

Conference Session 1.2: Academic – Content Development



International Progress Organization

Organisation Internationale pour le Progrès

The International Progress Organization and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions (1972-2012)

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(I)

In the spring of 1972, a group of students from Austria, Egypt and India decided to establish an international non-governmental organization with the aim to promote peaceful co-existence among all nations through dialogue and inter-cultural understanding. We launched this initiative from the University of Innsbruck in the heart of Europe's Alpine region. Innsbruck is a medieval town at the crossroads of Europe's North-South axis, which was then known to the outside world as host of the Winter Olympics. Although the town has a bridge in its coat of arms, symbolizing outreach and co-operation, we had to overcome deep suspicions and reservations in the initial phase of our activities, and we had to convince local people that, in our era of technological civilization, international co-operation must go beyond the confines of traditional thinking and Eurocentric attitudes, and should also deal with issues of cultural and civilizational identity in an ever more complex web of global economic interaction. For our initiative we had chosen the name "International Progress Organization," indicating that progress, for us, not only means technical and economic success but also a genuine advancement of humanity in terms of intellectual openness and spiritual awareness. In the Declaration of the First General Assembly, dated 30 October 1972, we had committed ourselves "to promote mutual respect among nations in regard to their cultural heritage in order to prepare the ground for peaceful and constructive coexistence," and we had declared that "we stand for tolerance and fairness towards minorities or groups that are not apt to defend themselves."¹

In the preparation of our General Assembly, I visited United Nations headquarters in New York to discuss the idea of cultural dialogue and to hold consultations on the organization of an international consultation on cultural co-operation. On 26 September 1972, I sent a letter to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) suggesting the organization of an international conference "au sujet des problèmes résultant du dialogue entre les différentes civilisations" (on issues resulting from the *dialogue among different civilizations*). We had, thus, used a term which three decades later became a buzzword of global discourse. On 19 October of that year I delivered a programmatic speech at the University of Innsbruck on *Cultural Self-perception and Coexistence: Preconditions of a Fundamental Dialogue* ("Kulturelles Selbstverständnis und Koexistenz: Voraussetzungen für einen fundamentalen Dialog") in which I outlined the concept of intercultural dialogue as foundation of global peace.² Advocacy of critical self-awareness of an individual's and a community's cultural identity – in interaction with other cultural traditions, and as contribution to peaceful co-existence at the local, regional and global level – has indeed become the foundational message of the International Progress Organization.³

¹ International Progress Organization, *Declaration of the First General Assembly*, 30 October 1972, at <http://i-p-o.org/ipodecl.htm>.

² First published in Hans Köchler (ed.), *Philosophie und Politik. Dokumentation eines interdisziplinären Seminars*. (Veröffentlichungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik an der Universität Innsbruck, Vol. III.) Innsbruck: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1973, pp. 75-78.

³ For details see Hans Köchler, *Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue: The Hermeneutics of Cultural Self-comprehension versus the Paradigm of Civilizational Conflict*. International Seminar on Civilizational Dialogue (3rd: 15-17 September 1997: Kuala Lumpur), BP171.5 ISCD. Kertas kerja persidangan / conference papers. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Library, 1997.

In January 1973 I sent a circular letter to all diplomatic missions accredited in Austria informing them on our intention to organize an international conference on “The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations,” and inviting the countries to nominate experts for this worldwide gathering, the first of its kind in the intersection between cultural relations and foreign policy. In order to promote the idea and further mobilize international support, I undertook a two-month trip around the globe (in the period March-April 1974). In the course of this “Global Dialogue Expedition” I had the chance to hold consultations with academics, politicians, diplomats, community leaders, NGO representatives and journalists, in 28 cities, and in 26 countries, on all five continents. On behalf of the International Progress Organization I would like to pay tribute to the late Rudolf Kirchschräger who, as Foreign Minister and, later, President of Austria, had assisted us in the establishment of contacts in many countries. I was able to meet with distinguished representatives of many religions and civilizations, among them the President of Senegal, the great poet and advocate of African identity, *Léopold Sédar Senghor*; the Minister of Culture of Egypt, *Yussef El-Sebai*; the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, *Saif Ghobash*; the Minister of Education and Social Welfare of India, *Prof. Nurul Hassan*; the Foreign Minister of Thailand, *Charoonphan Israngkul Na Ayudhya*; and the Director-General in the Ministry of Education of Indonesia and member of the Executive Board of UNESCO, *Prof. Ida Bagus Mantra*. In the course of this voyage, I had the opportunity to present, for the first time, our idea of inter-cultural dialogue in an international framework; at the invitation of Jordan’s Royal Scientific Society, I gave a lecture in Amman on “Cultural-philosophical aspects of International Co-operation.” The genuine interest and often enthusiastic reactions I received during these two months encouraged us to go ahead with our plan to further raise the awareness for cultural issues in the domain of global affairs.⁴

