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**The Dialogue of Civilizations:
Philosophical Basis, Political Dimensions and the Relevance of
International Sporting Events**

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the “dialogue of civilizations” has become one of the keywords in the global discourse on issues of world order and peace. Traditional enemy stereotypes along the ideological lines of the earlier East-West conflict have disappeared while new confrontational schemes are becoming visible under the slogan of a supposed “clash of civilizations.”

The nature of dialogue consists in the ability to see oneself from the perspective of the other. The human being’s consciousness – self-reflection – is only possible if the subject is aware of the other, i.e. of that which is not the self, that from which it can distinguish itself. Semantically, this is the essence of the Latin word definitio. Applied to the level of civilization, this entails that full understanding and development of any given civilization can only be achieved if the respective civilizational community not only takes note of, but positively interacts with other civilizations on the basis of (normative) *equality*. Thus, the “dialogue of civilizations” is the fundamental requirement for defining each civilization’s identity and for reaching its maturity and universal relevance.

The common values underlying all civilizations – making possible genuine civilizational progress – are those of *tolerance* and *mutual respect*. Acceptance and realization of those values is the necessary, though not the only condition for the adequate self-comprehension and identity of a civilization. In this regard, an analogy can be drawn between (a) the normative equality of civilizations on the socio-cultural level and (b) the concept of the sovereign equality of states on the political level.

One of the most serious threats to international peace and stability, i.e. to the realization of the basic goals of the United Nations Organization, is the persistence – or even creation in certain cases – of enemy stereotypes along civilizational lines. Over the centuries, the demonization or vilification of another civilization (particularly in regard to religious identity) has often been a prelude to armed conflict and has served to create a pretext for – or to legitimize – the violent pursuit of mainly economic interests. At the beginning of the third millennium, the world should not repeat the mistakes of an earlier era. No civilization should try to establish hegemony over the other. The claim to civilizational superiority has too often been a recipe for confrontation, even armed conflict.

It is the special role of international organizations such as UNESCO to promote a new global philosophy and awareness of the importance of civilizational dialogue and to strengthen all tendencies aimed at the establishment of a *just international order* in which *all* civilizations can express themselves and interact with each other freely and on an equal basis. The unipolarity of the global power structure, diagnosed and regretted at the same time by many who propagate the idea of a just New World Order, should not be reciprocated by cultural unipolarity and civilizational hegemony. UNESCO can play a crucial role in facing this basically new challenge mankind is confronted with as a community of nations: namely by redefining the organization's earlier policy calling for the establishment of a new communication order, and by adapting it to the requirements of our time, i.e. to the needs of a world community threatened by civilizational tensions that may even trigger a wider global conflict. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that have been condemned by all who believe in basic human values and in the common mission of mankind, the promotion of fair and balanced relations among civilizations – on the basis of equality and mutual respect – has become more important than ever. The shaping of a *global cultural policy*, which is in line with this philosophy, will be a basic contribution to world peace on the part of UNESCO. The Cold War between the political-ideological systems in the era of bipolarity must not be followed by a “cold war among civilizations.”

In the present era of globality, international sporting events such as the World Cup 2002 play a special role in the field of international relations. In the crucial transitory period of history we are in right now, a global sporting encounter such as the one being jointly sponsored by Korea and Japan may help to foster the spirit of dialogue and co-operation among the nations – and through them the civilizations – of the world. According to the Olympic idea (applicable also in the present case), in the field of sports the rival team is not and should not be perceived as the “*enemy*” – as it should neither be seen as a “surrogate enemy” in a political dispute between nations –, but as the *equal partner* in competition. Such an understanding of international *competition* can also be a model for political relations between states.

A global sporting event like the present one realizes in an exemplary manner the principle of “*unity in diversity*” which may be considered as the essence of a genuine dialogue among civilizations. The interest in and enthusiasm for the sports discipline of football probably unites *more* nations, peoples, ethnic groups, races, cultures, citizens from all denominations and all walks of life than any other sport – in the pursuit of a shared interest and a *common goal*. This discipline of group sports – and the spirit of competition under conditions of equality and fairness attached to it – serves as *common denominator* for the most diverse gathering of citizens of the globe – united in their enthusiasm for the sport they all cherish –, whether as active participants

or supporters of their teams. The fact that the World Cup 2002 is jointly hosted by Korea and Japan gains special significance in the overall context of peaceful co-operation and dialogue among nations and reinforces the positive impact of the event on the regional as well as the international political climate.

