

RHODES FORUM: A DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS

For Unity in Diversity and Concern for Mankind's Future

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Oct. 13—The conference to mark the tenth anniversary of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” (WPFDC), which took place Oct. 3-8 in Rhodes, Greece, left no doubt in the minds of the participants: In one decade, an international movement has emerged, which is becoming one of the most important counterpoles to those seeking to force the world into a unipolar structure, be it through “regime change” or coercion of any other kind. Despite the variety of topics covered and the diversity of the world views represented, there emerged nonetheless a common identity among the majority of participants with respect to the philosophy of the forum, that includes dialogue as a means of conflict resolution, and the principle of respect for other civilizations and cultures.

It was not only the geographical proximity to the Middle East crisis—Rhodes is just ten nautical miles from the coast of Turkey—that drew the participants’ attention to the acute danger of war. The conference opened with a video by MIT Prof. Noam Chomsky, who warned of the immediate threat to the entire world from an escalation of the tension around Iran, and even the danger of nuclear war. Chomsky pointed out that Israel had recently received advanced submarines from Germany, from which nuclear-tipped missiles can be fired. There could be little doubt that these submarines would join the vast U.S. armada that is now advancing through the Persian Gulf; an incident there could trig-

ger a devastating war, a threat that must be averted through diplomacy and negotiations.

The chairman and co-founder of the forum, Vladimir Yakunin; the vice-chairman, Prof. Fred Dallmayr of Notre Dame University in Indiana, USA; and also this writer, warned of the danger of a world war. This is no formal or academic issue, but one of whether humanity itself has a future, Professor Dallmayr insisted to participants in a round table discussion on the legacy of J.C. Kapur, an Indian national and the main inspirer of the forum, who died two years ago.

With six plenary sessions and a dozen round tables, 550 high-level participants from 65 nations, and given the plethora of themes and ideas presented, the testimony of a single reporter may perforce only touch upon some aspects. Multiple speakers articulated the desire for the creation of a new order that spans civilizations, and would enable the most sublime aspirations and achievements of the highest potentials of mankind, which have been lost almost completely in the modern world, where the boundless wealth concentrated in the hands of so few collides with the inequality and the loss of human dignity for so many, as Francisco Tatad from the Philippines put it.

No to Cultural and Economic Liberalism

Most participants agreed that the main reason for the desolate state of the world lies in the liberal economic model, and that this model has failed completely.

Several speakers referred to the lessons of history, that all empires and hegemonic powers inevitably brought about their own demise.

In contrast, the speech which stood out with almost unreal arrogance was that of Hans-Jörg Rudloff, chairman of Barclays Capital, the investment banking arm of the bank. This man, whose bank was in the forefront of the Libor interest-rate manipulation, in which customers were defrauded over the years by hundreds of billions (of which he knew nothing, of course), brandished the big stick. Anyone who attacks the methods of creative investment banking, he said, threatens the pensions of ordinary people, prevents investments, and is moving in the direction of the National Socialists (i.e., Nazis), who also attacked finance capital. If this speech contributed anything, it was as an illustration of the axioms that underlie the crisis.

A recurring theme was the utter collapse of moral values, the disappearance of any rules in the social order, and the consequent plunge into archaic and barbaric behavior. From different philosophical or religious standpoints, there was a demand for a renaissance toward the highest standards that are in accord with human dignity. Whether it was the ethical standard of the monks of Mount Athos, or the values of the Catholic Church, or the revival of Confucianism in China, the common denominator was the rejection of the cultural liberalization and decadence that are associated with globalization, and a return to the cultural roots of the different cultures and civilizations. Respect for the principle of equality of cultures and civilizations makes possible dialogue and mutual understanding.

Respecting questions of historically developed identity, there were very interesting presentations on the role of the Byzantine tradition in Europe, and on the issue of Eurasian integration. But also questions about technology and economic policy, from the implications of nanotechnology to infrastructure projects offered for different regions of the world, presented ideas and perspectives on how the current crisis of humanity could be overcome.

The Basis for Dialogue

An analyst from Portugal, Ghoncheh Tazmini, presented a well-received analysis of the Western approach towards Iran, which is characterized by a dogmatic universalism that in no way reflects the real transformations that have taken place in different cultures.

The era of a fixed, Eurocentric, inflexible idea of

modernity has come to an end, he said. How is a country like Iran to find its own way to adapt to global economic realities, as is deemed necessary, if the West tries incessantly to “tame” it, or force it to submit to Western pressure and permanent threats? The West associates Iranian President Ahmadinejad with apocalyptic scenarios, but it should be remembered that Iran was already labeled as a member of the “axis of evil” under the Presidency of the reformer Khatami. The policy of “carrot and stick” must come to an end; Iranians are not rabbits, he declared. The new policy must be based on the principle of “unity in diversity.”

Prof. Hans Köchler of the International Progress Organization (IPO) in Vienna defended his call for a Dialogue of Civilizations, which he had proposed in 1972 in a letter to the Unesco philosophy section, as being in no way discredited or a utopian dream. It is the absolutely necessary antidote to such slogans as R2P, “Responsibility to Protect,” a policy that provided the pretext for direct intervention in Libya, and now, indirect intervention against Syria, he said. The idea of dialogue of civilizations is now the vision of a global community of like-minded people.

Of course, the Rhodes Forum will not immediately stop the current threat of a third, thermonuclear, world war. But in the ten years of its existence, it has set a process in motion that gives a taste of a future world community that has renounced once and for all the barbarous use of war as a means of conflict resolution, and which makes respect for the the human dignity of all people on this planet the standard for relations between individuals and nations. And it is very good and important that some of the great nations of the world such as Russia, India, and China sent representatives to this important forum.

It is indicative of the state of affairs that this very promising and positive forum, which incidentally is planning many new initiatives for the future, received scant coverage in the Western media. But the spirit of J.C. Kapur is still alive, and he will be proven correct in his view that the cosmic order, the laws of physical creation, must assert themselves. The future of humanity—if there is to be one—will have as its leitmotif Nicholas of Cusa’s idea of unity in diversity, and the idea that humanity represents a higher value than the subjugation of the world under the unipolar dictatorship of heterogeneous secondary interests.

—*Translated from German by Daniel Platt. Three of the speeches from the Forum are excerpted below.*