

Strategies, methods and contents of a meaningful dialogue are centred on multiple, dynamic and overlapping cultural identities. This book is an invitation to leave the beaten tracks of dialogue events entertained by “representatives” of cultural or religious organizations. The key concept is cultural diversity between and within societies. Cultural policies can support human development as “a process enlarging people’s choices”, following orientations provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO. To mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 2008, the author calls for renewed commitment to universal values as a “common standard to be achieved by all nations and peoples”, and not as “European values”, separating Europe from other regions.



Traugott Schoefthaler, born 1949, was from 2004 to 2007 the first Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, established in Alexandria, Egypt, by the EU Member States and their ten Mediterranean partners. He developed and tested the strategies and methods presented in this book in close cooperation with other institutions and organizations. He is theologian and sociologist and obtained his PhD for cross-cultural research. He started his career in the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education and served more than 20 years the United Nations and UNESCO. From 1993 to 2004, he was Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO.

Adventures in Diversity

New Avenues for the Dialogue
between Cultures

Traugott Schoefthaler

ISBN 3-927907-99-5

German Commission for UNESCO

Introduction

The shockwaves sent around the globe by violent mass demonstrations in the Muslim World early in 2006 – related to the publication of cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad in a number of European media – had many effects. Most of the immediate reactions by political leaders in Western countries were not much inspiring. They are indicators of a problem, the low level of public knowledge and understanding of realities in predominantly Muslim countries. Most of those reactions re-asserted the high priority of press freedom in the “Western civilization”. They failed to calm down the situation since the real addressees were obviously Western constituencies. There was a real danger of a new bloc confrontation, following the model of the instrumentalization of selected Human Rights as ideological weapons by both sides in the Cold War.

This danger is not yet prevented: New initiatives claiming European ownership for human rights and democracy are mushrooming, new conspiracy theories branding dialogue with “the Islam” as surrender of the “Western Civilization” become popular, public support for Turkey’s membership in the European Union is fading away, and repeated proposals by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, an intergovernmental umbrella of predominantly Muslim countries, resulted in a new “West against the Rest” stalemate confrontation in the United Nations over Islamophobia.

There were thousands of intercultural dialogue events organized in the last 20 years, and their number reached all time highs in the years following the United Nations Year for the Dialogue between Cultures 2001. All this did not provide the international community with a mechanism for preventing confrontations over cultural or religious differences, or for at least coping with critical moments.

Fortunately, the “cartoon shockwaves” motivated a number of actors to re-think the fashionable pattern of dialogue events characterized by “representatives” of large cultural or religious entities seeking the least common denominator, and resulting in mostly very shallow results. The cultural organizations of the Arab League and of the Islamic Conference established expert groups, the United Nations started the Alliance of Civilizations project, the Council of Europe prepares a White Book on Intercultural Dialogue, the European Commission charged an expert group with compiling a report on “Sharing Diversity”, featuring concepts, ideas and practice of intercultural dialogue in all EU member and candidate countries. On 6 November 2007, the decision by the European Parliament and the European Commission to declare 2008 as the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” has been amended: The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of

the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership declared 2008 also as the “Euro-Mediterranean Year of Dialogue between Cultures”.

The new keyword is “diversity”, understood no longer as diversity between countries or large linguistic, cultural or religious blocs, but as a dynamic concept for the enjoyment of cultural rights and freedoms of every citizen of this world. The normative fundamentals have been laid out in the “Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity” (UNESCO 2001), followed by a UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).

The rhetoric of a collective “No” to a “Clash of Civilizations” was among the routines of intercultural dialogue events since the publication of Samuel Huntington’s famous article 1993 in “Foreign Affairs”. It seems as it has now given way to better reflected ways of thinking. Edward Saïd was in 2001 among the few who branded Huntington’s scenario as a “gimmick”, obscuring the real problem of a “clash of ignorance”. Today, his warnings against simplistic culturalism have now entered the public discourse. Political leaders and journalists deplore the lack of mutual knowledge and advocate more and better information and education about cultural diversity and religious pluralism.

There is a chance for reconciling two discourses that have cocooned side by side since World War II, the one on human rights, and the other on culture. Debates on human rights have resulted in growing numbers of Declarations and Conventions, supported by complex monitoring mechanisms. Unmistakably, the value of non-discrimination along criteria of gender, race, ethic or social origin, language, religion or any other opinion holds all human rights together. Our discourse on culture, however, was dominated by the desire to define “culture” as a more or less stable collective entity, cultures as something to be counted and classified in the tradition of 19th century cultural anthropology. The enlarged definition of culture, as not only arts and music but also any result from human interaction with nature, including symbolic representations such as language or beliefs, was approved by the UNESCO World Conference on Culture in Mexico City in 1982. This broader understanding of culture opened gates for modern cultural policies, featuring not only “high culture” but culture in everyday life, as a means of democratic participation. But it was still biased towards culture as shaping predictable individual attitudes and behaviour.

It was the Report by the World Commission on Culture and Development, chaired by former UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and published 1996 under the

wonderful title “Our Creative Diversity”, that opened a new perspective at culture, being both heritage and a space for creativity. The annual Human Development Report of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) made it a policy matter to define human development as “a process enlarging people’s choices”. The “Human Development Index” made this understanding more and more popular.

“Dialogue between Cultures” is an expression with a certain bias towards the old understanding of cultures that can be represented in museums or by individual speakers. But cultures do not dialogue. It is always human beings who interact; only in exceptional cases, they have a mandate from a cultural or religious community to speak on their behalf. Personally, I prefer the term “intercultural dialogue”. But it seems that the transition from culturalist thinking to a more democratic understanding of culture takes time. It is therefore important to fill static terms such as “Dialogue between Cultures” or “Alliance between Civilizations” with new contents.

This book presents new dialogue strategies, developed during the last three years, and thematic approaches on gender, religion and learning. It concludes with challenges for Europe, a cultural space embracing diversity but shaped since the European Enlightenment by a notorious lack of self-criticism and by bias towards excessive self-reference. Three years living in the Arab World have changed my perspectives. Intra-European debates on “unity in diversity” are interesting and necessary. But they can derail into an ideology of “Fortress Europe” if they do not fully take into account another factor that shaped European identities: the constant interaction with other cultural spaces in the world, in particular the closest neighbours on the other side of the Mediterranean. This publication includes contributions from colleagues and partners who shared with me adventures in diversity, in search of new avenues for a Dialogue between Cultures.

This book is dedicated to Amin Maalouf, the great master of multi-perspectivity. His work is an eye-opener for understanding identity as what makes every person unique. Most of his novels invite the reader to a fresh look at historical cultural encounters from a number of different perspectives. In “Leo Africanus”, he features the life of Hasan al-Wazzan, a Muslim born in Granada, then driven with his family by the Spanish reconquista to Morocco. Starting there as a merchant, he made the first recorded travel across Africa, became diplomat for the Ottoman Empire, made his pilgrimage to Mecca, and was enslaved and sold to the Pope in Rome where he served as chief advisor and geographer. In “The Crusades through Arab Eyes”, Maalouf presents Southern narratives which are essential ingredients of any new understanding between Europe and the Arab

World. His analysis of “murderous identities” offers not only a lucid analysis of what turns ordinary people from neighbours into enemies; it designs a viable concept of understanding cultural identities as multiple, dynamic and overlapping affiliations and belongings of all human beings.¹ The fatal notion of a singular identity was always a key instrument for mobilizing aggression, hatred and mass murder. It is the first element of cultural heritage that needs to be abandoned in any meaningful dialogue between human beings living between cultures.

Alexandria, in November 2007

Traugott Schoefthaler

1 Amin Maalouf: “Les identités meurtrières”. Paris: Grasset 1996.
(English: «In the Name of Identity». New York, London: Penguin Books 2003)

1. What Went Wrong With the Dialogue Between Cultures?

It happened on 27 March 2006. The President of the Arab Republic of Egypt declared on the occasion of the Khartoum Summit of the League of Arab States: “The Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations failed the first critical test during the recent cultural crisis.” It is the first time since the so-called Asian values crisis that an important political leader in power declared failure of cultural dialogue. Since the publication of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations“, there was almost consensus on what should be the public attitude of serious decision-makers. Huntington has to be condemned, how could he even think about a cultural clash, all men and women of good will are in favour of dialogue.



President Hosni Mubarak was right. We were not facing a “cartoon crisis”. We are living in a deep crisis of cultural relations going far beyond a political crisis. The crisis is extremely difficult to overcome, since it is linked to emotions, resentments, feelings of superiority and inferiority. And the crisis has a history in which the satirical cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad, published in September 2005 by the Danish Newspaper Jyllands-Posten, play only a minor, however catalyst role. As the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja, recalled early in 2006, we are dealing with “accumulated frustrations in the Muslim world” that “have their roots in the many unresolved conflicts affecting Muslims”. At international level, the so-called “War on Terror” is increasingly perceived as “War on Islamic Terrorism” and misinterpreted as “War on Islam”. And within too many Muslim countries, citizens are increasingly frustrated over the slow pace of improvements and reforms they “have the right to expect in terms of democracy, respect for human rights and concrete economic and social development”, according to Tuomioja.

The cartoon-related events were eye-openers. The deep crisis could no longer be denied. Public opinion was alerted, and expectations were high that opportunities for “catharsis”, for cleaning the air from suspicion and resentment, and for change in international cultural relations, would be better used than at previous critical moments.

