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THE QUEST FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN THE  
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION:  
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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*The Quest for Intercultural Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean Region:  
Opportunities and Challenges*

**SALLY KHALIFA ISAAC ATWAN**

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## **Abstract**

This paper tackles the question of intercultural dialogue in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. It focuses mainly on a fundamental point in the now persistent intercultural swing that the Euro-Mediterranean relations have been recently experiencing: that is the opportunities and challenges for an effective intercultural dialogue that could lead to a spill-over effect in this partnership. In this analysis, several sub-topics and questions are clearly brought into focus, among these are: how do security considerations necessitate a vigorous intercultural dialogue in the region?; how do the two sides of the Mediterranean perceive each other?; Is there a shared perception on main concepts, such as “security” and “intercultural dialogue”?; how is the recent debate over the rising importance of cultural factors is mainly derived out of security concerns?; in the same venue, to what extent has the intercultural dialogue has worked as a security building measure?; what are the “dialogue strategies” that are actually in operation to bridge the gap between the two sides of the Mediterranean region?; to what extent are those strategies responding to the need of an effective cultural dialogue?; and finally, what are the opportunities and challenges that exist in the international and regional context that could enable\hinder the two sides of the Mediterranean to deal with cultural issues effectively. These questions are tackled by first analyzing how an effective intercultural dialogue is becoming more and more a necessity in the framework of the EMP, deriving its importance mainly as a security and stability requirement. Then, the analysis brings into focus the experience of intercultural dialogue and its various mechanisms seeking the assessment of their effectiveness and impact. Finally, the paper attempts to investigate into the existing opportunities and challenges that could enable and hinder the two sides of the Mediterranean to deal with cultural issues effectively.

## **Keywords**

Mediterranean, Mediterranean Security, Intercultural dialogue, Euro-Mediterranean relations, Euro-Med Region, Governance in the Euro-Med region



## Premise\*

The Southern Mediterranean countries are of great strategic and security importance to Europe. This importance was reflected in European plans to first establish venues of cooperation with these countries on many dimensions. The most coherent plan appeared first in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 ending with a new formulation of the existing Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) initiated on 13 July 2008 by French President Nicolas Sarkozy as the “Union for the Mediterranean”. Nevertheless, Europe's plans to bring about an effective and strong partnership with the southern Mediterranean countries is being particularly challenged in the last decade by many cultural and social factors that reached their peak in the aftermath of the September 11 events. To these cultural challenges, among other factors, many scholars attribute the stagnation or the spill-around in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership without denying that many cooperation frameworks have been created in the process and that those frameworks could promise a powerful Mediterranean “region”.

This vision of a powerful coherent Mediterranean region appeared possible in the 1990s with the comprehensive Barcelona Declaration although the two shores of the Mediterranean lack much of the theoretical conditions necessary for a successful integration. Of these, steady economic growth, similar types of political systems, similar experiences in historical and internal social development, compatible forms of economic systems, and, most importantly, cultural homogeneity. Still, however, other factors do exist to push for a successful integration. Of these: geographical proximity; heavy political, economic and social connections that link the two sides of the Mediterranean; and a somewhat shared perception of the importance of cooperation for the sake of political, economic and strategic considerations. At least, this last factor could be deemed principal in driving Europe to bolster its bonds with North African and Middle Eastern countries.

However, the absence of cultural homogeneity between the two sides, as previously noted, has always appeared as the foremost impediment during the current decade with the two sides of the Mediterranean looking to each other with mistrust and skepticism. Moreover, this perception is coupled with less supportive public opinion led by not so much enthusiastic leaders on both sides. In Europe, the menace of extremism increasingly mounting from the south Mediterranean and the existence of a sizeable assertive Arab Muslim community - whether through legal or illegal migration - on its territories slowed down Europe's pace in the process. On the other side, the bulk of Arab countries in the southern Mediterranean, governments and societies, look at Europe from what could be called the “Islam versus the West” prism. This perception becomes further strong when these countries in North Africa and the Middle East point a blaming finger at Europe for the deadlock in the peace process and the unabated conflict between the Israeli and the Palestinians.

That said, this paper focuses mainly on a fundamental point in the now persistent intercultural swing that the Euro-Mediterranean relations have been recently experiencing: that is the opportunities and challenges for an effective intercultural dialogue that could lead to a spill-over effect in this partnership. In this analysis, several sub-topics and questions are clearly brought into focus, among these are: how do security considerations necessitate a vigorous intercultural dialogue in the region?; how do the two sides of the Mediterranean perceive each other?; Is there a shared perception on main concepts, such as “security” and “intercultural dialogue”?; how is the recent debate over the rising importance of cultural factors is mainly derived out of security concerns?; in the same venue, to what extent has the intercultural dialogue has worked as a security building measure?; what are the “dialogue strategies” that are actually in operation to bridge the gap between the two sides of the

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\* An earlier version of this paper was presented in Workshop 7: ‘Socio-Economic Dilemma, Cultural Challenges and their International Dimensions’ at the Eleventh Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, 24–27 March 2010, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

Mediterranean region?; to what extent are those strategies responding to the need of an effective cultural dialogue?; and finally, what are the opportunities and challenges that exist in the international and regional context that could enable/hinder the two sides of the Mediterranean to deal with cultural issues effectively?

