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JUNTO DA UNESCO
1, VILLA DE SÉGUR - PARIS VII
TÉL. 734.00.66 - 734.02.36

CONSEIL EXECUTIF - 104e SESSION

COMITE SPECIAL - Point 3.4.2.5. - :

"Rapport sur les incidences de l'emploi de nouvelles langues dans
les organismes des Nations Unies et Rapport du Comité Spécial"

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Intervention de Mme. Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

Paris, le 17 Avril 1978.





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Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I was just analysing why I didn't speak this morning... In fact I know now that it was because I was at the same time looking at you and therefore thinking in English and looking at my documents and thinking in French... But I couldn't come out of this schizophrenic attitude as I could not speak my own language. Now, speaking more seriously and as my own language is mentioned somewhere in this document, I would like to say a few words.

First of all I am very much in agreement with the previous speakers who have congratulated the services of the Secretariat for this excellent report. I have learnt a lot, also. I have not only learnt a lot but I think also that this document has somehow gone beyond what I call the "flat dimension" of a U.N. usual working document, those two dimensions that make it so difficult to take out what is really important. Here you find what is really important not only in the way things are put together but in the comments of the Secretariat. (So I think that somehow this is a very important element also for us in the Executive Board as we have, I think, a task of giving some advice to the services of the Secretariat about the way in which the documents are useful or are not useful for the purpose of our meetings.)

I am certainly very impressed with the fact that there is a ceiling, after which you cannot go in terms of use of new languages. I will not hide from the Special Committee that certainly in a not



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longer future my mother tongue which is spoken in three continents may raise a problem, within this context, in the whole of the Organization but let's wait until tomorrow...

However, I would like to stress a background question that goes beyond the costs of the different languages. You have certainly here cultural identity versus cost indicated in its different elements (this is of paramount importance). I see however another element which is also somehow a dialectical one within the very frame of culture itself. Of course, in order to express one's own way of thinking there's nothing like our own mother tongue. It is clear, it is our daily experience mostly for those of us who have to speak other languages. And our cultural identity is conveyed in a totally different way if we speak one language or another. When I think of this Organization and its contribution for a new international social and cultural and human order, I ask myself where is the main accent. Isn't there a great importance to make the work, the thinking, the different trends talked about in the Organization known to the large masses of people everywhere? And therefore isn't there a need for the use of different national languages so that there will be a possibility for the access of the masses of people to the means and instruments of culture that this Organization is supposed to produce? Isn't that the main stress and the main element?

Moreover, we have now in most of the countries new languages in the making. I am referring specifically to all the technological field, may it be the human sciences or the natural sciences. These scientific languages need a frame to start, to be elaborated within the framework of the cultural identity of each nation and people.



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Therefore I think that the Organization has a very important task in this field. While some people denounce imperialism (and all this so called United Nations jargon that goes with it) we are on the other hand falling into something that finally is the more introjected imperialism!... We are using instruments, we are using expressions, we are borrowing from other countries, other cultures, ways of speaking that we could invent anew in our own languages! This has a lot to do with the importance we give to the majority of mankind, to the masses and not just to the élites and the intellectual people.

I raise another question too in the context of the new international order. In meetings of experts or oficial representatives of governments people who have had the privilege of access not only to university education but to a lot of travelling and to a lot of reading and can rather easily switch from one language to another. Aren't we able in those situations to go beyond out-dated nationalisms (and as my friend Mr. Hummel said earlier) aren't we able to use one or two languages? For me it is very astonishing to discover that often somebody who is always speaking in his own language finally speaks much better than I English or French or Spanish (which are unfortunately the only three languages I can speak besides my own). Therefore I think that a study by the Organization should be done in terms of the possibility of the use of smaller number of languages. This, of course, without minimizing the sovereignty of each State, but with agreed stress and respect for each culture so that there would be a kind of 'gentleman's agreement' among all of us in such a way that we could use two languages for meetings in which in fact we can understand each other.

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It seems to me that this is, without moralizing, part of a new international order, of a new way of relating to each other. The new countries and the old ones have enough of identity today for the simple use of their national language in meetings to be a rather superfluous instrument. Many other elements - their presence, the way they speak, the way they affirm the values in which they believe - are certainly much better conveyers of their cultural identities and of their "raison d'être" as people and as a State.

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

