

Building Bridges through Dialogue: Reflections on the Euro-Arab Youth Forum

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The Covid-19 pandemic has not only affected our physical health and well-being, but has also resulted in a breakdown of communication and dialogue between different cultures and communities. With travel restrictions and closed borders, the pandemic has made it difficult for people from different parts of the world to connect and engage with each other. This has led to a sense of isolation and disconnection, particularly among young people. In this context, the third edition of the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, held in Sousse, Tunisia, in 2021, and organised by We Love Sousse, was a unique opportunity for young people from across the Mediterranean to come together, share their experiences, and discuss the importance of intercultural dialogue in the post-Covid-19 world.

Introduction

The third edition of the Euro-Arab Youth Forum took place in Sousse, Tunisia, in September 2021, with over 100 participants from 15 countries across the Euro-Mediterranean region coming together for a three-day event centred around the theme of Interculturality and Crisis in the Euromed Region (Covid-19). Organised by We Love Sousse as the head of the Tunisian network of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the event provided a platform for young people to connect, learn and work together, highlighting the importance of intercultural dialogue and cross-border cooperation.

The Forum highlighted the need for youths to take an active role in promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding. By engaging in meaningful discussions and collaborative projects, young people can play

a vital role in breaking down barriers and promoting a culture of peace and inclusivity in the post-Covid era.

Programme Highlights

The Forum's programme was designed to encourage dialogue and exchange, with a range of activities focused on building skills and fostering cultural exchange. The three-day event was structured around the theme of interculturality and crisis in the post-Covid-19 world. It brought together over 100 participants from 15 countries from both shores of the Mediterranean, who engaged in plenary sessions, workshops and networking activities.

The plenary session of the Forum was devoted to opening remarks from special official

guests, including the representative from the Arab League, the Governor of Sousse, the representative from BBC Media Action, and the Heads of Networks from the Anna Lindh Foundation.

One of the highlights of the Euro-Arab Youth Forum was the inauguration of The Global Cultures Center, which was hosted at the Kobba Museum in the medina of Sousse. The centre aims to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding by showcasing the diverse cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region.

As part of the Forum's closing ceremony, the first-ever performance of the Ishq concert was held at the Sousse Archaeological Museum, which left those attending enthralled.

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The Euro-Arab Youth Forum was supported by EU Neighbours South and BBC Media Action as the main media partners. Cultural exchange was also an important aspect of the Forum, with participants sharing music, dance, and other forms of artistic expression from their home countries. This helped to break down barriers and foster understanding between different cultures, highlighting the importance of embracing diversity and celebrating the richness of our differences.

Inauguration of The Global Cultures Center

As part of the forum, The Global Cultures Center was inaugurated in the Kobba Museum in the medina of Sousse. The centre is a new initiative aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and exchange, and will serve as a hub for cultural activities and events in the region. The inauguration of The Global Cultures Center was one of the highlights of the Euro-Arab Youth Forum

and took place in the presence of a number of high-profile guests, including representatives from The Arab Nations League, the Sousse Governor, the BBC Media Action representative, and the Anna Lindh Foundation Heads of Networks.

The Global Cultures Center provides a range of resources and services to support intercultural learning and exchange, including workshops, cultural events and seminars. It will also serve as a platform for young people to engage in creative projects that celebrate cultural diversity and promote intercultural dialogue.

The inauguration of The Global Cultures Center was an important milestone for the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, as it highlighted the commitment of the organisers and participants to promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding. It also demonstrated the potential of such initiatives to bring people together, promote understanding and cooperation, and build bridges between different cultures and communities. The inauguration was marked by the scientific conference on Culture Heritage in the Euromed region, delivered by high-profile experts such as Maria-Àngels Roque from Spain and Loubna Jouheir Fawaz from Mauritania.

In conclusion, the inauguration of The Global Cultures Center was a significant moment for the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, as it underscored the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding among young people. At the heart of the medina of Sousse, it will serve as a valuable resource for young people who are looking to engage in intercultural learning and exchange and will help to promote a culture of peace and inclusivity.

The Ambassadors for Intercultural Dialogue Elections

During the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, two ambassadors for intercultural dialogue were elected by the participants. The elections were

conducted in two rounds: Imen Doudech from Tunisia and José Juan Núñez Timermans from Spain were chosen as the ambassadors.

