

The Anna Lindh Foundation in 2009: A Year of Renewed Impetus

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The year 2009, focal period of this article, marked a new beginning for the young Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) with the introduction of a new strategy approved by the Board of Governors in December of 2008.¹ After the institution's stage of establishment, "characterised by dispersion," the Foundation seemed indeed to inaugurate a new era of reforms and consolidation revolving around institutional and policy reorientation.²

But how, despite a particularly trying global and regional context, was the Foundation able to gain renewed impetus, rising to a certain number of challenges the region was faced with? Does this mean the Foundation is on the right track and that all issues have been resolved?

A Difficult Context

After the launching of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in July 2008, which was intended to lend the Euromed Partnership a second wind (Young & Kausch, FRIDE Foundation 2008), the Anna Lindh Foundation was motivated to occupy a focal position. It had the ambition of contributing the human dimension the new Union was lacking, in particular by reducing the cultural and spiritual gap between the two shores.

The year 2009, however, did not start under the best auspices, but rather in a highly agitated global and

regional context. Clearly, the economic crisis, with its exacerbation of ethnic or nationalist sentiment and the rejection of foreigners on closed labour markets, with a background of the rise of the extreme right and reciprocal negative perceptions, not to speak of xenophobia, had particularly negative repercussions on our period of analysis.

Moreover, heightening conflicts (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan) were to be aggravated by the Gaza War in December-January. Beyond the human and material losses, this episode was particularly devastating in the symbolic sphere.

In the face of this military operation and its impact, the subsequent deadlock of the UfM – yet another challenge for the ALF – and growing intercultural tension, the Foundation reacted quickly, as we will see. Under the impulse of a dynamic leadership and with a membership network of nearly 3,000 NGOs, the Foundation seems to have gained in credibility and visibility over the course of 2009. Clearly, the scope of this article allows me to do justice neither to the efforts made by the ALF nor its achievements. However, this text will attempt to analyse the strong points of the year in question.

The Annual Work Plan for 2009 (4 November 2008 – 3 November 2009) follows the strategic orientations defined in the Triennial Plan while adapting them to the circumstances experienced by the region. It also aims to improve the institution's management and financial transparency through stricter operation.

After a brief analysis of the institution's reorientation, this article will focus on the most significant and innovative activities carried out, before closing with an

¹ The Foundation's year as discussed here is reckoned from November 2008 to November 2009. It celebrated the Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) through its "1001 Actions for Dialogue" programme. To carry out this overview, I essentially used the following documents: ANNA LINDH FOUNDATION. *Interim Narrative and Financial Report of the Annual Work Plan (4 Nov. 2008 - 3 Nov. 2009)*, submitted by the Executive Director to the Egyptian Delegation of the European Commission. 99 p.

ANNA LINDH FOUNDATION. *Annual Work Plan*. May 2009, 13 p.

² According to the former Executive Director during the transition period, Lucio Guerrato, and other leaders.

overview of perspectives and several possibilities regarding unresolved issues.

New Configuration of Governing Structures: Institutional Reorientation

An elected President, a new Executive Director, an Advisory Council in high demand and more staff allowed the institution and its different organs to improve operation, among other things. This most certainly constituted one of the strong points of the year. However, under conditions particularly critical for the Foundation's work itself, the Board of Governors representing the 43 member countries was not able to meet during the first six months of 2009. It nevertheless approved the 2009-2011 Triennial Programme (22nd Meeting of the Board, held in Nice on 17 December 2008), as well as the signature of a subsidy contract with the EU and the completion of Phase II (23rd Meeting, 6 July 2009). On 29 September 2009, debate revolved around the focal points of the year: achievements of the Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges programme, the Anna Lindh Report on EuroMed Intercultural Trends and the guidelines of the 2010 Annual Plan, as well as financial contributions by members.

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The Advisory Council, established in 2008, assists the President and supports initiatives to consolidate civil society in the region. Its purpose is to become the Foundation's think tank. Deliberations, principally at three meetings, revolved around the challenges to be met by civil society, in particular: dealing with the impact of the Gaza War (2nd meeting, 13-15 February 2009, London), the Plan for 2010, the preliminary results of the Gallup Poll and promotion of the 2010 Forum (3rd meeting, 9-12 October 2009, Istanbul). For the seventh time, the Foundation convened the Heads of National Networks, this time in Nice on 28-

29 November 2008, and decided to initiate a process of ongoing consultations via telephone and internet. As per the organisation's bylaws, the President of the Foundation and of the Advisory Council was elected by unanimous vote and stepped into office in April 2008. André Azoulay contributes the experience of a well-known figure on the Euro-Mediterranean stage. Economic Advisor to the King of Morocco, he also became renowned, among other things, for his early and intense engagement in favour of dialogue and peace, above all between Palestinians and Israelis. Particularly dynamic, he "revitalized" the institution, with the ambition of "providing support to peoples on both shores of the Mediterranean so they can reappropriate themselves of their common destiny." To do so, he does not hesitate to innovate or to have recourse to the recommendations of the EU High-Level Advisory Group, the "Groupe des Sages."

