

# Culture Lies at the Heart of the Mediterranean Construction

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The Barcelona Process will soon be celebrating its tenth anniversary. It seems a natural time to take stock of what the MEDA programme has achieved to date. One of its undeniable results has been to make it possible for Association Agreements to be set up, albeit at the expense of the substantial sacrifices required of Third Mediterranean countries. The financial rewards for opening up the markets of the South to the products of the North have proved to be negligible in comparison with the large sums allocated for the structural adjustment of the economies of the Eastern European countries. The only option left to us today is to note that some of these countries have since become full members of the European Union, while the income gap between the EU countries and those on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean continues to widen.

Europe has indeed expanded from 15 members to 25. It is apparent that there has been a significant shift in the centre of gravity of the European continent towards the East. Some observers are understandably anxious to establish whether this is also going to lead to a shift in the centre of gravity of European co-operation and economic development policy towards the East. Like myself, they know that it will. They are all too aware that Europe is founded first and foremost on a common market structure and on the protection of economic and financial interests. What is more, it is thanks to its level of economic development and to the growth of the spirit of the European Community that Europe

has abandoned the war-mongering culture which divided it for so long, in favour of a culture of peace. I am convinced that the peoples of the Southern shores of the Mediterranean will adopt the same approach, provided they are only given the means to do so.

Whether the European centre of gravity is to be re-positioned back again is clearly a question that only the Europeans themselves can decide. It goes without saying that such an undertaking would require a strong common political will on the part of Europe's Mediterranean countries. It is then that they will find us, the Southern countries, on their side, not only bringing grist to the mill but making a real contribution in terms of economy, culture, stability and peace.

Two are needed for a dialogue. In order to have a fruitful dialogue, both partners must get something out of it. Yet, when we listen to the Europeans talking about "*Mare nostrum*," they almost invariably tend to consider the Mediterranean to be theirs, not ours. This Euro-centric vision encourages the use of concepts such as 'aid' and 'assistance' in the current debate, while for our part we continue to hope that the term 'partnership,' used as a key word in the Barcelona Declaration, will ultimately come into its own. It seems to me crucial to work together on intensifying a culture of co-development which would replace that of aid to Third Mediterranean countries. It should be emphasised that, in the majority of cases, countries like mine have a much greater need for support in the form of a genuine transfer of knowledge and expertise suitably adapted to our requirements, than we have for support in the form of direct financial "aid."

How is it possible then to conduct a dialogue if everyone has different concerns?

The Southern Mediterranean countries are mainly preoccupied with attaining economic and social development, democracy and peace. The Northern shore countries are concerned with stemming the flow of immigrants, even though the Mediterranean has always been a zone of free movement and cultural insemination. Was Europe not portrayed in Greek mythology as the daughter of the Middle East? The Phoenicians and Carthaginians crossed the Mediterranean even before the Romans did. After the defeat of their leaders, many soldiers decided to remain and mingle with the native population, without giving a second thought to their own place of birth.

Jacques Berque emphasised the ambivalence in Arab culture, but this ambivalence seems to have, permeated the corridors of the European Commission, which talks about partnership while building an insurmountable and far from virtual wall in the very heart of the Mediterranean: that of the Schengen area, which makes pariahs of the citizens of the South, as far as freedom of movement is concerned. The reason given is always the same: migration and the extreme right-wing parties in Europe. But freedom is one and indivisible. As long as the citizens of the South are compelled to get by on an income which is 15 times less than that of citizens on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean, and as long as we do not implement a more aggressive co-development policy, there will always be an irresistible desire to go wherever manpower is required. It was for this reason that the Irish, the Italians, the Poles and other Europeans populated America; they were driven by famine and poverty. Rather than persisting in merely treating the symptoms, we plead

for a more dynamic policy of co-development, which alone is capable of eradicating the root causes of migration.

Can we really ask the countries on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean (and, with them, the rest of Africa) to forget completely their painful history, which has witnessed colonisation, the slave trade, repression and conspiracy, shameless exploitation of their riches and of their inhabitants, not to mention the distortion of their social fabric and the effects of cultural domination? Can we really ask these countries to pretend to believe that it is sufficient to be positioned on the same starting line in order to have the same opportunities as the other competitors?

New relationships within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership will not be truly innovative unless they go hand in hand with a greater effectiveness in their analysis and in their actions and, more specifically, unless they provide a minimum amount of happiness and well-being for the majority of our people, who quite rightly expect to attain a modicum of dignity and liberty. Understood thus and only thus, this new partnership will have every chance of finding favour with the majority of us.