In the present volatile situation of international relations, an event such as the World Cup 2002 has not only special importance for the promotion of intercultural understanding in general, it will also contribute to strengthening the ever more complex social and cultural network spanning the globe and uniting people everywhere in the pursuit of a common goal defined by the jointly agreed rules of a sportive game. In this sense, “globalization through sports” may contribute to the bonum commune [common good] of mankind; more than that, it may be a powerful antidote to the nurturing of social and cultural stereotypes that are often at the roots of international conflict.

(I) The dialogue among civilizations: current state, future prospects

(a) The dialectical structure of self-consciousness

The inner logic of self-consciousness of the human being helps to explain the very nature of dialogue among civilizations: reflexion (consciousness) in the sense of critical awareness of myself is only possible if and to the extent in which I know the other, his/her way of life, value system, etc. The identity of the mature person is shaped on the basis of the encounter with the “other,” that which is different of myself (whether in a personal or non-personal form). As explained in the great tradition of the philosophy of the human mind, the subject can only become aware of itself in distinction from an object, that which is not identical with itself.

What is true on the abstract and general level of self-consciousness of the individual, is also true – i.e. applicable – on the level of the collective subject. The community (whether in the form of peoples, national or ethnic or religious communities, etc.) develops its identity through complex interaction with other communities. In addition to this dialectical relationship of self-comprehension on the individual and group level, there exists an interdependence of individual and collective consciousness within each community.

(b) The philosophical nature of dialogue

The conditio sine qua non for defining a national, ethnic, cultural, or religious community is to relate it, i.e. compare it to other such communities.¹ The very existence and, at the same time, acceptance of the “other” – in this case in the collective, social, or communitarian sense – is the basic precondition for the shaping of the cultural, social, and ethnic identity of any given community – and of the unique identity (personality) of the individuals belonging to the respective community.

Cultures and – more generally – civilizations mutually depend upon each other in order to fully develop their identity and to reach a status of maturity and relevance on a global scale.² In conclusion: tolerance is a basic precondition for the development – and advancement – of a civilization, it is the fundamental value shared by all genuine civilizations.

¹ See the author’s earlier conception in: *Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation*. Lecture held before the Royal Scientific Society, Amman-Jordan (1974). Studies in International Relations, II. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1978.

² See Hans Koechler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. Tübingen: Erdmann, 1978.

It is the specific task of the philosophy of civilization to analyze and explain the structural relationship between the subject-object dialectic of self-consciousness and the actual requirements of inter-civilizational dialogue.³

(c) The multicultural realities in the context of globality

The application of this philosophical truth to the multicultural realities in the current environment of globalization is a challenging task for all those who are concerned about civilizational dialogue:

As a result of the globalized information and communication structures, a large number of civilizational entities exist simultaneously and are increasingly becoming aware of one another. The basic question faced by those who are concerned about an international order of peaceful co-existence at the beginning of the third millennium is: how can conflict be avoided, how can Samuel Huntington's paradigm of a "clash of civilizations" be prevented from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy?

First and foremost, each civilization should accept, for itself, the basic fact of other civilizations existing simultaneously with all their different value systems, beliefs, social habits, etc. This "fact of diversity" should be interiorized by each civilization and should not be seen as a threat, but as a chance for further developing and enriching the identity and awareness of one's own civilization.

In this regard, responsible leadership is required on the part of the major representatives and opinion leaders in their distinct civilizational environments.

As a result of the socio-economic and political facts of globality, the simultaneous existence of a variety of civilizational and cultural communities is becoming increasingly obvious. There is simply no viable alternative to the maxim of a peaceful co-existence among civilizations. The principle of normative (not factual) equality and mutual respect is indispensable. The only alternative would be Huntington's "clash" – or war – of civilizations.

Accepting the need for co-existence as basic norm for the very preservation of peace in the context of globalization and recognizing this norm as a value that is to be shared by all civilizational groups irrespective of their own specific value systems, will only be a first, but

³ For more details see the author's paper: "The Clash of Civilizations Revisited," in: Hans Koechler and Gudrun Grabher (eds.), *Civilizations – Conflict or Dialogue?* Studies in International Relations, XXIV. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1999, pp. 15-24.

essential step towards the development of a comprehensive philosophical framework and of a positive social attitude towards a genuine dialogue among civilizations.