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly urged, with a detailed Resolution adopted on 27 March 2006 in Brussels, all political representatives of the 35 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership member countries (the 25 EU Member States and their ten Mediterranean Partners) “to abstain from any action or attitude which might offend religions and/or provoke any hostile acts in respective public opinions”. Taking up an earlier proposal from the eight Arab Mediterranean countries, the Assembly called “on the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to take action conducive to the establishment of ... an ad-hoc committee, including wise persons and experts from both shores of the Mediterranean, to strengthen mutual knowledge among peoples and inter-cultural dialogue and mediation”.¹

The following reflections were intended to provide this committee with food for thought and initial proposals, developed from the Foundation’s “Draft Strategy for Re-launching the Dialogue between Cultures”², which was presented on 22 February 2006 to the political instrument of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the Euro-Med Committee.

1 Section 3.4 of this book presents the conclusions of this Committee.

2 Section 2.1 of this book.

Two Lost Decades of Dialogue

The last two decades brought increasing numbers of events for a Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations but are lost decades. Most efforts were invested in a much too limited dialogue concept which remains within the logic of Huntington's Clash scenario even in contradicting his conclusions. This scenario was never a cause of problems; it is just one example of an almost omnipresent limited understanding of culture as heritage and not also as a space of human creativity and liberty. Definitely, cultural forces shape attitudes and behaviour; but this is only one side of the coin. Such passive view at culture has its roots in 19th century traditions of nation-building. The related concept of "national cultures" reduces the creative dimension of culture to a collective instrument for national cohesion and identity. This goes at the expense of the right to cultural self-determination which is among the core values enshrined in international human rights conventions and agreements.

The human rights, agreed almost 60 years ago as common values of the international community, have not been mainstreamed yet to international cultural relations. The recent cultural crisis witnessed a large number of extremely short-sighted statements of European political leaders such as claiming „freedom of expression“ as “our Western value”. Selective use of human rights as an ideological weapon was a main feature of the Cold War. The consensus achieved at the 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on all human rights forming “an indivisible whole” has hardly entered the everyday political discourse. Moreover, the fact that all provisions of the European Human Rights Convention (1953) became universal human rights recognized by almost all UN Member States with the two 1966 Covenants on Civil and Political as well as on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights seems not to have entered yet the mainstream of European political reasoning. Reference to “European values” is one of the most disastrous tools used in communication between Europe and other regions.

On 14 March 2006 in Cairo, the participants in the 4th annual meeting of the “Arab Press Freedom Watch”, an association formed by journalists associations and unions of all Arab countries, expressed bitterness on most of the European “cartoon crisis statements” claiming freedom of the press as part of the “European values”. This was perceived as disregarding the daily struggle of Arab journalists for their freedom of expression and as isolating Article 19 from the context of all other human rights.

We need to develop a rights-based understanding of culture. We need to reconstruct our understanding of culture, taking advantage of recent international agreements on cultural diversity being as essential for humanity as is biodiversity for nature. We need to repeat 1948: In the aftermath of the atrocities of fascism, genocide and the Second World War, the international community found a common language for common values. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (as much as all subsequent international human rights instruments) does not make a single reference to any particular cultural or religious tradition. We have a common language for universal values. What we do not have, is a common language for cultural differences. We need to work on such language, if dialogue between cultures should make sense and provide instruments for coping with critical moments of confrontation. Preaching unity or the Golden Rule as the core element of global ethics has, too long, been the main result of international dialogue events. Such “lean dialogue” was bound to failure; two decades of dialogue did not produce a mechanism to cope with a crisis. We need a dialogue that starts with the assumption that “the other might be right”, to quote from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s definition given in “Truth and Method”. Such dialogue can provide tools for mutual respect – which is much more than tolerance. In the present crisis, respect is the key word.

The West against the Rest?

The cartoon issue was not the first test of the instruments expected from two decades of dialogue efforts. Largely unnoticed by public opinion in Western countries, a new two thirds against one third divide of the international community emerged in 2004 within United Nations. The last major confrontation of such kind was in the mid-eighties about a New World Information and Communication Order, confronting the principles of state sovereignty and free flow of information at the last possible historical moment before arrival of the Internet. Now it is on religion. It started with good intentions: The joint EU-OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) Forum on the political dimensions of “civilization and harmony” in Istanbul on 12-13 February 2002 reconfirmed goodwill and common values. But it could not go further: the follow-up meeting foreseen for 2004 was cancelled.

In April 2004, the OIC acted alone and submitted a Resolution on “combating defamation of religions” to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva which was voted two thirds against one third of member countries, the “Rest against the West”, as noted by only a few Western media. Although most Western countries had nominated Special Ambassadors and had designated special institutions for “Dialogue with Islam”, they did not accept the proposal by the OIC of including a special mention of “discrimination of Muslims” in this Resolution. The confrontation went further: The same text was introduced to the UN General Assembly and voted on 16 December 2005 by 101 against 53 countries, the yes votes coming from all Arab and Muslim and other so-called non-Western countries, the no votes coming from all EU Member and other so-called Western countries (UN GA Resolution 60/150). At this time, the cartoon issue was at an early stage, it was discussed in Arab and Muslim countries without mass protests or violence, cartoons even printed in Al Fajr and other media in the Arab world, “for discussion”, and for “facilitating forming of opinions”. Many Arab media defended the right or even the need of publishing about sensitive issues in religions. The no votes were explained by Western countries’ unwillingness to accept any wording specifically addressed to Islam; the yes votes insisted on the need to have internationally agreed wording for calming down Muslim populations at large. Western countries tried to contain the crisis through submitting another Resolution under the title “Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion and belief” (UN GA Resolution 60/166). This Resolution recalls the UN Declaration of 1981 on the subject. It mentions Islam only once, in recognizing “with deep concern the overall rise in instances of intolerance and violence directed against members of any religious and other communities in various parts of the world, including cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia”. Although this “more balanced text”, as it was qualified by Western countries, was adopted by consensus the same day as the Resolution on defamation, it did not put an end to the confrontation. The new divide over religion is getting deeper and will not vanish even after the waves over the cartoons get lower.

In 2007, the split between “the West and the rest” over the issue of Islamophobia seems to be deeper than before. Both sides seem to have dugged in their heels. Virtually the same texts on “defamation of religion”, with particular focus on Islam, were adopted (24 votes to 14, with 9 abstentions) on 30 March 2007 by the UN Human Rights Council and again presented to the UN General Assembly for discussion (A/HRC/4/L-12). The Organization of the Islamic Conference proposed to include the issue into the Agenda of the forthcoming Second World Conference on Racism (“Durban II”), scheduled for 2009.

As proposed by India, the new Resolution includes a reference to the mandate of Doudou Diène, UN Special Rapporteur “on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”. His recent report “on the manifestations of defamation of religions and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia on the enjoyment of all rights”, delivered on 21 August 2007 (UN document A/HRC/6/6) offers bridges. The Report gives weight to recent expressions of Islamophobia and related discrimination. Diène calls upon Europe: “...the question of the place of Islam lies increasingly at the centre of the construction of the new European identity. In this context the rise of Islamophobia reveals the existence of a European identity crisis.” He concludes with critical remarks on the “ruling elites in a number of Islamic countries (that) invoke religious themes to justify the existence of laws that violate the freedom of conscience and expression, the respect of religious minorities and the rights of women.” He also addresses recent forms of Anti-Semitism and Christianophobia the same way, with indicating responsibilities of all sides. He concludes with an appeal to Member States to start action at national level instead of limiting their commitment to international dialogue events. Very pertinent is also his summoning of “religious and cultural communities” “to explore the internal factors in their beliefs and practices which may have contributed to these forms of defamation of religions”.

As balanced and outspoken the Diène Report is, first comments from Member States are falling short of adopting a comprehensive approach. Most Member States selected those parts for their comments that fit into their previous arguments. Since EU Member States are deeply divided over the “European values” issue, none of them welcomed the pertinent comments on European identities. And, as expected, none of the representatives of Muslim countries commented on the Report’s criticism of ruling elites, misusing religion for justifying human rights violations.

It is obvious that instrumentalization of the cartoon issue for a number of political purposes took place, with a number of well orchestrated mass protests. Denouncing this, however, does not bring about much relief. The crisis is rooted in accumulated frustration which is specific to the Muslim world. In the words of the Egyptian Ambassador Muhammad Shaaban, the objective is to “send a message by the international community to some 1.2 billion Muslims all over the world” who are deeply convinced and feel that Islam was less respected and protected than other religions.³

3 The statement, delivered on behalf of the Arab group, is documented in section 2.3 of this publication.

New Dialogue Strategies

There are a growing number of new strategies emerging. United Nations established a High Level Group on the Spanish-Turkish proposal for an “Alliance of Civilizations” which has, in the light of recent events, a specific feature on Islam. The Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organizations of the Arab League (ALECSO) and of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (ISESCO) have jointly started the elaboration of “principles of a balanced Dialogue” which “should be based on rationalism, scientific methods and self-criticism” (Abu Dhabi Expert Meeting, 4-7 January 2006).⁴ The Council of Europe has recently approved a programme for cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries and is developing a strategy for “democratic management of diversity”. A “White Book on Intercultural Dialogue” will be presented early in 2008. The European Commission outlined, at the meeting of the EuroMed Committee on 22 February 2006, a “Decalogue” of instruments, regrouping ten Euro-Med regional programmes, projects and networks. The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, created in 2005 as the instrument of the Euro-Med Partnership for Dialogue, was invited to present a strategy for re-launching the Dialogue between Cultures the key elements of which are presented in the following sections of this paper. A comprehensive report with the programmatic title “Sharing Diversity” presents the involvement of EU Member and candidate countries in intercultural dialogue activities. This Report will be presented at the beginning of the “European Year for the Dialogue between Cultures 2008”. There was widespread criticism of a Eurocentric attitude which would be expressed by the joint initiative of the European Parliament and of the European Commission to declare such a year as “European”. This led the 9th Euro-Mediterranean Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Lisbon, 5-6 November 2007) to also declaring 2008 as Euro-Mediterranean Year of Dialogue between Cultures.