After the Foreign Ministers Meeting in Marseille on 4 November 2008 establishing the UfM and lending the ALF a central position, André Azoulay became omnipresent on the Euromed stage, naturally in order to keep the obligatory appointments of the year, but also and above all to mobilise his own networks and everyone's energy at difficult times. He took advantage of his own specificity and strong convictions to find sustainable strategies for handling new challenges. His communications skills were to do the rest. His tranquillity, in-depth knowledge of regional affairs, networks and the support of the Advisory Council as well as that of the Alliance of Civilisations, of which he is an eminent member, and perhaps a certain amount of courage were to help the Foundation handle the particularly painful drama of the Gaza War.

The new Executive Director, Andreu Claret, of Spanish nationality, was unanimously appointed by the Board of Governors on 1 July 2008. At the head of a larger staff now consisting of 29 people, this pleasant Spanish personality and polyglot has made use of his long-term experience as a journalist in Africa and Latin America and as an intercultural development manager at the head of the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) for five years, as well as his in-depth knowledge of the bureaucratic machinery of the EU in order to put the institution back on track, despite certain constants that cause a good deal of uncertainty. In fact, the institution is split between two headquarters, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Swedish Institute of Alexandria, which does not make everyday operation easy. The administrative labyrinth

of EU procedures, with their complexity, sluggishness and well-known associated grievances, must always be dealt with. In addition, the Foundation's placement under the control of the UfM contributes to the confusion and blurring of lines. The question that eventually emerges is: who's in charge?

The Annual Plan nonetheless followed stricter standards, with more effective tools for planning and resources considered to improve performance. Hence, a clear code of conduct was established. A number of new methods were introduced, aiming to maximise personnel efficiency and ensure more effective administrative and financial management while improving transparency.

It is true that the Foundation's budget was increased by 14 million euros for the 2009-2011 period. The EU's contribution represents 64.8% of the total budget, whereas 35.2% will be covered by contributions from the governments of Euro-Med Partner States and used primarily to fund activities by national networks. Nonetheless, it remains modest in comparison to needs and restrains aspirations. In addition, certain States, including some of the wealthiest, do not always send in their financial contributions.

In this regard, it could be said without exaggerating that the Foundation represents major ambition with minor means.

Foundation Activities in 2009: More Focussed Strategy and Greater Coherence

In the context described above, the ALF reacted by launching the Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges campaign, carried out in collaboration with the Alliance of Civilisations. This campaign backs up the Work Plan initially foreseen for 2009, opening the Foundation's latest Triennial Programme (2009-2011).

The Foundation's New Orientation

This new orientation establishes a sort of "return to the basics" after a certain dispersion, the two main objectives being: action and reflection. The Foundation thus focussed all of its activities (whether financed or co-organised) on five priority spheres of action, considered strategic areas: culture, education, the media, values and spirituality, and cities and diversity.

No less than 250 projects were financed by the Foundation and carried out by hundreds of civil society organisations from the 43 countries in the UfM in 2009,³ some of which are substantial in scope, as for instance, the Children and Literature programme. This programme aims to improve the quality of children's literature available in Arabic in the region and to integrate reading for pleasure into scholastic curricula in order to foster children's intellectual and emotional development.

The education for religious diversity programme was completed by the production of a guide – "How to Cope with Diversity at School: Teaching and Learning about Religious Diversity" – of which 1,500 copies were distributed in book format and 1,500 in CD format. Workshops for teachers were organized on the topic.

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A revised and corrected edition of the "Guidebook for History Textbook Authors" that had been in progress since 2006 was published in English and is ready for translation into Arabic, French, German and Spanish. The project is being done in collaboration with UNESCO, the Arab League, ALECSO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization), ISESCO (Islamic Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization) and the Swedish Institute of Alexandria.

The Foundation likewise engaged in substantially expanding the network of members, who constitute the backbone of the institution. From a little over 2,000, membership climbed to nearly 3,000.

As part of the new approach, communication was placed at the core of the Foundation's work. To this end, the ALF's information and communication channels needed to be stepped up on the local and regional levels, as well as its political visibility. A genu-

³ Clearly, the scope of this article does not allow us to go into detail on all of these activities. All details can be found, however, in the 99 pages of the *Interim Report of the ALF, 2008-2009*.

ine communication strategy was instituted, in particular for flagship activities, through mobilisation of the press, including specific campaigns, production of the pertinent promotion tools and recourse to a website.