With all the attention paid to the Euro-Mediterranean relations in the past two decades, reviewing the available literature to date proves that the questions of assessing the experience of intercultural dialogue in the framework of the EMP and identifying possible opportunities and tiring challenges of an effective intercultural dialogue in the post September 11 international and regional context have not been expansively and profoundly examined. Nonetheless, there is rich literature that focuses mainly on why an intercultural dialogue is important in the region, the way Europe and the Arab world see each other, and strategies so far adopted to initiate an intercultural dialogue.

Therefore, the present paper tackles these questions by first analyzing how an effective intercultural dialogue is becoming more and more a necessity in the framework of the EMP, deriving its importance mainly as a security and stability requirement. Then, the analysis brings into focus the experience of intercultural dialogue and its various mechanisms seeking the assessment of their effectiveness and impact. Finally, the present paper attempts to investigate into the existing opportunities and challenges that could enable and hinder the two sides of the Mediterranean to deal with cultural issues effectively.

### **The Quest for Intercultural Dialogue: The Security Enhancing Role of Diversity Management**

From a geopolitics prism, the Mediterranean basin has been historically regarded as one of the most politically and strategically important regions located at the heart of the world. This important region is equally regarded problematic for encompassing two greatly diverse worlds in terms of politics, economics, and cultures that are in the same time separated by the Mediterranean Sea. Tackling issues of cultural diversity, compared to political and economic rapports, has not been included in the political agendas of the Mediterranean countries, in specific those to the North, nor vigorously appeared in debate among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) until the last decade. The September 11 attacks and the resulting war on terrorism reinforced the so-called “*Clash of Civilizations*”, which became better perceived as “*Clash of Religions*”. These attacks and their aftermath, represented in the United States led war on terrorism, have produced depressing repercussions on relations, in general, and on intercultural dialogue, in particular, between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

In 1995, the clear interest of the European Union (EU) in extending cooperative relations with the Southern Mediterranean could be perceived as an attempt of that rising economic and political power to search for a zone of political and economic influence. However, in the aftermath of September 11, the EU attempts to enhance and develop the EMP is better perceived as a security derived concern. According to Nicolaidis' analysis, “it is right to analyze the EMP not simply as a functional project, but also through the twin lens of power and culture”.<sup>1</sup> The significance of intercultural dialogue is further stressed, noting that the southern Mediterranean is perceived to be a direct threat to the North, being capable of spreading extremism and exporting instability, while the southern Mediterranean countries look to the North with much skepticism of its intensions and willingness to impose its hegemony over the region.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis and Dimitri Nicolaidis, “The EuroMed beyond Civilisational Paradigms.” In: Adler and Crawford (eds.) (2004) **The Convergence of Civilizations? Constructing a Mediterranean Region**. Palgrave-Macmillan. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/ramses/nicolaidis.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Emr Ye Bagdagul Ormanci (2000). Mediterranean Security Concerns and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, p. 25. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/ormanci.pdf>

It therefore becomes valid to conclude that intercultural dialogue is becoming more and more a necessity for the security and stability of the Mediterranean region. Two main factors do exist to support this conception:

*First: a vigorous intercultural dialogue is necessary for Europe's search for a zone of political and economic influence in the Mediterranean.* As the Mediterranean is considered significantly strategic not only in political and economic sense, but also in cultural terms to the EU,<sup>3</sup> a successful intercultural dialogue that better provides understanding and mutual respect between the two sides of the Mediterranean constitutes an underpinning for an authentic and balanced partnership. It is equally considered a fundamental prerequisite for the EU to carve out a new sphere of potentially vast influence in the Mediterranean basin and cultivate special political and economic rapports further to the southern Mediterranean countries.<sup>4</sup> The importance of managing cultural diversity has therefore been among the main principles established by the Barcelona Declaration, those regarding the cultural and human dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean process, as was underlined by the many Euro-Med conferences of the ministers of culture and foreign affairs.

*Second: The upsurge of Islamic extremism as a threat emanating principally from the southern Mediterranean poses serious security risks to Europe.* These threats, coupled with the existence of a sizeable assertive Arab Muslim community in Europe, puts the need to manage cultural diversity through dialogue and cooperation at the forefront on the EU political and security agenda. The rising cultural antagonism between the two shores of the Mediterranean, particularly after the events of September 11, and the repeatedly debated cultural and religious confrontation between the two sides as merely “Islam versus the West” ruin all cooperative efforts meant to enhance the EMP.

Accordingly, one can easily conclude that an effective intercultural dialogue is important to better manage diversity and pave the road for a stable Mediterranean. According to this conception, intercultural dialogue has actually a security enhancing role and is an inseparable component of regional integration.<sup>5</sup> By working as a Confidence Building Measure (CBM), an effective intercultural dialogue serves the security and stability of the Mediterranean region and, if successful, would have a spillover effect on other aspects of cooperation in the framework of the EMP.

### **Assessing the Experience: Strategies of Intercultural Dialogue in the Framework of the EMP**

Ever since the birth of the EMP there have been many instruments to manage diversity and enhance cultural understanding in the Mediterranean region. Most of these dialogue strategies came under the spotlight in the aftermath of September 11 and the U.S. led war on terrorism in order to cope with the rising civilizational and cultural confrontation that have dominated the international scene. These strategies could be grouped in the following categories:

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Astrid B Boening (May 2008). Vortex of a Regional Security Complex: The EuroMed Partnership and its Security Relevance. **Miami-Florida European Union Center of Excellence**. Vol. 5, No. 11. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www6.miami.edu/eucenter/BoeningRegSecComplex08EUMAedi.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Carapico (Autumn 2001). Euro-Med: European Ambitions in the Mediterranean. **Middle East Report**, No. 220, p. 25. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559407>

