



Knowledge against racism



Minister Kyenge at SISSA: science and politics are in agreement

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Science and "on-the-field" experience prove it: culture and knowledge are the real answers to racism. An important day has just ended at the **International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA)** of Trieste, dealing with how science can help fight racism. Two highlights in the afternoon: the **conference "Neuroscience of Racism"** featuring **Elisabeth Phelps**, a neuroscientist of New York University, and the visit of **Italy's Minister for Integration Cécile Kyenge**, who took a guided tour of the Institute, met the Director and a student delegation of the School.

Integration and the fight against racism: these were the keywords today at SISSA in Trieste, an institute in which about 33% of the students are foreign, and that has made internationality one of its strongest points. This important day at SISSA started out with the encounter of the Minister for Integration **Cécile Kyenge** with **Guido Martinelli**, the School's Director, and some students' representatives.

The encounter was also the occasion to address the difficulties met by foreign students in Italy



with regards to our country's bureaucracy. Such issues not only represent a limitation in the life of individuals, but can also undermine scientific research itself. For this reason the Minister declared that "it is of extreme importance - and the Ministry is working specifically on such aspect - to revise the policies on residence permit duration and on health care."

"The model I have observed here at SISSA seems an important example the Ministry may learn from," added Kyenge. "It is precisely in school that we must start to build good integration practices, and what I see here is a good and positive example."

The second half of the afternoon was devoted to scientific research: can we employ science to fight against racism? **Elisabeth Phelps**, a neuroscientist of New York University, held an open lecture titled "*Neuroscience of racism*". Phelps illustrated the results of her studies. "The amygdala, a brain structure connected to the emotion of fear, plays an important role in racist attitudes and behavior. This means that racism and fear are strictly connected." Phelps observed that also those who do not consider themselves racist show a strong activation of such structure when looking at people from a different ethnic group. The good news, however, is that such negative activation may be attenuated, especially when the "foreign" faces become familiar to us. What elements can we employ to fight racism? "The experiences with others, the social context and the awareness that we are prone to fear what is different from us." concluded Phelps.

"It is comforting to know that science confirms what we already believe in," commented Kyenge at the end of the conference. "It is by getting to know the differences, the cultures and the individuals that we may work against racism and in favor of integration."

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