

# End of the Day in the Mediterranean

**Francisco Ferrero.** Director of the Instituto Cervantes in Brussels

The Mediterranean is a sea replete with stories and legends, full of wisdom of the different civilisations that have populated it over the centuries. Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians or Carthaginians have carried their knowledge across the sea and have transmitted it to their neighbouring peoples, and these meetings and influences have resulted in as many dialogues as wars. The Mediterranean, therefore, is a sea that stores the best and the worst of its peoples, the diversity of the cultures watched over by its shores. This is why it is important to learn from this past, to unearth memory in order to continue advancing towards an understanding of the other, as well as the preservation of the Mediterranean identity.

Night will come, light will go to rest, we will free ourselves of lies in sleep and breathe the peace of things, the murmur of the sea, and the goodness of the hours. Thousands of worlds will inhabit our imagination and a thousand ghosts will visit us. Then, perhaps, we will descend or fall into the abysses of the unknown which in the morning we will forget. This is how the day will end and then others and yet others will come in this absurd chain that marks the rhythm of our solitary soul, the chant of the spirit, recollections, imagination, *that mad girl in the house*, to quote Saint Teresa. These are the enigmas of the Mediterranean Sea that, inhabited by ghosts, returns them to us today and shows us the way so that we may meet, talk, hold out our arms and desires and walk together. The Mediterranean Sea, two shores and in between an enormous tongue of water that with its immense lips moves close to and away from worlds that should be brothers and not fight but share the same mouth, that same tongue.

A tired sea and in need of understanding, replete with stories and sadness, of sunken ships, buried among worlds of coral, seaweed and sand that conceal jealously-guarded tragedies. Civilisations lost in the depths, among shoals of fish moving along en masse, almost asphyxiated by pollution, and high above, the clarity of a radiant sky. This old Mediterranean, with an undulating beard, observing the strange diversity, which invites us to come closer to it, which tempts us to bathe in its waters and discover its peoples.

The Mediterranean Sea, which seeks to be path, meeting, hope and future and which I now contemplate from the plane, descending into Barcelona. A sea that, like children, must be protected and cared for. But I wonder who can understand the mysteries of this sea, and of this luminous sky that covers it? Where do we begin again, friend, on such an ancient adventure, of beauty, goodness, poverty? How can we Mediterraneans help ourselves? Where do we recite the verses that denounce those

who maltreat it or praise those who protect it?

I have myself the image of the cliffs, of the tamed hills that watch the sea, covered in pine trees, rosemary and gorse; that rich flora that inhabits them and the small beaches with few bathers. The sea! The ports full of people who are anxious or seeking peace, another way of life, to dialogue, to cross a mountain ridge, to lie on the ground and observe the sky, to satisfy their hunger, to enjoy the thirsty light of justice, the possible peace and the need to live on one of the edges of this sea, close to the fig trees, vineyards, almond trees in bloom, and the round carob trees, as hard as flint.

I hear along the coastline the voices of the saleswoman, I catch the smell of her fresh fish, a vision of those images painted a thousand times in the collective imagination of Jávea, Dénia, Pego, Alfàs del Pi..., Mediterranean villages. I breathe the orange blossom of the orange trees, the fresh perfume of the lemon tree in bloom, the sadness over the absence of the friend who went off on a long and definitive journey. I recall the past, the delicious flavour of the crushed, cut, whole, black or green, big and small, pickled olives.

I recover the perfume of olive and orange trees that will murmur their anxiety for the colours green, grey, black, orange, yellow..., that will return to us the nostalgia of so many absent people: Greek wise men, disciplined Romans, astute Phoenicians, Carthaginians... peoples that were the cradle of civilisations committed to the Mediterranean, who decided to accompany the sea, raise children, mint coins, bury dreams or perhaps spill blood, and sometimes poison ideas, combat boredom or inter evil.