The conference on “The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations” eventually took place in Innsbruck, Austria, in July 1974. To symbolize the idea of dialogue we had invited the heads of state of Austria (Europe) and Senegal (Africa) to offer their patronage to our initiative. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the General-Director of UNESCO sent special representatives. On 29 July 1974, the participants adopted a Resolution in which they emphasized “the necessity of efforts to increase the understanding of other cultures,” stating that “in the modern perilous era the main task and mission of cultural foreign policy must be the quest for peace,” and calling upon UNESCO and other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, as well as member states, “to organize systematic and global comparative research on the different cultures of the world, in view of obtaining clear guidelines for future action.”⁵ We had issued this appeal at the height of the Cold War, at a time of ideological confrontation between East and West, when international commentators were mainly focusing on military and political-ideological issues. In the meantime, since the collapse of the bipolar power constellation at the end of the 1980s, the emphasis on issues of culture and cultural identity seems to have become more and more part of the global mainstream.

For our first international dialogue conference in Innsbruck we had received encouragement from leaders on all continents, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations who, in his message to the participants, emphasized that “[t]he promotion of mutual cultural respect (...) is a vital part of the process of creating tolerance and understanding between all nations.”⁶ In the following years, we continued our efforts to make cultural identity, and the dialogical process which this implies, a central issue in discourses on a just world order. In 1976 we moved our headquarters to Vienna, the capital of Austria, and in 1979 we organized in that city, again in co-operation with UNESCO, an international

⁴ For media coverage related to the visit see, *inter alia*, the following interviews: “Cairo and the World,” in: *El-Gomhouria*, Cairo, 11 April 1974 (<http://i-p-o.org/Al-Gomhouria-11Apr74-English.htm>); “L’Europe a beaucoup à apprendre,” in: *Le Soleil*, Dakar, Senegal, 27 April 1974, p. 3 (<http://hanskoechler.com/le-soleil-27apr74.htm>); “Wir Europäer und die Dritte Welt,” in: *Abendzeitung*, AZ Feuilleton, Munich, Germany, 24 July 1974, p. 7 (<http://i-p-o.org/koechler-AZ-interview-1974.jpg>).

⁵ “Final Resolution,” in: Hans Köchler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. (Studies in International Cultural Relations, Vol. 1.) Tübingen / Basel: Erdmann, 1978, p. 142.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

meeting of experts on the socio-cultural implications of a “New International Economic Order.” In all our activities, we made an effort to publish the proceedings of our experts’ meetings so that the analyses and recommendations would be available on a permanent basis and to a wider community of researchers and activists. It is on this basis that we established the series “Studies in International Relations,” which includes more than 30 volumes so far.

Following wide-ranging consultations with UN member states in North and South, East and West, and from both sides of the then ideological divide, our organization obtained consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 1977. In 1978, the Executive Board of UNESCO also decided in favour of consultative status of the I.P.O. During the 1980s, we had a particularly fruitful co-operation with the Division of Philosophy of UNESCO and its erstwhile Director, *Prof. Mohamed Allal Sinaceur*, who later became Minister of Culture of Morocco.

