

5.3 Diversity, not Political Correctness – Benchmarks for Quality Journalism

“Ensure respect of cultural diversity and religious pluralism” is one of the most important commitments in the Barcelona Declaration, signed 1995 by the Foreign Ministers of the EU Member States and their Mediterranean neighbours. It is a shared value for the now 37 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). In this region, there is much diversity, but there is little respect. There is not even enough mutual knowledge. This creates for journalists in the region a real challenge. They need to be encouraged to make the EMP principle their personal commitment.

Tariq Ramadan, one of the most brilliant advocates of recognising Islam as part of European identities, formulated recently a very persuasive argument: “The *others* are as complex as we are.” There are never people who are completely different. “The others” are “all equal, all different” in terms of the Council of Europe’s recent youth campaign.

We definitely cannot eliminate causes of economic or political conflicts by quality journalism. But media can unmask such conflicts, in analysing the real causes, claims for land, resources, or domination or freedom.

We are living in a climate of resentments where rumours can kill, what a challenge for the media. It is a matter of fact that the large majority of Muslims feel that Islam is the only major religion which is discriminated everywhere outside majority Muslim countries. And the majority believes strongly in what they call an American-Zionist conspiracy governing international affairs. Our times are fertile in bringing about more conspiracy theories. A recent one is called “Eurabia”, the “Euro-Arab Axis”, increasingly popular in Internet blogs and providing food for mushrooming islamophobic circles. The EU, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and also the Anna Lindh Foundation are accused of an appeasement policy towards Arab and Muslim claims, betraying the so-called “European values”. The Manifesto of this new conspiracy theory “describes Europe’s evolution from a Judeo-Christian civilization, with important post-Enlightenment secular elements, into a post Judeo-Christian civilization that is subservient to the ideology of *jihad* and the

Islamic powers that propagate it....Till this day the Euro-Arab Dialogue is totally unknown to Europeans, even though its occult machinery has engineered Europe's irreversible transformation through hidden channels. European tax-payers do not realize that they are funding the numerous foundations of the Dialogue, its complex bodies which are working under their own national parliament, the European Parliament, the Commission, academia, press, media, and politicians – all weaving the web that conditions them to acclaim a system that has raised as virtues the denial of the Islamic threats and the renunciation of self-defense.”¹

Journalists and media cannot be silent on such streams of resentment which are poisoning our hopes for a peaceful living together in cultural diversity and mutual respect. Almost all media associations and professional journalists associations have elaborated ethical codes. They include, for example, the principle of non-discrimination in reporting about “native” and “immigrant” criminal offenders. It is obvious that existing resentments can be reinforced by police reports which highlight ethnic origin only in non-native cases. Articles following such ethical codes might be more difficult to sell, and journalists, too often, fear the killing argument of “political correctness”.

Probably, ethical standards are not a very good motivation for journalists. Invoking professional standards of “quality journalism” might be better. The women movement has been extremely successful in promoting a non-sexist language. No political leader can afford neglecting that there are women and men in the electorate. The profession of history teachers has developed the principle of multi-perspectivity as an indicator for school textbooks which allow access to the motivation and reasons of the various actors. There are numerous benchmarks for a quality journalism that invites readers to choose among different perspectives. One of the many problems is processing of information provided by interested parties including Governments. Most journalists have adopted, after 9/11, a cautious attitude in dealing with the term “terrorist” if there is an ideological context, even in documents originating from the White House or the Kremlin. The same caution is much less visible in dealing with terms such as “Israeli Arabs”. Copy-pasting this term from official bulletins could give support to a biased perspective suggesting that the Palestinians whose families did not join the refugees after the establishment of the State of Israel would have lost their ethnic identity, and the Green line would also divide unidentified Arabs with and Palestinians without Israeli passports.

1 Bat Ye'or: *Eurabia. The Euro-Arab Axis*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press 2005. Citations from pages 9 and 268-269 of the 8th printing, 2006.



Public dialogue with the winners of the first Euro-Mediterranean Journalist Prize for Cultural Diversity in Alexandria on 10 September 2006. From right to left: Aly El Samman, Head of the Dialogue and Islamic Relations Committee of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Cairo; Traugott Schoefthaler, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation; Hugues Dorzée, *Le Soir*, Brussels; Mahitab Abdel Raouf, *Revue d'Égypte*, Cairo; Annalisa Monfreda, *GEO Italia*, Rome; Yoav Stern, *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv. Photo: ALF

With the first edition of the Euro-Med Journalistic Prize for Cultural Diversity, the Anna Lindh Foundation and the International Federation of Journalists found numerous talents among young journalists in the whole region who have adopted respect of diversity as a benchmark for the quality of their work. Among the winners of the first edition in September 2006, there is a journalist from *Ha'aretz* who portrays the citizens of a mostly Palestinian city in Israel in all their diversified lifestyles, cultural, religious and political preferences. There is an Egyptian journalist who reports about the various attitudes of native Egyptians towards Sudanese refugees, and another one who portrays the complex relations between Muslim and Coptic citizens as well as within these communities.²

2 Anna Lindh Foundation and International Federation of Journalists: *The Euro-Med Journalist Prize for Cultural Diversity 2006. The Winning Articles*. Alexandria: ALF 2006. The articles can be downloaded in English, French or Arabic (<https://www.euromedalex.org/prize/EN/Articles2006.htm>)

We need to encourage journalists in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region to join the increasing number of media professionals who make the commitment to recognising cultural diversity their own, as a main component of quality journalism.

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