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International University Cooperation- Why?

These pages are devoted to expose my impression and opinion about the importance of education, generally, which overcome the borders of countries and different cultures, for better mutual understanding and tolerance. But, that is possible to achieve, even better, step by step, by the International university cooperation educating young generations about basic human rights and solidarity. On the basis of my concrete experience, I'll show this using two examples.

I have lived in a multinational, multiethnic and multi religious country all my life and I have been educated to respect people around me, no matter of their personal identity. This was a result not only of my family background and treatment, but also as a result of the nature of the social system which was based on such a value system. And so, during my university work I traveled a lot and visited many countries, met people belonging to different ethnic and national groups, races, religions... without any kind of prejudice. But, I also know that there are situations when people get in conflict. These conflicts may have different causes, socio-economic,

(I studied Sociology at the University of Belgrade (Belgrade, Serbia) and got all my degrees-BA, MA and PhD.)

geo-political, religious, etc, although they are manifold, and lead to very hard consequences. Most people in my country, and myself, couldn't believe that something like that could happen in our country. But we were wrong.

During the last decade of the 20th century my country experienced a very hard time. Yugoslavia was a big multinational country, 22 million people, but during the mentioned years, this nice country collapsed. It was disintegrated and divided into 6 separate states (republics). In one of them, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, burst the civil war, four years duration, with terrible consequences: numerous number of people were killed, a large number of war invalids, refugees... country was destroyed. The social relations between Muslims, Croats and Serbs, as three main nationalities which have lived for decades in peace, were broken, humanity was lost. Economic, political and social consequences of this drastic civil war were very deep. All this was followed by further disaster in 1999, when Serbia experienced NATO bombing (Serbia

had an old problem with its southern province- Kosovo- expressed in the unilateral declaration of independence in February, 17, 2008.) This republic was also completely ruined in all aspects of life. It is important to mention here that the universities in Serbia were in isolation, excluded from the European University Association, duration a year (until the end of 2000).

After all these happenings, a new time arrived. Democratic process of recovering the country has started and university, as an actor in these processes, recognized its role and was ready to face new time and these challenges. We can say that the beginning of 2000, marked this historical moment. In the whole society the atmosphere was full of great enthusiasm; political and social changes governed the whole society striving for peace, freedom, rule of law, human rights and solidarity.(In this atmosphere I was democratically elected as a Rector of the University of Belgrade, and reelected for second mandates in 2002 till 2004(I was not appointed by the government). In that time, UB had 30 faculties, today it has 31.)

As a sociologist I knew that university faced new problems and challenges and that it has the obligation to offer to young generation, and to a society as a whole, through education, some new means for intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and social cohesion, with the goal to overcome the war consequences.

It happened that in 2001, delegations from many European universities and different EU commissions, visited University of Belgrade, to see and to discuss about the education in Serbia. Among them, the representatives of the University La Sapienza Roma (Dept. for international relations, prof. Gueritore and M.M.Caneva), also visited University of Belgrade, but only this university offered the concrete way of collaboration: The Joint Master Program between three universities: La Sapienza Roma University, University of Sarajevo and University of Belgrade. The basic idea was that the "university cooperation is an important tool to help promote reconciliation between young people divided by conflicts...and also as an essential mean of contributing intercultural and interfaith dialogue". University La Sapienza organized the first post-war meeting between Rectors of Sarajevo and Belgrade universities, in Sarajevo (2001), in the Italian Peace Corps Command, together with Italian embassies in Sarajevo and Belgrade, representatives from UN and EU. This program, as a first European program of this kind, was accepted with pleasure from the universities and Memorandum of understanding, was signed. To fulfill the aims, the contract of cooperation and implementation of program, between three universities, was signed (11.Nov.) under the title: **State management and humanitarian affairs**. The unique character of this program was that it started as a cooperation of academic community with important socio-political and institutional support, by continuous efforts of La Sapienza University in that direction, what was great and sustainable.

