

EUROPEAN CHALLENGES TO CROSS CULTURAL BORDERS*Elena A. A. Garcea*

Someone has said that international relations are men's business and intercultural relations are women's affairs. International relations deal with politics, economics, important issues - things that men are usually familiar with; intercultural relations deal with exchanges, visits, gentle issues - things that better apply to women! International relations deal with war and conflict; intercultural relations deal with peace and harmony. International relations imply urgent matters, sometimes even emergencies; intercultural relations are nice, but not essential and can be postponed. A war must be settled, before peace can be established.

The person who made these remarks, Ewald Brass, did not personally believe they were true, but wanted to make a provocative statement concerning the fact that international and intercultural relations are too often separated, as if it were not possible to deal with both at the same time. Brass¹ is former director of the Franco-German Office for Youth (*OFAJ-Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse/DFJW-Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk*), a very good example of an organisation that uses intercultural activities in the field of international affairs.

On January 22, 1963, General de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer signed the Franco-German Treaty for Cooperation between France and Germany. Less than six months later, on July 5, 1963, the ministers of foreign affairs, Maurice Couve de Murville and Gerhard Schröder, signed the agreement on the foundation of the Franco-German Office for Youth. The aim of the Office for Youth has been to provide training and learning opportunities for young citizens in order to facilitate cooperation between the two countries.

Brass's considerations draw attention to the fact that political, diplomatic, social, cultural and conceptual reasons make international affairs dependent on intercultural relations. International relations establish borders between countries and the conditions to cross them, yet intercultural relations regulate not only the conditions to cross, but, as well, the conditions to enter into another culture.²

We need to understand the relationship between international and intercultural relations.³ The two are inseparable as no communication occurs if we do not translate and interpret behaviours in the same way we do when we speak a foreign language. The experience of both interculturalists and diplomats provides many examples of this. We need to translate ourselves and to interpret

others. We need to make ourselves understandable, and to do this, we need to accept that much information and many nuances will be lost. For example, I use English as a foreign language to make people understand me, but I know that my knowledge of English limits the expression of my thought. Nevertheless, I have to cross this barrier in order to communicate with foreigners. At the same time, those who have English as their mother tongue have to make the effort to understand my foreign accent when I speak, and my foreign style and logic, when I write. Those who do not have English as their mother tongue have to make the double effort to understand my accent and my style in a language that is not ours. Therefore, we are making a compromise. We want to communicate and we do it at the price of losing and missing bits and pieces of information. Nonetheless, we want to do it because we want to go beyond our cultural, national, linguistic and cognitive limits. I think in one language, translate it into another and people interpret my words so that they make sense in their frame of mind.

European Commission

In addition to the OFAJ/DFJW, one can find many other political, governmental examples of initiatives in favour of international/intercultural relations, a major one coming from the European Union.⁴

The European Commission acknowledged that intercultural dialogue plays an enormous role in the understanding and prevention of violence and terrorism. They created the *Jean Monet Project for Intercultural Dialogue*, on the premises that “the events of September 11 have underlined the necessity, recognised by the Heads of State and Government, to reinforce intercultural dialogue.”⁵

The project promoted a symposium “to provoke a relevant analysis of the numerous aspects of intercultural relations as well as conclusions and recommendations of a political nature.” The conclusions were conveyed to Mr Prodi and to Mrs Reding (Directorate General for Education and Culture) and to the political decision-makers, institutions and ministers. As a follow-up to this event, the Commission held a conference on “Peace, security and stability: international dialogue and the role of the European Union,” in December of 2002. The final declaration of the Jean Monet Project stated, “A policy of intercultural dialogue, next to traditional economic and diplomatic relations, plays a vital role in the governance of the shared responsibility. In this perspective, intercultural dialogue is an efficient instrument to prevent and manage

conflicts at all policy levels. ... The policy of an international dialogue by the European Union should focus on youth, education and communication."⁶

Centre for International Mobility

Another governmental initiative comes from the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), in Helsinki, Finland. This is a service organisation under the Finnish ministry of education and acts as the national agency for the European Union education, training and youth programmes. CIMO belongs to the youth information network Eurodesk and to the Euroguidance network, including 65 organisations in 31 European countries, which provide information on international mobility, best practices, education and training systems.