<sup>5</sup> Cf.: Emanuel Adler and Beverly Crawford (2002). “Constructing a Mediterranean Region: A Cultural Approach”. Conference on **The Convergence of Civilizations? Constructing a Mediterranean Region**, Arrábida Monastery, Fundação Oriente, Lisboa, Portugal, pp. 3-8. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://ies.berkeley.edu/research/MeditAdlerCrawford.pdf>

## 1. Legislation

Before talking about bilateral and multilateral dialogue forums, it is worth mentioning that among the instruments employed by the EU to, among other factors, prepare the grounds for a reinvigorated intercultural dialogue with the Southern Mediterranean countries is legislating rules that address the specific problem of religious minorities in Europe. Among these rules, is the *directive prohibiting discrimination in employment on grounds of religion and belief, disability, age and sexual orientation*. These new rules constituted the employment law part of a general anti-discrimination package proposed by the European Commission on 25th November 1999. The resulting directives are the EC Race discrimination Directive 2000/43 adopted on 29th June 2000 and the EC Equal Treatment Framework Directive 2000/78 adopted on 27th November 2000.<sup>6</sup> This legislation is meant to stress the EU's respect for specifically religious minorities, among which is the sizable Arab Muslim community on its territories. Yet, a major setback to these legislations could be detected in the aftermath of the September 11 events. Therefore, the post September 11 international and regional context is further tackled in the following pages as a major challenge to an effective intercultural dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

## 2. Institutionalized Multilateral Intercultural Forums

A prominent example in place is the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF), which represents a multilateral forum shared and resourced by over forty Euro-Mediterranean countries, to bring people together as a way to promote dialogue between cultures and respect for diversity. The Foundation has been created to act as a central actor of the EMP cultural relations and a facilitator of the participation of civil society in the process. This is mainly through coordinating network gathering hundreds of social and institutional bodies which share the values of the Foundation and work to make dialogue, peace and prosperity possible in the region.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the ALF has been working as a centre for information and dissemination of this initiative, and as an observatory of intercultural dialogue in the region. The fields of action of the ALF in this context include:<sup>8</sup>

- *Ideas and Ideologies*, through challenging trends of xenophobia, populism and different forms of extremism by inviting intellectuals, writers and leading figures who contribute to shape public opinions in the region to write and speak in various forms of discussion forums.
- *Education*: the ALF has worked in the field of Education, with the goal of training teachers of the region in teaching diversity. This, according to the foundation, has produced some important pedagogical and networking outputs, by bringing together those pedagogical and academic courses and practices which are enlightening on how to cope with intercultural challenges, and how to develop learning tools to better understand social, cultural and religious complexity.
- *Cultural Production*: In this respect the ALF works to build cultural bridges to ensure that Music, Cinema, Literature and Arts become a tool of better knowledge and cultural dialogue. Also, one of the most important tasks of the ALF in the cultural field is to coordinate its action with the *ad hoc* Euro-Med Expert Group, as decided at the Marseille Ministerial Meeting (November 2008), with the purpose of drawing a cultural regional strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> Discrimination Directives 2000, Directives, **European Law**. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.emplaw.co.uk/content/index?startpage=data/dec99009.htm>, See also: European Union Anti-Discrimination Policies and the Transposition of Council Directives into National Legislation by Member States, (November 2003). **Youth Forum Jeunesse**, Bureau Position Meeting, Brussels. [http://www.youthforum.org/ft/system/files/yfj\\_public/strategic\\_priorities/en/0684-03%20.pdf](http://www.youthforum.org/ft/system/files/yfj_public/strategic_priorities/en/0684-03%20.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Cf.: The Official Website of the **Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures**, at: <http://www.euromedalex.org/profile>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

- *Media*: In collaboration with Media owners, journalists and Media experts, the ALF is working to understand better the commercial, political and professional mechanisms which are decisive for the setting of the cultural agenda and the use of language from written and audiovisual Media. The common goal is giving the Media a positive role in the creation of a shared space of free and reliable information and opinion. To reach that goal, the ALF is closely collaborating with the Euro-med Media Task Force which has involved more than 500 journalists of the Euro-Med countries in its activities.
- *Religion, Spirituality and Values*: working to stress commons and understand diversity through the organization of events in which the religious representatives can discuss related issues.

### **3. Bilateral Arrangements/Action Plans**

Beside this institutionalized multilateral forum, other bilateral arrangements have been sought and established. These are the so called “Action Plans”, organizing different aspects of cooperation – being political, economic, social and cultural – between the EU on the one hand and single South Mediterranean countries on the other. Taking the example of the EU/Egypt Action Plan, one can detect that cultural relations have been stated among the priorities as well as the stated actions. As a priority, the two parties agree to “improve the dialogue between cultures and religions, cooperate in the fight against intolerance, discrimination, racism and xenophobia and in the promotion of respect for religions and cultures. Such priorities would be pursued based on the principles of respect, understanding and equality”.<sup>9</sup> As stated actions, the two parties agree to:

