

2.4 Mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

This outline of a mobility strategy, drafted by Traugott Schoefthaler, was presented by the Anna Lindh Foundation and its French National Network together with the Robert Cimetta Fund and the Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform in Paris to an interregional Workshop, 13-15 September 2006, on “Dialogue among Peoples and Cultures”, hosted by the French Government, and to the Euro-Med Civil Forum in Marrakech, 4 to 7 October 2006. It develops the mobility aspect of the strategy for re-vitalizing the Dialogue between Cultures (section 2.1).

“Free flow of ideas in word and image” was identified immediately after the horrors of the Second World War by the United Nations as a common standard to be achieved by concerted efforts of the international community. From the very beginning, this objective was defined with three major elements of mobility and exchange:

- Freedom and exchange of opinion and knowledge;
- Exchange of persons;
- Exchange of publications, artistic products, scientific and other information and free worldwide access to published information.

(Constitution of UNESCO, 1946, Preamble and Article I)

At the beginning of the 21st century, the economic dynamics of globalization brought along an unprecedented transnational flow of information and people. Against all fears of progressing cultural uniformity, the global availability of cultural resources did not reduce cultural diversity. It helped developing new opportunities of cultural expression and forging multiple and diversified identities.

The free flow of ideas in word and image is supported by new technologies breaking former state monopolies, from Satellite TV and Internet broadcasting to mobile phone exchange of voice, text and images to the world wide web and distribution tools such as CD, DVD and memory stick. “No culture is an island”, ten years ago still defended as a concept by the World Commission on Culture and Development, has become a new perspective of our reality. Most people remain deeply rooted in smaller or larger communities while adapting contents and forms of cultural expression to their daily life. Virtually all local cultural identities include now “imported” cultural elements that have found their way to the remotest and most closed communities, thus forming new “transcultural diversities” (Kevin Robins, Final Report on cultural policy and cultural identities for the Council of Europe, March 2006).

In the Euro-Mediterranean cultural space, these new developments are very unevenly distributed. Whereas ideas and images move freely in the virtual space, there are numerous obstacles hindering mobility of persons, and their cultural products and services. Mutual prejudice and mistrust have not diminished since the Barcelona Declaration was signed by the Member States of the European Union and their Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Partners in 1995. Increased access to information and tools for free flow of words and images did neither mobilize more freedom and exchange of opinion and knowledge nor did it reduce the obstacles for mobility of persons. The three key elements of mobility, as identified by the international community 60 years ago: opinion, persons and information, are not in balance in the Information Society.

The Barcelona Declaration reflects the three mobility elements in its third chapter on a social, cultural and human partnership as: “Dialogue and respect between cultures and religions”; “human exchanges” (civil society); “role of the mass media in the reciprocal recognition and understanding of cultures as a source of mutual enrichment”.

On the occasion of the Euro-Mediterranean Ten Years Barcelona Summit (November 2005), a number of critical assessments were published. Almost all conclude that economic cooperation developed successfully, a stable framework for political cooperation was established, whereas social, cultural and human aspects of bringing people and peoples of both shores of the Mediterranean was not given the appropriate attention in the first ten years of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Most of these reports criticize fragmented and compartmentalized action in this field which has been subject of long debates and discussions because of diverging views in

particular between European and Arab partners. Many state that perceptions have not changed, with disparate obsessions persisting. Most reports consider that migration was predominantly treated as a security problem, at the expense of a coherent policy for legal migration and mobility.

The Five Year Work Programme 2006-2010 adopted by the Barcelona Summit includes only a few mobility elements. “Improve intercultural understanding through regular dialogue, promotion of exchanges and mobility between people at all levels” is assigned to the Anna Lindh Foundation. The other elements are: conservation and restoration of cultural heritage; a Virtual Library with publications and documents in Arabic and European languages, as original and translations; university standards and student exchanges; scholarships and mobility grants for Higher Education staff; setting up multicultural and multilingual media; and promotion of legal migration opportunities.

The only civil society survey conducted on the Barcelona process¹ indicates that more than 50 per cent of all respondents want to see a “gradual liberalization of the mobility of people”. Only 26 per cent of respondents from the South, however, expect progress in this direction.

It seems, therefore, essential to develop a coherent strategy for “regular dialogue, promotion of exchanges and mobility between people at all levels” which can not be shouldered by the Anna Lindh Foundation alone. A first draft of such a strategy was elaborated by the High-Level Advisory Group on “Dialogue between peoples and cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Area”, convened by former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi (2003). The report warns against restricting exchange and networking to virtual communication, since only meetings in physical locations can offer to “experience all aspects of dialogue”. This “Groupe des Sages Report” gives priority to networking rather than individual mobility grants. Regular exchange and cooperation opportunities should be provided for youth, university staff, artists, authors and creators.

The Anna Lindh Foundation (Secretariat and French network) and the Roberto Cimetta Fund invite all partners involved in the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to:

1 European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED): Survey on Ten Years of the Barcelona Process, Civil Society's Views. Barcelona: IEMED 2005

1. Promote enhanced mobility and exchanges as a key element for a Dialogue between Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean area which reaches out to civil society at large as proposed by the Prodi Groupe des sages and confirmed in recent recommendations and decisions by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament (A6-0280/2005 and 0168/2006);
2. Join efforts to ensure that mobility of persons keeps pace with mobility of information and goods;
3. Advocate the creation of mobility assistance funds supporting the participation of cultural actors and youth in training, exchange and cooperation programmes offered by stakeholders of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership; (in addition to scholarships for students and mobility grants for academic staff already included in the EU Budget 2007-2013);
4. Advocate, at all appropriate levels, the creation of an “EuroMed Cooperation Visa”, facilitating visa procedures for citizens of all EuroMed countries invited to participate in meetings, projects and programmes organized by institutions or programmes of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (as repeatedly requested by the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum);
5. Support and design a coherent cultural strategy with measures for improving conditions of equal partnership between North and South; such measures include training and provision of advisory services enabling cultural actors, teachers, students and academic staff and managers of Civil Society Organizations in the South to organize a larger number of exchange and cooperation projects in the South;
6. Work on transforming support schemes to individual mobility into fostering exchanges.