



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES SOCIÉTÉS DE PHILOSOPHIE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETIES

www.fisp.org

MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Ischia, Apr 6-7 2009

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Since the Seoul Congress, the activities of the Secretary-General of FISP have been principally grouped around eight main initiatives. These have enabled both to set up a day-to-day running of the secretariat and to outline some working guidelines for the next years.

Secretariat. At the end of October, a new Secretariat was installed in rue Miollis in Paris in the premises of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH), the umbrella organization to which FISP has been affiliated since its establishment. The Secretariat office is managed by Mme Emiliya Ivanova on a part-time schedule. The setting up of this office in Paris, with the intention of its becoming a permanent base, was mooted by the current Fisp President, William McBride, whose wish was to put an end to the hitherto nomadic existence of our Federation and to harbor it in a place that might provide a more or less stable ongoing basis. As a word of caution, I should say that this secretariat project is still at the embryonic stage, since the availability of premises for the Council depends ultimately on the goodwill of Unesco. But the first step has been taken and we have good confidence that it will prove more than just a start. The quality of the assistance provided by Emiliya Ivanova contributes greatly towards this, and, no doubt because of my often virtual presence, she has quickly familiarized herself with the life of our association, for which I would like to express her public and grateful thanks.

Communications and Website. Among the tasks assigned to Ms Ivanova is first of all the regular updating of the FISP website, especially with regard to keeping the list of our associations up to date and to posting the periodic changes that occur in their executive boards. The renewal of the website, carried out by the technical services of Purdue University under the close and watchful vigilance of our President, resulted in a considerable graphic improvement and greatly expanded its functionalities. This site is clearly meant to undergo further development and to eventually become the principal tool of communication for the Federation. In particular, the Newsletter, which appears at more or less regular intervals, seems likely to evolve towards an electronic format to be regularly updated and to provide information on the activities of our member-societies and of the philosophy world in general. At present the FISP site is intended to be a source of information about the Federation: it seems timely to reflect on advantageously reshaping it as international reference site, open to the whole philosophical community, helping to bring this community together round intellectual and cultural issues that are its field of concern, and reflecting the changes and problems that philosophy and philosophers are facing throughout the world. A link with Unesco survey on teaching and research in philosophy, perhaps in the form of a discussion forum, might represent a first step to be taken in this direction.

Assiduous exchanges of correspondence with our member societies have also shown the vitality of the FISP network, as does the promptness of our associate bodies in responding to requests from the centre and

their commitment to the sound running of the Federation. In this regard I would like to make happy mention of the Société de philosophie du Québec, the potential termination of whose membership had been foreshadowed at the Seoul Congress. Alerted to this prospect, the new executive of the SPQ promptly re-established communication with us and took steps to meet their financial obligations – which our Treasurer had previously, and quite timely, expunged as it turned out. The fact remains, however, as I will endeavor to explain shortly, that FISP's potential still seems largely under-utilized.

Unesco Philosophy Day. Before going on to analyze the current state of our Federation and its future prospects, I would like to revert briefly to the Unesco World Philosophy Day held in Palermo last November.

When I attended the first preparatory meeting, last June, it turned up that the Italian organizers considered their task to choose, in consultation with Unesco, the themes for the Day and their breakdown through the different round tables. I pointed out that such Days had been set up for the purpose of bringing together a certain number of Unesco partner organizations, of which FISP was the foremost. Let me put this observation into historical perspective. The Day of philosophy arose as an initiative by FISP. Thanks to the long-lasting efforts of Ioanna Kuçuradi, Unesco accepted the principle of holding such an international Day. But, though the Federation's role in this was duly recognized at the first gathering in 2002, it rapidly lost that pre-eminence. Its role and involvement in the establishment of the programmes became progressively diminished, to the point that it was eventually considered just one among many partners, to which entrust at most the organization or one, or at best two, sessions or round tables. Several of you will recall a testy exchange between the Secretary-General and Unesco, where the latter rejected the principle that a special invitation should be addressed to FISP. And it was mainly on a personal basis that I was involved in the preparation of the Palermo Day.