In the first decade of our organization’s existence, we made efforts to *implement* the hermeneutical principles of inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogue – which we had worked out in the initial conferences – in specific and applied areas. In view of historical experience, we have always believed that inter-faith relations are a crucial part of inter-civilizational dialogue; in many instances, they are indeed the test case for the credibility of that project. Deepening the knowledge about other religious traditions is to be considered a vital element of cultural identity, at the individual as well as at the collective level. In that regard, we did focus on relations between Islam and the West, and we tried to raise public awareness for Muslim-Christian relations in Europe in particular. We also addressed the issue of religious freedom in connection with, among others, the controversial debates about the Islamic headscarf⁷ and the minaret ban in Switzerland.⁸ In a series of lectures we tried to explain the role of Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages and its influence on the European “Renaissance.”⁹ In the context of philosophical and theological discourses, we organized in Rome (Italy) a first international conference on “The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity” for which we were seeking support and endorsement from Muslim and Christian leaders. I held consultations, among others, with *Cardinal Franz König*, Archbishop of Vienna; *Sheikh Harakane*, President of the World Muslim Congress, Mecca; *H. R. H. Prince Hassan of Jordan*; and the Head of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Monsignore Jean Jadot*. One of the main aims of the conference in which Muslim and Christian thinkers participated on an equal basis, was to identify the metaphysical and theological roots of understanding among people of the monotheistic faith. In the Declaration issued at the conclusion of the conference on 19 November 1981, the participants stated “that new thinking is called for of both Muslims and Christians to enable their communities to become more fully conscious that they both worship the same God.”¹⁰ They also identified issues of common concern to the believers of all monotheistic religions and deplored the “tragic situation in the Holy Land of Palestine and in Jerusalem where recent political developments can dangerously affect the future of the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” and stressed that “Jerusalem must again be the Holy City of the people of Jerusalem and Palestine, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims to live in peace and harmony.”¹¹ They also emphasized that the “desire for dialogue” must be translated into forms of practical co-operation, and explained “that one of the main obstacles to meaningful understanding and

⁷ *Islamic headscarf and religious freedom*. Declaration of the President of the International Progress Organization, Vienna, 5 February 2004/P/RE/18525c-is, <http://www.i-p-o.org/hijab-france-nr-05feb04.htm>.

⁸ International Progress Organization, “Swiss minaret ban violates basic human rights and threatens religious peace in Europe.” *Peace for Life, E-News*, Quezon City, Philippines, November-December 2009, pp. 10-11.

⁹ Hans Köchler, “Muslim-Christian Ties in Europe: Past, Present and Future,” in: Hans Köchler, *World Order: Vision and Reality*. Edited by David Armstrong. (Studies in International Relations, Vol. XXXI.) New Delhi: Manak, 2009, pp. 391-401.

¹⁰ “Declaration,” in: Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity*. Vienna: Braumüller, 1982, p. 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

cooperation between Islam and Christianity is the continuing existence of false stereotypes in school-textbooks,” suggesting a concrete program of action on this issue.¹²

In the meantime, in the course of the events of September 11, 2001, the problem of stereotyping has acquired a new and dramatic dimension, which our organization has been addressing in a series of lectures in Europe, the United States and Asia, and in a special international conference held in co-operation with Malaysia Science University in Penang, Malaysia, in December 2007. In a series of lectures and University seminars, we also addressed the issue of Islamophobia.¹³

In the 1980s, the I.P.O. further established co-operation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, now: Islamic Cooperation Organization (OIC), and in particular its then Secretary-General, Habib Shatty. In order to sustain our efforts in the field of Muslim-Christian understanding we invited scholars from all parts of the Muslim world to deliver guest lectures at academic institutions in Europe, and we sponsored several information visits of scholars and students from Europe and the United States to Muslim countries in the Arab region and in South-East Asia. In November 1980, our organization sponsored in Vienna, Austria, an international conference of experts on Jerusalem.¹⁴ In November 1993 we held an international roundtable meeting, again in Vienna, on “Islam and the West – The Conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Its Consequences for a New World Order.”

In the years after September 2001 we continued to address the problem of the increasing alienation between the Muslim world and the West, and in particular as regards the mutual entrenchment of enemy stereotypes.¹⁵ On 9 November 2001, the International Progress Organization – upon the conclusion of consultations in Baku, Azerbaijan – issued a “Declaration on Global Dialogue and Peaceful Co-existence among Nations and the Threats Posed by International Terrorism” (“Baku Declaration”) in which we addressed the international situation in the terms of Muslim-Western relations in the wake of the events of September 11.¹⁶ We put special emphasis on the need to delink the issue of “terrorism” from that of religion and religious identity. In that context, we sponsored a series of roundtables and expert meetings in the Philippines (2002) (on Muslim-Christian relations in that country in connection with the situation in Mindanao); in Malaysia and Singapore (2004) (on the experience in inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations in these two countries); in Austria (2011); and in Turkey (2011) where we jointly organized seminars with state and private universities and non-governmental organizations on the issue of “Religion and Society,” sharing experiences in Europe and Turkey. In the ancient Arab towns of Mardin and Midyat in South-East Anatolia, along the Syrian border, we held special meetings with representatives of all ethnic and religious communities, including with the Metropolitan of the Syrian-Orthodox Church. Further colloquia about the role of religion in society and Muslim-Western relations were held in Austria (University of Innsbruck, June 1998) and in Morocco (at the International Book Fair in Casablanca in February 2009, at the University of Meknès in November 2011, and at the University of Tangier in February 2013). More recently, I delivered the keynote lecture on “Unity in Diversity: Philosophy and the Meaning of Dialogue between Religions” at the First International Conference on Contemporary Philosophy of Religion, organized by the Iranian Association for the Philosophy of Religion in co-operation with the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies in Tehran, Iran.

