



τὸ διαλεκτικόν

MESSAGE FROM SAN SERVOLO.

Fusing tradition and innovation, the statutory plenary session of the European Society of Culture was indeed held in Venice, but at a new venue, a completely restored island which has now been made fully functional. The meeting took place from 31 March to 3 April 2005. The session was held under the patronage of the President of the Italian Republic and with the support of the Veneto Region and the Province and City of Venice; it was organized in collaboration with Venice International University and San Servolo Servizi.

The responsibilities of the politics of culture with regard to an important contemporary issue positioned the work undertaken within the institution's core interests: for the Society, the dialectics between the idea of Europe and the process of becoming European is fundamental and in this context its work, as has rightly been stressed, has always been consistent. This dialectics appears, in a derivative relationship, throughout the journey accomplished in over fifty years, driven by the efforts to achieve the most authentic possible expression of the ideality of Europe.

Under the current circumstances, with the title "From the European Union to the Union of Europeans", the aim of the meeting was defined as follows: To bring together from all reaches of the SEC, including the Americas, knowledge and opinions on the state of societies in relation to the institutional structure of the European Union which is taking shape and ramifying; to attempt to take stock of the great hopes which have been raised but also the gap which exists between these two realities. Above all, however, to renew the critical and affirmative awareness of "Europeanness", *qua* stripped of contingent interests; to reinforce in this direction the task of culture, which is to render this awareness present and effective, in the conviction that these are the foundations from which the institutional structure which best meets the needs of history, today and tomorrow, may grow.

In the spirit of the politics of culture, then, our work has led us to pursue and deepen these reflections and to orient the engagement springing from them along the following lines:

Without support from the will of its peoples, the European nations will be unable to unite in shared institutions or to formulate effective policies. Achieving this goal presupposes that several challenges are met: compensating for a shortage of democracy, updating the ethical foundations of democracy, cultivating the federation of nations.

It is essential to situate the issue of unification on the level of the individual. Whilst the shared values on which European citizenship must be based are recognized in the texts of the Community, a true awareness of identity still awaits its maieutics. Here lies the task of culture. A morphology of European identity can find its symbols in Prometheus, Pericles, Socrates and Antigone. It is encapsulated in the affirmation of the freedom and equality of human beings. To achieve the power of a positive vision projected into the future, the sense of belonging must involve the reunification of historical consciousnesses. This is today's duty, which should be pursued tirelessly, without ignoring the persisting depth of the thought structures forged by nation states. The creation of a Europe which is not minimalist, but made up of Europeans, cannot be hurried; it must take place at the pace of moral life, which differs from that of economic life.

This creation without gaps, this journey without shortcuts requires a new approach in all disciplines. At this meeting, the following were noted: the issue of languages, where there is a need to balance the safeguard of languages and the need for communication; the importance of reading and libraries faced with the chaotic information provision of internet; the need for a quality leap in coordination between universities, since today the research leading to essential innovations must set excellence as the minimum quality standard. – To reconcile the needs of the markets with those of society the economy must develop untried solutions and therefore operate within the space of the politics of culture. – The identity-creating potential and stabilizing capacity of the single currency, with its corresponding ethical implications, need to be better understood. – From the legal point of view, starting from the recognition of what has already been done, of the significant achievement represented by the current state of the EU, the road towards a constitution establishing the European political subject is a tortuous one, since it is necessary to creatively harmonize domestic law, international law, community law.



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This makes the clear signs of the development, as a substratum, of a European civil society, of a *demos* made of “others” even more welcome. These signs are evidence of tolerance and solidarity among individuals, but also among local groups, which contribute to giving a soul to the body – without detriment to the different ways of life with their traditional characteristics. – The transition towards the Union of Europeans – to be proposed and taken further – will depend enormously on the agreement on a new model for development, which must be sustainable, in other words which balances economic growth and the quality of life. The preservation of the environment must be linked with social progress in a participative way, which requires a general effort to raise awareness.

However, from the perspective of the SEC, this process of becoming European, this striving for the union of Europeans, are not in any way restricted to the political borders of the EU, either in its current configuration or that of the foreseeable future. The feeling of discrimination which can be observed among the citizens of countries which will be candidates, in a more or less immediate future, with more or less probability of success, is groundless if Europe is understood in terms of its axiological borders. On the other hand, it is obvious that the Union exerts a strong force of attraction as a passport to democracy. From a distance, more than from nearby, it is perceived as the expression of the ideals by which it is inspired, as a dream of freedom achieved, as the entity within which unresolved national problems find their natural solution. It could be read as an exemplary virtue. Yet this legacy of thought which makes up “Europeanness” represents a commitment to be taken on and experienced everywhere, with a strong and secure sense of self-awareness on the one hand, and in a spirit of openness on the other. It is time for a genuine dialogue, a costly dialogue, of the type which the SEC has always supported, extended towards other civilizations in a desire for understanding and based on mutual respect. – “Towards a politics of mankind”: in its fundamental humanism, the Society’s current programme, thus expressed on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, has been outlined in its exemplary and cogent force, cogent for one and all, when faced with concrete situations requiring collective and individual effort.

Ideal Europe is reawakening and being heard. Real Europe is on the move. If culture is the creation of values – the definition in which the SEC recognizes itself – the politics of culture has an important role to play whenever there is a need to map out untravelled routes, to invent new solutions with which to reform the converging movement of the Europe of ideas and the Europe of deeds. This is true even if the point of convergence is at infinity. A Cartesian encouragement to faith in the power of thought consists in knowing that this is the form of consciousness whose object is established from the outset, without the need to seek it out.

The general Assembly, in its XXVIth ordinary meeting, elected the Mexican painter Raúl Anguiano to the international Vice Presidency by general acclaim. With this election the Master takes his place alongside past Vice Presidents: Leopoldo Zea, Angelos Angelopoulos, Charles Percy Snow, Arnold Toynbee, E. M. W. Tillyard