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ENT-CPLP: Entrevistas sobre a CPLP



Interview made to: Dr. Denis Huber (North South Centre – Council of Europe)

Interviewer: Prof. Doutora Maria Sousa Galito

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Hello and thank you for receiving me. Dr. Denis Huber, I ask you about the importance of interdependence and solidarity in the globalized world of today, and about the importance of dialogue and capacity building for solidarity in an interdependent world?

It's a very general question to start with. To evaluate the importance of interdependence and solidarity you must compare present and past situations. In general it's always important, but in some periods is more imperative than others. I believe that in this historic period, it's probably more important than ever. Why? I think currently there's a higher perception among public opinion about global challenges. There's a feeling that we live in one world, *our world*, and that what happens in Africa, Asia or America has consequences in Europe.

I see two things. First, there's a growing perception in the public opinion that global challenges can only be responded through global responses. Ex: one country can't do much about climate change, only a coordinated international response can have an influence.

Second, the importance of interdependence varies from country to country. Even today, the world's population is still more preoccupied with its country, region or town. The majority of the population cares about local problems rather than global challenges. At the same time people are aware of the interactions in the world - difficulties lived in the US market caused an international economic crisis and that the whole world collapsed.

What happens in the US, China and Brazil has consequences for them, as individuals. This is very important because coordinated policies can only be conceived and implemented on the basis of what the public opinion perceives. At least in Democracies, you can't implement policies without the support of public opinion.

When the North-South Centre was created, the most important relation in the world was East/West (Cold World). Mikhail Gorbachev was in power and much improvement was achieved. Today the Berlin Wall doesn't exist anymore. The North-South relations have now a bigger political dimension than existed before.

Before, the main idea was that North countries were rich and South countries were poor. The question was: what can rich countries of the north hemisphere do in order to help the poor countries of the south?

Today the situation is more complex. There's no more an East/west dimension, nor ideological conflicts. Even the North/South relations are not so obvious, anymore. There are not so rich countries in the North, and we have big powers in the South – like China, India, and Brazil – considered poor countries, and rightly so, twenty years ago. And look at them today. They are even more than emerging powers. The situation is far more complex.

Some years ago the world was more easily divided in compartments. Today this is not the case anymore. It means you cannot apply specific policies to specific parts of the world's puzzle, which gives an extra argument in favor of global policies. You must have a global picture about the current situation.

There are new actors. Twenty years ago there were two main major players in foreign relations: states and international organizations. Even today, they are the ones who have legal status.

Now we also have a parliamentary dimension (parliament sessions at a national level, European parliament, lobbies,...) but also regional and local authorities; as well as a civil society that has been a major player in international relations for the last two decades but wasn't so important before.

Today we face a very rich and big picture. The bad side: it is far more complicated. The good side: there are many channels you can use to respond to challenges that are global.

I'm very interested in North/South relations. Many countries speak the Portuguese language in the world. Portugal is in the North hemisphere, the others are in the South hemisphere. Two questions now. Can Portugal have a role in these North/South relations? Can CPLP (the Community of Countries of Portuguese Language) be a big player in these North/South or South/South relations? The importance of economic cooperation among countries, because, I think, economic issues are so important in the world right now.

I think you cannot isolate the economic level from other things. The notion of influence is wider. Economy is very important but not the only thing.

Strictly from the economic point of view, the big powers of today are the US, China and Japan. They are very influent but we cannot say they are the most important players in the world. In Europe, Germany and France are very influent but they are different in terms of economic influence. We must take a wider perspective than just the economic.

Other important things: political influence, military capacity to send soldiers abroad, to have a permanent seat in the Security Council of the UN. Cultural diplomacy is also growing in importance, which is a quite new thing. *Commonwealth* and Francophone organizations, based on cultural links, are getting stronger. CPLP didn't even exist twenty years ago.

At the same time there's a tendency for cultural diversity (against the uniformity and supremacy of the English language), which has become a challenge for the present world.

There has been an emergence of a religious component that has created, for instance, the organization of the Islamic Countries.

The world is far more complex. Economy is very important but there are other things also very important to take in consideration.

Now, going back to your question: What about Portugal? I think this is a perfect example. If you only take in consideration the economic dimension, Portugal has no real influence..

On the other hand, Portugal can be an important player for three reasons – in this order of importance: 1) because it is a member of the European Union; 2) it is a member of NATO; 3) and it is a *Lusophone country*. Here, Portugal can have a strong role and make a difference - not as an individual player, but through an intelligent use of the multilateral frameworks to which it belongs.

We started globalization with only one million in the fifteen century.

That's true. But the present world is a little bit different.

In your opinion, can CPLP stand in the long run without becoming some sort of an economic block? Or is and will continue being just an international player with cultural and linguistic links?

I don't think it can become an economic block, frankly speaking. We have an economic block in the EU. The other members of the EU would never accept that Angola or Mozambique would become part of the EU; nor Senegal which is a francophone country.

In terms of building an economic block or a political power, clearly the first option for Portugal is the EU. When I spoke about EU, NATO and the *Lusophone Community* I had in mind a hierarchy.

But at the same time there isn't an obvious separation between economic and linguistic fields. Having the same language helps trade and fosters migration flows.

What about the relation Europe/Africa and Europe/Latin America in terms of global education, interdependence and solidarity links? I mean, investing in global education make help spread the Portuguese language in the world. If in Lusophone countries

people go to school and learn how to speak and write in the Portuguese language, there will be more speakers of this language in the future.

The North/South Centre is based in Portugal but has not Portugal has an objective.

The main goal of this Centre is not to spread the Portuguese language.

This being said, our global education programme helps integrating schools and official programs in those countries. Young people should be aware that they are living in an isolated area, but they are part of the bigger picture. Global education brings a global dimension to education of young people.

We are developing this concept in English and in French – these are the official languages of the European Council – and implementing this idea in 36 European countries. In some countries it is integrated in the formal programs of these schools, in other countries we are implementing it in the non-formal education sector. We are trying to extend to this program to other countries outside Europe, but that's a rather medium term objective.

In recent years we made Portuguese speaking countries a priority. The Centre is always focusing on countries that need cooperation. Brazil doesn't need much assistance, so we are focused on Portuguese speaking countries in Africa. Cape Verde became a member of our Centre a few weeks ago. We are cooperating with Cape Verde in order to implement education on human rights and democratic citizenship and to foster Euro-African youth cooperation. So, we are progressively extending these programs in Africa. Likewise, Morocco is another new member state.

So, you don't use the Portuguese language?

It is not an official language of the Council of Europe.

We are working with IPAD, here in Portugal, to implement this project of global education.

But Portugal is only one country in Europe and not a specific target.

Perhaps I should mention we are planning to launch our website in the Portuguese language. For the moment it is only a project. It will be important, not much for Portugal – most of the people we are working in Portugal know English or French – but it will be important for African countries (PALOP), because many people there only speak that language.

Thank you, Dr. Denis Huber.