¹² Op. cit., p. 133.

¹³ See, *inter alia*, Hans Köchler, *Islamophobia and Politics in Multicultural Societies: Quid nunc, Europa?* Statement delivered at the International Conference “Beyond Religious Differences: Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination based on religion or belief,” Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Co-operation / Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport, November 2008.

¹⁴ The results were published in Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Legal Aspects of the Palestine Problem with Special Regard to the Question of Jerusalem*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. IV. Vienna: Braumüller, 1981.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Hans Köchler, “The ‘Clash of Civilizations,’ the Problem of Terrorism and Strategies towards Peaceful Co-Existence among Nations,” in: *ASEM Youth Dialogue on Globalisation, 19-22 September 2002, Hillerød, Denmark*. Conference Presentations, at http://www.asef.org/aeyc/active_dialogue_global_pre.html (2002).

¹⁶ For the full text see Hans Köchler, *Global Justice or Global Revenge?* Vienna / New York: Springer, 2003, pp. 380-386.

Similarly, our organization participated in a series of international conferences and expert meetings such as the Seminars on Civilizational Dialogue at the University of Malaya in the 1990s. At one of those meetings I presented our analysis on “Muslim-Christian Relations in Europe: Past, Present and Future” (1996), a text which in the meantime has become a basic reference document and teaching material in several countries and in different languages.¹⁷ At the event in Malaysia, I also discussed with Samuel Huntington his thesis of a “clash of civilizations.” Since the 1990s, we also took part in international meetings on basic issues of today’s *multicultural society*. We contributed position papers on the principles of multiculturalism, *inter alia*, at the symposium on “Citizenship and Rights in Multicultural Societies,” jointly organized by Stanford University and the University of Bologna (April 1993), and at the Conference on “Theoretical and Practical Issues of Transforming Societies,” organized by the Academy of Sciences of Armenia (April 2012).

In order to broaden the spectrum of our debates and in the interest of sustainability of our efforts, we established in the following years a network of co-operation with like-minded organizations and civil society groups such as the Center for Civilizational Dialogue in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” in Moscow, Russia; the Dialogue Eurasia Platform in Istanbul, Turkey; the Asia-Europe Foundation in Singapore; the International Movement for a Just World (Malaysia); the Dialogue Centre at La Trobe University in Melbourne (Australia); the Islamic Conference Youth Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, and Baku, Azerbaijan (ICYF); the “Global Dialogue Prize” of the University and the City of Aarhus, Denmark; the International Forum on Globalization and Dialogue between Civilizations (Tbilisi, Georgia); the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (Berlin and New York); and the Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education in Tokyo, Japan. Furthermore, the participation in the annual conferences of the Doha International Center for Inter-religious Dialogue (DICID) in Qatar has offered our organization a unique opportunity to discuss the principles of inter-religious dialogue in all its ramifications.

Apart from networking with non-governmental organizations, research institutions and think tanks on all continents, the International Progress Organization has aimed at deepening the co-operation with the United Nations Organization and UNESCO – which was the first global intergovernmental body to which the I.P.O. had presented its original idea of “dialogue entre les différentes civilisations” (dialogue between different civilizations).¹⁸ In December 2011, we participated in the 4th Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Doha where I presented our position on “Politics and Cultural Diversity: An Integrative Approach,” and tried to identify the missing link between diversity and development.¹⁹ Subsequently, in 2012, the Department of Public Information of the United Nations invited me, as President of the I.P.O., to write an op-ed article for the special issue of the *UN Chronicle* in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001).²⁰

Parallel to our activities (since the beginning in the 1970s), we have released a number of books and research publications that have explained our approach and contributed to the discussion of the civilizational paradigm in international relations, such as: “Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations” (1978), “The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity” (1982), “Civilizations – Conflict or Dialogue?” (1999), and “The Muslims and the West: From Confrontation to Dialogue” (Arabic /

¹⁷ Online or print versions of the text were published in Austria, Albania, Iran, Lebanon, Malaysia, Saudi-Arabia, Turkey, United States, etc.

¹⁸ Letter, dated 26 September 1972, addressed to the Director of the Division of Philosophy, Ms. Marie-Pierre Herzog, at <http://i-p-o.org/Koehler-letter-UNESCO-26Sep1972.jpg>.

