

# The place of culture and the role of cultural players in Euro-Med relations

## Background note prepared by Relais Culture Europe

The role of culture in Euro-Med relations is of great interest to Culture Action Europe for several reasons:

- Many cultural stakeholders already work in this area. This is not just true of Southern European countries. Scandinavian countries, for example, especially Sweden, have been very active for years in this field.
- Culture is a recognised area of cooperation between the EU and the Southern Mediterranean countries under the Euro-Med frameworks.
- The project of Marseilles Provence 2013 marks the importance of the cultural issues in the Mediterranean: issues which are of course similar to many others identified as relevant within the borders of Europe (intercultural dialogue, for example).

### Our aim here is twofold;

- to define and clarify the place of culture in the Euro-Med relations (i.e. between EU and South Mediterranean countries, mainly under the Euro-Mediterranean agreement)
- to reflect on how best to support the role of culture in the Euro-Med cooperation space

## I. Culture, Europe and the Mediterranean: the issues

### A. Europe and the Mediterranean

The term Mediterranean defines no specific, homogenous space, neither in terms of content, aims or geographical frontiers. It is a zone of several frameworks of cooperation and variable geometries of activities. Given the fluidity and vagueness of the term, some clarification is called for.

#### 1. The Euro-Med: a specifically Community approach to regional integration

- **Euro-Mediterranean partnership (EMP) and the Neighbourhood Policy:** the EMP (or Barcelona Process<sup>1</sup>) is the first global political undertaking in the region by the EU. The Barcelona Process brings together all 27-member states and the South Mediterranean States<sup>2</sup>, in a framework of cooperation on political, economic, social and cultural issues. EMP has three aims:
  - Improving the mutual understanding between cultures
  - Bringing people closer together

<sup>1</sup> Project launched in Barcelona in 1995

<sup>2</sup> Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Turkey + Libya (since 2004) + Albania et Mauritania (since 2007)

- Developing civil society<sup>3</sup>.

It is based on two cooperation dimensions:

- Bilateral (between the EU and each partner country)
- Regional (between the EU and the Partner States as a whole – this is the innovation)

Since 2004 these Mediterranean Partner States are also included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP is a new policy approach introduced in 2004 as a consequence of the last Enlargement process. It seeks to prevent new divisions emerging between the European Union and its new neighbours to the East and the South, and to define a zone of security at the fringes of the EU.

- **European policy to benefit the Mediterranean:** The Euro-Med policies (both EMP and the ENP) rely on logic of *rapprochement* between the Member States and the Mediterranean countries. It seeks to deepen political dialogue, and promote internal reform in order to help those countries to reach international standards as regards their economic integration and adherence to democratic values. The policy also has cooperation and development objectives at different levels (economic, social and political), which vary by country. These two dimensions guide the Euro-Med policy package and the resultant programmes.

#### 2. Other actors and approaches in the area

- **Europe: several cooperation dimensions**

Regional integration in the Mediterranean is a recurrent political issue. Several attempts have been made:

- The 5+5 (1990), which brought together Western Mediterranean countries<sup>4</sup>, was an attempt to cooperate directly with the Partner States via a closer regional integration by setting up an informal space for dialogue.
- The 'Alliance of Civilizations' launched in 2004 by the Spanish to avoid the risks of fractures between the West and the Muslim World.
- The 'Union for the Mediterranean' launched in 2007 by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and integrated in the Barcelona

<sup>3</sup> The first two result from the creation of a zone of shared prosperity and stability

<sup>4</sup> au Nord, l'Espagne, le Portugal, la France, l'Italie et Malte; au Sud, la Mauritanie, le Maroc, l'Algérie, la Tunisie et la Libye

Process, which advanced the idea of closer cooperation between countries bordering on the Mediterranean in specific, agreed areas (water, energy, transport) around concrete projects.

**Bilateral cooperation:** Outside the Community framework, each Member State has its own Mediterranean policy either regional or bilateral. The aims, objectives, partners and domains of cooperation vary by country. Some states as France or Spain are turned more towards the Maghreb (North West Africa) and others work more in the Levant area (Egypt, Iraq, Arabian Peninsula). This analysis also holds for local authorities that run, via a form of decentralised cooperation, their own specific activities in the region.

- **Moreover...**

**The American Greater Middle East Initiative:** in 2004, the Americans launched a redesign strategy for the Middle East. Running from Pakistan to Mauritania it aimed to transform the zone both politically and economically, and to bring democracy and peace to the area.

Globalisation has opened other cooperation and partnership possibilities to the Southern Mediterranean countries, with China for example or the Gulf States. They also have their own issues and desire to develop common spaces for activity, such as the Arab League.

