

Euro-Mediterranean Networks in the Cultural Arena

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The Euro-Mediterranean area has had first-hand experience of the negative repercussions of the Anglo-American war in Iraq in the Spring of 2003. New restrictions (both actual and psychological) on movements between the countries of the Mediterranean have delivered a major blow to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and its credibility, already substantially undermined as a result of the obscurity of the process and the paucity of tangible results.

Indeed, the Partnership constitutes a complex and delicate exercise that is constantly faced with challenges, in the shape of the major crises of world geopolitics. From the end of the Oslo Process to the ongoing war against the so-called «axis of evil», the Barcelona Process has regularly been pronounced to have reached its end, particularly within civil societies. Following the events of 11th September, and in spite of its ambitions, it is undeniable that the Partnership has failed to convince sceptics with regard to its relevance as an instrument for preventing conflicts and encouraging social, economic and cultural integration in the region.

Another consequence of the war has been that the cultural arena was abruptly called upon to come to the aid of aggravated north-south relations, as though people had suddenly become conscious of the lack of mutual understanding and awareness between the Mediterranean's cultures and peoples.

However, the picture would be incomplete without mentioning the responsibilities of the relevant social and cultural actors. Despite their high level of activity and creativity in the EuroMed area since 1995, these actors have not yet proved to be up to the task of completing the role that they were invited to play (on paper, admittedly) within the EU's Mediterranean policy. Within the cultural arena in particular, the efforts have resulted in an inability to influence public policies (at both a national and a community level) and has it has been rendered impossible to present a strong, united front.

Characterised by tremendous division and compartmentalisation (artists and academics do not understand each other, for example), which can sometimes be attributed to competition (regarding access to sources of financing, among other things), over recent years cultural environments have only managed to produce a discourse marked by disillusion and impotence as far as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is concerned.

It is against this rather gloomy backdrop that attempts at building networks amongst cultural agents are emerging, or being given a new lease of life. Such networks are frequently informal and non-institutionalised, based on relationships of trust and related to a particular project or meeting, such as the first Biennial of Journals of Critical Thought. This event brought together some thirty journals from the Mediterranean area, in Marrakech in December 2002, on the initiative of Transeuropéennes (Paris) and Chouala (Casablanca). Despite sometimes having a low profile, these informal experiences do stimulate intellectual

exchanges and solidarity in the Mediterranean region.

The recent phenomenon of the creation of Arab networks is indicative of a significant stage in the process of structuring the civil arena of southern Mediterranean societies. Two examples in this respect consist of Aïcha, the Arab women's forum, which operates on a decentralised basis (women and law in Tunisia, women and education in Morocco, coordination in Jerusalem, and so forth), and the Palestinian Network of art centres, based in Ramallah, which not only aims to boost the aptitude of artistic and cultural organisations in the West Bank and Gaza, but also constitutes a platform for cooperation with European artistic environments.

On a Euro-Mediterranean level, one of the most long-running projects, the Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean, has become an authentic network, and effected a renewal of its work methods in preparation for the gathering in Athens that took place in June 2003. The proceedings emphasised the events preceding and following the actual Biennial through a series of interrelated, decentralised workshops in various countries.

The highly innovative DBM (Mediterranean Basin Dance) network encompasses dance professionals (choreographers, dancers, companies, instructors, and others) from around the Mediterranean, and in 2003 decided to invest in the concept of training, this being a particularly crucial area for the south shore. The DBM receives European financing as part of the Culture 2000 initiative, and is a good example of the usefulness of European

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CULTURAL NETWORKS

Transeuropéennes (Paris):
www.transeuropeennes.org

Femec:
www.femec.org

DBM (Mediterranean Basin Dance) Network:
www.dbmed.org
Babelmed:
<http://www.babelmed.net/>

Biennial of Young Artists
from Europe and the Mediterranean:
www.bjcem.org

programmes being open to third Mediterranean countries. Its decentralised operation has taken it to Istanbul this year, for professional meetings involving Turkey's contemporary dance environments.

