INTRODUCTION

"Any social phenomena should be studied exclusively from a cultural point of view"
Wilhelm Dilthey

The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have been marked by arrogant omniscience. We all have believed that ethics and morality are indisputable cultural values and no longer need to be seriously protected.

A few years ago, we could not have imagined that humanity would face a pandemic, challenging the way we know how to protect our loved ones.

A few weeks ago, we could not have imagined that in the twenty-first century we would be facing an armed invasion and a brutal attack on human rights, democracy, freedom, national identity and on life itself.

Suddenly, we are confronted with a reality, in which one culture can hurt another without a shadow of remorse, where one culture can make excuses to kill men, women and children, and destroy homes and irreplaceable historical monuments. All these things are happening in Europe where values seemed so solid and secure – or at least we thought so.

Today we are becoming aware of our limited knowledge and understanding. We have extended the definitions of civilization and culture to the care and respect of the planet, while failing to consider how harmful precarious culture and education can be.

We are advancing into a new technological revolution developing artificial intelligence, yet we do not teach it to distinguish between truth and falsehood, or between good and evil.

We understood that poverty is a barrier to education and creativity and that social disparities can lead to inhuman violence.

We already have a long-lasting experience of how populism and manipulation can result in culturally questionable characters leading nations, while dragging their people down the wrong, dangerous and dark paths of history. And yet, we have not found more precise mechanisms to isolate those leaders, to avoid the trap laid down repeatedly by our evolution cycles. We face a complex reality, but we do not know how to control the dynamics of large numbers, nor can we control the diversity of the variables created by these numbers. We struggle to preserve our civilised rules and boundaries, but are we prepared to contemplate the indeterministic chaos in which our children will grow up?

The turbulence of recent and current events may lead some to believe that culture is peripheral to the unfolding drama. But culture must be a part of our resistence and our response. In the absence of culture, society falls again and again into the randomness from which chaos pulls out another individual with means and power – the next social leviathan.

In this context, our work here at the Council of Europe, as responsible citizens involved in promoting a value-based development of culture and cultural heritage, takes on an urgent and tragic dimension as paradoxically, CULTURE must be a part of the answer to our most pressing questions and challenges.

The following texts, from authors with a deep understanding of our society and its cultural facets, will illustrate the directions derived from a common vision of the idea of culture and the firm intention to respect humanity and its rights. Culture is intelligence, reason, empathy and balance in action and can be inspirational, uplifting or destructive.

We all know what "Never Again" means, and yet, before our very eyes, a nation is losing its culture and future.