¹⁹ International Progress Organization, *News Release*, Doha / Vienna, 14 December 2011/P/RE/23099c-is: “Doha Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations: Hans Köchler addresses special session on cultural diversity and identifies missing link between diversity and development.”

²⁰ “Unity in Diversity: The Integrative Approach to Intercultural Relations.” *UN Chronicle*, Vol. XLIX, No. 3 (2012), pp. 7-10.

2009).²¹ Similarly, we also participated in editorial projects such as the international journal *Culture and Dialogue* (published in Japan since 2010).

(II)

In the more than 40 years of its existence, the International Progress Organization has constantly tried to adapt its working methods to the changing geopolitical conditions, including the processes of civilizational self-awareness in the global South, and to the developments in terms of international communication (as a result of the emergence of modern information technology). The “lessons learned” from our efforts can be summarized in **practical maxims** that are related to working methods and attitudes such as:

- **Commitment to authenticity:** One must always aim at authentic knowledge of other cultures, which means that one has to “reach out” to a partner in dialogue and meet the people in their place; it is never sufficient to merely rely on second-hand information and reports in the mainstream media.
- **Intellectual maturity and independence:** It is of utmost importance to be able to resist manipulation of the mind by powerful vested interests. If one is genuinely committed to dialogue and peaceful co-operation with people representing other cultures and worldviews, one has to overcome the often strong tendency to stereotyping, and one has to undertake independent research (especially on contentious issues) and to try to verify oneself what has been reported.
- **Intellectual curiosity and compassion:** One should try to identify issues of *common concern*, particularly in the domain of ethics, which can serve as “conceptual bridges” of understanding between worldviews with an otherwise different metaphysical outlook. This approach is of special importance in the field of inter-religious dialogue.
- **Hermeneutical versus apologetic approach:** If one is intending to establish a sound basis for dialogue, one should follow a *constructive* method and try to avoid an overly *apologetic* attitude. The same mental energy and effort required to make sure that one’s own message and conviction are heard and properly understood in the way one wants, should be invested in the effort to listen to the explanation of the other worldview. In any effort at dialogue, *mutuality* is indispensable.
- **Going beyond stating the obvious:** Do not avoid the “difficult issues” (in terms of doctrine and fundamental values), or “dialogue” will remain shallow and non-consequential, and the compromises reached, or the mutual understanding, may be misleading and self-deceptive.
- **Avoiding political instrumentalization:** The issue of inter-religious dialogue and of understanding between different civilizations has become an essential part of political discourses at the domestic as well as at the global level. Nonetheless, issues of cultural identity have to be kept strictly apart from any political agenda (whether in terms of party politics in the domestic or of “politics of the national interest” at the international domain).²²

²¹ For details see the selected bibliography attached to this article.

²² See also Hans Köchler, “Civilization as Instrument of World Order?” in: Hans Köchler, *World Order: Vision and Reality*. Edited by David Armstrong. (Studies in International Relations, Vol. XXXI.) New Delhi: Manak, 2009, pp. 471-489.

– **Commitment to sustainability:** Continuity of the effort is almost as important as the substance (content) of the dialogue itself. It is not enough to intermittently and sporadically meet in different places for an exchange of views. Even the best conference (with carefully drafted resolutions and recommendations) is useless without adequate follow-up. This must include a commitment to the publication of proceedings and reports, and to conceptual work (research) between the meetings and events.

– **Networking:** Sustainability also requires the building of a network among civil society organizations that avoids the traditional bias towards co-operation among NGOs that are based in the industrialized world. Similar to the need to transcend the mental constraints of Eurocentrism, a network that is meant to serve the purpose of dialogue between civilizations has to include initiatives that originate in the countries whose cultural traditions have not yet been properly represented in other regions of the world. (The International Progress Organization has emphasized this very point in the Declaration of its first General Assembly on 30 October 1972.)²³

Apart from these practical maxims and methods, our organization has also become aware of the need to base one's efforts of inter-cultural dialogue on a clear theoretical framework. Trying to work out the hermeneutics of cultural self-comprehension, we have in particular learned that there is an intrinsic connection between critical **self-awareness** and **tolerance** of the other position. Among the "theoretical" lessons learned, I would like to mention here four **maxims and principles of dialogue** that should be acknowledged if "dialogue of civilizations" is to become a sustainable feature of international relations. (I have initially outlined these principles in a lecture before Jordan's Royal Scientific Society in Amman in March 1974²⁴ and have explained them in more detail at the Global Dialogue Conference that was held at the University of Aarhus in Denmark in November 2009,²⁵ following the worldwide controversy and debates stirred up by the publication of the so-called "Mohamed caricatures" in that country.)²⁶