In the information sector, it is important to mention the original example of Babelmed, a network of journalists from a range of Mediterranean countries (Turkey, the Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Greece, Spain, France and Italy), which focuses on the region's current cultural, literary and artistic situation, and which publishes high-quality articles and original texts on an impressive website. A real insight into Mediterranean culture, Babelmed is coordinated by an international team based in Rome. In 2003, field surveys published on the website made it possible to read a combination of northern and southern perspectives concerning cities involved in wars (entitled «War and Post-war») and on port cities («Sea Lands»).

Some of the experiences referred to above are also encompassed within the Femec (the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Cultures), the first EuroMed cultural network, which was thought up at the end of 2000 and really took off in that year. By the end of 2003, it had around forty active members, and its agenda includes some of the most interesting ideas that the Euro-Mediterranean independent cultural scene has to offer.

It unites artists, translators, academics, cultural operators, association leaders and those who run journals, from Europe and the Mediterranean; men and women (as well as organisations) who share a common desire, namely that of being involved in the creation of a human and cultural arena geared to

movement, exchange and sharing between the Mediterranean's northern and southern shores.

The Femec does not claim that it alone represents the Mediterranean's entire cultural sector, and its booklets underline its particular perspective: «We regard culture as resistance, as openness, as permanent negotiation regarding our differences». In specific terms, the Femec is an organisation where barriers are broken down, and therefore where people can come together and tackle demanding issues, via a series of regular meetings held particularly, though not exclusively, in countries on the southern shore. Thus, following the gathering in Cairo in 2003, which enabled reciprocal perceptions of the post-war situation to be examined, a meeting in Amman in 2004 will study the issue of «the power of culture and the culture of power», and will be followed by another at the end of the year in Casablanca, on the subject of cultural borders. These meetings exemplify the methodology of the Femec, which is based on generating powerful opportunities for sharing intellectual ideas and building relationships between peoples.

One of its intended objectives is to provide support for men and women from the cultural sector in their individual and collective work, as well as in terms of their independence from the authorities, in the north and the south alike. In this respect, the sharing of information is an essential task in terms of a contribution to overcoming one of the most glaring examples of inequality in Mediterranean cultural exchanges. In 2003, the Femec therefore created a website by way of a collective tool at the disposal of everyone. Among other things, it incorporates an initial nucleus

of Mediterranean journals on human and social sciences,¹ as a prototype for a larger network that is currently being developed.

Above all, the Femec aspires to be an instrument for the defence of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's cultural aspects, hence its commitment where the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue between cultures is concerned. In 2003, in fact, the launch of this institution, the first to be germinated from the Barcelona Process, has been on the agenda of the Partnership and cultural agents. Conceived by Europe in response to the risks of a split with the Arab and Muslim world, the new Foundation throws up two pivotal questions: what is understood by dialogue between the cultures of the Mediterranean region? And what form will the involvement of civil societies take in this dialogue?

But is it actually possible to refer to dialogue while the conditions of creation, education and access to cultural information, as well as those in which cultural production takes place, are marked by severe inequalities on both sides of the Mediterranean? Moreover, is it possible to finesse on the issue of freedom (of expression, of creation, and of movement) in the public arena, and to be satisfied with a dialogue between people of culture? Considered in this light, the cultural challenges appear to be more general and therefore more relevant to the entire collective of Euro-Mediterranean societies.

This is the attitude that the Femec is applying to its commitment within the non-governmental Platform regarding the EuroMed Civil Forum,² which is currently in the process of being established. The Femec aims to open cultural challenges up to public debate, and

¹ The journals featured in 2003 are as follows: *Mediterraneans*, Paris, *Prologues*, Casablanca, *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, Barcelona, *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien (Cemoti)*, Paris, *Confluences Méditerranée*, Paris

² Provisional secretariat: Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network Strandgade 56, DK - 1401 Copenhagen K, Tel: +45 32 69 89 11

to enable the cultural sector to come face to face with other aspects of the life of societies, beginning with issues related to development and the protection of human rights.

