

Education as a Strategic Cohesion Factor in the Black Sea Region

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The second decade of the 21st Century shall probably remain in the history of the Mediterranean and Black Sea Region, as the decade that brought fundamental divides and conflicts at many different scales which have been transformed in acute confrontations between different fractions in the society, between countries or groups of countries.

So, what is dividing us? Suddenly, as citizens of the region, we discovered that many topics that we were not considering under dispute became extremely important. So, we have discovered that the well known richness of confessions of our region is dividing us, the ethnical diversity, the unprecedented level of pollution that is causing irreversible degradation of the habitat in our region instead of bringing us together to solve them is generating debates and conflicts; some unclear historical issues is rapidly generating the proliferation of “frozen conflicts” in our region from Nagorno Karabakh to Crimea, Donbas and Transniestr to the entire Eastern Europe and MENA that is tending to become a norm in re-drafting the geopolitics but with thousands of death civilians and millions of refugees; the safety and security of food; the security of personal data under the disruptive evolution of information technologies; the unprecedented extension of the criminal networks enabled by social media technologies and many others.

At the same time, the evolutions that took place in recent years in several countries in Europe and neighboring areas, consisting of actions taken by or on behalf of certain groups or communities grouped on political, ethnic, regional or other interests have led to a segregation and confrontation tendency.

The complexity of the issues at the European and regional political scales, amplifies the effects of these actions and it is often directed towards confrontations, claims or even open conflicts.

It is obvious for everybody that such a pace with the mentioned tendencies is the way to peril and from the long history of our region we know that if such issues will

be left as they are, every mentioned divide, and every mentioned conflict could sooner or later generate disasters. We could not wait for some prophetic gurus, strategists or high level decision makers to solve them! We all have to involve ourselves and we have to make it quick!

From a conceptual point of view, considerable effort is needed both from the scientific community, experts, civil society, as well as from the legislative, executive and other stakeholders for developing a systemic approach to the problems related to securing the rule of law in all the counties of the region, the proper administration of human rights, the adequate norms for the relationships between minorities and majorities, the governance among the minority groups that have been established on different criteria, to promote social cohesion and a climate of understanding, mutual respect and cooperation.

We have to analyze each of the sensitive subjects in order to evaluate the complexity of factors that are involved in each topic and we shall probably discover that some of them are emphasizing our unpreparedness to address such a complexity. In this way, we probably shall discover that we are still tributary to bivalent logic, we still separate the people in I (or We) and Them, we still divide problems in categories, subcategories or specialties and continue to rely on analytic thinking.

From an educator's point of view, to address the above mentioned challenges, I consider that a new kind of literate is needed, one who can innovate by reasoning broadly across disciplines and by considering the human dimensions that are at the heart of every challenge.

In order to be prepared for the challenges that I have mentioned and for many others, aside from comprehensive knowledge in all traditional courses, our students have to understand the connections among the courses and to integrate, or “unify” their learning. More than ever we, as educators, have to teach our students to pay attention to the understanding of the complexity and diversity of nature, having in the centre the human condition.

The Black Sea Universities Network has been established based on a Recommendation of PABSEC as a platform for inter-university cooperation and we consider that it might play a pivotal role in the current difficult context in our region. At present, 110 universities are members in the network from 12 Countries associated to the BSEC Organization. We are running several activities on a bottom-

up approach for involving the professors and students in cooperative activities as: Development of live internet-based collaborative courses; Initiation of joint research platforms; Involvement of universities in innovative clusters; Joint debates involving students and professors; Collaborative projects of joint teams of students.

We, as BSUN, strongly believe that there is a very generous area for cooperation with PABSEC and the MPs from the region to unite our forces and to combine the bottom-up and top-down approaches in order to be able to generate synergies and to unlock the positive energies in our common region with an emphasis on education and science.

We know from our experience that we have to avoid, sensitive subjects and concentrate on generating connections and ties between students, professors, researchers and many other people. If we shall succeed in doing this, it will come a day when the very difficult issues in our region will come closer to a solution.

But, I consider that it is our duty, as the educators to warn the decision makers that the path of military actions and arms race is leading always to a disaster. It is still time for listening the voice of peace! It is our intellectual social responsibility to do whatever is in our capability to stop the transformation of the Black Sea in an area of confrontations, of militarization race and of divides!

And because for the Christian communities it is now the period of Lent, allow me to end by recalling the invitation of Pope Francis to pause, contemplate and return!

Let us pause for a moment of all our races, of all our small or big battles, of all the debates where we know and have all the Truth! Let us contemplate for a moment the real richness of our lives, the unvoiced sufferings of those in need, the wisdom from the eyes of our parents and grandparents, the hopes and dreams from the faces of our children! And let us return to the real values of our culture in this region of listening and respecting each other, of mutual understanding and to the culture of sharing and supporting each other!

“Fermi, guardi e ritorna!”

The Omelia of Pope Francis at Ash Wednesday, February 14th 2018