The relationship between civilizational awareness on the one hand (accepting the existence of the other as basic precondition for one's own identity) and the complex interaction with other civilizations on the level of equality on the other hand has become ever more important since the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America. One may state without exaggeration that *dialogue on the level of civilizations* has become indispensable for the preservation of peace on a global scale.⁴

Civilizational awareness and the search for one's identity must not be seen in the narrow context of self-assertion; such an attitude would inevitably lead to the creation and/or strengthening of social stereotypes. The self-comprehension of a civilization and the appreciation of its values have to be embedded in an inter-civilizational framework of mutual exchange. Civilizations that aspire to be present in the global framework of today have to accept the fact of interdependence.

In this context, one may distinguish *two basic paradigms*: (a) that of mere "subsistence," i.e. existence in a self-contained mode (without any aspiration towards interaction and positive self-assertion resulting from it), versus (b) that of co-existence as partner in a universal, truly global exchange of ideas and dialogue about the basic insights gained and the values propagated by each civilization on an equal level.

(d) The basic level of civilizational value systems and the meta-level of the value system of civilizational dialogue

A dynamic relationship exists between the diversity of social, cultural, and religious value systems in an ever more globalized world on the one hand and the consensus on a common system of values that results from the necessity to co-exist (the alternative to which would be perpetual conflict) on the other hand. The exclusiveness a civilization may eventually attribute to its particular value system cannot be justified with the argument of diversity. Such an attitude will inevitably lead to conflicts with other civilizations.

⁴ See the summary of the author's paper: "After September 11, 2001: Clash of Civilizations or Dialogue?" In: *Forum. Popular na pahayag ng malayang komunidad* (Unibersidad ng Pilipinas), Manila, Tomo 3, Blg. 3, 28 March 2002, p. 9.

The fundamental ethical principle of mutuality (mutual recognition) comes here into play. In order to be consistent in one's claiming the right of being accepted (tolerated) by the other on an equal level, one has to accord – or concede – that very right to the other. This normative principle (that may also be defined in the tradition of Kantian ethics) has the status of a meta-norm. It is at the roots of the philosophy of “peaceful co-existence among civilizations.” This philosophical awareness may be the first step towards a comprehensive and lasting, i.e. sustainable process of civilizational dialogue.

The diversity of normative systems related to the various civilizational and cultural formations requires the consensus on the basic norm of tolerance as common denominator between all civilizations.

A civilization puts itself outside of this context if it rejects the basic truth that each normative system, related to whichever civilization, can only claim a legitimate right to recognition if it respects the universal norm of mutual acceptance. Instead of being embedded in the common “civilizational space” of mankind, such a civilizational community will find itself on the road to permanent conflict with other civilizations. In the present context of economic globalization, this would be a rather contradictory state of affairs.

Should one of the major civilizations choose to define itself in an exclusionary manner – which is nearly always connected with the assertion of superiority – and should it thus put itself outside the context of dialogue, the world may well see a protracted *cold war between civilizations* – after the Cold War of ideologies and power blocs has ended more than a decade ago. This new form of “cold war” may well turn into real war – particularly when acts of violence are given a religious dimension, thus potentially triggering a sequence of events that may elude political rationality and traditional crisis management between governments.

In the present global constellation – where a unipolar political order is juxtaposed with socio-cultural multipolarity and related conflict situations on a large scale – there exists the real danger of a replacement of the horizontal scheme of dialogue by the vertical scheme of exclusion. The latter, whether we like it or not, implies a kind of “civilizational anarchy” (with all the “clashes,” frictions and conflicts that this entails) that is similar to the often referred to “anarchy between sovereign states” that has been typical for an international system in which state sovereignty is defined as an absolute value. Traditionally, this doctrine has been in conflict with that of the peaceful co-existence among nations.

This analogy is derived from the rather long experience of the Cold War and the United Nations' interpretation and application, until recently, of the principle of sovereign equality of

states. The comparison makes drastically obvious what is at stake in the present global discourse on the *status of civilizations and world peace*. Traditionally, international relations have been defined by reference to state interests as decisive factor of the interaction between states – whereby the avoidance of conflict was not perceived as a value in itself, but as a necessary requirement for self-preservation.

The present “New World Order”⁵ is characterized by an unequal power balance that results, as far as the socio-cultural consequences are concerned, in an increasing alienation between the Western-industrialized and the developing world. The undeniable tensions between the Western and Muslim world are a vivid expression of this imbalance. This situation creates feelings of being threatened on both sides of the cultural or civilizational divide: there exists fear for the preservation of one’s identity and independence on the one side, and fear for the loss of one’s dominant role and the preservation of one’s way of life, system of values, etc. on the other side. It is exactly here where the stereotype of a threat supposedly emanating from the respective “other” civilization comes into play.