Yet to achieve a greater effectiveness in their analysis and in their actions requires knowledge of the other, and acknowledgement and recognition of the other's existence as an entity in terms of history, culture and struggles. This also requires humility and the ability to see and to look, to hear and to listen to others, to share their difficult memories, suffering and pain. Can we say that the North has made as great an effort to get to know us as we know them? The latest hardships experienced by my country lead me to fear that this is not the case. In fact, for a decade, that most sacred of human rights, the right to life, has been subjected to indiscriminate, large-scale violations on a daily basis in the worst ways imaginable. If an initial balance had to be drawn from this dark period of my people's history, it would naturally deal with the fact that they bore their cross in isolation, under an embargo, in solitude, in the greatest solitude... In this permanent state of surprise, to which one never grows accustomed and which leaves hardship to be endured in solitude.

The Algerian people have lived through all the hardships imposed upon them by fundamentalist terrorism; they have come out of it stronger. At this point, in the reflection it is important to ask oneself what would have been the fate of the Mediterranean, of the entire Mediterranean, if Algeria had succumbed to unbearable pressures, to an unspeakable embargo and if it had surrendered to the plan for the establishment of a Taliban state in Algiers? How many other September 11-style attacks would there have been? In how many capitals? This is why we would like to show you that we in Algeria honestly and sincerely believe that our battle against terrorism, which we fought alone and against all the odds, protected the whole of Europe, and not just the Maghreb. We do not expect any gratitude, but a small measure of acknowledgement all the same, especially when it comes to evaluating the "Algerian risk." After that, you can start by remembering that Algeria also represents a new opportunity for the future.

In the meantime, we can fight the sideways glances together and the pervasive clichés which harbour misunderstandings and create gulfs. We can make a mutual decision to place culture at the centre of our relations since culture is the miraculous phenomenon that simultaneously engenders self-respect and respect for others, whilst ensuring group cohesion; in other words, it engenders all that is necessary and vital for any structure. This means that culture lies at the heart of the construction of a Mediterranean identity.

My country's culture embraces a territory of 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup> with a heritage and history going back two million years. Algeria is home to the largest open-air museums in the world, the Tassili (with an area of 80,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and the Hoggar (500,000 km<sup>2</sup>). We have managed this heritage on behalf of the whole of Mankind, with our own resources, to the best of our knowledge and ability, and (so we sincerely hope) carrying out our duty as we were required to do.

Algeria, which has willingly signed up for the support programme to give greater prominence to its own cultural heritage, considers that the Euro-Mediterranean approach, based on the principle of cultural heritage and on the establishment

of a shared area of peace and stability, must also be interpreted as returning to, or rather seeking inspiration in, the Mediterranean, as an act of (re)appropriation of history and rehabilitation of the memory of the peoples and civilisations of both the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean.

The Barcelona Process and the Euro-Mediterranean programmes which it engendered have facilitated the creation of frameworks for the exchange of points of view in order to encourage a better understanding between Europe and the countries of the Southern shore, with the clear aim of enhancing these relations, so as to bring together the destinies of two continents which, for reasons that are well known by all, have very different levels of development.

These Partnership programmes are an opportunity to explore crucial areas that until now have been marked by barriers and obstacles nourished and fed by ideological and religious clichés, which, although somewhat less widespread nowadays, are still persistent. Fixed ideas are based on the following concepts: "European dynamism and African stagnation," "the world of Christianity and that of Islam," "the developed world and the underdeveloped world," "North and South."

The implementation of joint projects undertaken with conviction and mutual commitment requires both sides to be heard, attentively and with humility. It is precisely this that evokes our own memories of pain and horror. Is there anyone who is capable of maintaining that Nazism is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian culture? Is it possible to maintain that the Shoah has its origins in the Weimar Republic? My aim is to take the stance that Islam, as a civilising heritage and spiritual horizon, is just as innocent to this outburst of violence as Christianity was when Nazism was unleashed on the world.

Algeria, through its Ministry of Culture, takes a special interest in socio-cultural projects, especially those which coincide with our own vision with respect to the protection of our cultural heritage, namely the establishment of an efficient and effective partnership which will enable us to catch up lost ground in terms of the accumulated neglect in the sphere of conservation and the exploita-

## 9TH EURO-MEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS.

VALENCIA, 18TH – 19TH NOVEMBER 2004

From its beginnings, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has supported the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership project, as the participation of economic and social agents and other representatives of organised civil society are considered to be indispensable. Therefore, in the framework of the Partnership, the EESC collaborated in the organisation of the Euro-Mediterranean Economic and Social Council Summits and similar institutions, which have been held annually since 1995. The aim of these summits is to tackle the questions considered crucial for the future of the Mediterranean region and formulate recommendations directed at the political authorities of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The EESC co-ordinates the action and the work of the Economic and Social Summits and similar institutions, and presides over the Follow-up Committee, created as a result of the 3rd Casablanca Summit (November 1997). The Committee is responsible for promoting the proposals and recommendations of the summits, analysing the course they take and making visible the work carried out by the Euro-Mediterranean network of Economic and Social Councils.

