

Sea and blood.

In 1951, after the long and destructive Second World War, a French person, Jean Monnet, realized that there were two things a country needed to start a war, steel and coal, very abundant in Europe. So he thought:

"If France and Germany stopped controlling their own coal and steel industry and directed it to people of those countries (whom would decide things together), it would be impossible to set out on a war between them."

So after an important speech which took place on the 9th May 1950, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France and Germany put together their coal and steel industries; forming the European Coal and Steel community (E.C.S.C.); which had a common market.

Several years later, during which new countries joined the Community; the European Coal and Steel Community became known as the European Union (E.U.), based on values like the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and human rights.

The story I'm going to tell you happened very recently, only one year has passed since it occurred. I was in Cádiz at the time, the story happened in 2017, in the south west of Spain.

It was nearly seven o'clock in the morning. A weak ray of sunlight played upon the wall, painted in blue and full of photos of beaches and sunsets. There wasn't a lot of furniture in the room, only some shelves with a lot of dusty looking folders on them and a half opened wardrobe, where you could see some clothes, mainly jackets with the words "Coast guard" written on them. On the table, mountains of papers messed up in complete disorder, in which you could see a framed photograph where two adults and two children, hugging each other, beamed happily.

The mobile phone vibrated. The man sitting on the chair beside the table got hold of it with great difficulty. Before he could even hold it to his ear, the voice at the other side of the line shouted:

- Martin, get down here now.

- What has happened this time? -he said in a tired voice-. Is this another joke of yours?

- No, I'm talking seriously, Martin, come here.

- How can I be sure you're not kidding?

- Come on, now, do whatever you want. A noise and silence.

Martin sighed as he got up, he opened the old wooden door, which creaked as he flung it open and went downstairs. When he arrived to the beach; he found me looking through my binoculars.

It was quite a good day. Although the sky was a bit cloudy, the oily surface of the sea promised good visibility and no storms ahead. A soft breeze was blowing and you could hear the rhythmic noise the waves made when they collapsed onto the beach's sand.

Martin didn't want to break that calm moment, but finally, he spoke.

- Hey Élodie, where's Pablo?

I turned round to see a tall and thin man, with dark eyes and untidy dark hair, wearing his uniform, a bit big for him; looking at me. He wasn't wearing his usual smile.

- I don't know, maybe he's patrolling the beach down there. I think he was a bit angry with you. Look at this. - I said giving him my binoculars.

He took them a bit reluctantly, still wearing this I - don't – believe – it – at – all expression he had shown ever since I told him Pablo was angry with him.

He looked carefully through them, scanning the sea's surface, looking for a clue about what I just said, and...

- Wh...what's that? - he said.

- That's just what I wanted to know.

- Well, I suppose we can only wait.

Twenty minutes later we were still on the beach hoping to see what was approaching the coast. We had even brought chairs for us to sit on and we had already had breakfast. Pablo was still lost in who knows what. Unease was palpable. Martin took the binoculars again.

- My goodness, Élodie! Quickly, call the ambulance! - said Martin.

- What happened? - I said.

- A small boat, about to sink and full of people!.

- But... no one in his right state of mind would use that to travel!.

- Who cares about that! Just call the ambulance!

So I did. The operator responsible for reporting it was really quick, so five minutes later everything was ready to receive about twenty people in dreadful conditions. They were starving, extremely thin and showing signs of advanced tiredness. We gave them medical care, clothes, blankets, water and some food, which they received with great amazement.

There were people of all ages; from adults to very little children. While I looked at them, something drew my attention. There was a young woman, very pretty, I dare say, tall and thin, with big dark eyes and a curtain of long, straight black hair that fell through her back to waistlength. She had an unusual skin colour, as if she had got tanned on the beach. She was wearing a colourful dress with the appearance of having been out in the open for a long time. She didn't seem happy at all, unlike all her partners. She was sitting on the ground, grabbing her legs with her arms.

I got near her and sat beside her. I tried to speak to her in English.

- Hi, my name's Élodie Dupont. How did you get here? It must've been a long journey - I said.

And waited and waited. I could feel her eyes scanning me. Although we were the same height, I felt really different with my brown wavy hair, my green eyes and white skin. She had all the dust of the countries through which she had travelled on her skin, whereas I was as clean as if I had just taken a bath. And when I was just about to lose hope of knowing their story, she spoke.