I therefore very strongly argued for official recognition to be obtained for the role of FISP as a privileged partner of Unesco in the field of philosophy. I had already requested that the President of FISP, the President of the International Institute of Philosophy and the President of CIPSH be officially invited to Palermo. Once we realized what structure the Italian organizers envisaged, built around targeted invitations rather than on open calls for contributions, we finally obtained, that the President of FISP should be one of the three official speakers during the opening session, along with the Director-General of Unesco and the Italian Minister of Justice. This was a way of legitimating the role of FISP as the representative organization of the philosophical world. This result was achieved not without some trouble, given that a certain number of those involved – including a few diplomats – were opposed to the idea that a philosopher might take part in the official opening of a Day which, after all, was just devoted to philosophy ...

That is why at Palermo there was no round table “organized by FISP” any more than by other institutions. Nevertheless, we were far from being absent from the programme. This included the President of FISP (who, besides his participation to the opening session, was also a panelist in one of the sections of the meeting), one Vice-President, the Secretary-General, two former Presidents, several members of the CD... However, I would like to insist on a point which I consider crucial. The presence of members of the Steering Committee is important, but the Philosophy Day must first and foremost be an occasion of international exchange where the priorities of our Federation are given prominence and where Fisp official role as representative of the philosophical community and main partner of Unesco is recognized. At Palermo we foregrounded the global dimension of philosophical research, insisting on the importance of opening philosophical investigation and exchange to scholars from the different African countries, from Asia, from the Arab and Muslim world, from Latin America. We opposed to the idea of considering new actors on the philosophical stage as mere bearers of a gender or cultural “witness”, thus limiting their involvement to reflections on what is hastily considered their group or community: women philosophers who are expected to speak (or rather to “bear witness”) on gender-related topics, African philosophers who are more than welcome to speak about... Africa, prominent Chinese scholars who cause surprise when they touch on subjects going beyond the realm of Confucianism... From this point of view, it seems to me that the Palermo Day marked an important stage in the affirmation of a global reach for philosophical research, something which certainly remains problematic but to which the spirit and vocation of FISP must be committed. Subsequently, the proposal put forward by Marietta Stepaniants on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the next Day, which

suggests bringing together the whole of the Steering Committee at the time of the Moscow Day, represents a further and new step to enhance the institutional presence of FISP. We look forward to this welcome initiative being carried on into the future.

Let us now turn to some prospective tasks.

Broadening FISP Membership. An important component for the development of the Federation, which is in line with the last years policies, concerns the broadening of FISP's geographic spread. Over the last few months, several colleagues have indicated to Bill McBride and myself their wish to see their associations become members of FISP. You will find in your dossiers four membership applications resulting from these contacts: two initiated by national societies and two submitted by international associations. Other philosophical associations are discussing the possibility of joining Fisp, and new applications are likely to be submitted in the next months. The positive dynamic that marked the last years in terms of new memberships seems thus likely to keep continuing.

This quantitative growth in our network undoubtedly represents a considerable advantage for the future of FISP. Nonetheless, it cannot cover up a marked geographic imbalance in our membership which we must imperatively address. Our ability genuinely to represent the philosophical societies of the world is diminished by the extremely limited presence within the Federation of associations based, in particular, in Africa and in the Muslim world. Below is a table setting out a geocultural breakdown of our member societies:

National Societies			
Europe	41		
Asia ⁶	13		
North America	9		
Latin America	9		
Arab and Islamic World ⁷	2		
Sub-Saharan Africa	2		
Oceania	-		
International Societies			
	Presidents	Secretaries-general or coordinators	
Europe	12	13	
North America	9	8	
Asia ⁸	4	2	
Sub-Saharan Africa	1	-	
Latin America	-	1	
Arab and Islamic World ⁹	-	-	
Oceania	-	-	