Buried mirrors that reflected their images, sweetened wars and extinguished hatred. Mirrors that reproduced the most absurd drunkenness, the clearest looks, the best sparkles. Mirrors we should unearth to look at ourselves in them again and see our past and

recover memory, the history that must help us go on. And meanwhile, the competition winners will murmur still haughty for the laurel received and we will again hear the clamour of the heroes of so many battles and we will read the works of the Greek philosophers, their aporias and principles. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Protagoras, Gorgias, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle will return. We enjoy again the works of Aristophanes and Menandros, the writers of tragedies and comedies that instruct and amuse us with their works. Pericles governs, it is the 5th century, and society loves his splendour. It is the time of the power-crazed and triumphant man, king of thought, proud of having arrived where he has arrived.

*The competition winners will murmur still haughty for the laurel received and we will again hear the clamour of the heroes of so many battles*

The Mediterranean is rising up, has achieved one of its peaks. "Everything flows, everything changes. Nothing remains. No one steps twice in the same river," Heraclitus of Ephesus had pontificated, and in his work *On Nature* he would add: "Fire is the father of all things, both those that are and those that are not." And meanwhile, Parmenides lucubrated on the being and Hippocrates established the principles of medicine that many doctors proudly show in their consulting rooms.

But love for the Mediterranean must continue and intensify and have as a reference what Jiddu Khrisnamurti proposed to us: "Total freedom, essential challenge for man." Because nobody possesses complete truth, or complete freedom, but rather the two things are principles which cannot be abandoned because they make dialogue between men possible. If someone believes himself to possess complete truth, he will judge others as mistaken, but if

in contrast, no-one claims to possess complete truth, everything can be discussed and they will speak with the other, who also possesses part of the truth. Meanwhile, the salt water of the sea, sometimes cloudy, other times clean, with seaweed, dense, awaiting us, the memory of those who tried it. Water of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Spain... , countries of the Mediterranean, North and South, that need to quench their thirst. Water that is metaphor and baptism of distinct thoughts. Decisive water, which pours out its history over our heads, which allows our arms to play with it, which warns our body about any danger as in other times, when the Mediterranean was believed to be invaded by monsters. Mare Tenebrorum. Mare Nostrum.

*Sea of pity and heat, merciless contemplator of immense eyes, which confirms human stupidity, lack of dialogue*

A sea in which Muslims, Christians, Jews, Calvinists, Lutherans, orthodox, heterodox, Maronites, Copts... women and men bathe. Sometimes, this angry sea chooses one of them and swallows him, like that monstrous Saturn who devoured his children and provoked the compassionate lamentations of prayers and pleas, and sometimes finally returned the bloodless body to its beaches. A drifting, bro-

ken, crushed, beaten body. Sea of pity and heat, merciless contemplator of immense eyes, which confirms human stupidity, lack of dialogue. Sea that sometimes surprises us with its severity and placidity on clear summer nights, when the full moon shows us the distance of the Mediterranean peoples or their closeness. The immensity of the sea, of the water, of the day, of man.

Smallness of the individual, of the egoist, of the foolish, of the arrogant. Motivation of the grandiose, who offers his hand regardless of whether the other is an Arab, Christian, atheist, Catholic, Muslim, poor or rich, ugly or grandiose. Dialogue and possible monologue. Culture united by the roots of its peoples and by the communication between them. Mediterranean Sea, path to find the others, to understand their identity, to learn about their differences, to contemplate their culture and experience it. Mediterranean Sea that translates and strengthens the task of the young, that helps to live with tolerance and with different mentalities. Mediterranean Sea, music with smell, flavour, colour in a colourless sea. Mediterranean Sea, identity and diversity of peoples and cultures, all possible at once. Sea, library to learn from the water and its richness, extract it from the depths, from exchange. Sea of unity and plurality. Respect that preserves and promotes cultures and at the same time maintains them. Mediterranean Sea, probable creation of an unknown God. Mediterranean Sea at the end of the day.