Key arguments

To contain and resolve the present crisis in cultural relations, a number of key arguments need to be communicated among actors already involved or interested in organizing the

⁴ The recommendations of ALECSO and ISESCO experts are documented in section 2.2 of this publication.

dialogue between cultures. The following six arguments are considered particularly important:

1. Traditional modalities of Dialogue between Cultures, developed over the past Decade, have largely failed because of their almost exclusive focus on what cultures and religions have in common. The present crisis calls for dialogue on differences and diversity. This is not a contradiction, since such dialogue can only be meaningful if it is based on the common value of equality and non-discrimination. The Barcelona Declaration (1995) states, as a political objective for State actors, the need to “ensure respect of cultural and religious diversity” in the region; but it has not been addressed so far, according to the recent evaluation of the Barcelona Process (EuroMeSCo, April 2005)⁵.
2. The lack of mutual knowledge about sensitive issues linked to religions and any other belief is obvious. This gap needs to be filled as a matter of urgency. Information on religious pluralism needs to be provided at all levels of formal and non-formal education, in a terminology that is not faith-loaded but accessible to people maintaining diversified beliefs and opinions. This information must include difficult concepts such as what is “sacred”, “holy” or “insulting”. The emotional dimension of religious feelings and any other belief is an indispensable part of such information which should enable citizens to an open discourse on ethical and moral standards, including an unbiased understanding of what are “double standards”.
3. Too often, dialogue events stressed collective identities (national, ethnic, religious) rather than identities of individuals or social groups. Dialogue fora composed of “representatives” of religious or ethnic groups are counter-productive and contribute to the clash of civilizations scenario rather than preventing it. Dialogue between Cultures must create space for mutual perception and appreciation of overlapping, multiple and dynamic cultural identities of every individual and social or cultural group.
4. There is urgent need for strengthening the human rights based dimension of Dialogue: Rather than seeking values common to all religions and cultures, the

5 Barcelona Plus. Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States. Lisbon: EuroMeSCo 2005

core values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights need to be stressed. The principle of Non-Discrimination along origin, race, colour, gender, language, and religion or any other belief or opinion has been agreed upon by the international community 60 years ago. In line with recent UN terminology, all cultures must be considered having equal dignity. This principle, however, must not be used as an argument for limiting the obligations linked to universal human rights instruments. In other words: No violation of human rights can be justified by invoking cultural traditions.

5. Active tolerance, involving mutual respect, needs to be promoted rather than mere acceptance of diversity. This requires provision of new and better learning resources and interactive educational methods. Education, in this context, should focus less on teaching and more on the organization of learning processes. “Interactive” methods focus on learning through empathy and role-taking, which supports the acquisition of multi-perspectivity as a core element of education for democratic citizenship.
6. Calls for boycotting a whole people are an alarm signal. They are an indicator of tendencies towards deepening stereotypes, of desires to balance perceived discrimination with discrimination of others, and of perceived double standards with their application to others. The present crisis calls for significantly more mutual interest being expressed: Europeans can contribute to calming the situation in expressing interest in the cultural and religious life within Mediterranean Partner countries, and vice versa. There are common stereotypes existing on both sides, such as: Europeans having lost moral values and ethical standards, Arabs or Muslims being potential supporters of terrorism. They can only be overcome through sincere dialogue about diversity between and within countries.

Towards a common language for cultural differences

There is no doubt that global terrorism and, unfortunately, also some approaches to combat it, are deliberately fuelled with cultural differences. The September 11 shock and its aftermath should, however, not obscure the “multitude of local claims and regional tensions over scarce resources” that, according to the former Secretary-General

of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, had long been masked by the confrontations of the Cold War blocs. They “pushed people into the narrow walls of group identity, feeding a new tide of smaller confrontations between ethnic, religious and national communities”.⁶ It is the everyday “logic of rejection” and the “narcissism of small differences” that, according to Pérez de Cuéllar, “threatens peace and security and violates the inherent dignity of the individual person”. Amin Maalouf, in his analysis of “murderous identities” (*“Les identités meurtrières”*, 1996) provides us with Mediterranean experience on how neighbours can turn over night into enemies, de-humanizing each other in reducing a human being to one trait of difference. It is always the same mechanism of drawing dividing lines between human beings through assuming and imposing collective identities rather than respecting the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination. Theodor W. Adorno and Alfred Horkheimer, in their studies on “The Authoritarian Personality”, published shortly after 1945 as a first analysis of the cult of power and violence in Nazi Germany, went deep into psychological terminology of ego- and ethnocentrism. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and Amin Maalouf come to similar conclusions: Culturally sensitive language needs to avoid schematic concepts such as the popular distinction between “Us” and “Them”. They even warn against further using the term of “The Other” which is standard in almost all intercultural education concepts, since it opens the gate for imposing collective identities on the individual. There is no viable alternative to their proposal of adopting a rights-based approach in dealing with cultural diversity.

But there is an obvious need to reach out to the emotional dimension of cultural expression. Feelings of inferiority or superiority overlap usually with belief. If not addressed, such feelings create resistance to new information; perception is biased by pre-determined value judgements. In order to deconstruct such pre-determination and allowing change and learning, it is helpful to analyze the individual or collective acquisition of such fixed value judgements. Social psychologists identified the phenomenon of coping with “cognitive dissonance” (Leon Festinger). The mechanism is very simple: If you cannot get what you want, you tend to de-value the desired good in order to continue living in peace with yourself and your community. This pattern was already given literature status by La Fontaine in his tale of the fox that was not able to reach to the grapes high up, and left the spot after telling to himself: these grapes are much too sour.

6 President’s Foreword to the Report by the World Commission on Culture and Development. *Our Creative Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO 1996, p.9.

Discussions even between young people from Europe and from Arab countries tend to remain, too often, at the surface of cultural differences. The head scarf issue is a typical example: Europeans qualify easily Muslim girls and women as victims of social pressure. Discussion hardly goes deeper, so as to allow an interpretation of dress codes of Muslims also as expression of feeling morally superior to Westerners. According to widespread feelings in the Arab and Muslim world, Europeans have lost their morals and ethical standards. Feeling at least morally superior is a key element of a survival strategy of those who feel discriminated.

The issue of double standards can and should not be avoided in the endeavour to find a common language for cultural and religious differences. It needs to be addressed in its full scope, ranging from Western Middle East Policy to Muslim calls for boycott against Denmark and to various kinds of imposing identities or values or calling for summary punishment. The double standard issue includes varieties of hypocrisy such as the – typically European – attitude of justifying actions and policies serving own interests with reference to universal values, a European heritage from colonial history.

In a climate of resentment, rumours can kill. Such climate cannot be healed by providing more knowledge alone. If learning about cultural diversity should bring about changes, many historically evolved and, therefore, taken-for granted views at cultures, identities, including their cognitive and emotional characteristics, need to be first de- and later on re-constructed.

Such reconstruction needs to seek a balance between the individual and his or her cultural environment. Individual decisions on accepting and adapting inherited forms of cultural expression need to be recognized as equally important as the generalized, collective dimension of culture.

What we need now is developing a common language for understanding and respecting cultural differences, without doing harm to our universal values. Many elements of such common language have been developed over the past ten years. The following five elements of such common language are of particular importance:

1. Cultural diversity between as well as within countries is as essential for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. Cultural differences are not a threat but a key factor of quality of life.

2. The right to be different is core element of a rights-based understanding of culture. The individual human being, as cultural actor, as learner, as communicator, as bearer of cultural diversity, is at the centre of a better understanding of culture.
3. Overlap between cognitive and emotional elements of intercultural relations is the rule and not the exception. Historical and biographic, individual and collective processes of attaching value judgements to cultural differences need to be addressed.
4. Deconstructing self-referential systems of belief and knowledge is essential. Religious truth that is believed eternal can only be compromised by an attempt to make it more convincing with evidence from scientific truth that is changing every day with more knowledge.
5. Freedom of opinion or any other belief is not only a basic human right; it is intrinsic to any human understanding of religion. Enforcing belief would be a contradiction in itself, as much as imposing values “comes down in the end to negating them” (Jacques Delors).⁷

Much more needs to be done to enable citizens of the increasingly multicultural world of the 21st century to know about, to understand and to respect their differences in cultural and religious expression.

“Learning about cultural diversity” has been recommended as priority for the development of social and human partnership in the Euro-Mediterranean region by a high-level group of experts, convened by former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi, in December 2003 (“Prodi Groupe des sages”). It is the unifying theme of the programme of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures.

Edited version of a keynote to the Forum “Europe in Dialogue and Interaction between Cultures” at the Finnish-Swedish Cultural Centre/Hanaforum, Helsinki, Finland, 5 April 2006

⁷ Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors. Paris: UNESCO 1996 (citation from Part I, section 2.3)

2. Revitalizing the Dialogue between Cultures

2.1 A Post-Cartoon Strategy

with comments by the Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform
and Abdul Aziz Saïd

Background

The Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona had adopted on 28 November 2005 a Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism. The document includes the following commitment of the Governments of all EU Member States and their Mediterranean partners: “We confirm that we will...reject any attempts to associate terrorism with any nation, culture or religion.”

My participation in the ISESCO Symposium “Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations: From Dialogue to Alliance” (Tunis, 30 January to 1 February 2006) coincided with the so-called “Cartoon Crisis”, an outbreak of mass protests in Arab countries against a widely perceived lack of respect of Islamic values in Western countries. On the basis of a statement made in Tunis on the new Code of Conduct, I developed – at request of the European Commission – a first outline of a new strategy for re-launching the Dialogue between Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean space. This strategy was presented at a special session of the intergovernmental Euro-Med Committee in Brussels on 22 February 2006, together with a position paper of the Arab Group (reprinted as section 2.3 of this publication). It was a basic document stimulating debates among civil society organizations in the following months. Preliminary conclusions, based on results of this debate and, in particular, the recommendations elaborated by a High Level Group of Experts, established by the

Anna Lindh Foundation and the Arab League (section 3.4) were presented to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 37 Member States of the EuroMed Partnership and to the Heads of the Foundation's National Networks in November 2006 (section 2.5).