⁶ Including Turkey

⁷ Including Iran

⁸ Including Turkey

⁹ Including Iran

Given this picture, the credibility of FISP itself is at stake. It is not a mere matter of geographic or cultural balance. Opening up to the philosophic communities of Africa and – perhaps even more urgently – to scholars in the Arab and Muslim world represents an essential challenge for FISP and for its ability to operate on a global scale. FISP cannot ignore the increasing incidence of scholarly initiatives emerging on diverse continents and the new approaches that are being proposed in the various areas of philosophical research. A few months ago, Bill McBride and myself attended a symposium on the situation of social and human sciences in Africa, organized in Cape Town by CIPSH, the International Council for Social Sciences and Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa¹⁰. Personally, I was struck by the variety of research directions revealed by the various papers. In a way, it was as if philosophy could no longer be done by restricting oneself to a single discipline, a single tradition of thought or a single system of theoretical and cultural co-ordinates. Our various heritages need to be blended, new structures for comprehending reality must be imagined, and more and more must we open ourselves up to forms of thought which differ from those with which each of us is familiar. It is not just a matter of simple intellectual co-operation, which remains a major task for FISP, it is to the contrary the very conditions of philosophical thought which are at stake. It is no longer possible to have a philosophy which is not aiming at a level of global understanding. Transposed to the aesthetic domain, one can perceive this “transcultural” approach in the co-operative project engaged with the International Association for Aesthetics submitted by Ken-ichi Sasaki and Gerhard Seel.

We should therefore look with a lot of interest at the proposal for a world conference on African philosophy being planned by Leonard Harris. We must also beat all paths which may permit to bring together, under the auspices of the Federation, scholars from the Arab and Muslim world who share our desire to establish a genuine philosophical dialogue. For it is certain that, along with the countries of Africa, it is imperative that we multiply the opportunities for meeting with the philosophical communities of the Muslim world. The next World Congress will take place in Athens, a city which not only embodies in its very heart the enchantment and remnant of the world of ideas, but is ideally situated at the crossroads where the West, Africa and the Middle East come together. It is therefore the perfect place for stimulating encounters between scholars of these worlds, and I believe we should not forget that quality when sketching the structure of the Congress. The journal *Diogenes* has recently taken a first step in this spirit by planning a special issue to Philosophy, Islam and Muslim Societies, and we would be pleased to welcome contributions from the Fisp network.

In practice, such an enlargement is not without problem. We are aware of the weakness presented by the “society” model for a certain number of countries. Learned societies often are faced with a practical dilemma, when their independence comes at the expense of an extreme penury of their own resources. In such conditions, how to consider the admission, or even the continuance within FISP of national societies whose finances are often very rocky. As our Treasurer indicated to us a year and a half ago, two societies well implanted in the Arab world, the Egyptian Philosophical Society and the Arab Philosophical Society, lost their status as members of FISP as a result of their inability to meet their annual subscriptions to the Federation. This is certainly not a situation exclusive to associations from those areas, but it probably strikes them in a more dramatic way than anywhere else. There are, to be sure, some counter-examples: I can mention the case of the SIHSPAI (The International Society for the History of Arab and Islamic Sciences and Philosophy) which, oddly, is not a member of FISP.

What should be done, then? It may well be instructive to recall the policy that the International Academic Union is in the process of considering. It is aiming to create in certain African countries new focal points around which scholars may gather to establish new international links : academies in the case of the UAI, international societies in what could be ours. But to enable such initiatives to succeed and to bring into our fold new national or international societies, no doubt it will be necessary – may our Treasurer forgive me – to push even further the possibility of reducing the subscriptions due to us, and even to allow for cases of complete exoneration. Even such an enlightened policy as that pursued by Guido K  ng through his great budgetary flexibility may not be sufficient to ensure societies to join Fisp, whereas their functioning depends

¹⁰ “Knowledge and Transformation: Social and Human Sciences in Africa”, Stellenbosch, Cape Town, 24-28 November 2008; abstracts available at <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Event-356.phtml>

entirely on the goodwill of their affiliates. Yet we have everything to gain by establishing official links with our colleagues in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Mali, but also in Uruguay and in Lithuania.

