

# Creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue Between Cultures and Civilisations

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It is not by chance that we note that it required the circumstances that followed 11th September, and in particular the war in Iraq, to finally see the idea of a foundation for dialogue between cultures and civilisations, as raised in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, come to fruition. The need for dialogue between cultures and civilisations had in fact been highlighted ever since the Barcelona Declaration in 1995. However, it proved necessary to wait until April 2002 for an action programme that took note of «the principle of creating a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to promote a dialogue of cultures and civilisations and to increase the visibility of the Barcelona Process through intellectual, cultural and civil society exchange»,<sup>1</sup> which was launched in Valencia under the new Spanish presidency. Under the Greek presidency, the foreign ministers of the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership gathered in May 2003 in Crete, where they set out the guiding principles for dialogue between cultures and civilisations, and defined the framework within which the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation should be created. And under the Italian presidency, the creation of the Foundation should be approved in Naples in December 2003.

This accelerated schedule is the result of the awareness of the urgency involved in establishing genuine dialogue that can serve «to promote a culture of peace and to achieve mutual under-

standing, bring peoples closer, (...) and strengthen exchanges among civilisations».<sup>2</sup> There are actually several factors that have contributed to the impression that, prior to this point, the Barcelona Process had not really made it possible to refute the vision, so prevalent in the present climate, of the «clash of civilisations» (Samuel Huntington) between the west and the Arab and Muslim world. The third chapter of the Barcelona Process, specifically intended to create a dynamic of social, cultural and human exchanges, has been marginalised in the minds of Europeans and Arab leaders alike. The former are more concerned with the issues of security and immigration (first chapter) and regard the social and economic development of the countries of the south shore (second chapter) as being the best means of bringing peace and stability to the region; while the latter, to varying degrees, are still mistrustful of initiatives that promote the opening-up and independence of civil societies, to the detriment of central powers. The Barcelona Process has thus given the impression of being, first and foremost, a matter for states, from which civil societies have been chiefly excluded and which therefore lacks real social and political visibility.

In particular, it has not been possible to offer an alternative to the perception of the Mediterranean as a division between antagonistic civilisations. This view provides an instantly accessible reference point on the basis of which socio-political disturbances amongst the populations living on the fringes of Europe can be interpreted, and real or imagi-

nary threats thus defined. That may be due to the very ambiguity of the essentially dichotomous concept of «dialogue», which presupposes an encounter between North and South and which is reinforced by the feeling of there being an unequal relationship between Europeans, who initiate, finance, and control the various kinds of MEDA programme launched in the context of the Partnership, and Arab countries, which are afraid of thus becoming any more dependent upon their powerful northern neighbours. Additionally, the latter feign unawareness of the fact that the colonial legacy greatly influences the relationship between Europe and the Arab world, where the traumas of the past are still tangible. Recognising and acknowledging the concept of the other involves confronting the recent past, during which a process of exclusion and normalisation was underway throughout the developing nation states, and when, at the same time, the multicultural societies of the Mediterranean region were in the process of disappearing. Delving into the collective memory would make it possible to reveal a common past in which the boundaries between communities were not as marked as they are today, rather than constantly referring back to a mythical Mediterranean, the cradle of civilisation, and thus blotting out the memory of the real issues in a rigidly defined view of the past.

From this point of view, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation project certainly corresponds to that approach, which consists firstly of recognising the other in order to then be able to define the terms of the partnership. On one hand,

<sup>1</sup> EuroMed Report, issue no. 45 EN, 29 April 2002.

<sup>2</sup> EuroMed Report, issue no. 59 EN, 28 May 2003.

## SOME INITIATIVES FOR THE PROMOTION OF EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CULTURAL DIALOGUE

### Meeting «Comprendre la violence et surmonter la haine en Méditerranée» Marseilles (15/16-11-02)

Ninth meeting in the Averroes Encounters, organised by Espaceculture, with the objective of reflection on the challenges in the Mediterranean. The question of violence was analysed during the various round tables, especially in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. <http://www.lafriche.org/averroes/2002/>

### Round table «Culture and Community in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership» Alexandria (5/7-10-03)

Organised by the Swedish Institute of Alexandria, the European University Institute of Florence, and the Universities of Birmingham and Liverpool, this round table brought together researchers and diplomats from both Europe and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The objective was to raise discussion regarding concepts of culture and community within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and to examine previous attempts at analysis of these concepts.