If civilizations are allowed to become a divisive factor in the global interplay of forces, the reality of international relations will be that of prolonged conflict, at times even open war; whereas, if and when civilizations define themselves on the level of global interaction among each other, they may be the driving force behind the peaceful settlement of otherwise (politically) intractable disputes or conflicts. In this sense, the issue of civilizations is not merely of abstract philosophical interest, but of utmost political importance. The now fashionable doctrine of the clash of civilizations must not be allowed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This danger is particularly acute since the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

(II) The role of national and international institutions in the promotion of mutual understanding and common values

International organizations such as UNESCO can play a leading role in the promotion of civilizational dialogue. To contribute to an order of peace through cultural exchange and understanding has been the specific mission of UNESCO ever since its foundation. As early as 1974 the principles of civilizational dialogue were outlined in the final document of the

⁵ See the author’s paper: *Democracy and the New World Order*. Studies in International Relations, XIX. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1993.

International Progress Organization's inaugural conference on "The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations," organized in co-operation with UNESCO.⁶

International as well as national organizations may draw from the inspiration offered by the great African poet, the former President of the Republic of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who not only shaped the philosophy of African cultural identity through his conception of *négritude*, but at the same time contributed substantially to the partnership and co-operation between the African and European-Western civilizations. UNESCO has greatly benefited from his philosophical guidance. As one of the founding fathers of independent Africa, he rendered considerable intellectual and political support to the promotion of civilizational dialogue as a means to overcome the power-dominated relations of the colonial era.

On the global level of the United Nations Organization, the era of *proclamations* should gradually be transformed into a period of *structural changes*. The system of international relations has to be adapted to the requirements of the above-described interaction of cultures and civilizations on the basis of (normative) equality. The concept of the sovereign equality of states, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter, should be complemented by that of the *sovereign equality of civilizations*. Herein consists the role and historical mission of specialized organizations such as UNESCO.

As important as the proclamation of the year 2001 – by the United Nations – as the year of the dialogue of civilizations may have been, the reality of international relations is still predominantly shaped by state actors. It will have to be restructured in such a way as to create adequate conditions for the global expression of civilizational values and identities – in the sense of a free and fair competition of ideas and world views.

This basic requirement has to be applied first and foremost in the field of the international media and in regard to the flow of information and communication on a global scale.

In this regard, UNESCO's earlier programmes and policies should be redefined in the present international framework. This task is becoming all the more important in a context in which the paradigm of the clash of civilizations seems to gain the upper hand in some of the powerful civilizational communities.

In our analysis, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 have made it imperative to revive UNESCO's earlier efforts towards the promotion of a free and balanced flow of information. In the present globalized context of the media and culture industry, such a strategy is more important than ever. UNESCO's earlier policies can undoubtedly be redefined in such a way as to

⁶ See Hans Koechler (ed.), *Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations*. Tübingen: Erdmann, 1978.

be compatible with the basic value of *freedom of information*. There seems to be a consensus that information should be free from state control and censorship, but should not be subjugated to – or absorbed by – powerful economic interests either.

In this era of globality – in which “civilization,” “civilizational identity,” and the right to assert one’s civilizational values vis-à-vis others, suddenly have become a major issue in international politics – it will be the special mission of Unesco to help to create a kind of “global space for dialogue” in a comprehensive sense, one that transcends the traditional scholarly distinction between politics and culture.

To deal with this situation in the context of the power constellation as it has evolved since the end of the Cold War is the challenging task before UNESCO. Close co-ordination will be needed, in this regard, with the United Nations Organization, and in particular with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UNESCO should further try to co-ordinate the national policies of member states accordingly.

Because of the urgent need to counter global tendencies towards cultural exclusiveness and civilizational confrontation, UNESCO may try to foster a *new consensus* among its member states on the meaning of a “new international information and communication order.”⁷ Unlike in the previous Cold War era, a new communication order will need to be defined in clear distinction from powerful trends towards the propagation of civilizational supremacy. Such a new programme should reflect the cultural multipolarity of the present world – which is in sharp contrast to the political unipolarity of the “New World Order.” The negation of diversity will lead to tensions and confrontations along “civilizational fault lines” (that are often artificially construed for the purpose of legitimation).