During the ninth edition of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit, on 18th and 19th November 2004, the representatives of the Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions met in

Valencia with the representatives of the professional organisations of the partner countries which do not have an economic and social committee or similar institution. Amongst the subjects dealt with throughout the different sessions, of particular interest was the analysis of the progress made on the proposal for the creation of a debt observatory, and the presentation of the report "Immigration and co-operation in the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region," directed by the Economic and Social Councils in Spain in collaboration with those of France, Greece, Italy, Tunisia and Algeria. Agriculture was another of the core issues of the debates. In addition, representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean network participated, such as the Euromed Trade Union Forum and the Euro-Mediterranean Network of Social Economy, amongst others.

The final Declaration established the commitment of the participants to promote dialogue between partners at regional and sub-regional levels. Another of the commitments established was the importance of strengthening the competence and independence of the trade unions and management, to contribute to the promotion of social dialogue and to free negotiation between social interlocutors. The Declaration also highlights the importance of going into depth in the most important current issues, such as

the strengthening and greater coverage of systems of social protection, the development of active employment policies and the protection of the most disadvantaged. Finally, with the aim of promoting the development of networks of non-state agents, the participants of the Summit asked that the role played by the Economic and Social Councils and civil society organisations in the application of the co-operation strategy be recognised during the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Ministers at The Hague.

More information:

European Economic and Social Committee, EESC

[www.esc.eu.int](http://www.esc.eu.int)

European Economic and Social Committee, role and activities within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

[www.esc.eu.int/publications/pdf/leaflets/EESC-2002-014-EN.pdf](http://www.esc.eu.int/publications/pdf/leaflets/EESC-2002-014-EN.pdf)

European Economic and Social Committee, Information on the IXth Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions

[www.esc.eu.int/sections/rex/valencia/index\\_en.asp](http://www.esc.eu.int/sections/rex/valencia/index_en.asp)

Economic and Social Council of Spain (CES)  
<http://www.ces.es/turcana/ces/index.jsp?idio ma=6>

tion of our cultural heritage within fixed time periods, and to reposition ourselves as a major partner in the Euro-Mediterranean regional context.

The countries of the North are coping with the hegemony of globalisation, and this also includes the cultural sphere. They are right to want to construct a solid cultural industry which protects them against the threat of extinction when faced with a globalisation that is synonymous with uniformity. But can they, on their own, protect themselves against the threat of extinction by developing cultural policies for and among themselves, omitting entire cultures which nevertheless form part of the same historic universe, the same world of the imagination? Living, talented, prolific and friendly cultures. We cannot conceive of or discuss cultural co-operation as an abstract concept taken out of the context of what is real and crucial. Our reality consists

of a world which is becoming increasingly globalised and which tends to impose the culture created by the most powerful and most profitable cultural industry. The law of the marketplace ends up by becoming the law of the land, and the consequences are well known: cultural dilution, uniformity, and extinction. We have literature, cinema, theatre, music, fine arts ... all with their potential virtually untapped. We need to develop them, to become acquainted with them, to disseminate them. We are not in the habit of producing a lot of hot air. Construction of a real cultural industry requires financial commitments which are unfortunately out of reach of the countries in the South. These countries in the South which cope with the same risks as you, and others like them, with a much lower level of preventive resources, but with the certainty, however, that our destinies are linked – linked by a shared present,

and by shared predictions for the future. The principle of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in its cultural dimension is intrinsically based on considerable acquired knowledge which engenders a genuine national consensus on the solutions to adopt in order to protect and disseminate a shared culture and heritage. The basic experience drawn from this new form of regional exchange would be worth consolidating and optimising by enabling strategies and programmes that are responsible for the Mediterranean culture to have a greater impact. We congratulate ourselves on this new reality since we share the vision of a new type of relationship between states, based on reciprocity, exchange, respect and an understanding of transcendent values which ensure the creation of multicultural groupings, as well as the establishment of an area of peace and stability and a zone of mutual prosperity.