The RNE Rencontre, which was described in an article two years ago as “the EBU’s great professional discussion forum”, will be held in Seville on 3-4 May 2007.

Since this will be the 19th Rencontre held since 1973, it is fair to say that the event constitutes a vital component of the European Broadcasting Union’s (EBU) cultural and historical heritage. For all these reasons, the RNE Rencontre has become an important gathering every two years for the professionals of European Radio. It was first held in Tenerife (Canary Islands), before moving to Torremolinos (Málaga). For the past six years, it has moved around: Valencia in 2003, Palma de Mallorca in 2005 and this year in Seville.

Faithful to its tradition, the RNE Rencontre takes place in seven working sessions, all based on one main theme. In Seville, discussions will be centred on “Public Radio Reflecting Diversity”. At first view, this general title could be considered as self-evident, because, after all, Radio is a mirror which gives a generally precise image of reality. In my opinion, however, the title is something more: it is a declaration incorporating the professional and ethical commitment on the basis of which we make radio.

Please allow me a few considerations on the main topic of the 2007 RNE Rencontre.
The image of reality which Radio offers cannot, of course, be a uniform or identical whole. The social landscape which we see before us is a varied one, whose different elements, notwithstanding their diversity, can nonetheless be connected. Such is the society in which we live, meaning that we must not confuse diversity with plurality, no matter how high the risk of conceptual analogy between the two.

**Diversity**

In our society dominated by a “modern” mindset as product (as well as being a social synonym of Western culture), the process of democratization appears to have eliminated social tensions to such an extent that some people speak of the pacification of society and a resulting loss of collective initiatives. I believe that we cannot speak of either diversity or plurality without referring to the significance of the triumph of democracy.

Nor can we escape the reality of the extent to which the structure of societal models may have yielded to the power of the State, the latter being understood as an organizing and organized entity. In this respect, it should be recalled that when philosophers speak of the “group”, they are also talking about social fragmentation and the resurgence of individualism. However, aside from the reclaiming of the individual in the face of individualism, the solution which we propose is based on cultural rights.

Why do we say that we must reflect diversity? Among other reasons, because the process of globalization which we are witnessing is bringing with it the dissolution of a social model in which institutions like the family and the educational system increasingly tend to be declared bankrupt because of their manifest inability to socialize the individual. Not to mention another, no less dangerous reason: nationalism, which is fundamentally contrary to plurality and diversity because it replaces the complexity of social relationships by the mere affirmation of the right of possession and belonging.

**Heritage of humanity**

In addition to the above points, the Barcelona Declaration states that the exchange of knowledge among persons of different cultures is necessary for the development of peace, freedom and justice, and calls upon the regulatory authorities to be attentive to the pluralism of cultural expression in the communication media. In fact, one might say that we

I should also like to note that in order to stand up to the concentration of the communication media and the subsequent homogenization of media content and message, the public broadcasting sector is called upon to guarantee unrestricted and genuine access to all content, the widest possible variety of content, by the vast majority of the public.

Five months after the Madrid Declaration, another one was formulated in Barcelona during the World Forum of Cultures. In this statement, the signatories affirmed that editorial content, and in particular cultural content in its audiovisual expression, are part of the heritage of humanity.
have gone from the defence of “cultural exceptions”, understood as a concept relating to minority groups, to the large-scale promotion of cultural diversity.

As we know, the term “cultural exception” is a relatively recent one. It first emerged in 1993 during the debate on the free trade agreements at the GATT. As surprising as it may seem, culture was approached as an object of commercial transactions. Obviously, the protectionist position defends measures in favour of the type of national culture which must be protected. For proponents of deregulation, the measures that protect culture and national identity (faced with the effects of “cultural imperialism”) have often been based on the existence of a kind of cultural unity in nation States. For this reason, protectionism could trigger an internal regulation of cultural identity which, at the same time, would eliminate cultural diversity within the nation State concerned.

Anyone who has followed the debate in the European Union on this question knows that the key to the EU’s integration of its Members is based on diversity and the building of multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural societies. The motto of the driving force that seems destined to lead European social cohesion would thus be “unity in diversity”.

Democracy & prosperity

A final consideration concerns something to which I referred above. Globalization has brought into focus two factors in particular: regional conflicts and wars, and underdevelopment and poverty in vast parts of the planet. Furthermore, the extremely attractive way of life in developed countries (especially in Europe), based on stability, democracy and prosperity, makes the wealthy States of the European Union a dream destination for immigrants from underdeveloped and poor nations. However, underdevelopment also exists in these gateways to Europe. In this sense, the EU’s own enlargement process can only be conceived as a great integrating project, which must be carried out correctly from the political, legal, economic, social and cultural standpoints.

All these matters and any others related to them which interest the participants are what we are going to be talking about at the 2007 RNE Rencontre in Seville. We will do so during the course of seven discussion sessions entitled “Understanding Diversity in Europe” (Parts I and II), “Multiethnic and Multicultural Society: Facts and Prejudices”, “Public Radio Working for Social Inclusion”, “Radio Integrating Community”, “Reflecting Faith: The Public Radio Contribution”, and “The Language is the Message”. The seventh and last session is a surprise prepared for us by our colleague and friend Graham Dixon (BBC). I should like to express my gratitude here to Graham, Sergio Valzania (RAI), Heinz Sommer (ARD-HR), Leif Lønsmann (DR) and Raina Konstantinova (EBU) for their invaluable cooperation in the preparatory work for the RNE Rencontre, as well as to Chantal Portales and Concha Ema – and, of course, to Rafael Rodriguez, Director of RNE in Andalusia, who has made every effort to ensure the success of this Rencontre.

Mediterranean

The venue of the 2007 RNE Rencontre has been kindly made available to us by the Three Cultures Foundation of the Mediterranean. This extremely beautiful building (see photos) was the Moroccan pavilion at the 1992 Seville World Exposition.

The building is in the form of an eight-pointed star and comprises an auditorium with a capacity of 200, a multipurpose room, a central meeting plaza where the 2007 RNE Rencontre will be held, exhibition halls, lecture halls, a library and documentation centre, etc.

The Three Cultures Foundation of the Mediterranean was founded in March 1999 to promote the meeting of different Mediterranean peoples and cultures based on the principles of peace, dialogue and tolerance. The project originated with the Kingdom of Morocco and the Government of Andalusia, subsequently joined by the Peres Centre for Peace, the Palestinian Authority and other persons and institutions in Israel committed to the principles that inspired the setting-up of the Foundation.

We could speak for days on end about Seville, the capital of Andalusia. I will spare you the details and invite you to enjoy and discover it for yourself on 3-4 May next. At that time of year, as a famous sevillana (local folk song) says, “Seville has a very special colour”. 

Press Room