Redefining and “updating” UNESCO’s earlier policy – or accommodating it to the new global environment – will make the organization more relevant in the United Nations system. Since the end of the division of the globe into ideological blocs, international relations have become more and more determined by the emphasis on “civilizational blocs.”

It will be UNESCO’s special task and responsibility to contribute to the global awareness of such a danger and to prevent – in co-operation with the United Nations – a situation in which the world would be headed towards a new “Cold War”: this time not between ideological rivals, but between civilizations.

⁷ See Hans Koechler (ed.), *The New International Information and Communication Order. Basis for Cultural Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence among Nations*. Studies in International Relations, X. Vienna: Braumüller, 1985.

In the course of history, the “defense” of civilizations, especially in the form of religious identities, has often served as a pretext for waging war without moral or legal restrictions, without respect even for the basic humanitarian norms. If a *civilizational dimension* is brought into a specific conflict, the adversary is becoming the enemy in an *absolute* sense. He is quickly portrayed as the “enemy of humanity” by his respective adversary; in such a “metaphysical” context there are hardly any constraints on the justification of the use of “all necessary means” aimed at the eradication of the supposed evil. In light of the recent sequence of events in regional and world politics, there may even be a “nuclear dimension” to the present confrontational scheme along civilizational lines, however unwelcome – even shocking – this may be.

Mankind should have learned the lessons from the history of the crusades. After so many regional conflicts and two world wars, the nations must not repeat the same mistake in the global setup of the third millennium. Burdening – or “overloading” – potential conflicts of interests between nations with the factor of civilizational (respectively religious) identity gives the respective dispute or conflict a kind of absolute, quasi-metaphysical dimension from which it is almost impossible to withdraw or to disengage in the sense of rational principles of conflict resolution. Recent regional conflicts on more than one continent are clear proof of this frightening reality.

Because of these imminent, not only imaginary, dangers, UNESCO should make it one of its priorities to educate global public opinion so as to make people aware of the very real dangers of *civilizational crusades*. In the era of nuclear arms – with no efficient non-proliferation regime in place – crusades along civilizational lines may well turn into armed confrontations with unforeseen consequences.

Therefore, UNESCO should strive to co-ordinate the policies of member states on the basis of the vital priority of civilizational dialogue as basic element of a redefined concept of peaceful co-existence among nations. Similarly, UNESCO may have to redefine its traditional role of promoting intercultural understanding.

Against this background of UNESCO’s new role, the tasks put before nation-states and national institutions are obvious. Some of the basic goals of the new policy – resulting from the need to take stock of the political relevance of civilizational dialogue – on the national level are:

- to organize the educational system (on all levels: primary, secondary, graduate) in such a way that all forms of vilification or demonization of other civilizations and cultural expressions, particularly in the form of religious beliefs, are eradicated from textbooks and curricula in general;

- to promote international cultural exchanges on all levels and in a non-discriminatory manner (including the various disciplines of arts and sports);
- to encourage and support the utilization of the ever more important electronic media (including satellite TV and Internet) in the service of promoting better understanding among nations, peoples and civilizations;
- to introduce credible and enforceable legislation banning hate propaganda, racial and religious incitement, and the cult of violence in general. The right of free speech, free expression of one's beliefs, finds its limits when these freedoms are used to deny that very right to others, whether individuals or communities.

These are just some of the areas within the responsibility of nation-states and national institutions that require urgent attention in the context of international peace. This non-exhaustive list of priorities should also be considered by regional and international organizations – with a view of co-ordinating the various steps among national governments.

(III) Global sporting events as occasions to foster international dialogue

If we take into consideration the challenges faced by states and international organizations in regard to the fundamental task of creating the conditions for “sustainable civilizational dialogue,” the phenomena of mass culture, including sports, gain special relevance. The role of sports and global sporting events will have to be reevaluated and redefined in their socio-cultural impact on the political realities.

International sporting events are characterized by a dichotomy between *national self-assertion* on the one hand and *transnational partnership* on the other hand. Global competitions such as the FIFA World Cup transcend the narrow confines of the nation-state. For each national team and its supporters, they are truly transnational encounters with other nations’ partner teams in the spirit of fair and open competition, while at the same time reinforcing national identification vis-à-vis the “other.” The national symbols – emblems, flags, and anthems – are not only indispensable for the official protocol of the games, but form an integral part of this kind of mass culture.