This initiative is a testament to the Forum's commitment to promoting intercultural dialogue and collaboration between young people from different regions. The role of the ambassadors is to continue advocating for intercultural understanding and to work towards building bridges between different communities.

The newly-elected ambassadors expressed their gratitude for being chosen and emphasised the importance of continuing to foster intercultural dialogue beyond the Forum. They both affirmed their commitment to using their new roles to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding among young people in their respective countries.

Overall, the election of these ambassadors is a significant step towards creating a more connected and tolerant world, where cultural differences are celebrated and embraced rather than feared or ignored. It is a testament to the power of youth-led initiatives in promoting positive change and building bridges across cultures.

The Ishq Concert

The Euro-Arab Youth Forum concluded on a high note with a memorable closing ceremony that featured the first-ever performance of the Ishq concert. The concert was the result of a series of online meetings, workshops and creative sessions, bringing together 12 musicians from all over the Euromed region to present its musical heritage.

These talented musicians gathered in Sousse for an eight-day musical residency to finalise their artistic creation before presenting it in the prestigious Sousse Archaeological Museum. The residency was a unique opportunity for the musicians to learn from each other and collaborate to create something truly special.

The concert was a celebration of diversity and cultural exchange, and the musicians

expertly fused traditional and contemporary elements of music to create a harmonious blend. The audience was left spellbound by the captivating performances, which showcased the rich cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region.

The Ishq concert was a fitting finale to the Euro-Arab Youth Forum, highlighting the power of intercultural dialogue and the importance of preserving and celebrating our diverse cultural heritage. It served as a reminder that despite the challenges of the post-Covid-19 world, we can come together and create something beautiful when we work collaboratively and celebrate our differences.

Reflections on the Forum

Participants in the Euro-Arab Youth Forum highlighted the value of the event, emphasising the importance of dialogue and exchange in building bridges and promoting understanding across cultures. Many participants spoke about the lasting connections and friendships they formed through the Forum, and the impact of the skills and knowledge they gained in their personal and professional lives.

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One of the key takeaways from the Forum was the importance of interactive exercises in promoting intercultural dialogue. Through activities such as role-playing and group discussions, participants were able to engage with different perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region. Many remarked on the value of this kind of hands-on learning, which allowed them to put theory into practice and develop new skills in communication and cooperation.

Another key reflection from the Forum was that it is becoming an advocacy platform to promote artistic expression and intercultural dialogue. This platform will provide a space for young people from across the region to share their work, exchange ideas, and collaborate on creative projects. Participants were excited about the possibilities this platform presents, seeing it as a powerful tool for promoting understanding and bridging cultural divides.

The Forum also had a wider impact on the communities represented by the participants, with many taking the skills and knowledge they gained back to their home countries to effect change in their communities. By fostering collaboration and collective action, the Forum helped to create a shared sense of purpose around the issues that matter most to the next generation.

Media Coverage

The Euro-Arab Youth Forum held in Sousse, Tunisia, was an important event that attracted many national and international media institutions. The event was covered extensively by various media outlets, including TV stations, newspapers, and online publications.

EU Neighbours South and BBC Media Action were the main media partners of the event, and their involvement helped to raise awareness of the forum and its objectives. Both media organisations are committed to promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, and their support was instrumental in promoting the importance of these values.

In addition to the media partners, many other national and international media institutions were present to cover the event. Interviews were conducted with TV stations, and press

articles were written in *Lapresse*, *Le Temps*, *Alsarih* and *Tuniscope*, among others. These media outlets helped to disseminate information about the forum to a wider audience and highlighted the importance of intercultural dialogue and understanding in today's world.

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The media coverage of the event was a testament to the significance of the Euro-Arab Youth Forum and the important role that young people can play in promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding. The involvement of the media partners and other media institutions helped to raise awareness about the Forum and its objectives, and encouraged young people to get involved in intercultural learning and exchange.

Conclusion

The Euro-Arab Youth Forum is a powerful example of the importance of youth engagement and intercultural dialogue. By bringing together young people from across the Mediterranean, the Forum helped to build bridges between different communities and create a shared sense of purpose around the issues that matter most to the next generation.

As we look to the future, it is clear that events like the Euro-Arab Youth Forum will continue to play an important role in shaping the global conversation around youth empowerment and intercultural dialogue, and in creating a more just, inclusive and sustainable world for all.