The most recent policy papers on immigration include the Treaty of Amsterdam, which has the objective that immigration and asylum are a Community responsibility⁷, and the Tampere European Council, which was part of the 1999 Finnish Presidency conclusions and had the objective of creating an EU area of freedom, security and justice.⁸

The policy papers on guidance, counselling and information include the Memorandum on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality⁹ and the High Level Task Force on Skills and Mobility.¹⁰

From 1999 to 2001, CIMO coordinated an international project entitled *Towards a European RAINBOW - Increasing Intercultural Awareness among Guidance Counsellors*. The project took into consideration the European policy papers on immigration and on guidance, counselling and information.¹¹

The main aim of the Rainbow project was to design and implement a European training module on multicultural counselling and intercultural communication for guidance counsellors working with immigrants and ethnic groups in the education and employment sectors in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece and Italy. All partner organisations operated in the field of educational and vocational guidance and counselling. Half of the partners were members of the transnational Euroguidance network that covers 31 European countries and supports the European guidance community in mobility-related issues, such as providing guidance practitioners with information on studying and training opportunities abroad.¹² The Rainbow project also created a www-service¹³, a database about multicultural counselling that includes an in-service training course, a thematic link collection and a virtual learning space.

My experience as trainer in the Rainbow project showed how intercultural awareness could be an effective tool for guidance counsellors. Together we understood that guidance counsellors often use intercultural communication with their clients unconsciously, without mastering intercultural skills and, therefore, running the risk of being unsuccessful.

European Federation for Intercultural Learning

I shall now present two other case studies of non-governmental organisations working in the field of intercultural communication.

The European Federation for Intercultural Learning, EFIL (Brussels, Belgium), is the umbrella organisation of the AFS associations in Europe. AFS Intercultural Programmes, Inc. formed in 1947 to facilitate student and teacher exchanges, after the activities of its predecessor, the American Field Service ambulance corps. The origins of American Field Service (AFS) began shortly after the outbreak of World War I. A group of 15 Americans living in Paris volunteered to drive ambulances for the American Hospital there. This group, eventually known as the American Field Service, undertook to transport wounded French soldiers from the front lines to mobile medical units. By the end of the war, their number had grown to 2,500 volunteer ambulance drivers. During World War II, the American Field Service's all-civilian volunteer force was stationed in Europe, Syria, North Africa, India and Burma. When the war ended in 1945, AFS volunteers pledged not to abandon their tradition of international service. They began their exchange programme in 1947, bringing 52 high school students from 10 countries, including "enemy" nations such as Japan and Germany, to the United States for a yearlong exchange experience. Today, AFS has offices in 52 countries and more than 290,000 participants have taken part in international cultural exchanges.¹⁴

EFIL comprises 22 AFS European organisations and Tunisia, as an associate member.¹⁵ Its main activities are international exchanges for young people, development of educational methods and materials on intercultural communication, and intercultural training for teachers, students and volunteers. The current EFIL projects include:

Co-ordination of intra-European trimester exchanges: On behalf of the Council of Europe, EFIL co-ordinates pupil exchanges between western and eastern European countries. Thirty countries are involved in this exchange.

Research on the mobility of secondary school students: Thanks to the support of the EU Commission (Socrates Action 6.2), EFIL has undertaken a two-year

research programme focusing on the mobility of secondary school pupils. The research seeks to identify the existing regulatory environment, especially with regard to validation and recognition of curricula, and to identify best practices.

Creating a special visa status for participants in international mobility schemes: The creation of common European borders calls for harmonised immigration and residence rules for the Union's members. EFIL is lobbying for a special European visa status for exchange programme participants in order to facilitate the international mobility of secondary school pupils in Europe.

A new generation of educational and mobility programmes: EFIL is lobbying the European Commission on the next generation of EU programmes in order to set aside more funding for mobility and intercultural learning, the validation and certification of skills acquired through participation in mobility projects and increased support to schools wishing to foster intercultural learning in the classroom.

A European network for transnational studies: EFIL collaborates in a higher education project with Bocconi University (Italy) to create a network of formal and non-formal educational institutions and to develop a protocol of specific competencies and a set of didactic tools and guidelines for secondary schools.

Validating the intercultural results of stays abroad: AFS, with the support of EFIL at the European level and in collaboration with Mitchell R. Hammer, has launched into a three-year study involving 1400 pupils aimed at evaluating and measuring the educational value of intercultural learning and competence.

Discussion

Europe is the continent with the largest quantity of borders. Its small countries with millenary histories and diversities offer a variety of intercultural challenges. The borders among European countries, when they still exist, are no longer the frontiers of the past. Mobility of professionals, teachers and students has substantially increased and has been encouraged at local, national and international levels. This affects workplaces as well as educational settings by enhancing cultural diversity. International professionals, trainers and educators should be prepared and should prepare societies for these new scenarios.

