The Mediterranean Dimension of the Universal Forum of the Cultures

The Universal Forum of the Cultures – Barcelona 2004 exuded Mediterranean with its views of the sea, the daily sea breezes, the heat on some of the days, the Spring showers, the tourists and the festive atmosphere in the Summer, the noise and the musicians, the sunset and sunrise light, and many more things. A side from making an appraisal of its organisation, the very idea of the Forum can be considered one very much adapted to Mediterranean life: that of bringing citizens together, in a shared environment of enjoyment and reflection through culture, considered in a broad sense and as a way of life. The aim of Barcelona 2004 was to analyse the possibilities of combating the tensions generated by globalisation while embarking on reflection, dialogue and celebration. In this respect, the Barcelona Forum had a certain amount of cacophony with the differences in which the citizens were expressing their visions of the world, their diagnosis and their proposals for action through different formats.

The Barcelona Forum featured urban development, citizenry and dialogue, in differing proportions and intensities over 141 days. The privileged position of Barcelona as a meeting point for cultures and peoples, the city’s Mediterranean and open character and its proven determination to help, reflect and protest against the world’s problems, contributed to attract to Barcelona a wide range of artistic, academic and social communicators.

The Forum project set out to also undertake urban redevelopment thought for finding solutions to the problems that particularly occur in the cities of the Mediterranean coast as a consequence of their history and development. The integration of urban infrastructures in the citizen’s lives, the recuperation of the Barcelona coastline and its beaches, the revival of the biotope, the construction of the city basing it on the existing model and structures, are all innovative operations that go beyond their urbanistic or social valuation.

The Mediterranean is a historically privileged region of contact between cultures, religions, languages and peoples. Contacts that often have not been free of conflict. The advance of economic and media globalisation has implied an increase in the circulation of ideas, images, people and information that have produced a Mediterranean region full of complexities, contradictions, tensions, opportunities and creativity.

The Barcelona Forum 2004 was a clear reaction to these complexities, tensions, contradictions, opportunities and creativity. The music, the exhibitions, the scenic arts, but, above all, the dialogues, had the Mediterranean and its challenges and conflicts as a source of inspiration and reflection.

The Universal Forum of the Cultures’ three core themes: sustainable development, cultural diversity and the promotion of the conditions for peace, have shown, in all of the Forum’s output (music, theatre, dialogues, exhibitions, workshops), a Mediterranean dimension, since this region, despite being so small and so diverse, is a microcosm that brings together many of the essential themes that affect the development of humanity at the beginning of the 21st century. The Mediterranean has to revise its geopolitical position in the globalised world and with the increasing relations between the two sides of the Pacific. In this space, we can see the effects of climatic change and of the over exploitation of resources, North-South relations and the effects of globalisation, terrorism and war, contact between the three principal monotheistic religions, the birth of many polytheistic religions, commerce, great linguistic diversity, three continents and many centuries of history.

A great number of debates, thoughts and exhibitions focused on the conditions for peace, specially taking into consideration a part of the world (Palestine, Libya, Syria, the Balkans and Lebanon) considered as a source of terrorism and conflicts. The denunciations against unilateral and monolithic approaches were made in parallel with a reflection about the role of Europe in ensuring stability in the area, through international aid as much as the position of upholding the values that have provided wellbeing to the continent. But, above all, the Forum brought together differing proposals for conflict resolution: defense of a culture of peace, promotion of disarmament and measures to be implemented during the process of reconciliation following a conflict. In the dialogues, the protagonists of the conflicts that fill our newspapers, or have already been forgotten, reflected on various aspects. Some of the themes dealt with the realities of social coexistence during or after a conflict (how resistance and the push for peace is organised in the middle of a conflict; how to reconstruct the social fabric and coexistence after a conflict; the recuperation of the memory after what they have lived through, the dignification of the victims, the reinsertion of the perpetrators into...
Europe's role in the world, 11th May
In this dialogue, organised by the CIDOB Foundation, participants reflected on the role that should be played by Europe in the defence of a system of international relations based on multilateralism. In this respect, the Barcelona Declaration was approved. The Declaration defends a cohesive and coherent foreign policy in which security and peace should be fundamental objectives in the actions of the European Union.

Global Broadcasting Communication, Cultural Diversity and Regulation, 28th – 29th May
Programme focused on sharing the experiences and action models being developed by a wide range of regulatory organs in their spheres of action. It also highlighted the crucial importance of audio-visual media, not just in the economic aspect, but also in educational, social and cultural areas.

Water for life and security, 31st May – 1st June
The dialogue culminated with the approval of the document “Fundamental principles for a Global Convention on the Right to Water,” a kind of universal declaration of rights and obligations to be taken to the UN to achieve support and compliance by all Member States.

37th Congress of the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM). Listening to the sea, 10th June
This congress stressed the need to raise awareness both in people and among the regulatory organs to maintain the balance between human development and the marine ecosystem in the Mediterranean.

Conflicts: Prevention, Resolution, Reconciliation, 16th – 20th June
This seminar stressed that the establishment at international level of a culture of prevention, as well as the increase and improvement of foreign knowledge, constitute a first step towards resolving conflicts at their roots. Participants also agreed that civil society organisations and society itself are relevant for the creation of a culture of peace at grassroots level.

Towards a World Without Violence, 23rd – 27th June
The dialogue advocated for the need for a change in mentality to de-legitimise violence as a means of conflict resolution. For the acquisition of these new values, it is necessary to redefine the concept of human security, currently based on the arms race, and also to redefine development investment and assistance.