As far as the ideal of open competition is concerned, the classical Olympic motto of “Citius, altius, fortius!” is of paradigmatic importance for any kind of international sporting encounter including the World Cup. But, as in the “classical” times, this noble goal cannot be seen in isolation from the political and socio-cultural realities on the background of which the sport is exercised.

It is of utmost importance to locate global sporting events realistically in the triangle of (a) *national self-assertion*, (b) *partnership-in-competition* – irrespective of the national and/or cultural and religious affiliation of the partners –, and (c) *global definition and outreach* of the specific event in the framework of the respective global sports organization (whether FIFA, IOC, or others).

In a certain sense, those sporting organizations are even more representative of the peoples of the world than the United Nations Organization with its basically legal-political outlook. They engage definitely a larger number of people for a common purpose than universal political organizations – and political functionaries – can ever dream of.

Within the framework of the above-described triangle of factors determining international sporting events, one cannot deny the *dual face* of mass sporting events: on the one hand, such events serve as catalyst of self-assertion and national pride, on the other hand they bring people of virtually all races, religious affiliations, ethnic, cultural and civilizational

identities together *for one common purpose*: namely that of *sportive competition* according to globally agreed-upon criteria (that are defined by the respective world sports organization).

This duality also characterizes the nature of competition of national sporting events, but remains confined to intra-national ways of identification by region, social group etc.

There exists a kind of *dialectical relationship*, derived from the “antagonistic” nature of sport itself, between self-assertion, often accompanied by the “degrading” of the other as inferior or even as a kind of “surrogate enemy” in a nationalistic context, and the respective sports discipline serving as *common denominator* that brings together, even unites people of all civilizations, social and political affiliations – whether as actual competitors or supporters of their teams – for one common purpose.

While the national identification through sports involving large numbers of people as spectators and “supporters” (fans) generates a unique dynamic and an emotional cohesion among the respective community of team and supporters, this excitement and spontaneity – that is the “rule of the game” of any team sport – must not be seen as an end in itself. It has to be integrated into the overall *ethics of international sportive competition* that is based on (a) sharing a common interest in and enthusiasm for a certain discipline of sports, (b) the acceptance of common standards and criteria of evaluation for all competitors (according to the ideal of fairness), and (c) respecting the competitor on the level of human equality and dignity.

The basic respect for the other as “partner-in-competition” – and not as adversary or surrogate warrior in nationalistic and chauvinistic battles – is the fundamental *precondition* which alone makes the joy over victory meaningful and the grief over losing a game bearable.

I can only appreciate my victory in a meaningful way if it is one over an equal partner, a partner who is my equal in human dignity and whom I treat with respect on the basis of mutuality. Victory is only genuine if the success in the game was not a foregone conclusion or a right which I exclusively claimed for myself and/or my group. The same holds true, vice-versa, for the situation the defeated group finds itself in. If the team spirit is based on partnership, equality, mutual respect for one another, losing a game does not mean deprivation or humiliation – that might be accompanied by the loss of self-confidence and self-esteem altogether –, generating merely a desire for revenge instead of invigorating the competitive spirit.

This perception of a sportive game may have been at the roots of Albert Camus’ famous autobiographic confession: “Tout ce que je sais de la morale, je le dois au football”

(“All that I know about morality and the obligations of man, I owe to football.”/H.K.) In his youth, the famous philosopher and writer had been goalkeeper in his Algerian football team. He made this evaluation of the impact of football on his philosophy of life in 1957, at a time when he had already reached the stage of world fame as philosopher.⁸

In such a context – which, in essence, may be that of the often mentioned, but hardly seriously reflected upon “Olympic spirit” – the winner will not pose in a gesture of *self-aggrandizement* and the loser will not face the kind of humiliation that comes with a competition based on human inequality (which is not the same as the difference in sportive skills and in the mastering of techniques) and the resulting disrespect for one another.

