

measure for measure

Joan Barata on Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is one of the most important issues nowadays. “Important” entails a big effort, indeed this is probably one of the most “dividing” issues we have. It literally seems to tear apart the entire world viewpoint in mostly two or three parts.

Now, displaying an intergovernmental organization might affect our prospective. We’re talking about The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, better known as OSCE. It is the world’s largest security-oriented IGO (International Governmental Organization). Arisen thanks to the Helsinki Final Act (summer 1975), today it is composed by 57 participating states and 11 partners for the co-operation. It consists of 3 mainly baskets: security issues, economic and environmental issues and human rights.

On November 5th, Joan Barata (picture 1), the Principal Adviser to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, did a conference to the Global Governance first and second year students, in Rome (picture 2). He showed the students how the OSCE works. This organization is not a legal identity, therefore it has no legal power. If we have to sum up the meaning of this institution we would define it as the expression of the political willing of the participating states. Their decisions just have a political nature, therefore they have to ask the permission to be active in a certain state. It might happen that a country disagrees and get the OSCE off the borders (as we can see in the Caucaso region situation). Moreover, any time a proposal is made, it has to be accepted by all the member states (principle of unanimity), and this is often difficult to deal with.

The Representative of Freedom of the Media came about as a result of Permanent council Decision no.193 in November 1997 and the office began its operations in January 1998. It currently includes an International staff of 12 members from 11 nations. The decision no.193 mandates that this arm of OSCE has the position to: monitor relevant media development in all participating states; assist participating states in furthering freedom, independent and pluralistic media; assume early-warning function; finally, respond rapidly to non-compliance with the OSCE principles.

At the end of his speech, Mr Barata left time for some questions. Many auditors raised their hands, but the question which led more discussion was: “Which is your opinion about what happened at the Charlie Hebdo magazine?” He answered with a significant statement: “A Hate speech is completely different from a Dangerous speech”. As we can see he was totally indignant on what happened and indeed he claimed that OSCE hadn’t understood Pope Francis public statement (“if someone offended my mother, I would punch him”) because it seemed to justify violence, somehow.

Going back to the first point of this article, we would ask you something, kind reader: which is your opinion on freedom of expression? Should it exist a limit? Is it possible to assert one’s opinion, even an offending one, without incurring in any sanction? Before answering we suggest you to think about it loudly.

Riccardo Cavosi, Wangari Baaro



(picture 1)



(picture 2)