rather directed to the greatest number, because we have already surpassed in Europe the difficult course of the higher education “massification.” people want to be able to move, to go-get, anywhere where there are qualifications and jobs. For that, it is indeed necessary that higher education be largely recognized by different institutions belonging to different areas in Europe. All this implies strong engagement by the States. One can also expect effects on the States themselves. Students, professors and researchers who move from one country to another, according to certain training and/or research programmes, represent, beyond any anticipations of economic appreciation, the certainty of a European citizenship, tomorrow.

Accounting for such future results is a meta-dialogue of another level about which we have spoken above, a meta-dialogue-2. The Bologna Process actually equates and interacts with what was built along a sustained plural history like as a number of complex idiosyncrasies. And, if we may legitimately expect from a higher education “Common Market” effects similar to those produced by the organization of a single market of products, we are before a new space, that of the possible emergence of a new citizenship, fruit of the movement of the women and men who are being educated.

A Meta-dialogue indeed, because such grossly “upwards” construction leaves very little place to licensed, idiosyncratically structured institutional interlocutors. Universities thus trace new roads under no preset plan, however equipped with a few principles, forums, and networks.

Another meta-dialogue, where Europe should play a driving part, is the work to be achieved between two banks of the Mediterranean and, beyond such banks, in the depth of her closest territories. We do know that the situation is serious and insecurity threatens us. However, we must not make allow simply safeguarding actions to direct all actions, quite to the contrary. The Barcelona Process led to a certain progress, certainly still limited (MEDA, Agadir Trade Agreements, associations agreements etc.), and its continuation is too slow. Civil society actors *can* play a reinforced role. Regional cooperation, ditto. The last conference on regional co-operation between France and Morocco, which was held in Rabat in January 2006, showed the effectiveness of relations established between areas and cities. It underlined the powerful role that may be played by the universities in the follow-up or support to projects. Universities in networks, on both sides of the Mediterranean, bring expertise, carry out exchange programmes that allow their teachers and students to initiate researches and produce innovation, particularly on the difficult issue of water. The Barcelona Process eventually emphasized the often-determinant roles played by bi-national, even bicultural actors who sometimes actually carry the responsibility of elected

officials, in their host country. Europe can implement this type of regional action.

I would like, in conclusion, to return to the essential idea of a Europe initiator and engine of a meta-dialogue, which only concerns her. The European meta-dialogue is indeed a dialogue not limited by its nature to the relations between Europe and certain zones of the world, even if it must hold account of the diversity of interlocutors and the disparity of their means. For more than one century, Europe has shown that a peaceful coexistence of languages and cultures and multiple *Weltanschauungen* are indeed possible. She anticipates, not necessarily exhibiting its pre-built image, a society of unstable, precarious peace, however with a universal scope. And such ambition turns its back against both local identities and globalisation of products and services. In this sense, Europe is both dialogue and a space of idiosyncratic dialogue. She lives out her objectives, which privilege the formation of a rising generation of executives, the support toward researches, the demand for balanced partnerships and, on certain zones experiencing an appalling economic underdevelopment, an in-depth alert against pivot partnerships in order to prevent the breakout of graduates. Youth is a major actor of this meta-dialogue. Youths were not directly acquainted with the times of colonialism. In other countries, they are upright and mobilize themselves to build a righter and more democratic world. Everywhere in the world, they show an exacerbated sensitivity with regard to international balances and do not consider planetary scale at all beyond

their range. New technologies of communications, Internet etc bring them new ways of action. More than the preceding generations, they show an astonishing capacity to experience cultural and linguistic complexity.