Hence, with a great deal of prudence and laying down clear conditions for an ad hoc admission, we may have to imagine new, and eventually intermediate kinds of membership. An interesting suggestion sketched by our colleague Colin Anderson, President of AULLA (Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association) considers the possibility of mutual sponsorship among societies, aiming at covering, for a limited period of time and at reduced rate, the fees dues by one or another indigent society. No matter how realistic this may prove, either this or other mechanisms may be worth to be taken into consideration. In any case, Fisp should respond to inputs coming from societies low in funds but that value the linkage they may have through FISP to an international connection they do not want to give up.

Forthcoming Steering Committee meetings. In the same spirit as expressed above, I believe we should also ensure a fair geographic airing for the upcoming meetings of our Committee. Let me mention, in relation to this, the proposal advanced a few months ago by Sékou Guèye to host one of our meetings in Senegal, an idea to which both Bill McBride and myself had pledged our support.

I have been able to observe through periodic meetings of CIPSH as well as more recently at the Unesco Philosophy Days, just how much such scholarly gatherings, even though perhaps not so significant on the plane of cutting-edge research, nevertheless make an important contribution towards the creation of new linkages, and thereby towards the opening up, often in unconventional and hidden ways, of new perspectives for work and research. The recent experience of the Delhi Congress, organized by Bhuvan Chandel in partnership with CIPSH, shows just how far such “in situ” meetings can go in nourishing partnerships between international organizations and national communities.

Consultative Commissions. One matter that I would like to address concerns the role of the consultative commissions of FISP. The missions given to these committees, or at least to a number of them, seem to me in need of being rethought. A certain number of suggestions can be found in the reports that have been sent you, as well as in the proposals to establish new committees. I would like to propose for your attention a single point, which seems to me of the highest importance. To what extent should the activity of such work groups be limited to a theoretical reflection, rather than towards inspiring actions that our Federation might undertake on the scholarly, academic or cultural policy fronts on an international scale? Isn't it the case, because of the very nature of FISP, to produce statements, suggestions or other indications that, within the areas of competence of each of these subsidiary organs, should aim to become international references? According to our rules, these Consultative Commissions “prepare the work of the Steering Committee within their area of responsibility and advise the Secretariat and the Treasury”. But, as I remarked, it appears to me that FISP's potential will remain under-utilized if our work is limited to “internal” objectives instead of putting our energy at the disposal of the international philosophical community.

In the area of philosophy teaching, Unesco is currently in the process of presenting the 2007 World report to the Ministers of Education of the different regions of the globe, with the aim of promoting policies that arise out of its enquiry. Should not FISP contribute some leading directions that may be able to influence this process? May I recall that the main components that Unesco is insisting on relate, on the one hand, to the teaching of philosophy at secondary school, and on the other hand, to the means by which philosophy might be taught since the primary school level – what is commonly called “philosophy for children”. Actually, this particular chapter of the Unesco study has just been translated into German by the German National Commission for Unesco, and I was pleased to learn that a whole symposium on this subject will take place during the next Day of Philosophy, in Moscow. A proposal directed towards involving FISP in this reflection has been addressed to us by Michel Tozzi, one of the Unesco report's co-authors, and you will find it in your dossier. It mentions the possibility of a partnership with one of our members, the IAPC. It seems to me that, whatever may be our views on this subject, and they are certainly very different, it is in our interest not to turn down this input. In the fields of ethics, bioethics and human rights, is it not the vocation of FISP to join the international debate by getting involved with bodies and initiatives both in the scholarly domain and addressing the United Nations level? By the way, such was the very goal when this Commission had been created, as

Gilbert Hottois reminds us in this activities report. In the area of the history of philosophy, should we not be thinking, as Hans Poser's proposal implies, of putting forward tools of analysis and work capable of bringing together, be it only on the formal level, scholars belonging to different traditions?

It is thus the essence, or rather the mission of our Federation which is at stake. Its role cannot be restricted to organizing a World Congress every five years, supporting the Philosophical Olympiads and being involved in a few complementary activities. The scholarly network that we represent, and which we are called on constantly to strengthen, possesses all the qualities to play a very significant role in the theoretical and cultural debates of our world. All the more reason then that our work directions be defined according to a certain number of priorities and that we take advantage of instruments of communication which would give our action real academic, scholarly and public impact. It will be also through this capacity to resonate in the public sphere the voices of our member societies that we will strengthen our capacity to attract new members. From this point of view, the idea of providing the Federation with a distinctive voice, through the constitution of a work group charged with ensuring our visibility in the external world (insofar as it exists) seems to point in a highly desirable direction.

