

From Dialogue to Hospitality and Co-operation.

Programme and Objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation

By Traugott Schoefthaler, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, for the quarterly Magazine “Quaderns de la Mediterrània”, published in four languages in Barcelona.

Past generations in the Euro-Mediterranean region have, too often, limited the idea of dialogue between cultures to a dialogue between nations, languages and religions. This way, and against best intentions, it was made possible to misuse culture as a weapon in preparing for a clash of civilisations.

Such clash can be orchestrated at global scale, following Samuel Huntington's scenario. There is no doubt that global terrorism and, unfortunately, some approaches to combat it, are deliberately fuelled with cultural differences. The September 11 shock and its aftermath should, however, not obscure the “multitude of local claims and regional tensions over scarce resources” that, according to the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, have long been masked by the confrontations of the Cold War blocs. They “pushed people into the narrow walls of group identity, feeding a new tide of smaller confrontations between ethnic, religious and national communities” (President's Foreword to the Report by the World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995).

It is the everyday “logic of rejection” and the “narcissism of small differences” that, according to Pérez de Cuéllar, “threatens peace and security and violates the inherent dignity of the individual person. Amin Maalouf, in his analysis of “deadly identities” (“Les identités meurtrières”, 1998) provides us with Mediterranean experience in this regard. It is always the same mechanism of drawing dividing lines between human beings through assuming and imposing collective identities rather than respecting the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Theodor W. Adorno and Alfred Horkheimer, in their studies on “The Authoritarian Personality” published shortly after 1945 as a first analysis of the cult of power and violence in Nazi Germany, went deep into psychological terminology of ego- and ethnocentrism. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and Amin Maalouf come to similar conclusions: Cultural policies need to avoid schematic concepts such as the popular

distinction between “Us” and “Them”. They even warn against further using the term of “The Other” which is standard in almost all intercultural education concepts, since it opens the gate for imposing collective identities on the individual. There is no viable alternative to their proposal of adopting a rights-based approach in dealing with cultural diversity.

The “Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity”, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2001, is the first international normative instrument that recognizes the importance of multiple and overlapping identities of individuals and groups. “In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity.” (Article 2)

Dialogue between Cultures is essentially a dialogue between human beings, not between anonymous cultural entities. Present and future generations must, therefore, be given the instruments for dialogue. In the Euro-Mediterranean region, they need to be provided the opportunity to learn at least one foreign language, preferably more, and to acquire knowledge about all religions and cultural traditions that have shaped this region as crossroads of civilisations.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was established in November 1995 in Barcelona. The Barcelona Declaration states the need to guarantee cultural and religious diversity. Ten years after, on 14 March 2005 in Cairo, the first Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly welcomed the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, established on 30 November 2004 by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in The Hague, as “the first common institution of the Barcelona Process that is based in a Southern Mediterranean Partner and co-financed by all members of the Partnership”, to quote from the new EuroMeSCO Report “Barcelona Plus”. This report was prepared by the Euro-Mediterranean network of political science institutions at the request of The Hague Ministerial to assess progress made, shortcomings encountered and potential identified for the future of the Barcelona Process. It was presented in February 2005 (p.11).

The Assembly welcomed the Foundation's Three Years Programme for 2005-2007, approved in January by its Board of Governors, and emphasized its role "in eliminating prejudices and stereotypes, in enhancing pluralism and respect for 'the Other', in projecting the common heritage of the Euro-Mediterranean region, and in deepening the role of the civil society and non-governmental organizations as boosters for development, modernization, reform and mutual understanding and respect".

Since it was decided to establish the Foundation as a network of networks, I am optimistic that, in close partnership with the Heads of the 35 national networks and the co-ordinators of the existing EuroMed regional networks, it is possible to make it a key instrument for bringing peoples and people closer in a common Euro-Mediterranean space.

More than ten of the national networks are already operational, and representatives of all 35 networks had a two days working meeting in Alexandria in April 2005. They brought together ideas and proposals for implementing the Three Years Programme Framework for the Foundation which first was presented last November to the Hague Ministerial Conference. Almost all last steps in order to provide the Foundation with international and local staff and to give it legal personality as a civil society institution having an intergovernmental Board of Governors and hosted by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in tandem with the Swedish Institute in Alexandria are expected to be completed by August 2005. By then, the Foundation should enter in its full operational phase.