Initiatives to improve the ALF's image were not lacking either, insofar as festivals, music and artistic activities, as well as awards and honours, as every year. The 2009 Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue between Cultures, organised in conjunction with the Fondazione Mediterraneo, was granted to the "Combatants for Peace," a civil movement established by Palestinians and Israelis. The laureates of the Anna Lindh Journalism Awards in the various disciplines were bestowed their awards in Monaco on 6 November 2009 for their reports or coverage of cultural diversity.⁴

The second edition of the regional literary contest, "A Sea of Words," open to young people under thirty years of age, was launched in Barcelona by the ALF and IEMed.

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In addition, the Foundation sought to round off its activities with several flagship projects lending the Foundation's programme greater credibility and visibility. In this text, we will discuss two that reveal both the Foundation's capacity for adaptation and its potential for building dialogue on scientific foundations, fostering openness and consolidating civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

Restoring Trust, Rebuilding Peace Initiative

This initiative is not simply the Anna Lindh Foundation's response to the economic and political crises affecting our Euro-Mediterranean Region, but

also, as indicated by the President, André Azoulay, "testifies to the need for greater justice, dignity and respect for all, without taking sides." This operation also reveals the institution's adaptation to the disastrously negative consequences of the Gaza War.

The campaign launched under the above title on 3 February 2009 in Paris by the Foundation and the Alliance of Civilisations seeks, in fact, to mobilise civil society action towards revitalising confidence in dialogue and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Open to proposals until 20 June 2009 for focalised actions from 1 July to 21 September and in order to increase their visibility, this operation was granted a budget of 330,000 euros for co-organised actions on the local and regional levels in the spheres of the culture of peace and peaceful coexistence of communities.

Over 260 applications were submitted to the Foundation, which financed 48 local initiatives and 13 regional ones. Cultural activities were carried out simultaneously in Israel and Palestine in September 2009. This initiative was crowned by the International Forum, co-organised by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Museum of World Culture and held in Stockholm on International Peace Day, 21 September 2009. This high point took place in three stages. The first consisted of an introduction and analysis and exchange of views among renowned figures. The second stage was a media event, broadcast live on internet and involving local and international journalists. The Euro-Med Award for Dialogue ceremony closed the event, garnering exceptional media coverage.

The ALF Strategic Report on Intercultural Trends

In 2009, the ALF launched a key initiative that had been recommended by the High-Level Advisory Group, "Groupe des Sages," which had defined the guidelines.

In view of "the need for a tool that can effect the delicate task of evaluating something as intangible as the impact of dialogue" and that could constitute a sort of "rapid alert system," the Groupe des Sages

⁴ Ethar El Kataney in the Press Category ("Egypt Today," Egypt); in the Television Category: Martin Traxl (ORF, Austria) and Ennio Remondino, (RAI, Italy); Chine Labbé in the Radio Category (France Culture, France); Alberto Arce for Conflict Coverage (El Mundo, Spain); Lisa Goldman for Conflict Coverage and contextualisation (Columbia Journalist Review).

proposed the creation of an Observatory of Intercultural Trends.

I am glad to see that the Foundation is returning to its origins by taking up our Group's recommendation, which particularly engages me.

Certainly, such an Observatory does not exist (at least not yet!). But it seems to me that we are but at the beginning of the process. We will have to wait until the publication of the Report to discover the definitive form. In substance, the Report, as it appeared in December 2009, will consist of the presentation of the results of the Gallup Poll and qualitative analyses. The poll carried out by Gallup was on absolute values as well as religious issues and other topics. The questionnaire took into account the diversity of cultural backgrounds. Specific segments of the population, such as youth, urban residents and rural residents, were polled.

The articles, commissioned from some thirty experts from different UfM Member States, could be published as separate sections in the Report. Each article focuses on a specific topic, as, for instance, mutual perceptions, human interaction, shared values and perspectives for a joint Mediterranean project, which would allow intercultural trends to be identified and valid conclusions to be reached for the entire region as opposed to any specific country. The aim of the Report (possibly in conjunction with the Observatory in the future) is to serve as a scientific tool allowing the challenges faced by the UfM in the human and cultural dimension to be identified. "The goal [is] to create a new narrative of cultural cooperation for the Mediterranean Region."

The regional level for the creation of a common future shared by the peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean Region

Of course, the 2009 Gallup Poll carried out at the Foundation's instigation concerned only 13 of the 43 Member States for budgetary reasons. The cross-section of the population polled was certainly not diverse enough to represent the entire spectrum of categories. But it seems to me that we can celebrate a job well done. This unique, highly complex undertaking is interesting on several counts.