A new Code of Conduct?

If it is necessary to conclude international agreements on the basic principle of the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism – which derives its substance from the non-discrimination values of Human Rights – we have a problem. Since terrorists usually claim to act on behalf of whole nations or regions or religions, there is urgent need for promoting a new and better understanding of culture. It is a matter of fact that we are all born into existing cultural environments. But it is also true that creativity is an essential part of the human condition. Culture is heritage as well as creation.

We need to promote a better understanding of cultural diversity. It is a matter of fact that one aspect of cultural diversity can be found in differences between common cultural characteristics of nations or religions. But it is also true that creative diversity is part of the wealth of each nation and religion. Statements such as “if you know one Arab, you know them all” are stupid but among the core ingredients of stereotypes and racism.

Past generations in the Euro-Mediterranean region have, too often, limited the idea of dialogue between cultures to a dialogue between nations, languages and religions. This way, and against best intentions, it was made possible to misuse culture as a weapon in preparing for a clash of civilisations. If we are committed to de-legitimize terrorism, we have to refrain from the traditional but extremely dangerous pattern of organizing cultural dialogue with individuals invited to “represent” whole cultural entities or religions.

Key arguments

1. Traditional modalities of Dialogue between Cultures, developed over the past Decade, have largely failed because of their focus on what cultures and religions have in common. The present crisis calls for dialogue on differences and diversity, based on the common value of non-discrimination.
2. The lack of mutual knowledge about sensitive issues linked to religions and any other belief is obvious. This gap needs to be filled as a matter of urgency.
3. Too often, dialogue events stressed collective identities (national, ethnic, religious) rather than identities of individuals or social groups. Dialogue Fora composed of “representatives” of religious or ethnic groups are counter-productive and contribute to the clash of civilizations scenario rather than preventing it.
4. There is urgent need for strengthening the human rights based dimension of Dialogue. Rather than seeking values common to all religions and cultures, the core values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights need to be stressed: No discrimination along origin, race, colour, gender, language, religion or any other belief has been agreed upon by the international community 60 years ago. In line with recent UN terminology, all cultures must be considered having equal dignity without, however, allowing this to be used as an argument for limiting the obligations linked to universal human rights instruments.
5. Active tolerance, involving mutual respect, needs to be promoted rather than mere acceptance of diversity. This requires provision of new and better learning resources and interactive educational methods (education understood in the broader sense of organization of learning processes, “interactive” understood as learning through empathy and role-taking).
6. Boycott is never a solution; it is an alarm signal. The present crisis calls for significantly more mutual interest being expressed. Europeans can contribute to calming the situation in expressing interest in the cultural and religious life within Mediterranean Partner countries, and vice versa. Stereotypes existing on both sides (such as: Europeans having lost moral values and ethical standards, Arabs or Muslims being potential supporters of terrorism) can only be overcome through sincere dialogue about diversity between and within countries.

Conclusion for the organization of dialogue events

There should be no more “representative” events. Events should be:

- inter-institutional, with the objective of creating synergies and common platforms of action, as follow-up to the Rabat Commitment on concrete and sustainable steps for dialogue, concluded in June 2005 between ALECSO, ISESCO, OIC, UNESCO, Council of Europe, DCCD, and the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)¹, or:
- all participants talking in a personal capacity; or:
- workshops or seminars on good practice: or:
- reach out events.

New projects and programmes

The strategy paper was accompanied by a draft action plan which was enriched in the following months by concrete projects and programmes. These include:

- A EuroMed teacher training programme on cultural diversity and religious pluralism (established jointly with the Council of Europe and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization ALECSO).
- The “Dialogue 21 Campaign”, an Internet-based Youth Dialogue collecting comments and proposals from young people between 18 and 25 years, with a mechanism of matching European and Arab, Turkish or Israeli partners for continued exchange of

¹ The Rabat Commitment, 16 June 2005; online www.unesco.org, www.euromedalex.org and other websites; full text and proceedings: Dialogue among Civilizations. International Conference: Fostering Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations through Concrete and Sustainable Initiatives. Rabat, Morocco, 14-16 June 2005. Paris: UNESCO 2007

opinions. The proposals were collected and developed in a Youth Workshop; the best participants were awarded a distinction as “Youth Messengers for Dialogue”, and their proposals were presented to the EuroMed Committee.

- A series of Youth Dialogue workshops: A series of workshops offered training of dialogue skills through simulation games, role-taking and elaboration of proposals for settlement of conflict. Another feature was a series of workshops on non-verbal intercultural exchange and cooperation in arts, music and cooking.
- Training of teamwork among young graduates from all Euro-Med countries (with establishment of Euro-Med Young Researchers projects and groups).
- Cooperation with media and journalists associations: A media campaign with Arab TV and radio stations was started for explaining principles of dialogue to large audiences. A special award was created for young journalists covering the living together of communities with different cultural background, and project grants were offered for “women as promoters of dialogue in the media”.
- A regional programme for the development of children’s and youth literature.

These projects started immediately and found their way into the new three years strategy and programme of the Anna Lindh Foundation for 2007-2009 which was approved by the intergovernmental Euro-Med Committee in September 2006 (www.euromedalex.org).

Comments by the Euro-Mediterranean Non-Governmental Platform

First of all, we do fully agree with your criticizing the former attempts to organise Dialogue between Cultures on the basis of collective identities as if those would be fixed forever. These attempts, based on a dominant idea that cultures are homogeneous, have made it difficult to discuss about internal tensions within cultures, internal needs for debate and historicisation. These attempts have put aside the political dimension of relations between cultures too. They have never confronted the issue of power relations between cultures, and have lead to immobility, in so far as each of the groups involved prefers to remain within its own well-defined borders and to maintain a status quo, instead of crossing the borders.

We fully agree, too, with the argument that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights core values need to be stressed within the Dialogue between Cultures frame. These core values have to be linked with new instruments such as the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity, in order to articulate both dimensions. None of them should be instrumentalised against the other. Out of this exercise may come interesting insights.

We agree, too, with the idea that “representative” events are presently useless, and even more: counterproductive. Multiplying links, connections, mobility of civil actors, journalists, artists, creating common spaces for debate is much more important.

Finally, we agree with the fact that mutual respect is a key for relaunching social links in the Mediterranean area.

Still, in our region we are very far from this mutual respect the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) calls upon. It is not the place for developing at length the political, economic and social realities in the region, and their impact on mutual perceptions. We would just like to underline that the past months – not speaking about the past years – in the region have been stamped by a huge lack of respect. From the migrants’ silence and marginalisation in Europe to the ill-treatment of asylum seekers at the EU borders

(Ceuta and Melilla as part of a trauma) to the most recent images coming from the Jenin prison attack, with half naked men being kept under weapons' control by the Israeli army – not to mention terrible images and information related to the Iraq War, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, etc. Imaginaries are traumatised. Hatred speeches are enhanced by each of these images.

Imaginaries in the North have been traumatised too. The 11th September events, followed especially by the terrorist attacks in Spain, Morocco, Tunisia and Great Britain, have created an atmosphere of fear, of distrust. Racism and xenophobia are increasing in many European countries. The lack of trust is obvious. The “dialogue between cultures” initiatives have first been launched as an answer (better said, a reaction) to the 11th September, and this has produced negative dynamics.

Consequently, one of our first duties in the region should be to disconnect “dialogue between cultures” from reaction to terrorism, and to raise problems as they are.

It means first that we have to make internal debates within each culture visible, and that we have to contribute to developing them. As already said, there is no homogeneous culture. Each of them is a mosaic of trends, habits, representations, memories, languages, ways to practice language, monolingualism or multilingualism, etc. Common trends of radicalisation, hatred and closed identity speeches are being spread all around in the region. They have many common points, beyond their announced “cultural differences”. They look like each other.

Democracy is fragile, not only in the South but in the North as well – many of the European NGOs being part of the Platform could give a more detailed insight in this fragility of Europe. In the southern countries of this region, democrats have been fragilised for years, not to say that they were kept under silence. They have been undergoing attacks from all sides for years and years, because their position was always the wrong one in the past historical struggles for power, during the Cold War, and after. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has opened a frame for these democrats to interact, and to debate about their visions of society. None of the already mentioned radical trends welcome them.

There is not a single and unified vision of what a democratic society is. There is not a single version of what relations between cultures could/should look like. But there is one single way to reject the other, to make singularities to vanish in collective belongings, to censor multiple belongings and open imaginaries.

What we are facing is for sure not a cultural crisis. We are facing an in-depth political crisis which marginalises these democrats or tries to control them and enclose them within well-stereotyped frames of what democracy should be or should not be, which marginalises and threatens freedom of thought, of consciousness, of expression and creation. We are facing an in-depth political crisis where traditional schemes are being attacked/deconstructed through symbolic violence, and this has consequences on social links. We are facing a political crisis where cities find hardly means to make people live together.

Back to the Euro-Med frame, we reiterate our attachment to it, as it represents a unique frame for overcoming such situations, while discussing them. Still, we all know that this frame will be more successful once equality and reciprocity will become central in it. (It is the reason why the expression “Unity in Diversity”, used in a document produced by the ALF, may sound slightly too Eurocentric – as it reminds a lot of the EU device in the European Constitutional Treaty). Core values are equality and reciprocity on all the Mediterranean shores as well as within societies of the region.

Taking account of this, we may draw your attention to the way campaigning in the European media should be conceived. Immigrants who are living in Europe should feel at ease with this campaigning and accept it. Immigrants play a determining role in the perception people have of the Euro-Med region. We would suggest including this aspect into your strategy. Memories of migrants have to be taken account of. Memories of Europe including migrants are central. The immigrants’ contribution to European societies has to be visible and better understood. The minorities’ contribution to societies of the region has to be acknowledged, etc. Reciprocity is at the very core of respect. And responsibilities of States should be underlined there.