Ten years after Barcelona 1995, the new EuroMeSco Report seems to be very enlightening. It identifies progress made, in particular concerning chapters 1 and 2 of the Barcelona Declaration, political and security as well as commercial and trade co-operation. Shortcomings are identified particularly under the third chapter, human, social and cultural co-operation.

The broad objective set out in the report is the transformation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership into a "Community of Democratic States" by 2015. This 20 years timeframe is not derived from the Helsinki process, which was highly instrumental for bringing the East and the West of Europe together, less than 20 years after signature of the Helsinki Charter (1975). The report sees the potential for bringing Europe and the Mediterranean closer in strengthening the Barcelona Process as the instrument for the South within (and not outside of) the actually

designed European Neighbourhood Policy. The report recommends much more emphasis on the third chapter of Barcelona.

The following conclusions on Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) are of direct relevance to the Foundation:

- (1) On cultural diversity: "The Barcelona Declaration states the need to guarantee cultural and religious diversity, but this aspect has not been addressed....Combating racism and xenophobia has not been specifically set forth as an EMP aim and initiatives in this domain have therefore been lacking. The Anna Lindh Foundation is expected to address the issue." (p.14)
- (2) On dialogue: "Inter-civilisational dialogue is often seen as an alternative to political reform. But this is to institutionalise the failure of mutual understanding...The concept of 'hospitality' rather than of 'dialogue between civilisations should guide cultural co-operation. This means putting cultural pluralism at the centre of co-operation...This should become the guiding principle of the Anna Lindh Foundation." (p 30-31)
- (3) On education: The report suggests that education should be a priority, with focus on exchange, mobility, networks and use of the Internet.
- (4) The principles for enhancing effectiveness of the Barcelona Process: more coherence, visibility and networking, less bureaucracy.

The programme of the Foundation was inspired by the report of the High Level Group of Experts on the third chapter of Barcelona, established by the former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi (the "Prodi groupe des sages", December 2003). The first programme of the Foundation was worked out after consulting the networks and the advisory committee in November 2004. Its following main ingredients seem to respond directly to the EuroMeSco recommendations:

- (1) Dialogue between cultures and civilizations needs to go beyond exchange of words to co-operation. Dialogue, conceived as a dialogue between human beings, must provide room for the expression of plural, overlapping and dynamic cultural identities. The Programme is, therefore, based on the objective to put human rights into practice.
- (2) The objective of learning to live together was outlined by the World Commission on Education for the 21st Century chaired by the former President of the European

Commission Jacques Delors. Formal education systems are to be geared towards learning environments, teachers from instructors to organisers of learning, schools to centres for daily practice of tolerance by giving way to others' points of view. Multiperspectivity, the intellectual skill of looking at things from more than one perspective, is a core element of quality education.

- (3) Value education. In line with the Delors report, "values... cannot be taught in the strict sense: the desire to impose from the outside predetermined values comes down in the end to negating them".
- (4) The strategy of the Foundation joins the recent international consensus on cultural diversity being as essential for humankind as is bio-diversity for nature. Respect for diversity and pluralism are essential for social coherence.

A main feature of the work of the Foundation is the 2 + 2 formula. Any project of the Foundation requires the participation of at least two partners from the North and two from the South of the Mediterranean. Youth is the priority target group. Striving for synergies with and adding value to existing activities are essential. The Foundation invites successful bilateral North-South co-operation projects to accept proposals for third and fourth partners.

The Foundation will, this way, give incentives for creating a multitude of links between the largely unrelated worlds of bi- ad multilateral co-operation. The Foundation will link civil society projects in the region in it's main fields of activities: youth, culture, education, communication, science, human rights, sustainable development, democratic citizenship and empowerment of women.

For the years 2005 to 2007, the Foundation has the following six programmes, as approved by its Board of Governors on 27 January 2005:

"Our common future" provides opportunities for learning to live together, with activities in music and creative writing, a schools network and teacher-training.