- Support the Egyptian government efforts to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with international conventions to which Egypt is party and to elaborate a human rights strategy in partnership with the NCHR and with appropriate consultation of other relevant organizations;
- Cooperate to combat all forms of discrimination, intolerance, racism and xenophobia and in particular hate or defamatory discourse based on religion, beliefs, race or origin, inter alia through exchange of best practices and legislative action, as required;
- Strengthen the role of media in combating xenophobia and discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or culture and assume its responsibilities in this regard.
- Ensure an effective management of migration flows;
- Exchange of information and experiences on legal migration, entry and stay, integration, reunification of family, inventory of existing routes and commitments made by Member States;
- Enhance cooperation to facilitate the legal movement of people between Egypt and the EU through strengthening of the concerned institutions dealing with the promotion of employment, capacity building, as well as providing information about the employment opportunities for labor migrants in the EU, risks of smuggling and trafficking of migrants; ensuring fair treatment of legal Egyptian migrants, and facilitate the flow of remittance transfers;
- Exchange of information and promotion of co-operation on transit migration;
- Cooperate in combating illegal immigration into Egypt and the European Union;
- Exchange of information and experiences on migratory movements, illegal migration including the scale of illegal immigration into and via Egypt;
- Pursue and support effort to prevent and counter illegal migration into Egypt and the European Union;

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<sup>9</sup> **EU-Egypt Action Plan**, European Neighborhood Policy. Retrieved December 2009 from: [http://www.mfti.gov.eg/English/agreements/Egypt\\_EU\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.mfti.gov.eg/English/agreements/Egypt_EU_Action_Plan.pdf)

- Develop a dialogue and cooperation to curb illegal migration flows, including in the regional context.<sup>10</sup>

Although the preceding articles of the EU/Egypt action plan succeed to manage certain aspects related to illegal migration due to involved governmental commitment, other aspects related to enhancing intercultural dialogue and relations remain without clear policy guidelines or *modus operandi* leading to their effective implementation.

#### 4. Inter-Governmental Organized Discussion Forums

Another instrument to enhance intercultural dialogue in the framework of the EMP is the organization of conferences and various forms of discussion forums between the official representatives of the EMP countries. Those may be ministers of culture or of foreign affairs as well as representatives of regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the EU and the League of Arab States. In addition, the Council of Europe is developing a “strategy on democratic management of diversity”, and the European Commission presented, at the meeting of the Euro-Med Committee on 22 February 2006, a “Decalogue” of instruments, regrouping ten Euro-Med regional programs, projects and networks. The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures - which is discussed separately in the preceding lines – is another EU created forum to manage an effective intercultural dialogue.<sup>11</sup> Beside this set of dialogue forums sponsored mainly by the EU, other international actors are getting much involved in the process. Worth mentioning in this place are: The United Nations decision to establish a High Level Group on the Spanish-Turkish proposal for an “Alliance of Civilizations”; the Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organizations of the Arab League (ALECSO); the Educational, Cultural and Scientific programs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (ISESCO), which are all notable examples.

No doubt that these forums of discussion are important as effective tools for stirring debate on the many cultural and social problems hanging in the throat of the Mediterranean, particularly that the convening parties are decision makers. However, the issued recommendations of these forums are rarely adopted by EMP governments nor do they appear in the shape of tangible actions. Hence, these conferences risk appearing as *per forma* forums of discussions. Even when these forums are established as a result of governmental or inter-governmental initiative, rather than being a periodical one, such as the joint initiative of Austria and the League of Arab States in 2008, conference discussions and recommendations get to only identify the weaknesses and problems to tackle in the framework of cultural and social dialogue. This is a good achievement in itself, but only as a start. Still, however, no clear policy guidelines are offered to or adopted by decision makers in a tangible manner.

The following, for instance, are some of the principal recommendations adopted by the participating countries at the joint initiative of Austria and the League of Arab States in 2008:<sup>12</sup>

- Undertake curriculum reform for state, private and religious schools to include civil and human rights, cultural tolerance, understanding and acceptance.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Traugott Schoefthaler (2006). Challenges in Assuring the Dialogue Between Cultures, Alexandria: **Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures**, p. 5. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/files/53755/11840807615Schoefthaler.pdf/Schoefthaler.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Report on the Conference: “**Europe and the Arab World - Connecting Partners in Dialogue**”, Joint Initiative of Austria and the League of Arab States, Vienna, 17-19 December 2008. Retrieved December 2009 from: [http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:jSmzAVBTXijMJ:www.euromedi.org/attivita/link.asp%3Flink%3D1664\\_OCR00009.doc%26idevento%3D1664+%22Europe+and+the+Arab+World+-+Connecting+Partners+in+Dialogue%22,+Joint+Initiative+of+Austria+and+the+League+of+Arab+States,+Vienna,+17-19+December+2008&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=eg](http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:jSmzAVBTXijMJ:www.euromedi.org/attivita/link.asp%3Flink%3D1664_OCR00009.doc%26idevento%3D1664+%22Europe+and+the+Arab+World+-+Connecting+Partners+in+Dialogue%22,+Joint+Initiative+of+Austria+and+the+League+of+Arab+States,+Vienna,+17-19+December+2008&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=eg)

- Establish twinning and mentorship programs between European and Arab state institutions, companies and civil societies.
- Utilize and expand existing scholarship schemes, and provide equal access for women to scholarships and bilingual exchange programs, and enhance exchanges in language, cultural, social and natural sciences, technology, law, and theology.
- Fund joint art and media productions that promote cultural understanding, overcome stereotypes, and strengthen relationships and bonds among citizens in European and Arab countries.
- Promote initiatives to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations. Also, encourage the empowerment of civil society and their full participation in public life as an important contribution towards the strengthening of the social fabric and the stability and credibility of the state in general. In the same venue, cooperation between civil society organizations in the Arab world and Europe should be supported in order to strengthen pluralism, democracy and in confronting terrorism and extremism.
- Empowering young people across the Arab world and Europe irrespective of their racial, religious, or linguistic affiliations.
- Promote the use of the UNESCO sponsored Manual on Human Rights Education as a tool for concrete training programs both in Europe and the Arab world.
- Calling upon European and Arab governments and institutions to adopt, fund, follow up and monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