This is not merely an abstract philosophical reflection about sports and specifically football. It is a proven fact that sports, understood in the sense described above, is able to “transcend borders,” to put politics aside – at least for a moment – and to reach out to the “other” in an almost impossible situation, one that may be beyond comprehension on the level of political rationality. Proof of this dimension of sports is the “mission impossible” that was accomplished in the most extraordinary games played in the history of football – in the eyes of the author –, namely those played on the battlefield between British, Allied and German soldiers during the so-called “Christmas Truce” on 25 December 1914.⁹ Though they could not stop the war (and the games were obviously part of a larger fraternization among the supposed enemies on that very day), those games had demonstrated – far beyond their symbolic value – that human beings, when they are motivated by the spirit of genuine competition, cannot be prevented by whichever form of hate propaganda, even that related to a world war, from extending basic respect to one another and sharing in the excitement of an encounter – on the basis a mutually cherished game, even in the middle of a battlefield.¹⁰

Another example of the bridge-building – or “ice-breaking” – capacity of football is a more recent event in the history of the FIFA World Cup, namely that of the North Korean

⁸ See Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus. Une vie*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

⁹ See Robert Wilde, “The Christmas Truce of 1914,” at <http://europeahistory.about.com>, 2001: “The fraternisation lasted, in many areas, for the whole of Christmas day. Food and supplies were exchanged on a one to one basis, while in some areas men borrowed tools and equipment from the enemy, in order to quickly improve their own living conditions. Many games of football were played using whatever would suffice for a ball, while bodies that had become trapped within No Man's Land were buried.” See also Tom Morgan, “The Christmas Truce, 1914” at *Hellfire Corner*, <http://www.fylde.demon.co.uk/xmas.htm>: “The Football Match - One oft-repeated part of the Christmas Truce legend is the story of a football match played out in No-Man's Land. There are several conflicting stories about such a match (and if all the stories are true there must have been more than one), with varying versions of the final score. The German officer, Leutnant Niemann, describes a match which took place in the No-Man's Land of the Frelinghein-Houplines sector, just outside Armentières, and appears to have taken part himself. His account ... gives a final score of 3 - 2 to the Germans.”

¹⁰ For a more detailed documentation see „The Christmas truce“: *World War I Remembered*, BBC News, Monday, November 2, 1998, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

football team's participation in the 1966 World Cup in the United Kingdom. At the height of the Cold War, the Korean team reached the quarter finals, supported by enthusiastic British crowds wherever it played.¹¹ In spite of the extreme ideological differences and political enmity between the Western and Communist blocs at the time, people were able to reach out and to communicate with each other on the basis of their common enthusiasm for the game:

Chants of "Korea! Korea!" echoed round the stadium after their victory over Italy and more than 3,000 Middlesborough fans travelled to the city of Liverpool for the Portugal match ... "Before we arrived in Britain, we were not sure how the people of England would treat us," recalled centre half Rim Jung-son [of the North Korean team / H.K.]. "We thought we would be shunned," he said. "But the Mayor of Middlesborough and all the people went out of their way to make us feel at home. And I still cannot understand why they did it, but I am glad they did."¹²

As is obvious from the amazement, even disbelief of the North Korean team member referred to above, this unique occurrence, nearly forgotten in the history of the FIFA World Cup, was a defeat for power politics and for the cold warriors on both sides of the ideological divide. It could not stop the course of history, but, again, the love of football had created a free space of communication between people from the two sides of the ideological blocs – a constellation that, to the author's knowledge, materialized nowhere else during the dark period of the Cold War.

However, one should not be taken away by these unique experiences and historical examples so as to idealize present realities. The dangers inherent in team sports attracting huge crowds of spectators – of which the most exemplary case is football – must not be overlooked in the present environment of global mass media. Because of the potential of sports such as football for the emotional mobilization of huge numbers of spectators, powerful economic interests have come into play. Those interests may tend to give more weight to the “adversarial paradigm” of sports – thus turning sportive competitions (whether on the national or international level) into surrogate struggles – or battles – for the self-assertion of a group (whether a fan community within a country or a group formed by “fan-identification” with the nation that is emotionally, even semi-officially “represented” by the respective football team). Under certain, often unforeseeable conditions, this phenomenon is accompanied by the vilification of the partner in sports as “enemy” and thereby burdens the respective sportive event with a political-nationalistic dimension that runs counter to the “Olympic ideal,” the common ethical standard for all worldwide sporting events.

¹¹ For details see the article “Games of their lives,” in: *Shanghai Star*, 29 November 2001.

¹² Quotation from *Shanghai Star*, loc. cit.

The pendulum may well swing into the direction of national self-assertion; thus football games may all of a sudden turn into proxy wars between national rivals, eventually leading to the outbreak of real wars. In this context, one should not forget the infamous “soccer wars” of 1969 between Honduras and El Salvador that resulted in some 2,000 deaths. These wars occurred on the background of already existing tensions between the two countries as a result of serious economic problems, unemployment, and migration and led to continuing enmity between the two nations at the time.

