Report of the UNESCO Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues on the Challenges of Globalization to Philosophy and Democracy

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Mr Pierre Sané, ADG/SHS, invited participants to discuss globalization with regard to philosophy and democracy. The working group, once brought together, indicated that the economical data (existence of a world-wide extended market) should be combined at the same time with socio-cultural aspects (preservation of cultural specificities), philosophical culture made out of translations and traditions and democratic culture which is educational work.

1) Trying to characterize “globalization”

1) The predominance of economy

It seems reckless to venture to provide with a unitary definition of the notion of globalization. Failing in producing a precise and clear definition of the notion, we may however give a few way marks. In cases such as this one, it is better to be incomplete and fit the demands of a description meant to be perfected than to hurriedly edify closed and theoretical systems about globalization. While researching the way marks one must nevertheless admit the prevalence of economy in this notion. The multiplication of free trade zones, particularly in the contracts that the United States of America formed with individual states, the recommendations of the World Trade Organization regarding free competition, the Kyoto Protocol against the destructing effects of harmful industries on the quality of life are significant examples of the frontward place that economy has in the globalization notion. But does this come with the omission of the socio-cultural?

2) Is the socio-cultural becoming residual?

According to Mr Fathi Triki (Tunisia) globalization is essentially economic and does not succeed in “including culture and the social area”. The economical does not play anymore the integrator role it had in the globalization of the beginnings of the XXth century, the one that witnessed the Fordism emergence. Thus, the socio-cultural tends to get ethnic-colored, or even follow identity or nationalist tendencies. Mr Ibana (Philippines) underlines the fact that globalization must not sweep away identities: how to participate in globalization without losing the “self”? he asked. These questions are all the more crucial that we observe that inequalities grow up as the world expands: the opening-up to world trade of 50 LCDs (Less Developed Countries) did not lead to a poverty reduction. Development can be sustainable only if a maximum number of individuals reach a decent life. This challenges the duality centre/periphery that globalization has generated.
3) **The centre and the periphery/ fringe**

It seems that globalization does not come yet with a multipolar world: there are countries that create and control knowledge, others that manufacture and execute what has been decided in rich countries. The alter-globalization movement points out this organization of the world between countries of the centre and countries of the fringe. To avoid such a world, it is question to transform knowledge into a strategic issue: poor countries must have access to a sufficient education level in order to go back from the production to the conception, as outlined by Mr Benmakhlouf inspired by the studies of Daniel Cohen, professor of economics at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Mr Al Jabiri (Iraq) also underlined how globalization was currently paralleled by such coercion as the freedom of choice of many people decreased. The paradox is that the way globalization is developing is what threatens it most: the development of inequalities. How can philosophy face so many challenges?

II) **Philosophy facing globalization**

1) **A report**

Mr Triki (Tunisia) states that it is question to identify the challenge and to give philosophy its criticism role back whereas Mr Mawhoub (Morocco) underlines that we must deepen the philosophical demand in the view of this situation and be critical towards individualism. One thing is obvious: philosophy is disregarded because it is not pay enough attention to economy. Mr Yamawaki notes that texts by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen are not sufficiently studied by philosophers and refuses to analyze globalization from one unique paradigm. Mr Himmich (Morocco) indicates the need to offer alternatives to the financial culture that breaks syndicates, reduce working fees by mass redundancy and aims at increasing trade market profits.

It comes from all these interventions that the issue of quality of life and substantial liberties, put forward by the Nobel Prize of Economics, Amartya Sen, is highly philosophical and represents one of the philosopher’s struggles, theoretical and practical.

2) **A philosophy of process, of interactions and comparison**

The analysis of economical processes is certainly a philosophical task but it must not make us forget the conditions of citizenship. Being with, making part of a relationship (relationality, Withness, mitsein) are philosophical notions that would better be fostered again, given the fact that globalization is challenging us into building a world of solidarities. Mr Triki (Tunisia) underlines the ravages of the corporate culture in Maghreb, culture that threatens philosophy and against which the latter has to recall its ethical demands. Mr Yamawaki (Japan) points out the fact that philosophy has to find its place among social sciences and not to venture alone before the challenges of globalization. Moreover, he deprecates the fact that Western philosophy, a recent one, is predominating (Foucault, Derrida, Taylor, Said) at the expense of Buddhist and Confucian traditions. We must reach a balance between the different philosophical traditions and UNESCO should help promoting those that are few or not represented. Mr Al Jabiri (Iraq) says that philosophy rushed into an “ideological chaos” subsequent to the work of Huntington and Fukuyama. Where has the Kantian project...
of liberation of man gone, he asked? Mr Triki (Tunisia) observes that in Maghreb there is “a form of internalization of the philosophical inside the religious” that has to be questioned. Be it in the Arab world or in the Asian World, it is time to compare traditional philosophies and those that are Western-looking and which benefited from an important transmission these last thirty decades. Philosophy is not an exception either: the Western way of life spread out and with it a way of thinking leaving aside age-gold traditions that are not less philosophies as the rest. Mr Jean-Louis Poirier (France) underlined that philosophy had not to show its everlasting demands but the discordances, the disparities and the blanks that it may experience; and Mr Cam (Australia) noted there were in philosophical studies composite items that must be clarified: a South-Korean studying in Germany, a Magrebi in France have a heterogeneous education that needs to be made visible.

III) The democratic demand
The challenges that globalization poses to philosophy may be summed up in two words: education and democracy.

1) The educational work
Globalization comes with the promotion of a knowledge market (drug patents, software, etc.) and this economy does not manifest itself equally in the different societies: several Arab and Asian countries suffer from analphabetsm and do not seem ready (particularly Arab States) to systematically convert their growth into educational development. South-East Asian countries have been named as “emerging” because they were able to realize this conversion. Because of the lack of democracy, the fragility of the institutions and the very high personalization of the decision authorities this process is still awaited for in Arab countries. Mr Bennakhlouf (Morocco) underlined that exclusion problems, specifically regarding women, are a tragedy, though avoidable: 1) why does a little girl from the Moroccan countryside have to choose between whether attending school or helping her parents? 2) Why are scan methods used to have, in China and India, women waiting for little girls abort? China and India have already a women deficit (phenomenon of the “missing women”) of almost one hundred millions.

It seems that both problems come under two different situations: on the one hand, the lack of education, on the other hand the evolution of mentalities. There is concerning these problems a democratic vigilance that philosophy has the duty to constantly recall.

2) Democratic criteria and conditions
The aspiration of all to a decent life requires the meeting of a minimum of democracy demands like the recognition of press freedom, the struggle against precariousness, a real citizenship and not a virtual one: it is not sufficient to formally recognize rights that are not applied. Concerning citizenship, it is also relevant to distinguish between the libertarian options or not (Mr Yamawaki). Elites, notably for Maghreb, are fully responsible of the lack of democracy in these countries. Mr Mawhoub (Morocco) quoted Hölderlin: “where there is danger, there is a possibility of salvation” and Mr Al Jabiri (Iraq) noted that it is during emergencies that we learn the most. Arabic and Asian countries can seize this occasion created by globalization to widen their horizons and determine the modalities of their participation in this new adventure.
without considering themselves as victims or being doomed to suffer from this new conjuncture.

**Recommendations:**

- Encourage the translation of philosophies between both regions: Asia, the Arab World.
- Present the Arab and Asian cultures in their democratic potential. Make visible and clarify this potential.
- Analyze the obstacles obstructing the acceptance of democracy.
- Place philosophy in public debates.

*There is also a general meeting report.*