These recommendations demonstrate the awareness of the participants of the need to reform and work on enhancing civic rapport. However, these recommendations, as they are named, remain advisory ones that require political will and enabled civil society to be able to interpret them into fruitful actions. Reaching consensus on universal values is already established, but what is urgently needed in the region is consensus on “a common language for cultural differences” that should be worked on “if dialogue between cultures should make sense and provide instruments for coping with critical moments of confrontation.”<sup>13</sup>

Reviewing another case of these inter-governmental organized discussion forums, which is the reputable conferences of Foreign Affairs Ministers, leads to the same conclusion. The following are the conclusions of the 8th Euro-Mediterranean Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in November 2006.<sup>14</sup>

- Ministers underline the need to further strengthen the intercultural dialogue, through the work of the Euro-Mediterranean Anna Lindh Foundation for dialogue between cultures and through the development of the Cultural Heritage programme. They agree to intensify efforts by launching a series of initiatives for combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia, as well as rejecting extremist views, preventing all forms of incitement to hatred, violence and terrorism, which divide peoples across the Mediterranean. They also undertake to promote the culture of dialogue, ensuring a better knowledge, mutual understanding, freedom and respect for all religions, other beliefs and cultures among Euro-Mediterranean peoples, embracing their cultural diversity. The 35 networks of the ALF (which now include more than 1000 organisations) and the Euromed Heritage Programme should play an important role in this regard.
- Ministers take note of the ideas/proposals put forward at the meeting of Heads of Networks. The ALF is invited to contribute in the preparations of the ‘2008 EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue’. Ministers invite Euromed Ministers of Culture to hold a meeting in Greece, to discuss the Barcelona Process intercultural agenda, examine the results of the first 3 years of the Anna Lindh

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<sup>13</sup> Traugott Schoefthaler, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> **Conclusions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs**, Tampere, 27-28 November 2006. Retrieved December 2009 from: [http://www.epuf.org/media/documents/2006\\_tampere\\_conclusions.pdf](http://www.epuf.org/media/documents/2006_tampere_conclusions.pdf)

Foundation as well as the possibility of creating synergy with other initiatives such as the follow-up to the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and the UN Alliance of Civilisations. Furthermore, Ministers invite Euromed Partners to reflect on the possible creation of a Euromed Youth Parliament, which could hold its first meeting in 2007. Ministers also take note of the designation of Algiers as the capital of Arab culture in 2007.

- Ministers also give their support to the need to strengthen youth exchanges, e.g. the launching of a scholarship scheme for the academic year 2007-2008, as a valuable tool to realise these objectives as well as to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue to take place in 2008. It is most beneficial for mutual understanding that such exchanges take place between all Euromed countries.
- Ministers also take note of the Alliance of Civilisations initiative co-sponsored by Turkey and Spain and of the report issued by the High-Level Group on the Alliance of Civilisations on 13th November 2006 to the Secretary General of the UN.
- Euromed and the Media initiative will continue its work in exploring ways of, inter alia, enhancing the role of the media for the development of intercultural dialogue. To this end the task force would meet again in 2007 to analyse the work done in the national media consultations. They will prepare practical proposals on this subject, and others in the fields of assisting independent information providers and increasing access and quality of information for Euromed citizens. These results will be presented and discussed at the Senior Officials level in preparation to a Euromed conference on media in 2007.

These conclusions equally demonstrate the awareness of these officials of major directions to which the efforts of the governments they represent should be directed at as well as the mechanisms through which their intercultural aspirations could be realized. Still, however, tangible results are lacking. Perhaps, much of the explanation of this contradiction between declared policy orientations and actual results on the ground, which still indicate cultural antagonism and confrontation between the two sides of the Mediterranean, could be found in the structural impediments inherited in the regional and international context, which, among other factors, are tackled in the following pages as tiring challenges for a successful intercultural dialogue.

### ***5. Civil Society Cooperation***

Other forums of discussion that are believed to be of major support in enhancing cultural relations and dialogue in the EMP are initiated and organized by CSOs. The awareness of the crucial role of CSOs in bridging the gap between the two sides of the Mediterranean has been clearly stressed ever since the birth of the EMP in 1995. Regional meetings of CSOs in the Civil Fora, or the Forum Civil Euromed (FCE), have accompanied the regularly held Euro-Med conferences of Foreign Affairs Ministers to determine key directions of cooperation in the Barcelona Process.<sup>15</sup> The northern Mediterranean in particular, due to its democratic character and set up, has been working to promote a number of civil society programs out of its conviction that participatory mechanisms offered by various civil society actors are able to further enhance different aspects of cooperation in the framework of the EMP, particularly those aspects related to social and cultural rapports. Among these programs are those launched by the EU itself to encourage regional exchange between civil societies in the Euro-Mediterranean region, such as Euro-Med Audiovisual, Euro-Med Youth and Euro-Med Heritage.<sup>16</sup> The EU did not only take initiatives to enhance relations between CSOs across the Euro-Med area, but