<http://www.bham.ac.uk/POLSIIS/departement/staff/pdf%20files/Alexandriareport.pdf>

### International Congress: «Femmes: migrations et dialogue interculturel» Athens (23/26-10-03)

Organised by the Forum des Femmes de la Méditerranée with the objective of providing the greatest amount of information possible on the causes and effects of women's migration, both within their countries of origin and in host countries. And also, emphasising the ever-increasing frequency of women among immigrants and bringing out their exceptional role as a factor for dialogue and enrichment in their countries of adoption.

[www.unesco-center.gr](http://www.unesco-center.gr)

### Seminar: «Beyond Enlargement: opening Eastwards, closing Southwards?» Toledo (13/16-11-03)

Within the framework of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, the aim of the seminar was to debate the cultural impact of the European enlargement and process of integration in the relations of Europe with its

Mediterranean neighbours. With this objective, reflection was fostered on the possibility of strengthening cultural cooperation between Mediterranean countries. This seminar was held in the context of the programme «Enlargement of minds» by the European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam), in collaboration with the Toledo School of Translators.

[www.eurocult.org/pdfdb/intro/ToledoManifesto.pdf](http://www.eurocult.org/pdfdb/intro/ToledoManifesto.pdf)

### Conference, «Intercultural Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region: the foundation of peace and stability» Amman (6/7-12-03)

Organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy with the objective of strengthening intercultural dialogue between the countries of Europe, the Maghreb and the Mashrek to thus encourage peace and stability in these regions. The conclusions and recommendations adopted will be used by the Transmed Programme, a North-South Centre programme dealing with the subject of transmediterranean dialogue.

[www.coe.int/T/E/North-South\\_Centre](http://www.coe.int/T/E/North-South_Centre)

«dialogue between cultures and civilisations» promotes «understanding of other models of society, of ways of thinking and of acting and to co-exist»; on the other, it constitutes «a basis for understanding our common history and opening current avenues of cooperation». <sup>2</sup> However, this dialogue can only fulfil the goals established for it firstly on the condition of the «new intergovernmental instrument [contributing] decisively to the development of a true sense of joint ownership of the Barcelona Process by its members»; and secondly of the initiatives undertaken seeking to «reach the greatest possible number of citizens, while aspiring to overcome barriers in the way of access to information and to achieve a greater level of mutual knowledge between them». <sup>2</sup>

The idea behind both this initiative and the proposal to create a Euro-Mediterranean assembly in the near future is to generate the feeling that Partnership really is an issue that concerns everybody (co-ownership) and that the European Union will not seek to control the activities of the Foundation under the pretext of being its main financial backer. From this perspective, its advocates will have to deal with two

challenges: firstly, guaranteeing the Foundation real autonomy and a capacity to undertake initiatives, while ensuring that Europeans and Arabs are evenly represented in guiding bodies, in addition to guaranteeing a certain degree of financial independence; and secondly, making it an instrument that both serves and is a product of the desires of civil societies, and doing so despite the fact that the members of the Advisory Committee and the Executive Committee that will be established in the Autumn of 2004 are to be appointed by the government.

If the aim of this initiative is to tip the scales of the Barcelona Process in favour of the third chapter and to refute the «clash of civilisations», while giving priority to civil societies instead of merely addressing the elite as has been the case in the past, it still remains necessary to provide the means to do so. With an anticipated budget of ten million euros over a period of three years, half of which is to be provided by the Commission and the other half by the twenty-seven Euro-Mediterranean partners, is not the Foundation, even conceived of as a «network of networks», with a role that is geared more to unifi-

cation than to organisation, still insufficiently equipped to carry out this enormous task successfully? Furthermore, in a report presented in November 2003, the High-Level Advisory Group set up by the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, stated that the Foundation would be unable to «fulfil the demands and expectations made of it» unless a certain number of conditions were met (financial, managerial and conceptual independence; adaptation of financial and administrative means to requirements; and identification with a clearly visible location). In reality, everything will depend on the political resolve demonstrated by the partners when they gather in Naples in December 2003. To begin with, the choice of headquarters could not have a more symbolic value. Will the capital of the host country (Rome) be chosen on the north shore? Will a compromise be selected in the form of one of the European Union's new members (Malta or Cyprus)? Or will the option of the south shore be taken up (Alexandria), thus entrusting the headquarters of what can legitimately be regarded as the first Euro-Mediterranean institution to an Arab country?