## **B. The place of culture in European and Mediterranean relations**

### 1. Community Action : a 'soft' policy

- **Culture in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation**

**The Barcelona declaration integrates culture to the relationships between Europe and the Mediterranean countries:** Although rarely an objective in development terms, it is among the Euro-Med priorities. The Barcelona declaration identifies a « *social, cultural and human* » chapter which aims to improve mutual understanding and *rapprochement*, and has as corner stone the reinforcement of cooperation with civil society.

**Programmes for culture:** Barcelona sets up two specific areas of work.

- Dialogue between cultures and civilisations, which foresees meetings in the cultural sphere (defined mainly as applying in the religious sphere as well as struggle against intolerance and fanaticism).
- Medias (radio, television).

Euromed Heritage, Euromed Audiovisual and the activities of the Anna Lindh Foundation for

Dialogue between Cultures have been developed under those priorities. A rich cultural activities have also been supported by the Delegations of the EU in the different Mediterranean countries.

- **Limited cultural activity**

**Intercultural dialogue is the main aim of the Euro-Mediterranean work in the cultural field.**

This idea covers a wide range of activities and approaches. In its operational form, groups are put forward (women, teachers), activities targeted (exchange, meetings), themes identified (intolerance, fanaticism). However, the methods and content are left open, which leads to a wide and rather imprecise panorama involving people from very different fields (migrants protection, education, equality), each with their own objectives. The resultant programmes do not directly concern specific cultural sectors (except for Heritage) or specific artistic sectors. This discourages any specific impact on issues such as professional training, support to the job market, or artists' access to international markets.

**No cultural policy:** even if the cultural chapter of the Barcelona process covers activities with cultural characteristics, it is not and cannot be a genuine cultural policy since no such competence exists at the Community level. Another technical obstacle exists since the European Commission has no cultural diplomats, and no trained cultural specialists. Additionally, the Commission's cultural activity is fragmented and split across different services with different aims (and between different Directorates).

What is more, cultural policies development suffers from certain reticence on the part of the Southern Mediterranean Partner States. Many of these States are more or less authoritarian; free expression, the free circulation of cultural works, people to people exchanges are therefore considered as extremely sensitive issues.

### 2. Other actors in the Mediterranean cultural sphere with their own objectives<sup>1</sup>

- **Member States and their national policies:** In Europe, although some States are very committed to cultural work, few have a policy or global approach for the place of culture in their international relations. Some do not have the means, for others it is not a priority. All of them nevertheless have cultural activities abroad with their own objectives: artistic excellence, civilising added value, language and education, to cite a few. In spite of these differences, States tend to support culture in a general global logic of visibility and as a tool to promote

<sup>1</sup> Text analysis can be found in Made in Med. Les enjeux des échanges artistiques en Méditerranée, published by the Fonds Roberto Cimetta in December 2007

the exportation of their national cultural. Common preoccupations do exist however, such as intercultural dialogue or the management of local ethnic populations on European territory.

- **Foundations and private sector:** Several foundations are active in the Mediterranean. Their work aims at reinforcing the cultural diversity of populations and the opening up of civil society. They tend to act in projects based on geopolitical priorities (the Arab World, the Euro-Med, etc.) and tend to be at the base of artistic and cultural cooperation in the area. The Open Society Institute for example seeks to reinforce democracy and supports civil society initiatives.
- **Professionals:** The cultural and artistic sector has set up networks to support cooperation in the region. Mobility is a good example, as it is recognised as bringing added value to critical thought alongside artistic exchanges. Funds for mobility have appeared such as the Roberto Cimetta Fund (supported by the European Culture Foundation), and in the Southern Mediterranean, the Young Arab Theatre Fund, the Safar Fund and the Al Mawred Fund.

## II. Role and place of cultural actors in supporting Euro-Med cooperation.

### A. Clarifying and defining our work

#### 1. Culture, Europe and the Mediterranean: how to read the situation?

**A Community entrance point:** the general context is difficult to grasp because of a complexity of players, and levels of cooperation. We therefore need to understand better where we can act, where to place ourselves, where our influence will be most pertinent and what are the aims, key players and methods of work in the region.

As a matter of fact, most debates on the topic still lack a structured awareness of the context, including: a confusion between policies and actions, a lack of understanding of the EU cultural competencies, a lack of knowledge of other players active in the region and lack of background on existing work. We need to fill these gaps to make our work credible.

#### **The Euro-Med is part of the EU's external relations package.**

Culture is slowly finding its place on the international scene. The EU is defining its general role internationally as that of promoting peace, stability and prosperity. Thus, at European level, unlike national policies, cultural activities are not about 'exporting national culture' but rather promoting general European values. However if the European Commission's engagement is genuine, this area of actions is still very new and the road will be very long,

both to involve national Member States ground players.

