

**Speech of Father René Chamussy, s.j.,
Rector of Saint Joseph's University
On the occasion of the international seminar
'Iceland and Lebanon: at the Antipodes of the EU'
Beirut, 30 September- 2 October 2005**

One has managed to compare, one day, Ireland and Palestine. Here and there blood is shed, and wars of occupation and liberation never cease to poison an atmosphere ever more charged.

What we are invited to think through is a more daring comparison between Iceland and Lebanon, two tiny entities stuck to the immense Europe.

A daring comparison indeed, for what relation can be between Bjork and Feyrouz, Vikings and Phoenicians, that volcanic land lost in the glacial ocean and that Mediterranean fringe to the desert and the sea that Lebanon is ?

Still, the comparison is essential in so far as Europe, at the time of the establishment of its Proximity policy, finds itself pressed to explain, beyond its complex administration of all matters, how it will finally honour its commitments towards these extreme lands, both carrying riches so little perceived.

Over the coming two days, you will be speaking of law, economy, international relations, in short geo-strategy. I would like to say here a word which is perhaps relevant to epistemology, or to the sociology of science, I know not. All the construction of your seminar is based first on a comparative work between two entities, before you turn to Europe and invite her to manage as she can in light of all the emerging elements her policy of neighbourliness.

What needs to be seen is that today, in the days that are ours, drawing comparisons does not mean any longer that there are entities short of each another. Back in the period we nowadays call 'contemporary history', imperialism had its response to such problematic: imperials told the underdeveloped, 'we're gonna teach to you to live well, to be democrats, and so on'. All means were practicable, including the vilest ones. This period is, or should be, behind us.

What matters today is to enter without fear in a 'planetary negotiation amongst cultures'. One can play with comparativism, but it will work well only if we accept to say at one and the same time: 'we do not share yet a common world', and 'this is what is essential for each one of us'. This is what a contemporary French sociologist has called symmetrical anthropology. It is in function of this departing point that we can see how to make progress together and how to tell Europe: 'this is what we bring, these are our specificities'; and, in the same breath, ask the EU: 'You Europeans, considering this context, what do you have to offer ?'

We then remain ourselves, Lebanese and Icelanders, and work for a different world with a Europe which is different.

It remains for me to wish for you an excellent seminar. May then the artists whom I mentioned earlier, Bjork and Feyrouz, these singers full of the culture of their people, remind you that the realities you are working with are not merely cold scientific datas which are your turf: they must always be donned with that creative imagination which facilitates all dialogue.

Thank you.