- First of all, good news, considering the growing gap between perceptions on the North and South

shores: the results of the opinion poll, it seems, show the existence of positive trends on the regional level for the creation of a common future shared by the peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

- Moreover, this is the first poll carried out on such a scale and providing a basis for analysis representing Euro-Mediterranean public opinion.
- The interest of the exercise resides precisely in its regional approach. The Foundation proposed not presenting the results by country in the Report, but rather providing an overview of the main conclusions reached through the poll in two introductory articles.
- The poll also provides a credible scientific basis to review curricula and other undertakings in order to better take action and react on the topics.
- Likely to become a periodical exercise, the opinion poll will allow evaluation of the evolution of intercultural trends on the regional level, with the strengthening of Mediterranean cooperation over the years.
- This also means that it will allow us to listen to the Mediterranean societies, what they have to say in general, to one another and about themselves in this game of mirrored similarities and disparities between Oneself and the Other.
- For the Foundation, making their voice audible and "visible" to the ensemble of Euro-Mediterranean actors through this Report means lending a cultural voice to societies themselves.
- This represents, therefore, freeing cultural and religious discourse from the near-monopoly held by extremists on both shores, a prevailing discourse that is increasingly ludicrous and heinous and which renders the voices of society and individuals inaudible. The voice of society is thus usurped and culture misrepresented.
- Lending a voice to societies means allowing them to reappropriate themselves of their own culture, restoring its plenitude, far from reductive manipulations.
- Through this Report, the Foundation will fully play its role, placing Euro-Mediterranean societies in direct dialogue.
- And finally, in freeing the voice of society, it will do a great deal for the empowerment of those without a voice in societies under process of democratisation.

What is then required is, apart from giving this Report a broad dissemination, lending it the major response it warrants. In this regard, the media should rise to the occasion.

By Way of Conclusion: Perspectives and Possibilities

The Anna Lindh Forum, to be held in Barcelona on 3 to 7 March 2010, aims to lend new impetus to co-operation among civil society organisations dedicated to intercultural dialogue within the UfM. It aims to bring together for the first time, some 500 representatives of civil society from the region, NGOs, cultural institutions, universities, the media, regional authorities and regional networks.

Preparations for the 2010 Anna Lindh Forum, marked by many, varied meetings, took up the ALF's time and resources well before the call to participate officially issued on 25 November 2009. As part of the preparations for the 2010 Forum, a total of 35 joint actions will be undertaken by the ALF National Networks, the Forum being considered an opportunity to enrich their activities.

The false equality, the false symmetry of the Partners will endure as long as the Euro-Mediterranean Region is not endowed with a real strategic framework and a coherent political project among equal partners

Positive discrimination should foster the participation of network members working in South-shore countries. As described in the Forum news in December 2009, "it constitutes an opportunity for enrichment of the ALF programme and activities by the 43 national networks, while serving as a source of inspiration for drawing up the UfM agenda."

We will have to wait and see how this major event goes before evaluating its impact.

For a More Pacific Euro-Mediterranean Region: Will the ALF Succeed Despite Inertia and Contradictions?

However, in order to fully play this precious, unique role with legitimacy, the Anna Lindh Foundation will have to meet other challenges and overcome certain contradictions, beginning with its own. Unfortunately, we are not making progress on this front, for the Groupe des Sages wished the Foundation to be the expression of civil society so as not to be hostage to States. It must, in fact, go beyond its inter-State nature by doing away with the reticence of certain Member States in order to fulfil its mission and make the voice of civil society heard even when it contradicts said Member States. In this regard, the publication of the Report has had to be postponed.

The ALF must, moreover, overcome the flagrant contradictions between the stated intentions of the UfM – "share [the different] cultures by fostering scholar and scientist exchanges..." – and the reality of policies, so harsh in practice, in particular with regard to visas and the circulation of people. The researchers, university scholars, students and doctoral students from the North are, for instance, welcomed with open arms in the countries of the South, whereas those from the South run up against innumerable obstacles on the territories of the 27 EU Member States when attempting to carry out their tasks.

The false equality, the false symmetry of the Partners will continue to weigh upon the collective unconscious, upon perceptions, but also upon real actions. It will endure as long as the Euro-Mediterranean Region is not endowed with a real strategic framework and a coherent political project among equal partners. For a Euro-Mediterranean Region that is, if not serene, at least more pacific, it is necessary to recall the imperative need to do away with the sources of tension, above all, the Israeli-Arab conflict, which has unfortunately become commonplace. It is urgent to end this tragedy that holds the Foundation hostage and denies the human dignity for which the ALF struggles.