### 2. As cultural players

- **Demonstrate the role and impact of culture:** currently, as European cultural actors, we tend to envisage at best that the EU will simply do internationally what it does in Europe, or even simply think of it as funder of last resort (substituting for national funding). The role of the EU is however different. We therefore need to understand that new support instruments for culture in external relations policies will not directly support European operators' projects but rather the projects of the cultural actors from recipient countries, and that real developments in this policy field will happen in the long term.

- **How**

Awareness raising: We have to widen our field of action, set up new links with DG RELEX and the European parliament, work with national partners including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and organise ourselves to get our ideas over clearly.

Through projects: We have to develop relevant projects responding to the priorities of the Euro-Mediterranean policy frameworks as well work with our Mediterranean partners to help them reinforce their structures and the emergence of new civil society actors.

### B. Impacting in the Mediterranean

#### 1. As regards the basics...

**Move beyond Intercultural Dialogue (ICD):** ICD privileges a transversal vision of culture, which is often distant from on the ground issues. For this reason, very few artistic and cultural projects end up being funded. We need to better define the meaning of ICD and link it to the real work on the ground. We also need to clarify the values on which ICD rests (in order to reinforce its legitimacy).

**Give value to creativity: artistic and aesthetic content:** Artistic and creative projects have to be given appropriate support and recognition of their value in reaching broad policy objectives.

2 examples:

Creativity supports the development of civil society: artistic groups are in general in favour of liberty and represent the most forward thinking parts of local society. Constructive cooperation with arts groups and civil society actors will also support the emergence and strengthening of local civil society players.

Creativity can help to change social images: intercultural dialogue is also about modernisation of our cultural images and representations (i.e. beyond stereotypes). This requires us to support cultural production in the

South both in terms of visibility, creation and consumption. There is also a need to work towards a higher international visibility for this artistic production. In parallel, we need to ensure that the images of the West are not only those carried by the media but also the arts, perhaps leading to a more nuanced and less superficial view of Western societies

- **Defending transversality:** We would like to see a clearer articulation of the links between cultural activities and their possible development impact (as is already the case in the ACP grouping where this is actually translated into practical programmes). This linkage might then lead to others - the Mediterranean area is for example a hot spot in security terms (terrorism, migration) and in both these cases culture might have a role to play.

#### As regards outputs: using the Community method

Community's policies repose on a number of key principles. Some of these are directly about cultural action and the sector needs to be able to engage with all of them.

- **Give value to partnership and governance**  
Partnership: in the cultural field the EU cannot act alone. The European Commission has neither diplomats nor specialised cultural administrators. It is therefore vital that the EU create mechanisms that allow it to work with/through professionals in the sector. For example in the mobility field, the management of a programme in the area to an organisation competent to run such a programme could be envisaged.

Governance is one of the principles within which the Community works. In this context it means associating in the conception and the implementation of the different policies a number of actors at different levels (political, professional, institutional, civil). This governance approach has two implications:

- On the part of the responsible institutions it requires a real association between grassroots professionals and civil society.
- It also requires a genuine mobilisation and engagement of professionals in the frameworks that are being put forward, and the collective challenge of bringing grassroots preoccupations to the attention of decision makers.

- **Advocating for the sector to mobilise:** cultural operators are not very involved in those spaces where Euro-Mediterranean policy is discussed and decided. Artistic players are also absent from most civil society spaces as two examples will show; the Anna Lindh Foundation has very few members which are professional cultural organisations (theatres, companies, museums...); the Euromed Civil Forum, which has an ongoing dialogue with the Commission, finds it very difficult to state that culture is actually relevant to its work. We need to work at advancing these fronts; the frameworks exist, but we need to occupy them.

The *European Agenda for Culture* proposed various spaces for dialogue (the structured dialogue and the civil society platforms) wherein the issue of culture and external affairs might be raised. More specifically, the Commission is launching a consultation with cultural actors about a Euro-Mediterranean cultural strategy. In this respect, the 'Workshop on actors in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue' which will take place in Marseilles at the beginning of November is an opportunity for us to mobilise and make our voices heard.

\*\*\*

The Euro-Mediterranean questions are very interesting for us in the sector since:

- It illustrates the global issue of culture in the field of EU's external affairs.
- It sheds light on policy issues that go beyond the frontiers of the EU.
- It can help cultural operators to understand much better the policy framework in which they work and contribute to the thinking on how to improve their actions.
- It underlines the necessity to move ahead, politically and practically.

The long-term objective is to change how culture is perceived both inside and outside Europe. To do so, as well as influencing the relevant institutions, we must reflect on our own situation. The fact that we are as yet too little involved in European policy issues, indeed one might even say we are suspicious of them, only lessens our impact and weakens the role of culture in the European project. In other words, the Mediterranean question is about us, and our roles as committed European cultural players.