(1) **Equality of civilizational (cultural) "lifeworlds,"** including value systems, in the normative sense: This excludes any form of patronizing or supremacist attitudes from the part of one civilization (culture) towards another. "Sovereign equality," one thus might say, is not only an attribute of states as entities of international law, but also a principle that can be used to describe the inalienable right to civilizational identity.²⁷ It is obvious, in this context, that the notion of "development," if it is understood in a normative sense (which would allow a kind of external evaluation), cannot be applied to civilizations. Development (in a normative sense) can only be measured from *within* a given civilization or culture.

(2) **Awareness of the "dialectics of cultural self-comprehension" and self-realization:** A civilization (culture) can only fully comprehend itself, and thus realize its identity if it is able to relate to "the other" in the sense of an *independent* expression of *distinct* worldviews and value systems, i.e. perceptions of the world, which are not merely an offspring of one's particular civilization. The process

²³ Point I of the I.P.O. Principles ("Internationalism"), <http://i-p-o.org/ipodecl.htm>.

²⁴ Hans Köchler, *Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation*. Studies in International [Cultural] Relations, Vol. II. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1978.

²⁵ "The Philosophy and Politics of Dialogue": Keynote Lecture, *Global Dialogue Conference 2009*. Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark, 6 November 2009.

²⁶ The four points listed below are quoted here according to the version of my lecture published by La Trobe University: "THE PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS OF DIALOGUE." *Centre for Dialogue Working Paper Series*, No. 2010/1, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 2010.

²⁷ This right is also implicitly enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as a collective right. Art. 1(1) clearly states that the peoples' right of self-determination implies that they "freely pursue their ... cultural development."

of civilizational or cultural self-realization is structurally similar to how the individual human being achieves self-awareness: *re-flexio* (reflexion) implies that the subject looks at himself/herself from an *outside* perspective, making himself/herself the object of perception (“subject-object dialectic”).²⁸ As has been explained in the philosophy of mind, particularly since Immanuel Kant, individual self-awareness is the synthesis in a dialectical process in which the *ego* defines itself (in the sense of *de-finitio*: drawing the border) in relation to “the other.” The same applies to the collective self-awareness of a civilization. Only if the latter is able and willing to see itself through the eyes of “the other,” will it achieve a status of *maturity* (in the sense of its *internal* development, not in regard to external evaluation!) that will allow it to overcome the fear of the other as “the alien” and, thus, to take part in a global interaction (“dialogue”) with other civilizations.

(3) **Acknowledgment of meta-norms as foundation of dialogue:** Derived from the normative equality of civilizations (point [1] above), these norms at the meta-level are logically prior to any *material* norms and have to be subscribed to by all partners in a credible undertaking of dialogue. “Tolerance” and “mutuality” (mutual respect) are two such examples of meta-norms; they are to be understood as *formal* (as distinct from *material*) values that determine the interaction between civilizations on the basis of dialogue and, as such, are non-negotiable. They are the very “conditions of possibility” of any such process, enabling an individual civilization to realize its specific, i. e. materially distinct, value system. Due to their general, formal, nature as quasi-transcendental preconditions in the Kantian sense, they cannot be attributed to just one particular civilization; their status is obviously *trans-cultural*.

(4) **Ability to transcend the hermeneutical circle of civilizational self-affirmation:** In order to be able to position itself as a genuine participant in the global interaction among cultures and civilizations, a given civilizational community has to go beyond what Hans-Georg Gadamer described as *Wirkungsgeschichte* (“Reception History,” referring to the exclusive impact of the respective community’s “autochthonous” traditions on the formation of cultural identity). When it comes to the shaping of its identity, the need for a civilization to “free” itself from *exclusive* dependence on its own history is particularly obvious in all educational processes.²⁹ In view of the lasting impact on the global power constellation, reference to *Eurocentrism* as basic feature of Europe’s – and the West’s – cultural identity formation can most pertinently illustrate this hermeneutical dilemma. Over hundreds of years, the Western civilization has been accustomed to export its worldview, value system and lifestyle to “the rest” of the world, a process that has often been accompanied by a strategy to reshape the identity of those other cultures and civilizations. Against this background of claimed, and enforced, civilizational hegemony, international cultural exchanges have all too often been mere self-encounters – or “civilizational *soliloquia*” – of the dominant partner. However, a civilization will only be able to fully understand itself and define its place in the global realm of ideas, if it is able to reach out to the worldviews that have developed *independently* of it, namely those that have not already been shaped by that civilization. This is indeed the essence of the *dialectics* of civilizational self-comprehension or self-definition (point [2] above): *de-finitio* means the ability to see what is *beyond* the (civilizational) border, and to understand one’s own civilization *with regard* to the other. Absence of self-reflexiveness has all along been the handicap of Eurocentrism and its mirror-like phenomenon, *Orientalism*, which Edward