Culture plays an essential role in both promoting and hindering change and in affecting Europeans' view of their present and future attitudes toward cooperation and integration. The EU originated in the effort to create and share a common market economy. In the 1990s, the communal principle was extended to political, legal, financial and social issues. However, policies and

laws remain quite different in the various EU countries due to cultural differences. Uniform and coordinated policies can take place only with intercultural awareness and cultural adjustments.

The EU has constitutional arrangements and a series of treaties, but a European constitution does not exist yet. Various organisations have provided fora for discussions and proposals, including formal institutions as well as private organisations. Among the former, the European University Institute in Florence drafted a “Basic Treaty” for the Union at the request of the European Commission.¹⁶ Among the latter, *The Economist* suggested a review of the Basic Treaty combined with the previous EU treaties.¹⁷ These discussions rise from the need to harmonise European diversities. Cultural diversity is an important resource. The initiatives of formal institutions and private organisations finally and systematically corroborate the individual pioneers who started supporting intercultural communication in much earlier times. Among them, the Franco-German Office for Youth has succeeded in promoting intercultural activities to fulfil international affairs since the 1960s. More recently, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) has coordinated an international project to increase intercultural awareness based on the European policy papers on immigration, guidance, counselling and information.

Initiatives of non-governmental organisations are even more numerous than those of governmental agencies. The earliest one is probably AFS Intercultural Programmes, Inc., which was created in Europe in 1947 to facilitate student and teacher exchanges among the different countries that fought against each other in WWII. AFS later gave birth to a European-based organisation, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), which promotes the development of educational methods and materials on intercultural communication and intercultural training for teachers, students and volunteers.

The success of all these programmes confirms that the diversity of European cultures is a positive challenge as it brings richness and added value to its citizens. It provides them with the opportunities and skills to manage intercultural communication, cooperation, and synergy and to handle the competitive advantage to manage diversity. The European Commission, together with the heads of state and government, acknowledged the social, diplomatic, and security roles of intercultural dialogue, by creating the *Jean Monet Project for Intercultural Dialogue*.

Endnotes

- 1 Ewald Brass, "La conflittualità nell'esperienza vissuta nello scambio interculturale," in *La pedagogia degli scambi interculturali*, ed. Maria Grazia Calasso (Frascati: I Quaderni di Villa Falconieri 10, 1986), 59-64.
- 2 Elena A. A. Garcea, "The increasing significance of intercultural learning in the global education and the technological society of the 21st millennium," *Hacia un aula sin fronteras. Jornadas educativas* (Bilbao: Ayuntamiento de Bilbao, 2000). Elena A. A. Garcea, "How Europeans Perceive Europe: A Case Study from Italy," *European Business Review* 13 (2001), 263-268.
- 3 See, for example, George F. Simons, ed. *EuroDiversity: A Business Guide to Managing Differences* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2002).
- 4 See, for example, Elena A. A. Garcea, "The Legacy of the Past: How National and Regional Differences Continue to Effect Trade, Cooperation, Politics, and Relationships," in *EuroDiversity: A Business Guide to Managing Differences*, ed. George F. Simons (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2002), 35-58. Elena A. A. Garcea, "Current Cultural Crises, Fears, Fantasies, and Foreseeable Futures," in *EuroDiversity*, ed. Simons, 59-85. Elena A. A. Garcea, "Managing Diversity to Create Marketable Value Added from Differences," in *EuroDiversity*, ed. Simons, 86-110.
- 5 Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/ajm/dialogue/declaration_en.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/unit/immigration_en.htm.
- 8 Available at http://www.europarl.eu.int/summits/tam_en.htm.
- 9 Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/life/communication/com_en.pdf.
- 10 Available at http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2001/dec/taskforce2001_en.pdf.
- 11 For more information, see Elena A. A. Garcea and Mika Launikari, "Multicultural Counselling Competence: Requirements for the Future," in *Intercultural Competences in a Globalised World. Society of Intercultural Education, Training and Research Congress Vienna 2002*, ed. Frank Brück, Marie-Thérèse Claes, Astrid Kainzbauer and Michael Thiel (Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration: Vienna, 2002) 32. Mika Launikari, "Multicultural Counselling Competence: Necessity for the Future," *European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia*, Equalvoices 10; available at http://www.eumc.at/publications/equalvoices/ev10/ev10-3_en.htm.
- 12 Available at <http://www.euroguidance.org.uk>.
- 13 Available at <http://rainbow.cimo.fi>.
- 14 Available at <http://www.afs.org>.
- 15 Available at <http://www.efil.afs.org>.
- 16 Elena A. A. Garcea, "Managing Diversity to Create Marketable Value Added from Differences," in *EuroDiversity*, ed. Simons, 86-110.
- 17 "A Constitution for the European Union," *Economist*, 28 October 2000, 22-28.