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<sup>15</sup> Bettina Huber (2004) *Governance, Civil Society and Security in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Lessons for a More Effective Partnership*. **Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik**, Berlin, p. 7. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.euromesco.net/media/euromescopaper39.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

also between the local authorities of these countries. This is through the new pilot initiative of decentralized cooperation between local authorities, MED'ACT launched in 2003.<sup>17</sup> Also worth mentioning is the notable Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform<sup>18</sup> the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network,<sup>19</sup> and the Euro-Med Civil Forum. These forums are designed and set up as a network of CSOs and activists in many countries concerned with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. They believe in strengthening participation of civil society in the decision-making process of the EMP, particularly the civil society in the south and the new member states, providing it with the necessary legal and practical means to act. Their activities range from the organization of conferences, workshops, and training courses to issuing periodic newsletters and reports. In effect, and following on Huber's analysis, civil societies of the region are indispensable for greater understanding and closeness between cultures, and it is indeed considered one of the mechanisms necessary to "diminish security risks and promote stability in the region in the long run".<sup>20</sup>

However, criticism has been on the peak in the last few years for the growing marginalization and the diminishing role of civil society actors in the governing bodies of the EMP. This is mainly because of the many difficulties encountered by civil society actors on the southern side of the Mediterranean as a result of either their authoritarian governments that tend to prevent these independent actors from participating in meetings organized within the EMP,<sup>21</sup> or because of the growing body of restrictions imposed by the Northern side on their free mobility, even though these CSOs have democratic and secular agendas. These challenges have significantly undermined human exchanges, and endangered artistic, scientific and educational exchanges between the two sides of the region.<sup>22</sup> Because of these challenges, the impact of the role of civil society in bolstering cultural and social ties between the North and the South seems to be ineffective. The same conclusion reached on the efficiency of inter-governmental discussion forums is therefore pertinent to the case of civil society cooperation: "there has been much talk of reform in the region but very little actual reform".<sup>23</sup>

## **6. Scientific Cooperation and Educational Exchange Programs**

One of the greatly prominent instruments to bridge the gap between the peoples of the Mediterranean region and to enhance the understanding of commonalities and differences is scientific cooperation and educational exchange programs. In this respect, a number of initiatives and programs have been launched to contribute to enhancing cultural exchange and dialogue in the region. Among these are the European Training Foundation ETF, an agency of the European Union established to contribute to the development of the education and training systems of the EU partner countries with the mission of "helping transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labor market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cf.: The Official Website of the **Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform**, at: <http://www.euromedplatform.org/spip/spip.php?rubrique183>

<sup>19</sup> Cf.: The Official Website of the **Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network**, at: <http://en.euromedrights.org/>

<sup>20</sup> Bettina Huber, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Annette Jünemann. The Forum Civil Euromed: Critical Watchdog and Intercultural Mediator, in: Panebianco, Stefania (Hrsg.): **A new Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Cultural Identity**. Franc Cass, London 2003. Retrieved January 2010 from: [www.hsu-hh.de/download-1.4.1.php?brick\\_id=v5BiAKIaiDgurdjtj](http://www.hsu-hh.de/download-1.4.1.php?brick_id=v5BiAKIaiDgurdjtj)

<sup>22</sup> Ridha Kéfi (2009). From the Barcelona Process to the Union for the Mediterranean: Civil Society in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Retrieved January 2010 from: <http://www.iemed.org/anuari/2009/aarticles/a82.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Bettina Huber. Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> The Official Website of the **European Training Foundation (ETF)**, at: [http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/AboutETF\\_EN?OpenDocument](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/AboutETF_EN?OpenDocument)

Another important program is the EU Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies (TEMPUS) that was opened to the Euro-Med region in 2003.<sup>25</sup> Being financed by the Joint European Projects (JEP), these educational programs, such as the case of the Master of Euro-Mediterranean Studies (MastEuroMed) at Cairo University, aims at creating a favorable environment for enhancing intercultural dialogue.

In this regard, TEMPUS has created new great opportunities for cooperation between European institutions and south Mediterranean Universities. Added to this, are many other specialized educational programs, particularly in the post-graduate level, that allow for the exchange of scholars across the two shores of the Mediterranean. The efficiency of this type of exchange programs is further enhanced in the framework of bilateral arrangements launched between the EU and single south Mediterranean countries. For example, according to the EU-Egypt Action Plan, the two parties agree to:<sup>26</sup>

1. Continue and enhance a policy dialogue between EU and Egyptian authorities in the field of education and training;
2. Continue to reform primary and secondary education to improve quality, especially through continuing decentralization and community involvement and human resources development for teachers and professors, as well as technical vocational education and training (TVET) to make it more responsive to market needs in the context of the Egyptian national educational standards;
3. Reform higher education in line with the principles of Bologna process to improve internal and external efficiency. Foster the development of human resources and human capital, and promote the reform of higher education through the TEMPUS program; ensure the integration of the social dimension in educational planning and programs.

Nevertheless, actual experience proves that these regional exchange programs have been limited to a few sectors of societies - such as heritage workers, film makers, top university students and teachers - and that few individuals have been benefiting out of its virtues.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, restrictions imposed on the mobility of individuals in the region further refrain progress on this front. In conclusion, and following Nicolaidis' analysis "it would be naïve to believe that such formations can itself create "w-ness" in the region. Nevertheless, they serve to reflect and amplify the various presuppositions of the partners involved and the undercurrents shared among intellectuals and activists co-opted in its operation".<sup>28</sup>

In final analysis, certain remarks could be delineated on the experience of intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region: the socio-cultural basket has been generally under-funded compared to other aspects of political and economic cooperation; civic activities have been limited by the highly centralized Euro-Med dialogue in a manner that greatly undermines the credibility of the rhetoric on the need to give space to various types of CSOs to achieve the objectives of the third basket of the EMP;<sup>29</sup> and the restrictions imposed on the mobility of groups and individuals in the region has worked as a significant impediment on an effective intercultural dialogue. On the part of the EU, numerous initiatives and programs have been launched, and a set of rules and regulations organizing immigration control, social affairs, and cultural external relations have been developed. However, no clear actions appear to be resulting from these separate initiatives, which aim at developing human resources and promote understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies.

