

Анатолий Торкунов: «The new primacy of foreign policy»

Interview with the rector of the State University of International Relations of Moscow (MGIMO) and member of the governing Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

The conference "Wisdom and Knowledge. The person and human rights", took place in Rome at the embassy of the Russian Federation from the 15 to 17 April at the initiative of the "Sofia Association Russian Idea Idea of Europe" and of the State University of International Relations-Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moscow (MGIMO). «This conference», the Russian ambassador Alexej Meshkov underlined at the beginning, «is also an anticipation of the International Forum "Ad Fontes. At the sources of European unity. Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, Byzantium" which will be held in Moscow in November next on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the MGIMO University». At the conference in Rome Professor Anatoliy Torkunov, Rector Magnificus of MGIMO and a member of the Governing council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation was present. On his return from a mission to China and about to undertake a UN mission entrusted to him by his own country, Rector Torkunov agreed to answer questions put by 30Days about the initiative and the reasons for it.

Today everyone agreed with you when you spoke of the need of a "new diplomacy" for the twenty first century.

ANATOLIY TORKUNOV: It would be a mistake to imagine heads of diplomacy opposing the traditional principle of the defense of national interests or claiming that they should be so on principle. And yet States are becoming ever more aware that beyond pure pragmatism and the logic of power, the primary direction of diplomatic action in postmodern society is the defense of the person. This is by now a given fact for all to see. Postmodern society is in fact determined by two factors which come together and mutually influence each other today. The first, at national level, is the degree of maturity reached by civil society. It has to do with the completion of the process begun in the early twentieth century and which an astute Italian diplomat recognized, the Marquis of San Giuliano, when writing to his foreign minister, he said that democracy was transforming public opinion into an indispensable foundation of foreign policy. The second factor is the existence, at international level, of problems which now involve the world community as a whole: the growing distance between rich and poor countries, the safeguarding of the environment, the problem of drinking water for millions of people and the question of the desertification of the Amazonian forests, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the shift of many conflicts into the armed phase. It has to do with questions which, in themselves, belong to internal politics but which nevertheless justly set the whole world community in alarm. I mean that the notion of the primacy of foreign policy has now taken on profoundly different characteristics, compared to Bismarck's time. The international arena is pervaded by horizontal and vertical relations which overflow existing frontiers. That situation cannot but alter the fundamental characteristics of diplomacy. Today diplomacy cannot but be in some sense "democratic", which is to say ever more sensitive to the demands made by civil society and by the parliamentary assemblies and "humanitarian", capable that is of considering the interests of the whole world community in its entirety and, in a particular way, of doing its best primarily for the defense of peace and of the human being, safeguarding those goods which are essential for each one of us.

Could one say that the guiding lines you describe have assumed primary value in the diplomatic policy of your country?

TORKUNOV: Yes, and it is what our ambassador to Italy, Alexej Meshkov, wished to confirm today. And in this context I would like to stress what president Vladimir Putin affirmed about the «irreversibility of the choice made by Russia in favor of freedom» and about his intention of consolidating the foundations of democracy and civil society. And it is in the framework of this diplomacy, which I would call humanitarian or of the person, that the high consideration of my Country for the goals which the UN has set itself should be read; it is within this framework that Russia and the US are allies against international terrorism; the qualitative improvement in relations between Russia and NATO is taking place in that context, it is there that our strategic partnership with the European Union finds place, and it is from that perspective that the relations of special friendship which exist today between Italy and the Russian Federation should be viewed.

It seemed that you would like ever stronger cooperation between non-governmental organizations within the process of the "democratization" of diplomacy.

TORKUNOV: There is a thrust aimed at forming communities of cultural and scientific research and networks of experts from the various fields of knowledge which cooperate on trans-national bases. In diplomacy a whole complex of interdependent activities is coming into being which are growing thanks to the ordinary work of public and private agencies. The particular complexity of the order of the day in the area of multilateral negotiation, for example in relation to the safeguarding of the environment, to the question of genetic engineering or the problem of stable and sustainable development, requires the inclusion in the process of negotiation of representatives from the world of culture, science, industry, business, as well as the spokespeople of influential non-governmental organizations.

Does your call for ever closer cooperation between Christian Churches and States belong in this context?

TORKUNOV: In the most recent questions of international politics, the diplomacy of the Christian-Orthodox Church and of the Catholic Church have also played an extraordinary role. In Russia, the Christian-Orthodox Church and government diplomacy are strongly linked and the link ensures that diplomatic action is pervaded by greater morality, as against pragmatism and the logic of power. It is by now common practice for leading diplomats of the Russian federation to frequent the Patriarch. This is also the key to reading the recent visit of Patriarch Alexis II to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Patriarch warned us about the particularly insidious danger inherent in the rumors of an alleged global clash of civilizations, the clash between the Muslim and Christian worlds. It is a conflict in which, in reality, only interests restricted circles of radicals on the one hand and forces which seek to exploit it on the other. The Russian-Orthodox Church, with its centuries-long experience of collaboration between Christian Orthodoxy and the Muslim world, wishes to make its great and very precious contribution to averting this clash of civilizations by preaching tolerance and taking up the task of educating the young generations in respect for the person and the supreme value of human life. Here I would like to say a word about relation between the Russian-Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church.

Please do, Rector...

TORKUNOV: Despite the confessional divisions, the possibilities of collaboration between the Catholic Church and the Russian-Orthodox Church are enormous in the sphere of multilateral humanitarian diplomacy at a global level. Today the joint action which the two Churches can perform in inspiring and working out a diplomacy characterized by the defense of the person, by peace, by solidarity, by protecting rights and goods essential to everyone, hence a diplomacy based on the ideals and common principles which constitute the Christian origins of the entire

European continent, even in those aspects which might seem to us secular or indeed neutral in terms of the faith as such, can result in being decisive. Here I would like to recall that the Forum "Ad Fontes: At the sources of European unity: Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, Byzantium" which we are organizing at MGIMO along with the "Association Sofia Russian Idea Idea of Europe", is based on the ideas of the late lamented Sergej Averintsev: that is on the reaffirmation of the idea of the person as the founding element of the cultural unity of the two hemispheres of Europe. There would be obvious spin-off for a concrete social organization from multidisciplinary research targeted at the rediscovery of the sources of European culture, encapsulated in the city-symbols of Athens, Jerusalem, Rome and Byzantium and that then achieve synthesis in the Christian concept of the person. To resolve in this way the cultural identity crisis which Europe is heading for is at the same time a great contribution to diplomacy that is continually more inspired both by revealed and human wisdom. Diplomacy is an art, as are poetry, painting and so on. Now, what values, what principles inspire the artist in his work? If diplomacy, like art, let itself be inspired by the highest values of humanism, that step could turn out to be decisive in resolving the great questions to which I alluded earlier.

A last question: what do you say in answer to those who see in the close collaboration between the Churches and States the re-introduction of the old tie between throne and altar?

TORKUNOV: I say that exactly the opposite is true. The idea is not that politics acts as religion, or that religion acts as politics. On the contrary it involves striving together so that no conflict takes on religious coloring and to shape together the everyday diplomatic commitment according to a policy based not primarily on pure pragmatism and on the logic of power, but on dialogue and on respect for the person, a policy that spares all peoples suffering and poverty.