"Avenues of multiperspectivity" offers educational materials in many languages, with a multilingual education server, research on school textbooks, and the culture of religions.

"Our creative diversity" explores the numerous ways of cultural creation, with projects such as EuroMed heritage in young hands, and dialogue between cultures in the classroom.

“Science without frontiers” invites young researchers to join their talents. The programme aims at establishing a higher education network, provision of travel grants, the organization of EuroMed Model Universities and the establishment of trans-border research groups.

“Information society” gives access to digital opportunities in a globalised world, as a follow-up to the World Summit (Tunis in November 2005), and will promote educational and cultural journalism.

“Empowerment of women” promotes participation of girls and women in all fields of society through training programmes and travel grant schemes.

The Foundation will reach out to youth through inviting young people to learn and work together. Traditional forms of inter-cultural dialogue would not be interesting for them. Working together builds trust and confidence - much more than words. Conceptual work will focus on the issue of unity in diversity and seek to identify benefits from the international debate on cultural diversity for the Euro-Mediterranean Co-operation.

How can this be translated into programmes? One good example is music as an essential part of dialogue between cultures. Even where the exchange of words seems to be exhausted, musicians can continue. The Foundation will participate in the organisation of concerts and workshops on a regular basis. We have interesting tasks ahead of us, such as helping young people in Europe discover the Mediterranean roots of "their music", and bringing back to the South what Europe has made with inspiration it took from the Arab region.

Discovering the southern Mediterranean roots of Fado, Flamenco and Sirtaki goes well beyond academic ethno-musicology. Young people in Cairo appreciate El-Arabi Sureyar's language-driven songs, which Europeans might qualify as Arabic Rap, totally unknown in Europe because he never produced a CD.

The growing success of almost all varieties of “world music” offers new avenues for cross-fertilization of Rai and Rap and many other genres, traditional and contemporary. The whole world of migrants in Europe is also rich in music that deserves to be brought to the attention of a broader public. There are good auspices for Euro-Mediterranean World Music. Music is the best ambassador for our efforts in explaining to young people how rich cultural diversity is, and that diversity does not mean conflict.

I am looking forward to work together with the 35 national networks in putting our ambitious programme into practice. I do hope, however, that the Foundation, with its resources being very modest as compared to earlier proposals, will not be misunderstood as funding agency and will not be left alone in addressing racism and xenophobia. Priorities for the coming three years are establishing 35 well organised national networks and creating new bonds between them. Good practice in bilateral co-operation needs to inspire what the EuroMeSco Report suggests: effective multilateralism.

Annex: Resolutions concerning the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures adopted by the First Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, Cairo, 12-15 March 2005

Final Declaration (approved on 15 March)

Para 7 q: The participants “emphasize the importance of the rôle of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures in promoting mutual understanding between the Euro-Mediterranean peoples, in eliminating prejudices and stereotypes, in enhancing pluralism and respect for ‘The Other’, in projecting the common heritage of the Euro-Mediterranean region, and in deepening the rôle of the civil society and non-governmental organizations as boosters for development, modernisation, reform and mutual understanding and respect.”

Resolution of the Committee on improving quality of life, exchanges between civil societies and culture (approved on 12 March)

The Committee...

11) Welcomes the Three Year Programme of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, and invites the Foundation to provide information on a regular basis with regard to the implementation of the Programme. It also stresses that only constant and concerted efforts of national networks will ensure the full operation of the Foundation;

12) Expresses its satisfaction with the solution of the problem of the Foundation’s financing, which currently counts on € 11 million from voluntary contributions from all partner States. It hopes that in the future the Foundation will be able to count on a stable funding system, open to contributions from new donors, e.g. local authorities and private organisations;

13) Expresses the hope that full synergy may be established between the Foundation and the Parliamentary Assembly, whose members, as they directly represent the peoples of partner States, will be able to give further impulse to cultural co-operation activities. To this end, it deems appropriate for the Bureau to consider involving a representation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in the work of the Foundation’s steering bodies.