- Hello. I'm Magali. We all come from Nigeria. As you must know there's a lot of terrorism down there. We were ready to risk our lives, if we went out of the country there was a tiny possibility of reaching a safe place; otherwise they could kill us all. So we crossed the Sahara Desert through Niger, Mali and Algeria. It was a very tough journey. We had to take care of the eldest ones and the children, we had difficulties to find food, and we could be attacked at any moment. We had to sleep wherever the night caught us and withstand sand storms. Some people got lost in the desert, and we never saw them again.

When we were in Morocco we paid someone a lot of money so he would lend us a boat and went into the sea. The journey was horrible, we didn't have space to move nor a place to protect ourselves from the heat, the cold, the sun... We took it in turns to row, and we got lost a couple of times. A lot of us died on the way. At least we arrived here... where are we?

- You're in Cádiz, Spain.

- I hope we will be happy here but I hope we can return to our country someday. All my family is in Nigeria.

- I'm sure you will. You know what? I'm also an immigrant. My father is French and my mother is German. They met each other in a maths conference as they both teach that subject. They started talking and ended up married. I was born in France and when I finished my studies I came to Spain to work. I went to university in France, and I have a physics degree, but then I changed my mind and decided I didn't want to be a teacher anymore. I came here because I thought that they would offer me a job and a fair salary. It also had a good economic situation and its customs weren't a lot different than the ones in my country of origin. They treated me very well and I got the job I wanted to work as a coast guard so I'm very happy here.

In that very moment the police turned up. They took the refugees to an Internment Centre where they would wait for the permission to stay from the Spanish Government. I saw them go in a car having a strange feeling.

The centre was full of women, children, men and elderly people who came from different places in Africa. The food was very good but there were too many people and there wasn't enough space and at night you could hear them crying because they missed their country and the people who were lost in the sea or in the desert.

Magali and her parents knew Europe because of the advertisements they had seen on the village's only TV. It seemed a far away place but rich and cosy, however, as the weeks passed their idea changed. They started thinking the journey hadn't been a good idea at all but if they hadn't done it maybe they would be dead by now - as she told me later.

One year after I met Magali, while I was in Germany during my summer holidays. I entered a shop. It was really crowded and there was so much noise. I scanned the room and my eyes fell upon a young woman, tall and very pretty who was paying for something. She looked familiar to me but I couldn't remember why. She turned her back on the shop assistant and walked towards the door. We looked at each other for a moment and suddenly she grabbed my arm and asked if my name was Élodie Dupont. I answered positively.

She was really pleased although I was puzzled and I asked who she was. She looked rather confused. She said *"I'm Magali, don't you remember me?"*, *"of course"* I said.

I asked her about how everything was going. She told me that finally they gave them a job but they didn't have a contract. They had to wake up early, around seven o'clock and go to work in the countryside, collecting the fruit and vegetables under only the protection of a straw hat and work 'til the afternoon,

stopping only to have lunch around two. They went “home” (basically a place where they could sleep, crowded with people) maybe at nine o’clock and had to wash themselves quickly and go to bed. There wasn’t barely time to speak. They weren’t given a fair salary, maybe about 25 euros a day and they were in very harsh conditions, they didn’t even have days off. So she saved all the money she could and travelled to France. From there she went to Germany, where she could find a job as a teacher. She had a family, a house and everything she needed. I was really happy about this but I didn’t understand why they treated them like that.

We are supposed to be in the European Union, aren't we? Based on values. Like the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and human rights. Then, why are there differences between people of different places of origin? Why aren't we all the same and have the same rights? I think that's a thing we must solve.

As Elie Wiesel said a long time ago, *"the worst thing in actuality is indifference. To know and to not act is a way to consent these injustices. The world has become a tiny place and what affects to other people in another country... affects us all"*.

Europe is a reality that is being built up by the European people as well as by other people who come from other countries, a caring place that respect the human rights and people's dignity. What would have happened with France without the Spanish people who helped it's developing?, or with Germany without the Polish people who work there?

We must defend the idea of a fair world in which everyone has the same rights and are treated in a good way everywhere he or she goes, a place in which the people can express their ideas and live well, a world where everything can be possible.

Irene Fernández Fernández 3º C E.S.O.