Relations to Unesco. As you are aware of, Unesco asked Cipsh to prepare an outlook of the state of research in philosophy throughout the world. The call for contributions we sent out has resulted into about 40 reports or papers. Let me recall that we received a helpful assistance from our colleague Maija Kuule, who supplied us the contributions she had received on behalf of the committee on Intercultural cooperation that she chairs at Fisp. A further questionnaire aiming at gathering data on the material conditions in which philosophical research is carried out should be shortly circulated by Unesco – however, we do not have further information on this item.

The study currently under preparation, just as the former one (devoted to the teaching of philosophy and published in 2007), proves, at least in part, the interest we have in pursuing our cooperation with Unesco. While Unesco activities have shown unequal quality in the past, particularly in philosophy, they are now passing through a very dynamic stage. In this context, the sharp criticisms that the philosophy programme is currently undergoing at Unesco do not seem grounded in a fair evaluation of its ongoing activities. My sense is that Fisp should take the defense of this programme which, by the way, represents the main source of Cipsh, hence indirectly of Fisp funding from Unesco.

Languages. FISP should be able also, no doubt better than any other organization, to provide some general pointers, or at the very least some elements for reflection, on the particularly sensitive question of what languages to use for international philosophical communication. We have wished to provide some WCP-oriented hints to Steering Committee, entrusting three members of our CD chosen for their experience in this issue. I would like to record public thanks to Evandro Agazzi, Peter Kemp and Marietta Stepaniants for having graciously put their time to fulfilling this task. Whatever may be the points of agreement or disagreement that each one of us may find in the report they have compiled, and that you can find among the documents of our meeting, this latter seems to me to represent by its openness, and I believe that President McBride shares my feeling, a remarkable synthesis of the multiple and complex issues involved in this matter. We will perhaps be able to derive some functional rules from it.

Acknowledgements. Finally, I am pleased to thank all those who have assisted us in the preparation of this meeting. Beginning with our splendid hosts of the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, who have readily agreed to welcome once again a meeting of this Steering Committee. I would like to express in the name of us all the gratitude of FISP towards the President of the Institute, Gerardo Marotta, to his Secretary-General, Antonio Gargano, to Wolfgang Kaltenbacher who is here present with us, and to all those who along with them have discreetly worked very hard to ensure the success of our meeting. Without them and their efforts we would not be here, and we hope that this meeting is but the beginning of new partnerships between the Institute and each one of us. We find ourselves, dear Wolfgang, in one of the lofty places of Italian philosophy and I am sure that this session of our committee will help Italian political leaders understanding how wide are the relationships that the Istituto has been able to establish across the world.

We are also equally indebted to the great availability and beautiful assistance of our colleagues of the Cultural Circle “Georges Sadoul”, who have successfully handled on the Istituto’s work in Ischia. Rosario de Laurentiis, Giorgio Brandi and Dario Della Vecchia have mobilized the whole island to make certain that every practical detail, even the most minute, is put in place. They are primarily responsible for the warm welcome we were accorded on our arrival, for some of us a true release after a difficult stop in Naples. It is also thanks to them that our meeting is being held in this symbolic spot that is the City Hall, and I am pleased to ask them to forward our most grateful thanks to the Mayor of Ischia and to the Chairman of the City Council.

From Naples to Ischia and from Ischia to Rome, I would like to make sincere mention of the valuable assistance provided Patrizio Fondi, Diplomatic Advisor of the Minister of Culture. Thanks to him, we could overcome a certain number of administrative difficulties linked to the heavy schedules of Italian consular offices. Patrizio Fondi had already shown his attachment to the international dimension of philosophical research during the preparation for the Unesco Day in November last year. Once again he has proved a true friend of philosophy and of philosophers who are striving to their best to work in philosophy on the scale of a more and more global human community.

Luca Maria Scarantino
Secretary-General