There is a need for stressing interdependence and common destiny in the Euro-Med region and for translating it into action. It implies new dynamics, new visions, new proposals, and the ALF may contribute a lot in offering a “scene” for such imaginaries to arise.

This comment was received from Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes, Vice-President of the Euro-Med Non-Governmental Platform on 20 March 2006. This Platform re-groups hundreds of civil society organizations and networks in the Euro-Mediterranean region and organizes the annual Euro-Med Civil Forum.

Comments by Abdul Aziz Said

1. It has traditionally been the case in inter-religious dialogue that majority cultures tend to be more interested in **commonalities and “overcoming” differences**, while minority groups have tended to emphasize the importance of difference, identity boundaries, and the rights to being different. Addressing inherent power inequalities by shifting the research agenda toward emphasizing difference is an important step toward addressing cultural difference at the state and interstate level.

Yet difference has also been a source of fear and mistrust in the absence of a framework that allows for the possibility of moral equivalence and in the context of an absence of security. Moral judgments still calibrate difference along superior/inferior axes, with those related to the self typically accorded with the highest moral stature. These are the differences exploited by political opportunists which can polarize entire communities already isolated from one another and insecure in their understanding of difference.

As Father Dall'Oglio points out, retrieving parallel cultural concepts that help to develop norms of respect for the Other are critical. Cultural concepts, designed for the “in-group”, reveal underlying spiritual norms of unity, selflessness and material transcendence so urgently needed for building respect for others and for their boundaries. In the United States, we can look to cultural norms of “civility” and “good neighborliness” as part of our repertoire of meaning and for guidelines in structuring our attitude and actions to the Other. Only when we fully cultivate respect for cultural difference at the interstate level, will we cease to believe that casting others in our own image is the only way we can achieve salvation, peace, or security.

2. The lack of **mutual knowledge about sensitive issues** linked to religions must be fully addressed.

Religious ideals permeate virtually every aspect of our social order and understanding, as it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g. freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and

profane). Our very notions of peace – how it is achieved, experienced and perpetuated – are derived from our religious predispositions, core assumptions, ideals and highest values.

Sensitive issues in religion are inextricably bound with a larger whole, and must be viewed in the larger context of multiple goal-seeking behaviors of believers.

At the same time, it may be important to examine *when* issues become sensitive in different religious traditions, to identify what other historical, political, economic, or social triggering events or contexts may be strongly influencing the emergence of certain issues or themes over others. These may be responses to conflicts that evoke deep-seated needs for affirmation of identity and a restoration of meaning for those involved. Individuals under pressure may look to religions for idealized courses of actions and other forms of inspiration. Addressing these extra-religious issues may also be as important as understanding their religiously-rooted responses.

3. The process of dialogue itself is as important as the commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes. The traditional emphasis on “**collective identities**” tends to generate loyalty issues, the need to defend or present an idealized form, and fears of demonstrating group vulnerability which prevent the kind of self-reflexivity that effective communication and constructive dialogue requires. The opportunity to hear or recognize the value of others shuts off. We endeavor to describe ‘who we are’ while the other tells us ‘what we do’. We wish to present the highest idealizations of ourselves while the other presents us with our shadow self. We strive to underscore the universality of our values while the other points to the particularity of their application. We project our deepest fears on to the character of others.

Individuals of different cultures, religions and communities in conflict will always feel the weight of group representation while engaged in dialogue with others. What we can do, however, is lighten their burden by addressing the dynamics of conflict behavior and create safe spaces. People under stress react by reducing their beliefs to small, workable subsets in order to fight and protect themselves, assuming a rigidity and defensiveness that closes off effective dialogical encounters. Skilled facilitators can help to identify these shared processes and help participants through these reactions.

4. **Human rights** must always be promoted as a goal of dialogue. Creation and follow-through of ‘actionable’ policies must form an integral part of the dialogue process,

which push participants to think collaboratively on concrete measures designed to build trust and direct resources toward shared goals. Dialogue may make friends, but checklists and achievable goals make allies.

5. **Active tolerance:** Dialogue, as a new paradigm in global relations, is based on knowledge to achieve new knowledge, to see each other with different eyes, in a different light, looking together toward a shared future in a global community made safe for diversity. Active tolerance involves more than peaceful coexistence – it is bringing to the table the best that our civilizations and communities have to offer. In recognizing the contributions of others, we become morally equal partners working toward a shared global community. For example, the West offers much to the Islamic world in terms of institutionalizing democracy, education and development. In exchange, Islam can offer the West its own considerable achievements and insights into community, spirituality and diversity.

Dialogues which become conflict management enterprises are subversive contests to delegitimize the other and reduce them to dehumanized symbols. Dialogue challenges us to deeply investigate our assumptions; active tolerance compels us to live by the principles we proclaim and those we discover through our dialogical encounter. Through this process we stimulate the flourishing of each of our communities.

6. **Common Language:** Cultural diversity and difference are expressions of the richness of creation. As social creatures, however, we tend to respond to stress and conflict by reducing difference to threats and rejecting Others as mere symbols. The West has recognized on the surface the value of diversity, and yet has episodically wrestled with such homogenizing forces as nationalism and other ‘isms’, while strong religious undercurrents actively seek to transcend identity differences through invocation of love and compassion. While acknowledging the commonality of needs, we must accept the plurality of wants as a civic virtue. Linking intra-religious and intra-cultural dialogue with the inter-religious and inter-cultural dimensions remains one of the most pressing issues for the future of the dialogue of civilizations.

Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Said is Founder and Director of the Center for Global Peace, and the International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program, American University in Washington, DC. He contributed this comment in his capacity as member of the High Level Group of Experts on overcoming major misconceptions between “the West” and “Islam” (see section 3.4)

2.2 ALECSO and ISESCO: “The Dialogue with the Other”: Principles and Recommendations

The following document is the result of an Arab expert meeting, convened 4 to 7 January 2006 in Abu Dhabi by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which is the cultural organization of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), together with ALECSO (the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization) and the United Arab Emirates National Commission for UNESCO (which is the Arab countries coordinator of the Euro-Arab Task Force of National Commissions on “Learning to Live Together”). The following English version of the results was published in the Internet after the meeting; it is reprinted with only minor editing. Western dialogue managers are invited to read not only the more harmonious texts resulting from international dialogue meetings but also authentic texts from within the Arab-Muslim world. The following text includes a number of important elements of a “balanced dialogue”, for example the insistence in both self-criticism and equal footing of dialogue partners. The document advocates a strict separation of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. (Editorial note, TS)

Warranties of the ‘Dialogue with the Other’

Our world is currently witnessing an age of Globalization that has contributed to the affluence of thoughts, goods and services among countries and nations. Globalization mainly tends to uniformity in the world’s different political, economic, social and cultural aspects; it deeply threatens cultural diversity. And now with Globalization reaching the stage of unilateral dominance over the international scene and the struggle to marginalize the great majority of nations and cultures, a large number of countries – including Arab countries – have decided to unite in the face of this dangerous Globalization and to fight its possible threats.

A number of conferences have been held to promote the political, cultural and economic dialogue with the participation of selected Arab cultural personalities who discussed a number of important issues for figuring out the mutual interests between Arabs and other nations.

Among the important issues discussed was the issue of identity, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the dangers of interexchanging the concepts of resistance and terrorism, provocation of clashes between Islam and the West, dividing the world into a rich North and a poor South, in addition to the problems of environment, desertification, unemployment, starvation, illiteracy...etc.

The need for 'Dialogue with the Other' has become more urgent than ever before, which requires an international dialogue in the light of what Globalization dictates about democracy on the political level, liberalism on the economic level, and establishing modern countries upon basis of highly developed technologies as an essential basis for production in a world witnessing many economic and social turns.

However, Arabs and Muslims should start with a dialogue among themselves before they would consider the 'Dialogue with the Other', and both should proceed hand in hand. The 'Dialogue' should be based upon deep belief in cultural diversity, self-knowledge and self-judgment, designing referential frames for a fruitful dialogue with the Other as well as rejecting arbitrariness and any other form of ethnic or religious discrimination.

The 'Dialogue with the Self' should also aim at protecting the cultural diversity in the Arab world within the frame of unity, and it should guarantee the openness for the global culture and reject all forms of radicalism, isolation and arrogance. Besides, it should also guarantee the acceptance of the Other, enhancing the sense of tolerance and respect of the spiritual and cultural heritage of all nations.

Arabs and Muslims are currently at the centre of the international struggle which involves political, military, economic and cultural levels. Arab and Muslim intellectuals cannot stand arm-folded in front of all the dramatic shifts that take place in the Middle East, the most dangerous of which is the project of the Greater Middle East, the Israeli stubbornness towards establishing a Palestinian state, in addition to the major geo-political confrontations which the whole world currently witnesses.

This is why Arab and Muslim intellectuals call for creating a dialogue among themselves and with other nations, and persist in refusing any schemes for marginalizing Arab and

Muslim nations as well as any intentions for keeping them away from making important decisions affecting the future of Arab Muslim nations and cultures.

Through an effective 'Dialogue with the Other', Muslims and Arabs aim at reaching a good stand on the international scene in the age of Globalization, a stand which they want and which is not dictated by others. The Other is not only the West; the Other is all the African, Latin American and Asian nations with whom Arabs and Muslims share a number of political, social, human and cultural aspects.

The 'Dialogue' aimed at by the Arabs and Muslims at this critical stage in the history of humanity is a dialogue based upon the freedom of choice and the respect of the Other who is culturally, ethnically and religiously different. One of the main factors of success of this 'Dialogue with the Other' is that Arab and Muslim intellectuals should give up their complex of guilt and their feeling of always being accused and always being in the defensive.