Furthermore, like the cultural networks, the EuroMed non-governmental platform is genuine proof of the fact that, regardless of the field in which they work, cultural agents in civil societies

share the same desire to overcome difficulties and to otherwise influence the fate of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliament.

TEMPUS-MEDA PROJECTS 2002

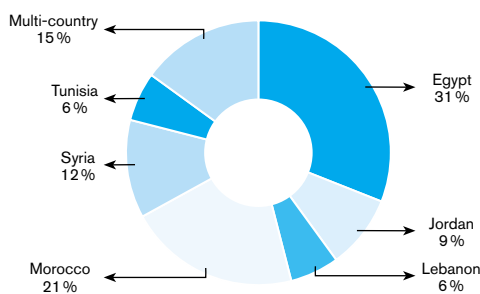
Joint European Projects are one of the instruments of cooperation in the Tempus Programme. The JEP provide financial aid for two or three years to association projects between institutions in the partner countries and EU countries.

(Graph A) JEP applications selected in 2002 by beneficiary MEDA country (33 projects in total).

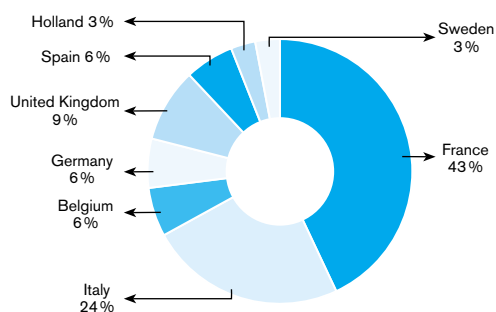
(Graph B) JEP Projects by EU country signatory to the agreement (33 projects in total).

The signatory member or contractor must be located in the EU and is legally liable for the administration of the Tempus subsidy.

GRAPH A



GRAPH B



Sources: European Commission, DG Education and Culture, Education and Training, http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/tempus/index_en.html Martina Rathner, DG Education and Culture, cited by Ideaborn consultants.

ACTIVITIES OF THE TEMPUS OFFICE IN MOROCCO SINCE JULY 2003

Tempus-MEDA Meetings

- European Commission in Brussels (3 and 4 July 2003): NTO (National Tempus Offices) officials from the Mediterranean.
- Rome (19 and 20 September 2003): exchange of experiences with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
- Alexandria (13 and 14 October 2003): intercultural dialogue and workshops dedicated to the directly operational activities of Tempus.
- Catania (7 and 8 November 2003): debate on the opportunity of creating an area for dialogue and joint action between the university bodies of the Euro-Mediterranean countries. The main conclusions of the meeting were: The idea of creating a «space for higher education for the Euro-Mediterranean countries»; the need to review certain pro-

grammes that are already in operation, (in particular, an extension of the «individual mobility grant» to a period longer than 8 weeks as envisaged in the candidate's guide to the Tempus-MEDA programme); the possibilities for extending the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme to MEDA countries; the harmonisation of institutions and programmes (bearing in mind the process of Bologna); and setting up a «portal» to which all the universities of the Euro-Mediterranean area will be invited to submit proposals on mobility.

Parallel informative activities on the Tempus Morocco programme

- The information seminar Tempus Morocco, on 26 July 2003, in which the Minister of Higher Education and the Vice-Minister for Scientific Research stressed the importance

of the Tempus programme and its contribution to the success of the Higher Education Reform which will take effect this year.

- During the months of October and November, and as the final date of 15 December approached, the NTO-Morocco multiplied the number of contacts and induced the presentation of the maximum number of projects likely to be chosen. With this in view, information meetings were organised in the Moroccan universities and institutes. In addition to information meetings and sessions, a website is in preparation and a data bank of searchers in Morocco and abroad is in the process of being completed.

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