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<sup>25</sup> Bettina Huber. Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> **EU-Egypt Action Plan**, op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> Bettina Huber. Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis and Dimitri Nicolaidis, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Carapico. Op.cit., p. 26.

## **Opportunities and Challenges for an Effective Intercultural Dialogue:**

Based on the preceding analysis as well as the scrutiny and assessment of instruments employed to forge and enhance the intercultural dialogue in the EMP framework, the following is an attempt to identify opportunities and challenges inherent in the international and regional contexts, which could enable/hinder the two sides of the Mediterranean to deal with cultural issues effectively.

### ***1. Existing Opportunities:***

***1. The multilateralism that the EU represent in its dialogue with the southern Arab-Muslim countries:*** Unlike the unilateralism that has mostly characterized US hegemonic rapprochement of the southern Mediterranean region, specially under the George W. Bush Administration in the aftermath of September 11 - which is among the factors contributing to widespread anti Americanism in the region - the EU represents a somewhat “moral leadership” in the region aided by its inherent character as a multilateral actor. This is not to advocate that Europeans are immune to “what they hope are purely anti-American sentiments”.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, it is indeed an opportunity to Europeans both to act as an alternative and perhaps counterweight to the United States in the region,<sup>31</sup> and to attribute more credibility to their various mechanisms of intercultural dialogue in the framework of the EMP. Although this is indeed an opportunity for the EU that increases its ability to act, it should not be overestimated. This is because the crucial political and strategic role that the United States plays in the southern Mediterranean, better to be referred to in this place as the MENA region, gives the United States a greater clout in the region and renders its status quasi invulnerable to Europe as a competitor.

***2. Ills to handle identified and mechanisms to heal them established:*** A major achievement of the EMP experience in coping with cultural challenges - as demonstrated in issued recommendations, conference conclusions, various programs reports and scope of work - that ill to handle are clearly identified. Enough to mention that there is a consensus in the EMP countries that diversity is inherent in all societies, which requires diversity management tools that are based on human dignity, equality and non-discrimination. In addition, there is a clear perception on both sides of the Mediterranean of the main issues to tackle for a successful intercultural dialogue. These common issues are increasingly brought into focus and discussion in European-Arab forums, including diversity management mechanisms, violations of minority rights, gender equity, and empowering civil society. Undeniably, the variety of established programs, forums and institutions to tackle these ill is a good asset and an existing opportunity that should be further developed and empowered in order to become effective multilateral forums not only for dialogue but also for action.

### ***2. Challenges to Tackle:***

***1. The heated cultural and religious antagonism as the dominant characteristic setting the stage for the international system in the aftermath of September 11***

The US led war on terrorism and its implications of implicit connotation of the West being in confrontation/war with Islam influenced intercultural dialogue between the EU and south Mediterranean Muslim Arab countries, even so the EU has adopted an approach founded on the notion of dialogue among cultures and sought a multilateral action.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis and Dimitri Nicolaidis, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Sara Silvestri (November 2005). EU Relations with Islam in the Context of the EMP's Cultural Dialogue. **Mediterranean Politics**, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 385, retrieved December 2009 from: [http://www.city.ac.uk/intpol/dps/WorkingPapers/Silvestri\\_MED\\_POLITICS.pdf](http://www.city.ac.uk/intpol/dps/WorkingPapers/Silvestri_MED_POLITICS.pdf)

Indeed, the upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism materialized in terrorist Islamic organizations, especially in the aftermath of September 11, has contributed to slowing down the pace of intercultural dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean. It became further unavoidable to all actors in the Mediterranean to take into account the growing hegemonic presence and actions of the United States in the region, backing down EU actions and working to marginalize intercultural dialogue in the EMP itself.<sup>33</sup> Added to this is that despite of the apparent civilizational approach adopted by the EU, the latter has inevitably embraced ample restrictions on the mobility of and exchange programs for groups and individuals (in particular of students, scholars, researchers, artists, and journalists) in the Mediterranean region. This has been noticeably manifested in the regulations stipulated by the EU under the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ), which was introduced into the EU Treaty framework by the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. It incorporates migration law, family reunion law, asylum law, police cooperation, and cooperation in criminal law. Particularly, the AFSJ took on measures to organize aspects of immigration and borders control in addition to the development of security and anti-terrorism procedures, which are of major tension in its social and cultural relations with its Arab partners.<sup>34</sup> Noting the sizable Arab Muslim community in the European continent and the initiated social and cultural venues of cooperation between the EU and these Arab countries, the adopted measures to control immigration and restrict mobility of peoples from the south into the EU were perceived “as an attempt to create a cultural barrier between those who are seen as European and those perceived as the others”.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, mounting criticism from Muslim Arab associations has become louder, the EU “discriminatory practices as violating civil rights and fundamental freedoms”.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, these cultural barriers have been perceived in the south “as the factor, which destroys all possibility of partnership in a common Mediterranean heritage and environment”.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, these measures have contributed to widening instead of bridging the gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean. In fact, this challenge poses itself as one of the most persistent and important challenges to a successful intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region. This is because the EU appears to be torn between two contradicting “measures” that serve its security; the first is intercultural dialogue as a confidence building measure and hence a security measure, while the second is stipulating and putting into effect a wide range of anti-terrorism regulations that unavoidably work against an effective intercultural dialogue and greatly diminish the EU credibility in that dialogue.