²⁸ For details see Hans Köchler, “The Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue,” in: *Philosophy, Islamic Views & Modern Attitudes. The Papers Presented at the Second World Congress on Mulla Sadra (May 2004 - Tehran)*, Vol. 4. Tehran: SIPRI Publications, 2008, pp. 3-15.

²⁹ This aspect and the resulting need for comparative cultural studies were particularly emphasized in the Final Resolution of the International Progress Organization’s conference on “The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations,” held in Innsbruck, Austria, from 27 to 29 July 1974: Hans Köchler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. (Studies in International [Cultural] Relations, I.) Tübingen/Basel: Erdmann, 1978, p. 142.

Said has aptly described as the ideological legacy of the West's colonial encounters with the rest of the world.³⁰

In this sense of philosophical hermeneutics, *dialogue between religions* – as part of a universal encounter among civilizations, the main challenge of our era – may contribute to a deeper awareness of the common foundation of our life-world, and it can give metaphysical depth to today's technological civilization that, in its globalized version, risks to forget its metaphysical roots.³¹ I would like to conclude the overview of our humble experience in the field of inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue with the words I said on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the International Progress Organization (in 2012): “We will continue to emphasize the crucial issues of a world order of peace and equality among peoples, nations and, not least, among citizens of all cultures and races. In the 21st century, ‘progress’ must not be understood in a narrow materialistic sense. The concept of human rights (...) has to be applied to all aspects of society: cultural, social, economic, and political.”³² Respect for each individual's religious identity, and each community's religious tradition, indeed a genuine commitment to co-existence and dialogue among civilizations and religions, is an indispensable element of just and durable peace also at the global level.

Appendix

Lectures and conferences

(with interactive links)

[Letter by the President of the I.P.O. to the Division of Philosophy of UNESCO](#) proposing an international conference on the dialogue of civilizations (26 September 1972)

Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Co-operation

Lecture held by the President of the I.P.O. before the Royal Scientific Society, Amman, Jordan, 9 March 1974

[The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations](#)

International Conference held in co-operation with Unesco, Innsbruck, Austria, 27-29 July 1974

[The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity](#)

International Symposium organized in co-operation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Rome, Italy, 17-19 November 1981

[The New International Information and Communication Order](#)

International Symposium held in co-operation with Unesco, Nicosia, Cyprus, 26-27 October 1984

[Challenges and Perspectives of Inter-religious Dialogue](#)

Lecture held by the President of the I.P.O. at the Conference for Inter-religious Dialogue between Islam and Christianity: "Peace for All," Khartoum, Sudan, 8-10 October 1994

Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue

Lecture held by the President of the I.P.O. at the Third Inter-civilizational Dialogue at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 15-17 September 1997

Civilizations – Conflict or Dialogue?

International Roundtable held in co-operation with the Department of American Studies of the University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria, 8 June 1998

[The Baku Declaration on Global Dialogue and Peaceful Co-existence among Nations](#), Baku, Azerbaijan, 9 November 2001

³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. Reprint ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

³¹ For details see the lecture by Hans Köchler: “Unity in Diversity: Philosophy and the Meaning of Dialogue between Religions.” Keynote lecture, First International Conference on Contemporary Philosophy of Religion, organized by the Iranian Association for the Philosophy of Religion in co-operation with the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran, Iran (23 December 2012).

³² Message on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the International Progress Organization (Vienna, 1 October 2012) at <http://i-p-o.org/Stmpres.htm>.