We have to understand that this 'Dialogue' is constrained by a number of complicated international factors through which many external schemes are dictated upon nations within the frame of what is called the 'war of thoughts'. Besides, it is also constrained by the American desire to reshape the other nations according to their own criteria.

All this brings about the urgent need for a wise dialogue between the different nations and for creating the basis for new international relations.

Principles of a balanced 'Dialogue with the Other'

One of the essential objectives of a fruitful Dialogue with the Self or with the Other is working for the establishment of a basis for mutual understanding between peoples who have different beliefs and different concepts of life. All this requires abiding by the rules of a rational dialogue with the Other which are:

1. Self-Knowledge and self-criticism and re-assessment of the current economic, social, cultural and political problems they are facing and which lead to their weakness and fragmentation at regional level as well as ineffectiveness at the international level.

Arabs and Muslims cannot present themselves through a 'Dialogue' with a perfect image without any defects.

There should be a constructive criticism of the current state of the Arab-Muslim culture with reference to the Arab-Muslim heritage which should be researched for bright examples of rationalism, openness and tolerance that could be brought into the 'Dialogue' in question.

It is obvious that Western Europe was the first to contribute cultural creation which still affects the modern world. It was the creator of the first technological and industrial revolutions, further developed in the Far East during the 20th century. Thus, a deep critical knowledge and a profound understanding of the Western cultural contributions should be the best gate towards any fruitful dialogue with the European and the American West.

One of the main features of this 'Dialogue with the Other' is that it evolves in the frame of a modern global civilization with human dimensions that the Arab-Muslims have contributed to earlier civilizations. This is why Arab-Muslim intellectuals should go back to their heritage and rediscover it with a critical eye and deep understanding, in order to make use of all its great achievements.

They should also go back to the right spots in the history of Arab-Muslim achievements, in order to realize that we are an integral part of the modern civilizations of all nations. Arab-Muslim intellectuals are invited to a dialogue with the positive and rational aspects of their cultures, as an essential step towards a constructive dialogue with the current global cultures.

2. Arab-Muslim intellectuals should also have a similar critical reading and understanding of the cultures of the Other, and they should search for their historical background. Dialogue requires profound understanding of the present, the past and the heritage of the Other, in addition to the institutional frames of reference of former dialogues between Arab-Muslims and the West, and to conclusions and recommendations issued by international and regional cultural and political organizations.
3. Arab-Muslim intellectuals should give up their feelings of inferiority, their guilt complex and their attitude of always being in the defensive. Balanced dialogue creates a solid ground of understanding and a basis for fruitful cooperation with the Other for

establishing a new form of Globalization that tends to be more humane and tends to further respecting cultural particularities as well as cultural diversities. This balanced 'Dialogue' also requires accepting differences in points of view, respect of human freedom and rejecting any form of imposing principles and values.

4. Employing scientific methods in the Dialogue and searching for objectivity as a means of understanding the Other are core elements for fruitful cooperation and for building together a better human future, with better methods for education, scientific and academic research as well as promoting cultural exchange.

Levels of the 'Dialogue'

One of the main factors for achieving a fruitful dialogue is including all the political, economic and cultural aspects, as well as all the Arab personalities involved in 'Dialogue'. Dialogue should take place at the following levels:

1. Among political leaders and decision-makers, representatives of political parties and political organizations.
2. Among religious personalities and researchers in the field of religion.
3. Among intellectuals, thinkers, authors, artists and representatives of civil society organizations.

Intercultural dialogue and inter-religious dialogues should be kept separate so that religion would not be used as a means for pursuing political interests.

Trustworthy specialized working groups should be charged with conducting the 'Dialogue' with the different nations, as well as with selecting Arab intellectuals who have the experience and the ability to conduct interactive cultural dialogues with intellectuals from other countries, for furthering the understanding between the two sides.

Media and cultural institutions are invited to publish the principles of the 'Dialogue' and for further explaining them, in order to creating awareness of its importance at national level.

Objectives of the 'Arab-Muslim Dialogue with the Other' in the Age of Globalization

The main objectives of the Arab-Muslim Dialogue with the Other in the age of Globalization include the following:

1. Establishing fundamentals of peace, security and justice in the world, and work for achieving prosperity for all nations as well as policies ensuring economic growth, in order to face all forms of radicalism, discrimination and terrorism.
2. Opposing all forms of radicalism and searching for shared human aspects with the Other.
3. Creating an atmosphere of stability and welfare for all mankind, rejecting fatal struggles and all kinds of violence as well as respecting the local cultures and the right to protect their ownership and heritage.
4. Establishing a solid basis for renewing the 'Dialogue' as well as enhancing a culture of openness and tolerance. Establishing international organizations in the service of humanity, and improving the existing organizations with a view to solving any current struggles through diplomacy, according to UN principles and International Law.
5. Implementing new forms of fruitful cooperation between the forces of the new international system, according to the principles applied by the 'Dialogue' of cultures and civilizations, and rejecting all forms of occupation and despotism against weak nations. Rejecting illegal political and military interference (e.g. Iraq), Israeli occupation and the atrocious Israeli actions against Palestinians.
6. Involving Arab-Muslims in establishing an international alliance for creating a multilateral world, in order to overcome unilateral dominance.
7. Establishing Arab-Muslim scientific institutions with the experience of the selected scientific personalities in the Arab world, in order to enhance a fruitful 'Dialogue with the Other'.

8. Launching a permanent media campaign in cooperation with distinguished media personalities, in order to further explain the benefits of the 'Dialogue'.
9. Emphasizing the real bright image of Arabs and Islam and their civilizations and disapproving all kinds of radicalism that have been generally associated with Arabs and Muslims.

Dialogue Methodology and Ethics

To ensure the success of the 'Dialogue', the topics chosen should have the dimension of mutuality and should avoid tackling sensitive issues that would offend the feelings of one of the sides of the 'Dialogue'.

As Arab-Muslims respect the culture and the beliefs of the Other, they also expect that the Other should reciprocate this respect. This requires that both sides of the 'Dialogue' stick to the following ethical guidelines:

1. Respecting cultural diversity and accepting the fact that human diversity is the key to human welfare.
2. Avoid wrong ideas; working on better mutual understanding and focusing on working together.
3. Dialogue should be based on rationalism, scientific methods and self-criticism.
4. Good understanding of the 'Dialogue' conditions and trying to reach fruitful conclusions and recommendations and conditions for their implementation.
5. Searching for bright sides of cultures and focusing on them. Depending on self-criticism to avoid any inherited mistakes of arrogance and pride.
6. Ensuring that the 'Dialogue' should be rich and free from all forms of radicalism or fanaticism. Striving for impartiality and equality when implementing recommen-

dations, respecting human rights, and avoid using the 'Dialogue' as a means of pursuing personal interests.

7. Reconsidering all the common concepts of progress and backwardness, without associating them with certain nations and religions; overcoming stereotypes in this regard.
8. No civilization can impose permanent values of cultural progress and backwardness on other civilizations; Western progress should not be the only criterion for progress of all other nations.

Recommendations

Arab-Muslims proved to be capable of having mutual dialogues with other nations throughout different historical phases, especially in the old Islamic civilization. Arabs and Muslims are more than willing to enhance such 'Dialogue' at our times, and are committed to success of this 'Dialogue'. Recommendations of further conferences should be geared towards the implementation and to the success of the new 'Dialogue'.

Current conditions in the age of Globalization are becoming more complicated. This requires a departure from old myths with reference to the great Arab and Islamic cultural achievements of the old Islamic civilizations, and identifying the reasons and factors behind the deterioration of this civilization.

Modern culture is diverse and complicated and should not be considered separately; the cultural Dialogue should include all the social, political and economic aspects, and involve cooperation with competent personalities from these spheres, and with representatives of media and civil society organizations. This should broaden the horizons of the 'Dialogue' and enrich its topics, in order to reach at important conclusions aiming at the welfare of the nations and targeted at improving the present and the future of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Arab intellectuals are well-experienced and fully equipped for conducting such dialogues between cultures, and for addressing the different cultures in their own languages. These intellectuals and cultural and scientific personalities can add more human dimensions

to the 'Dialogue' in the age of Globalization and can also launch initiatives which can further enhance the 'Dialogue' on the basis of peace and respect of others' interests.

In order to ensure the fruitfulness of the 'Dialogue', we recommend the following:

1. Issuing Arab and Islamic initiatives with human dimensions to limit the threats of Globalization and American dictatorship.
2. Referring to Arab and Islamic values, in order to distinguish between resistance and terrorism, and to limit any external interference in domestic affairs.
3. Arab and Muslim cooperation for reforming the UN and its institutions, in order to enhance their role in peace-keeping on the basis of justice, to protect the independence of small countries, and to prohibit military interference from major powers.
4. Participating in the elaboration of new legislation against ethnic or religious discrimination.
5. Setting rational limits to the concept of an international trade that has severely harmed the developing and poor countries.
6. Effective participation in the cultural movement against Globalization.
7. Encouraging Arab endeavours towards establishing a Globalization with human dimensions, and the cooperation with independent intellectuals and democrats for stopping the arms race which threatens to provoke more armed conflicts especially in the Middle East.
8. Creating a new generation of youth movements, based on deep belief in constructive dialogue between different nations, and launching a campaign for the translation and publication of books that contribute to raising the awareness among Arab-Muslim youth of the importance of the 'Dialogue'.
9. Commending the joint initiative of the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and of the Islamic Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization for holding this meeting; and calling for follow-up through regular meetings of Arab intellectuals in order to work out a joint Arab Islamic perspective for more dialogues with intellectuals from other countries; the issue of 'Dialogue' should be placed as a permanent topic on their agenda.