The program was carried out through interdisciplinary approach; students could acquire knowledge in economic, political, geopolitical, security and institutional functioning systems, which represented a ground for studying the emergence and development of social crisis, humanitarian problems and human rights violation. The courses were organized through interactive lectures and included 8 modules, three workshops, internship and preparation of project work (master thesis). The program was conducted in English, with mobility of professors and students between the universities. Besides the academics, a number of experts who have experience in solving practical issues, also took important role in this program,

like: diplomats, journalists, managers, experts in security system, lawyers ...Students also had an opportunity to visit many relevant institutions in situ to get practical knowledge about their functioning.

After getting through all exams, internship and seminars, students got the chance to dedicate themselves to research for final work.

So, acquiring wide theoretical and practical knowledge, they could prepare the final project (master thesis), choosing the topic of their own choice. Master thesis was a very serious task and it was prepared under the auspices of mentor and defended in front of competent mixed commission: **Master Diploma was unique and signed by three rectors.** 1/

In Belgrade, enrolled students from different countries and different nationalities, not only from Italy, BiH and Serbia, but some were from Macedonia, Romania, Montenegro, Nigeria, even from England and China.

1/ To mention a few examples of master thesis which were defended in this program: 'The relation between European court of justice and the European court of human rights'; 'Soft or hard power versus terrorism'; 'Promotion of BiH within the context of the European integrations'; 'Ombudsman institution- protector of the citizens'; 'Education in conflict-affected fragile (fragile) environments'; 'Terorism in Europe after the 9/11'; 'Democratization in Africa: process and obstacles-case studies: Ghan, Nigeria and Kongo'; 'The African Union: Challenges to managing peace and security in Africa: case studies: Lybian crisis 2011, Mali crisis 2012'; 'Elected officials in crisis situation'; 'Rehabilitation in Serbian legal system'; 'Importance of information and role of media in crisis situation';

The result :

This program was organized with the idea to strengthen international university cooperation, for promoting peace, human rights and solidarity, through education, intercultural tolerance and dialogue. The titles of master thesis show that students achieved abilities to face the sensitive situations and to offer the explanation and possible solutions. Besides this, this kind of university cooperation gives more benefits like listening professors from different universities and different views, meet colleagues with different cultural background, personal contacts and discussions about actual problems of their countries, informal conversation and friendship parties, so peculiar for young generation. **Better knowing others means better mutual understanding.**

The second example also shows how wise was the initiation to organize similar international university cooperation among the universities of Middle East Countries since this region has been for a long time in serious conflicts. Like in the first case, Roma Tre University took over the initiative to do it (again Prof. M.M Caneva).

Since I was invited to participate and to transmit my experience from the previous program between Belgrade, La Sapienza and Sarajevo universities, I did it twice. This cooperation was organized with the same idea- peace, understanding and tolerance among people. Seminar was

based on the expositions of papers by the representatives from different countries and universities of this region, and then a wide discussion with many questions and arguments about the topic. Young students (around 30's and younger) were from different countries of this region, some from western countries, too, with different professional occupation, used to be very active and communicative among themselves, in classroom and outside. Among them there were young doctors with practice in hospitals (medical treatment of wounded persons), teachers, youth leaders, political activists, employees in governmental office... I also noticed, that they continue to socialize informally going together for dinner or entertainment in the evenings.. At the end of Seminar, Italian professors had the most interesting lectures about the achievements in science solving difficult problems of the world, which also attracted attention of the whole group with open discussion. The whole Seminar was penetrated with humanism and beauty to evoke deep emotions about the value of human life.

My opinion and total impression is that this kind of seminars/programs has a great benefit for young generation to actively participate in creating a better and sustainable future, sharing the basic value system with respect to human rights, mutual understanding, tolerance for diversity and differences, society without poverty and then how to prevent conflicts, how to create conditions for peace. This is the main message of this kind of education. International university cooperation is something that all of us, at this Seminar, encouraged to believe that education has a power to create a better world for all people, step by step. That is the answer on WHY?