

3.2 Mediterranean Dialogue is Unique

Salvatore Bono

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I appreciate that the Advisory Committee¹ is called upon its primary task: giving advice on the “policy” which should inspire the main lines of action of the Anna Lindh Foundation, and, therefore, on the concept of dialogue in the Mediterranean, including even the concept of “the Mediterranean”. On the other hand, I have difficulties to reply to questions the underlying position and criteria I do not share.

I am expressing my position in all frankness, but this does not imply a judgement on activities developed and results achieved until now by the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The questions asked create the impression as if we would have to cope with aches, to cure illnesses, to solve problems, in a nutshell: to alter a certain state of affairs. I am advocating a positive perspective, courageous, almost utopian: Formulating and disseminating a message – in particular to young people, through the media – which goes beyond the present situation and all its dramatic problems which we do not ignore, fully appreciating the efforts of those who are dealing with them, such as politicians, diplomats, sociologists, economists etc.

1 Salvatore Bono is, together with the authors of sections 3.1 and 3.3, member of the scientific Advisory Committee of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The fundament of our work should be the conviction that our frame of reference must be the Mediterranean, our dialogue of cultures which is the dialogue of the cultures of the Mediterranean in the Mediterranean, which is different from a dialogue between Europe and China or Latin America, or any other region. All problems raised must be related to the specific frame of the Mediterranean as a whole. As a matter of principle, we should not favour any influence exerted by one civilisation, religion or society on any other. We need to consider every particular relation in a perspective and with the arguments offered by the Mediterranean as a whole.

We should not limit ourselves to tolerance or respect of others and their diversities. We have to see whether, at the end, the others are really others, given that all have something in common which is, in my view, a shared historical experience, without guarantee of continuity. We have to be proud and enthusiastic of being members of such a community, characterised by uncountable diversities but nevertheless one which is coherent and unique, unparalleled in the whole world.

We need to discuss which is the space of this Mediterranean world, unique in its diversity, which is subject of our dialogue (not only the coastal regions of the Mediterranean Sea or the Mediterranean or Mediterranean Partner countries the number of which could be changing from one moment to the other).

If we share, even from different approaches, a similar Mediterranean vision – and this would be the main issue to be discussed – we have to discover, identify, even “construct” and disseminate the feeling of a Mediterranean identity which is, obviously, situated side by side, for everybody and each particular community, with all the other identities (the village, the city or region of origin, nation or state, religion, or civilisation to which everybody has priority belongings to (Arabo-Islamic, Europeo-Christian, Jewish etc.), but each of those identities can have its proper differentiations: Latin or Germanic, Slavonic and Orthodox etc., without forgetting of the wealth of ethnic-cultural specificities (Hungarian, Albanian, Berber, Sardinian or Corse and so on). In looking at the Mediterranean, we could establish probably an endless list of such identities.

These reflections do not concern the cultural dialogue only but, to a certain extent, every relation between Europe and its Mediterranean partners (or Mediterranean “neighbours”). The Europe of Brussels has geared these relations to its needs of solving some of its problems (security, limiting immigration, “terrorism” etc.). It has not declared to have the ideal of a new living together in the Mediterranean context, in the name of restoring a

historical community of cultures and civilisations. Paradoxically, much of our discourse on diversity, on dialogue, on bridges between cultures and civilisations, risks ending up with a negative effect at the public at large which is largely ignorant of the history and the links between our civilisations. We could come to reinforce the picture of fundamental differences, of deep waters to be crossed by bridges, or create the impression that, in the Mediterranean world, we are just starting today with encounters and confrontations; for the Europeans, this would certainly be related to images of desperate people who arrive at our coasts by not very reliable boats, and totally forgotten would be our thousands of years of living together as well as the fact that we all share, with the same rights, a common heritage of civilization. This implies, obviously, profound and sincere recognition of the same dignity and value of all (each being an “other” in relation to others), having confidence and patience, and not insisting in unconditional acceptance of particular values and modes of thought and political, economic, or social life by everybody. The Europeans forget, too often, that history offers us, among other things, an endless lot of phenomena that existed in the past, that guide today our perspectives and communication with “others” (democracy, human rights, status of women, religious reciprocity and so on).