In remarks about cricket, Bino K. John has most aptly drawn our attention to the political dimension of sports, to the eventual impossibility to separate the areas of sports and politics, and to the failure to contain emotions that are triggered by sports and mobilized for political purposes at the same time: “Sport however is politics too. Victory and defeat in sport affects people. And reactions of people can work in many ways. When millions of people are directly and passionately and vociferously involved in sport (cricket in Asia and soccer in other parts, soccer wars in Latin America) the game reflects human behaviour, relations between countries and thus is directly elevated to the level of politics.”¹³

We should also be aware that the ugly occurrences of hooliganism – though not being a necessary corollary of this form of team sports involving large masses of fans – are not a merely accidental phenomenon – in the sense that they may appear under certain more or less coincidental, socially unfavourable conditions, but might be contained when conditions are more favourable. So far, at least in Western Europe, the approach has been that of dealing with the symptoms, but not with the causes. “Policing” the games and improving security arrangements on the level of co-operation between police agencies of the countries involved will not bring remedy to this phenomenon but only “contain” it for the moment.

In order to be able to locate global sporting events adequately in the above described “triangle of international competition,” we have to face possible dangers with open eyes and we should refrain from idealizing the relationship between sports and politics. Ignoring the negative emotions that may be triggered by international sporting events and that may subsequently be instrumentalized for political purposes in the adversarial sense will not solve the problem.

The genuine excitement of the masses of people – which, on the global level is most universally realized in the sportive discipline of football – must not be located in the context of the late Roman Empire’s cynical maxim of panem et circenses, but should be seen as based

¹³ “Sonn policy will bring light; South Africa needs no gray areas” at <http://www.cricket.com/cricket/news/20020108binoo.shtml> , New Delhi, 8 January 2002.

on a common interest in a certain discipline of sportive competition that brings people of all cultures, languages, nations, denominations, and of all walks of life together – people who otherwise would not relate to each other and not take note of each other. The Machiavellian approach is definitely not the right one if one tries to locate football in a comprehensive socio-political and socio-cultural framework.

When placed in such a context, global sporting events will not further fuel existing national conflicts and rivalries – or stir up potential conflicts –, but will foster common understanding between nations and peoples through the excitement generated by fair competition and through the interest indirectly resulting from this excitement in the other's sportive conditions and circumstances of life.

The basic question will always be: how can this sharing of a common interest be transformed towards people's mutual acceptance (a) in the field of social and cultural relations, and (b) in that of international politics. Can power politics to a certain extent be tamed by sports – because global sporting events may stimulate an international climate of peaceful competition even in times of political crises and global instability (as in the present constellation in the year 2002)? Or will sports fall victim to international power politics whenever “higher national interests” are at stake? In this regard, one should not forget the history of political boycotts of international sporting events.

By recognizing the dialectic – or antagonistic – relationship between self-assertion and respect for the other, we shall be able to bring out the truly *universal nature of sports* of which football is definitely the exemplary case: it reaches more nations, peoples, cultures, social communities, etc. than any other kind of sport in our time. Player and supporter of a team alike are drawn into a situation in which they spontaneously take note of one another as a result of the competitive situation of the game. In the case of a worldwide sporting event, this kind of “mutual recognition for competitive purposes” can, at least partly, be integrated into the wider context of global dialogue and peace.

Concluding remarks

The “dialogue among civilizations” may be a lofty – for some even evasive – philosophical ideal. As with other philosophical concepts, however, in order to obtain a specific meaning and relevance, it has to be interpreted in the concrete social reality of our world.

More than by abstract norms and proclamations of states on the conduct of international relations, the “facts on the ground” are determined by events that spontaneously move the masses – such as the games of the present football World Cup in Korea and Japan.

The fact that this event is jointly hosted by Korea and Japan symbolizes in itself the spirit of partnership and co-operation that goes along with global sporting events. The World Cup contributes to this goal not in the lofty sphere of elite culture, but in the field that is ultimately most relevant for global peace: namely that of the involvement of the masses of the people – people of all creeds, cultures, affiliations, and from all continents – for a common purpose that transcends the realm of politics and economic interests. Competing for excellence – and supporting the teams in their efforts – in *that* discipline of sports which has become the most widely cherished in our global village may in itself be a simple goal, but its accomplishment will have far-reaching socio-cultural consequences and a positive impact on a new perception of the global village’s “unity in diversity” – a perception that may become an effective antidote to newly emerging confrontations along civilizational lines.
