



EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD AND CONFERENCE

Organized by Youth for Human Rights International & European Foundation for Human Rights and Tolerance

(Brussels, 7th June 2006, rue d'Arlon 82)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to all of you. I am really pleased to be here for such an interesting and positive event, which contributes, of course, to promote more and more the Humans Rights and the Human Rights culture and education in the society, and also to approach the citizens, and particularly, the youth to the European Union and to its democratic project.

As you may know, I come from Catalonia -Spain-, and I am member of the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament. And I am glad too that a Catalan girl, Concha Pinós, is going to receive one of the European Human Rights Award.

This Committee of Culture and Education is responsible for the cultural aspects of the European Union, and in particular, for improving the knowledge and dissemination of culture, the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage, cultural exchanges and artistic creation.

It is also responsible for the Union's education policy, including the European higher education area, the promotion of the system of European schools and lifelong learning; for the audiovisual policy and the cultural and educational aspects of the information society; for youth policy - which must interests you- and the development of a sports and leisure policy; for the information and media policy; and for the cooperation with third countries in the areas of culture and education and relations with the relevant international organisations and institutions.

However, as you can imagine, although Human Rights are not explicitly included amongst these responsibilities, they are effectively taken into consideration and considered in all the Committee works.

In fact, Human Rights are a transactional issue of all the Committees in a democratic institution such as the European Parliament. But it is true that in the Culture Committee, especially in those aspects that have to do with education, the Human Rights have been an issue frequently raised.

But before explaining my vision on Human Rights and on Human Rights culture and on the need of inclusion of Human Rights standards in the school curricula, I would like to give some details of the European Parliament policy in youth.

Last year the European Parliament approved the "Youth In Action" programme that will cover 2007-2013. The idea behind the renewal of that programme was to provide a simpler and more flexible programme than its predecessor, open to young people between 13 and 30 in the Member States and third countries.

The programme's aims were described as follows:

- promoting young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular,
- developing young people's solidarity, in particular in order to reinforce social cohesion in the European Union,
- fostering mutual understanding between peoples through young people,
- contributing to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field, and
- promoting European cooperation in youth policy.

I am sure that "Youth in Action" will make an important contribution to the active citizenship of young people in society and thus enhance their feeling of being part of Europe, so that it is likely to deliver substantial European added value.

Furthermore, the aims of the programme should be extended to include support for linguistic diversity and promote the participation of young people in the democratic life of Europe, so as to take account of Article III-282(1)(e) of the draft treaty for a European Constitution.

But as young people, you are not only interested in specific programs about youth, but also to those issues that can affect your lives. And this is why it should be strengthened the opportunities that the European Union give to all citizens through the Erasmus and other

educative programmes to travel, to study and to get in touch with other European cultures and languages.

Last year, in the report on the situation of Fundamental Rights in the European Union 2004, I highlighted the idea of including the Human Rights in the educative curricula of schools and institutes of the Member States through its inclusion in a subject which should explain and promote the Human Rights recognized by the international community.

Also, I congratulated for the creation of an Agency of Fundamental Rights in the European Union, and stressed the importance that all Member States signed the Framework Agreement for the Protection of the National Minorities, as well as the European Charter of Minority and Regional Languages.

By the way, I am from Catalonia, and my mother tongue is Catalan. Catalan is not a minority language. It is spoken by 11 million people from three different Member States - Spain, France, and Italy-, and has a status of official languages in my region, and of co-official languages in all the Spanish country.

Nowadays, it is possible to speak in Catalan in the Committee of the Regions, in the European Commission and in the Council, and I hope that not so far, citizens will be able to communicate with the Parliament in their own language, which will help to approach them to the European institutions and to its project.

In this sense, I think that is strictly necessary to make an effort to take into consideration all the linguistic and cultural sensibilities, not only because it is the only way to gain their support to the integration project, but also because only by doing it, we will make this project richer, more democratic, and more stable.

World peace and global understanding today depend on the dialogue between cultures. The project of an Alliance of Civilizations, created to meet such a challenge, has been adopted by the United Nations as its own. It should not be difficult for the Europeans to realize that intolerance and lack of communication between diverse identities endanger not only the stability of the international system but also coexistence within the European Union.

The Europe support to a regular dialogue should provide flexible instruments in reconciling opposed visions, thus preventing conflicts. I am convinced that it is necessary to reconcile freedom of expression and full respect for religious beliefs. This should be done not by introducing coercitive elements in our law systems, but by means of effective leaderships in every country.

Within our societies, dialogue is particularly important to enhance an inclusive approach to diversity. We should not regard cultural dialogue as a mere issue of national or European foreign policies. As the world becomes more and more interdependent, there is a growing need in every country to acknowledge the internal dimension of such a dialogue. Only by being consequent we will prevent the risk of divide that hinges upon our societies.

Europe has always been a plural reality, a complex amalgam of peoples and identities. Realizing this can help us to accept, without reservations, diversity coming from abroad. Diversity that has brought into our societies by migration flows, although currently very intense, has always existed. National, regional and local governments, together with the EU, should ensure that accommodating diversity means providing real opportunities for every individual.

And the current proliferation of social society initiatives, as yours, is an important asset for dialogue and mutual understanding. The ability of groups and organizations to bring societies closer is a crucial element to achieve this goal. All levels of government should promote the conditions ensuring that those groupings can perform their task across the borders.

As far as I am concerned, education and knowledge should be the main priorities for governments in order to shape a real culture of tolerance. All governments should promote policies aiming at spreading among public opinions the idea that diversity and individual equality are fully compatible. By doing so, we will ensure that prejudices and mistrust are left behind, and thus also the source of xenophobic attitudes.

You may know that 2008 will be the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue. In this framework, the European Union should reinforce dialogue among its citizens so that this dialogue can be viewed as a process of recognition of cultural differences but also as a tool for reaching shared solutions based upon shared values and principles. Such actions should not also strengthen the role of the EU in the world but also social cohesion within our borders.

Well, all in all, young people are our future, and it is our responsibility to guarantee the basic principles such as Human Rights for them, which they will be able to apply to their lives in the future, to assure a more respectable and peaceful world.

Thank you very much,