East-West Dialogue, 1st – 3rd July
The debate stressed the need to increase the dialogue between these two civilisations and the search—within the framework of ruling globalisation—for a new model of economic development with more social and environmental conscience for the Asian continent.

According to experts, Asia is destined to be the leader of the world economy as from 2025.

Parliament of the World's Religions, 7th – 13th July
Religious leaders and believers from seventy-five countries and more than one hundred religious denominations met to have dialogue. This dialogue was aimed at demonstrating a common will: despite differences in beliefs, they share a fundamental principle that unites them and for which they should fight: universal peace and mutual respect.

Tourism, Cultural Diversity, and Sustainable Development, 14th – 17th July
Tourism is one of the main mechanisms of intercultural knowledge and dialogue. The challenge of this dialogue focuses on making tourism a vehicle for conservation of cultural and natural diversity, and a means to consolidating the culture of peace.

World Congress on Human Movements and Immigration, 2nd – 5th September
This congress, organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean, dealt with the situation of the migratory phenomenon and the importance of human mobility as a tool for development and the construction of progressive societies. Emphasis was placed on the importance of considering diversity as an element of integration, and not of conflict. In order for this to happen, multilateral management of migration is essential.

ticism, because it is a great contradic-
ton to speak of love and peace and at
the same time to justify the use of vio-
ence in order to resolve intercultural
conflicts of religious background. The
world’s religions have emphasised their
differences throughout history and have
always left aside the universal principle
that unites them all, that is, the ethics of
respecting each other. Society today is
contaminated by intolerance and frag-
mentation. Religions can help to promo-
te a new international order. “The con-
victions that are shared by the Christian,
Jewish, and Buddhist, as well as by the
Chinese religions, ought to be empha-
sised, because they can greatly con-
tribute in creating a new model of interna-
tional relations,” stated the Catholic
theologian Hans Küng, when making a
plea for all religions to enter into a poli-
tical-social debate, even if it means acting
against the wishes of their political lea-
ders. “There will not be an improvement
in the international order without a com-
mon global ethics,” he asserted.
Sustainable development and the fight
against poverty marked the proposals
put forward for the Mediterranean. Water,
energy geopolitics, biodiversity, sustai-
nable management of tourism and the
need to reflect about human movements
were established as the principle cha-
llenges in the development sphere.
Shared water resources, the access to
them and the management of interna-
tional trans-border water supplies, can be a
key to achieving peace or becoming sour-
ces of conflict, especially in Europe and
the Mediterranean (the rivers Rhine,
Danube, Jordan, etc.), and in Africa (the
Nile, Congo and others).
The Mediterranean Sea is also experien-
cing a process of globalisation. The bio-
diversity, the landscape and the coast
are changing rapidly due to human activ-
ity and climatic change. The Mediterr-
anean is the main tourist destination of
the world and is a victim of its own suc-
cess. The degradation of its coastline is
unprecedented and many of its species
are on the point of extinction. Research
into the cleansing of sewage, the promo-
tion of more sustainable types of tour-
ism that do not put so much pressure
on natural resources and the develop-
ment of cultural exchanges ought to help
to establish an equilibrium, first, be-
 tween human evolution on both shores of
the sea and, second, between this evo-
lution and the marine and terrestrial ecos-
ystems. Today’s society invests much
energy in order to achieve access to the
basic rights for all citizens, without dis-
crimination of race, colour or beliefs.
However, the increasingly deteriorating
environment and the growth in social,
economic and cultural discrimination,
endangers the wellbeing of future gene-

dations.
The management of human movements
is an essential part of the mentioned futu-
re wellbeing and the relations between the
populations of the developed and
developing world. The territorial complex-
itv of the migratory processes, the rela-
tions between partnership, security and
development, shared identities, the pro-
cesses of integration and living together
in the cities and in its public areas,
the protection of immigrants basic rights,
the contribution to development, the co-
ordination with other commercial poli-
cies or social integration, the dialogue
between all the stakeholders have been
the subjects dealt with in the regional
analysis of migrations in the EuroMe-
diterranean region.
By reflecting about the problems, cha-
llenges and opportunities of the Medi-

eranean in all its dimensions, the need for
a new paradigm of coexistence, under-
standing and integration is evident; one
which is based on a series of parame-
ters that have been repeated in thou-
sands of different ways and points of
view. The alleged Clash of Civilisations
has been transformed into a clash of inte-
rests and ignorance. More dialogue and
knowledge is needed in order to move
away from stereotyping and monolithic
thinking. The contemporary intellectual
structures are not capable of recogni-
sing alternative ways of thinking that allow
the articulation of agreed solutions in
accordance with the reality of a diverse
and constantly evolving society. It is
necessary to develop an alternative vision
that embraces diversity in its widest sense
in order to be able to address today’s
needs. Apart from knowledge, further
understanding of interdependency and
human vulnerability, as much as intellec-
tual curiosity and the promotion of edu-
cation to break down barriers are the
ways forward to a fairer world. In a sea
as small as ours, the present great divi-
sion is unsustainable.
The Mediterranean is an area where
various different peoples arrived and
imposed their respective Roman peace,
Arabic peace, Britannic peace and
American peace”: “It is now time to speak
of a Mediterranean peace, reached by
us” (Guido de Marco).
The Universal Forum of Cultures set out
to be a place for a coming together of
minds, creativity and a little common
sense in which frontiers disappear.

More information about the ideas, par-
ticipants, programmes, legacy and con-
clusions of Barcelona 2004 at:
www.barcelona2004.org
www.fundacioforum.org