[After September 11, 2001: Clash of Civilizations or Dialogue?](#)

Lecture held by the President of the I.P.O. at the Lecture Forum organized by the University of the Philippines, Asian Center, Quezon City, Philippines, 11 March 2002

[The Dialogue of Civilizations: Philosophical Basis, Political Dimensions and the Relevance of International Sporting Events](#)

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the World Cup Roundtable on Promoting Understanding among Cultures and Peoples organized by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the Asia-Europe Foundation, Seoul, Korea, 1 June 2002

The "Clash of Civilizations," the Problem of Terrorism and Strategies towards Peaceful Co-existence among Nations

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Conference "A World Without Borders? Asia-Europe Responses to Globalization" organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the Danish Youth Council, Copenhagen, Denmark, 22 September 2002

The Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the World Congress on Transcendent Philosophy and Mulla Sadra, Tehran, Iran, 23 May 2004

The Dialogue of Civilizations and the Future of World Order

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at Mindanao State University, Islamic City of Marawi, Philippines, 1 September 2004

The "Clash of Civilizations" – Perception and Reality in the Context of Globalization and International Power Politics

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Forum on "Globalization and Dialogue between Civilizations," Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, 30 September 2004

Islamic headscarf and religious freedom

Declaration of the President of the International Progress Organization, Vienna, 5 February 2004

[Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures: The Quest for Mutual Understanding](#)

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Conference "Environment, Peace and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures," organized by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Tehran, Iran, 10 May 2005

Participation in the International Consultation convened by the [World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations" \(WPFDC\)](#), Moscow, Russia, 25-26 March 2006

Civilization as an Instrument of World Order? The Role of the Civilizational Paradigm in the Absence of a Balance of Power

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Symposium on "Civilizations and World Orders," organized by the Foundation for Sciences and Arts, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 May 2006

Participation in the *Copenhagen Lab of Co-existence* and launching of the *Co-existence Expedition*

Global Cultural Forum "Co-existence of Civilizations," Copenhagen, Denmark, 5-6 September 2006

Participation in the Fourth Annual Session of the *World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations,"* Rhodes, Greece, 27 September - 1 October 2006

Civilization and World Order: The Relevance of the Civilizational Paradigm in Contemporary International Law

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the Seminar on "Multiculturalism and International Law," organized by the Silk Road Institute of International Law and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China, 14 April 2007

The Hermeneutical Principles of Civilizational Dialogue

First Conference of the International Research Institute for Philosophy, Logic, Argumentation and Communication at the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) State University, Yerevan, Armenia, 31 May 2007

Dialogue of Civilizations - The Main Challenge of Our Time

Introductory lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Conference "Dialogue of

Civilizations: The Role of Political Parties," organized by New Azerbaijan Party, Baku, Azerbaijan, 27 September 2007

The Conditions for Building Civilizational Space

Moderator's Report by the President of the I.P.O. at the World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations," Fifth Annual Meeting, Rhodes, Greece, 13 October 2007

[Inter-civilizational Youth Engagement Program \(IYEP2\)](#)

Kuala Selangor, Malaysia, 16-20 November 2008

Unity in Diversity: Eurasia's Contribution to Civilizational Dialogue

Moderator's Report by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Conference "The Role of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Dialogue of Civilizations," Almaty, Kazakhstan, 9 June 2009

The Philosophy of Dialogue and the Challenges of Multiculturalism

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, Baku, Azerbaijan, 9 April 2011

[Religion, State and Society in Turkey](#)

Seminar series in Istanbul, Mardin and Ankara, 6-12 May 2011

The Dilemma between Unity and Diversity: Remarks on Contradictions and Misunderstandings in the European Debate on the Multicultural Society

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the International Conference "Integration and Identity in the Global Society - an Invitation to Dialogue," Berlin, Germany, 30 May 2011

The New Social Media and the Reshaping of Communication in the 21st Century: Chance or Challenge for Dialogue?

Lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the Ninth Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, Doha, Qatar, 25 October 2011

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Today's Multicultural Society and the Hermeneutics of Intercultural Relations:

Opening Ceremony, International Conference "Theoretical and Practical Issues of Transforming Societies," Yerevan, Armenia, 16 April 2012

[Transformations of Dialogue](#)

Keynote lecture by the President of the I.P.O. at the Opening Plenary Meeting of the 10th Annual Session of the Rhodes Forum, Rhodes, Greece, 4 October 2012

The New Social Media: Chance or Challenge for Dialogue?

Statement at the Roundtable Meeting on "The New Network Society," Rhodes Forum, Rhodes, Greece, 6 October 2012

Unity in Diversity: Philosophy and the Meaning of Dialogue between Religions

Keynote lecture, First International Conference on Contemporary Philosophy of Religion, Tehran, Iran, 23 December 2012

Religious Identity and Universality of the Mind: Reflections on Co-existence in a Globalized World

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