**2. The absence of a common strategic language and of a common language to handle cultural differences.** Although, there is a consensus in the region on what could be referred to as “universal values” as well as a clear identification of the ills to handle in an intercultural dialogue, still there is a divergence in European and Arab perceptions on how to approach cultural differences in a common language. This challenge is further aggravated by the fact that there is no consensus among the two sides of the Mediterranean on the essence of basic fundamental concepts, such as “security considerations” or “threats” to the region. Added to the complexity of this challenge the fact that achieving this “*common strategic language*”<sup>38</sup> on security considerations is highly challenging. This is because the main sources of security concern in the north are majorly different from those in the south. While in the north the EU is preoccupied with rising extremism, chaos and instability emanating from the south and the potential of these elements to breed security risks, the Arabs focus on the enduring

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<sup>33</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis and Dimitri Nicolaidis, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Cf.: Neil Walker (ed.) (2004). **Europe's Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice**. Oxford University Press

<sup>35</sup> Sara Silvestri. Op. cit., p. 388.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 388.

<sup>37</sup> Emr Ye Bagdagul Ormanci, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Carlos Echeverria Jesus (1996). Euro- Mediterranean Political Relations: Confidence and Security-Building Measures. **Halki International Seminars**, p. 2. Retrieved December 2009 from: <http://www.eliamep.gr/old-site/eliamep/old/eliamep/www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/files/OP97.7.pdf>

Israeli occupation of Arab lands; the political agenda of Iran – rather than its attempts to develop nuclear weapons; repercussions of the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan; and many other security concerns that emanate mainly from inside the region. As one scholar put it: “the tensions existing between and within the North African and Middle Eastern countries themselves account for the core of their security concerns.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the divergence in security perceptions and the absence of a “common strategic language” is considered a main challenge that these countries, particularly those to the North, are required to tackle first in order to add to gain political support and credibility for a successful intercultural dialogue.

3. Apart from geographical fitness, ***the exclusion of some Arab states from the EMP frame, while including Israel, is deeply criticized in the South and regarded as a Western attempt to divide the Arab world.*** This in fact, and according to Nicolaidis' analysis, leads to conclude that “the EMP unavoidably creates new exclusionary boundaries.”<sup>40</sup>

4. ***The colonial history has continuously fueled an atmosphere of mistrust, especially in moments of cultural confrontation between Europe and the Muslim world.*** Generally, this colonial legacy has been considered one of the major factors explaining mounting cultural and civilizational antagonism between Europe and the Muslim world. This element continues to fuel suspicion and mistrust of the Europeans initiatives to disseminate its values, norms, structures, and institutions to the southern partners.<sup>41</sup>

5. Related to the preceding point is that, in terms of international political economy, ***the North-South prism through which the Euro-Med relation has usually been perceived undermines an effective intercultural dialogue.*** The divergence in economic systems as well as levels of development contributes to an ever “hierarchical North-South or core-periphery dynamic”,<sup>42</sup> which further fuels suspicious of south Mediterranean countries of the intentions and credibility of that hegemonic power to the north.

6. ***The under-funding*** - as an indicator of EU ranking of priorities in its relations with the southern Mediterranean - of activities listed under the third social and cultural basket of the EMP compared to other political and economic baskets greatly undermines the authenticity of an effective intercultural dialogue.

7. ***The divergence in political systems between North and South is another persistent challenge to an effective intercultural dialogue.*** In light of the prevailing authoritarian rule in most Arab countries involved in the EMP, advocating democratization, respect for human rights and minorities, empowerment of women as agents for change, educational reform, and inclusion of civil society actors is becoming an empty talk. Apart from restrictions on the freedom of mobility from the South to the North, evidence proves that governments in the south object to the flow of resources to non-governmental entities on their territories.<sup>43</sup> Noting the fact that the EU itself is not willing to genuinely advocate democratization and human rights in the Southern countries because of the political and strategic importance of the authoritarian regimes there makes the talk about intercultural dialogue rather a practice between the elites of these countries and a constant rhetoric empty of substance.

8. Intercultural dialogue is challenged by ***the mainstream trend to focus on what cultures and religions have in common***, rather than what are the differences, how to understand and accept the other as is and how to manage diversity. Related to this point is the prevailing either ignorance or

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Kalypto Nicolaidis and Dimitri Nicolaidis, op.cit., p.15.

<sup>41</sup> Emr Ye Bagdagul Ormanci, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Sheila Carapico. Op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

intolerance about sensitive issues linked to religions and others' sacred beliefs,<sup>44</sup> which leads to rendering many forms of intercultural dialogue rather superficial.

### **List of Abbreviations**

AFSJ	Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
ALF	Anna Lindh Foundation
CBMs	Confidence Building Measures
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EC	European Community
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
Euro-Med	Euro-Mediterranean
FCE	Forum Civil Euromed
JEPs	Joint European Projects
MED'ACT	Euro-Mediterranean Local Authorities Project
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NCHR	National Center for Human Rights
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
TEMPUS	Trans European Mobility Program for University Studies
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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<sup>44</sup> Traugott Schoefthaler, *op.cit.*, p.6.

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