2.3 Defamation of Islam and Dialogue between Cultures

Muhammad Shaaban

Ambassador Muhammad Shaaban was for many years the Egyptian Co-ordinator for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In January 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon appointed him to his Cabinet as Undersecretary-General for the General Assembly. Shaaban presented the following statement, on behalf of the Arab Group, to a special meeting of the Euro-Med Committee in Brussels on 22 February 2006. The meeting addressed the crisis in North-South relations in the light of violent mass demonstrations in most Arab countries after the publication of cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad in a number of European media.

The role we played following the publication of the drawings aimed mainly at containing and rectifying matters at the bilateral level with a view *not* to internationalize the issue. We live in the 21st century and we know pretty well that the press is free and that it is “the Fourth Authority”. That is also true in many of our countries. So, the aim was not to ask a Government to “punish” the newspaper since everyone knows it cannot. Rather, the objective was to explain to a country that it is party to several international instruments and UN Resolutions which explicitly state that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression “carries with it special duties and responsibilities” (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 10.2 of the European Convention on Human Rights); and that “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law” (Article 20.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

We are not short of conventions or resolutions that spell out the responsibilities of Governments in such cases. Suffice it to refer here to the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1624 (2005) sponsored by an EU Member State and unanimously adopted by the Council, which met at summit level on 14 September 2005. Operative paragraph 3 of this resolution “calls upon all States to continue international efforts to

enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures.”

Nor are we short of reports that EU-commissioned centres such as the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) have issued as the “Report on Islamophobia in the EU following September 11”. That report highlighted the regularity with which ordinary Muslims became targets for abusive and sometimes violent retaliatory attacks, all of which were seemingly becoming more extreme and accepted.

In New York, a draft resolution sponsored by the Islamic Group and presented to the General Assembly on “Combating Defamation of Religions” was adopted by a majority of 101 votes with 53 ‘Western countries’ voting against it, including all European Union Member States.

It was the same resolution that the same countries had voted against at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in April 2004. The explanation of the *no* vote then was the claim that the resolution singled out Islam, not all religions. Again, on 31 October 2005 in the Third Committee, and on 16 December in the General Assembly, the same explanation of vote was advanced, ignoring that the Islamic Group in New York wanted to defuse a looming popular outrage worldwide, and that it did not bring the same resolution to the General Assembly for fun but for a message to be sent by the international community to some 1.2 billion Muslims all over the world who felt that the most sublime symbol of Islam was insulted and that their religion was denigrated.

Coming to the resolution itself, out of 16 operative paragraphs only four project facts about the outlook to Islam by the West, especially since 11 September, and the link between Islam and terrorism, often denied officially by Western leaders, but more often advanced by some circles in the West; discrimination against Islam and other religions, and defamation of all religions, particularly Islam. 12 other operative paragraphs cite facts about manifestations of tolerance and discrimination in matters of religions and beliefs, and urge States to take resolute action to prohibit the dissemination of racist and xenophobic ideas and material.

The way the issue evolved is the responsibility of those among our partners who were either rigid in their dealing with the issue, those who turned a blind eye to our efforts to diplomatically defuse any probable popular outrage, not even replying to oral and written messages sent to them since late October 2005, or those who preach dialogue and respect

for all religions and then vote against a resolution calling for combating defamation of religions.

Aren't the provisions of that resolution the same points raised in reports of the EU-financed Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), whether in its report on Islamophobia in EU Member States, or in the latest 2005 Report on Racism and Xenophobia in EU Member States, which cite trends at discrimination and racism adversely affecting minority groups, migrants and refugees in several EU Member States, in the employment, housing and education sectors, and which make a reference to violent and aggressive acts against ethnic minority and foreign groups by public officials – namely the police and immigration officers?

Aren't those the principles mentioned in several European Council Directives, let alone in the rulings of the European Court on Human Rights in many cases of violation of those principles?

Didn't our Foreign Ministers endorse five principles that should govern dialogue, originally proposed by us, in the Action Programme on Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations, at their meeting in Valencia in April 2002?

“Dialogue between cultures and civilizations should be conducted on the basis of certain parameters and principles, namely:

- 1. Respect for pluralism, diversity and cultural specificities.*
- 2. Equality and mutual respect.*
- 3. Avoidance of prejudices and stereotypes.*
- 4. Dialogue should aim to reach not only a better understanding of “the other” but also solutions for persistent problems.*
- 5. The ultimate goal of dialogue should not be to change “the other” but, rather, to live peacefully with the other.”*

As regards respect for Islam in Europe and indeed anywhere, Islam is a religion embraced by 1.2 billion people. Islam is the only religion that venerates all the prophets and messengers that God has sent to peoples since Abraham. It is part of the pillars of Islam

to respect all God's prophets and messengers and they are mentioned one by one in the Qur'an. The least Muslims expect is that their religion and its symbols receive the same respect, even if large numbers of people in the West are secular, agnostic or atheist amid a majority of Christians. Some 20 million Muslims live in Europe, the majority of whom are law-abiding citizens who are well integrated in their societies and who are equally attached to their spiritual ideals and values.

Indeed, those who claim to uphold freedom of expression by defending the right to reproduce offensive drawings of the Prophet of Islam are in effect saying to Muslims that what they hold dear and sacred is far more worthy of protection than what Muslims hold dear and sacred. The cartoons had more to do with incitement of hatred, racism and xenophobia than with freedom of expression.

As early as November 2001, that is only two months after the tragic September 11 incidents, our delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Committee meeting under the Belgian Presidency proposed that a separate item entitled "Dialogue between Cultures" be inscribed on the agenda of each Senior Officials meeting. At the 31st meeting of the Euro-Med Committee in Brussels on 7 February 2002, under item 2: Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations, I made a statement in which I stated that "dialogue between civilizations should be pursued on the basis of equality and mutual respect; we should not be led by the saying that 'all people are equal but some people are more equal than others' ...We must bear in mind a basic reality – the world we live in today is a result of the meshing of our cultures and civilizations. All civilizations and peoples should be proud of their respective accomplishments and contributions to the world. Yet, each one must assess its shortcomings or pitfalls, for we are all capable of using violence and no one is immune of that. All have, at one moment or another of their history, let intolerance, hatred and contempt reign unbridled. In each culture, some have even sought to negate the humanity of others."

We also stated that "Today, we are at the crossroads of history. We have to make a choice: either seek to build bridges of understanding, or fall into the abyss of never-ending conflict with tragic consequences for mankind. The paradigm that we should aspire to evolve and nurture is one of civilized interaction and international legitimacy versus arrogance, extremism and lawlessness".

One of the positive results of that incident is that everyone should draw lessons for the future and should not play into the hands of extremists or bigots on all sides. Our

European partners should keep good on their word to work earnestly towards a true and unbiased dialogue between cultures and civilizations. We should teach present generations to “live and let live” and to respect cultural and religious diversity. We should all work diligently to prevent any inklings of a clash of civilizations, which would be detrimental to peace and the welfare of peoples. Between freedom and anarchy, there is a hair-thin border line. Let everyone learn and work for not crossing or trespassing that line.

Some European Government ministers or heads of political parties came out with flagrant anti-Muslim statements, describing Islam as a plague or calling for a new crusade against Muslims, thereby triggering popular reactions in Muslim countries and in Europe, with violent, unforeseen and undesired consequences. In this regard, we certainly denounce physical or material attacks against citizens or official representations as such acts are contrary to the letter and spirit of Islam. We equally expect others to ensure the same for our citizens and official buildings in those States.

At the same time, in the past few days we have seen political leaders in several EU countries who came out courageously to condemn any insult to other religions, and to openly denounce the irresponsible and immoral republication of the infamous drawings in some media. Those politicians are the brave people who seek to establish peace and harmony in their respective countries and in the world at large.

Let us admit that there is a crisis that needs to be resolved once and for all. We need to work together:

1. To pledge that we will do our utmost to avoid repetition of such offences to religions and their symbols.
2. To return to and intensify dialogue between cultures, which we started in earnest in the Euro-Med Committee since November 2001 but which, for several reasons, has tapered off. We should develop imaginative measures to drastically reduce racist and anti-Muslim sentiments in many parts of the world.
3. The Alliance among Civilizations initiative by Spain, welcomed and endorsed last November by 35 Euro-Mediterranean partners on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, should be activated and translated into deeds and actions. In this regard, we look forward to the outcome of the Qatar meeting of this initiative.

4. The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures, hosted in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, is meant to foster this dialogue. It is essential that we understand each other better and that we continue in earnest the dialogue between cultures on the basis of mutual respect. In this regard, one idea could be that a seminar be organized at the Anna Lindh Foundation, which comprises Senior Officials and eminent persons from the EU and Mediterranean regions to discuss ways and means of enhancing dialogue and ensuring respect for religions and cultures through a set of actions and measures.
5. To work together in the Euro-Mediterranean context to adopt a code of conduct on combating defamation of religions.
6. The second seminar on the media to be held in Vienna may discuss an agreement on a code of ethics for the media regarding self-restraint in publications that hurt or insult religious sanctities.
7. At the global level, to send a clear message to the international community that all countries reject defamation of religions or cultures and are determined to stand against any attempts at smearing or mocking any religion, belief, culture, ethnic group, or their symbols. The shortest and most practical way to send such a message is for our representatives in New York to sit together and work on a resolution with unequivocal messages to Governments, the media, NGOs and peoples all over the world. They can take, as a basis for a brief and concise text, GA Resolution 60/150.¹

For the immediate future, we should send a positive signal to our peoples that the current emergency has led to advancing the Euro-Med Committee meeting by one month. In other words, our meeting today can be considered an extraordinary meeting. We therefore propose that this meeting come out with a Presidency statement on behalf of the 35 Euro-Mediterranean Partners reflecting our joint resolve to intensifying the dialogue, to work diligently to prevent the recurrence of those offences to Islam or to any religion, to reaffirm that we share a common future that we should nurture together, and to reiterate the continuing validity of the five principles that should govern our dialogue as set out in Valencia.

1 UN General Assembly Resolution on "Combating Defamation of Religion", adopted on 16 December 2005.

Such a statement should be publicized worldwide so that we can both appease the outrage of Muslims all over the world and help defuse the present crisis. The crisis is still raging. So, any 'business as usual' message from the Euro-Mediterranean Partners could cause a backlash.

As Arab and Muslim countries, we have been dismayed at the mere two sentences that came in the conclusions of the latest GAERC (EU coordination, Ed.) meeting about the ongoing crisis. We wondered if that was the weight given by the European Union to such serious an issue. We therefore hope, and indeed expect, that the forthcoming GAERC meeting on 27 February will rectify matters by projecting what most Heads of State or Government of EU Member States have been recently expressing concerning respect for Islam, its symbols and its followers.

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.

2.5 Preliminary Conclusions

The following conclusions from the debate on new strategies for re-vitalizing the Dialogue between Cultures since February 2006 were presented by the author in his speech to the Barcelona VIII Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Tampere, on 28 November 2006.

As the dialogue instrument of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the Anna Lindh Foundation has submitted in February to the EuroMed Committee a draft strategy for revitalising the Dialogue between Cultures, taking into account a climate of growing resentments between North and South of our region, as well as the fact that traditional modalities of dialogue have largely failed to cope with the so-called cartoon crisis. Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and the Euro-Med Parliamentary Assembly have invited the ALF to prepare mechanisms which would allow prevention and early intervention.

Let me share with you three core elements that have been identified after consultation of our national networks, regional partners, participants in our youth dialogue campaign, our Advisory Committee and a high level expert group convened together with the Arab League:

1. Xenophobia is fear of foreigners, motivated by lack of knowledge. If we want to promote mutual respect, we have to provide in all countries education for cultural and religious diversity, a minimum knowledge which is not provided in most of our school textbooks. Ironically, the so-called non-believers are the only group that is benefiting, in some EuroMed countries, from such education.
2. We need to transmit both, knowledge about shared universal values, but also about differences. Similarities and differences overlap. There are even cultural differences in pursuit of universal values such as between the English and the French way of legal provision of non-discrimination in society, the one focusing more on integration by “positive laws”, the other more on integration into republican identity.

3. We need to take a stand against any misuse of culture or religion for political purposes. Such misuse can be very sublime, for example in stressing the misconception of Europe versus Islam, as if Europe's identity would not also have Islamic roots and present features.

The Tampere conclusions concerning countering terrorism should not be misunderstood as if dialogue would be just a modality of the fight against terrorism: Dialogue cannot replace political action and negotiations; what it can do in this context, is de-legitimising any association of cultures and religions with terrorism.

We have established, together with the Council of Europe and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), a EuroMed teacher training programme on cultural and religious diversity. The first 400 teachers from 35 countries have benefited from this programme providing educational resources hardly to be found in school textbooks.

Our Youth Dialogue programme involved more than 2000 young people which are normally excluded from dialogue projects. The programme stresses multiple, dynamic and overlapping cultural identities, thus putting into practice international agreements such as the UNESCO Universal Declaration and Convention on Cultural Diversity.

Learning about cultural diversity, the common denominator of the ALF programme, also takes place at music workshops and in establishing teams of young researchers from four different countries.

The Anna Lindh Foundation has departed from the tradition of dialogue events that bring together so-called representatives of cultures and religions. We focus on a human rights based understanding of culture as both: heritage and a space of freedom to make choices, which is the UNDP definition of quality of life.

3. What needs to be changed

3.1 Meaningful Dialogue

Marie-Claire Foblets (MCF), Tuomo Melasuo (TM) and Alisa Meyuhas Ginio (AMG) reply to ten key questions resulting from the debate on “what went wrong with the dialogue?”; Interview: Traugott Schoefthaler.

*Prof. Marie-Claire Foblets (MCF) is Professor of Law and Anthropology at the University of Leuven, Brussels
[Original text in French]*



*Prof. Tuomo Melasuo (TM) is Senior Research Fellow at the University of Tampere and Head of the Finnish National ALF Network
[Original text in French]*



Prof. Alisa Meyuhas Ginio (AMG) is Professor of History, Tel Aviv University



What are, in your view, the major misunderstandings or misconceptions between “the Western” and “the Islamic” world?

MCF: The West sees the “Islamic World” as a whole, an entity. There is, however, not only one, but there are several realities, no country is the same as the others, and within each country there are numerous very different orientations – exactly as in the West there are differences between countries and between citizens in their relations to religion. It is wrong to make a general statement concerning “the world view” of the citizens of the Muslim World. Most probably, the “Muslim World” sees also the West as a bloc, but I feel that there exists a more differentiated perspective. The connotations between “Holy War/Jihad” and “Islam/terrorism” are dangerous, and the image transmitted by the media is not very helpful for making the distinction between those totally different concepts.

TM: I do not think that we should talk about misunderstandings or misconceptions. It is not about a “technical” problem caused by error. It is a problem of attitudes. Generalisations and stereotypes about the Muslim World do not have real substance, and even less about “the West”. Instead of adopting stupid generalisations, we should try to approach social realities.

AMG: The so-called “Western world” derives its roots and characteristic traits from the historical and cultural fusion of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Greco-Roman Classical heritage. The Islamic world has been influenced by both these traditions, yet allows a predominant position to the precepts of the Holy Qur’an. All three monotheistic creeds believe in one, indivisible truth that is not to be compromised, challenged or denied. In the Western world, following a process of secularization and revolutions, many societies, tracing their roots to Latinate Europe and its historical and cultural dependencies, instituted a constitutional separation between State and Church. Such a separation makes social, cultural and political pluralism possible. In most Muslim countries the said separation has not taken place; neither has it occurred in the Jewish tradition and, later, in the State of Israel. The difference regarding human attitude towards life between a religious and devout person on the one hand and a secularized layman on the other hand is crucial. Whereas the secularized individual weighs his or her preferences according to worldly reasoning – what is likely to happen now and here –, the pious, religion-oriented individual makes decisions in relation to Divine Revelation and the life after death. This decisive gap seems to be eternal. The problem is how might cultural pluralism function in a society committed to a single predominant creed and can one successfully compromise between the loyalty to country and people and the devotion to religion and heritage?

What went wrong with the Dialogue between Cultures?

MCF: We should be capable to avoid any form of stubbornness in dialogue. There is a tendency of talking about “the other” instead of establishing a real dialogue with everybody sitting at the same table for an open and respectful discussion. It is important to accept contradictions, listen to other ideas, to speak and to listen.

TM: You have very well indicated that we do not give enough consideration to cultural differences. I would like to add that we do not give enough consideration to the actors, to the individuals in their societies. I am always explaining to my students in Finland that the religiosity of a Mohammed is not so different from that of a Matti.

AMG: The dialogue between cultures must be founded on reciprocity and mutual respect. Where neither exists – there can be no dialogue. Father Paolo Dall'Oglio claims that respect for the other is not enough and should be followed by the parallel concept of hospitality: to be able to welcome others ‘under our tent’ and appreciate their own hospitality. Following the process of colonization first and decolonization later, and in view of dwindling birth rates at home, many European states encouraged immigration from Third World countries in the hope of getting cheap labour. The measures taken in order to promote integration of the new-comers into the hosting society were either non-existent or insufficient or rejected by the new-comers on the grounds of loyalty to their ancestral traditions. The result was frustration on both sides. Today, in view of terrorism, demographical facts and cultural ghettos, the Western world feels threatened and fear-stricken. Fear breeds hate and Western societies tend to nurture hate towards ‘the other’. In Europe, Anti-Semitism has long been professed against Jews; now it is joined by Islamophobia. The existing dialogue between cultures, trying to stress the common issues, such as the belief in one God; the fact that we all are human beings [“If you prick us do we not bleed?” (W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, III, i)], misses its point: It offers no remedy for fear or hate. The only way to create a true dialogue between cultures is getting to know ‘the other’s culture, being ready to respect it and only then discuss the pending issues of contention or differences between cultures.

What new forms, contents or methods do you suggest for establishing a meaningful dialogue between cultures?

MCF: We should promote real cultural exchanges through arts. It is important to learn more about history, the heritage and cultural exchanges of the past, but also to entrust creative artists the mission of elaborating the full perspective of creation and reflecting on encounters.

TM: Here again, it is not a technical issue which would be subject to innovation. But focussing on actors, individuals, social or ethnic groups, could be a good choice.

AMG: The only feasible way of establishing a meaningful dialogue between cultures is education, pedagogy and encounter. Educating the youngest members of society and encouraging them to learn about their neighbours – ‘the others’. Why have they come here? What are their creeds and beliefs; their distinct ways of life? In the text of the interview of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio (see section 6.1 of this book, TS), there is mention of the core curriculum for all schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina on “the culture of religions”, providing a basic knowledge of all religions in the country to the young generation. I believe this is the only way to create and establish a meaningful dialogue between cultures; intentionally, stress is to be offered to the young generation, since this target audience may still be ready for some change, whereas the more elderly are stereotype-stricken and less eager to modify their ways of thinking. Getting to know ‘the other’ is the first step in a long and poignant way of being able to accept and respect thy neighbour, if not to love him or her. Such an acceptance should be the basis for social integration of the new-comers into the hosting society. Yet ‘the others’ have to contribute their share as well: once a chance of integration is sincerely put before them, they should do their utmost to conform to the code of social behaviour and cultural values prevailing in their hosting countries. I would mention here the maxim launched by Jewish scholars in Germany in the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment and following the legal and civil emancipation then bestowed upon the Jews: Be a Jew in your tent and a member of civil society while among your fellow citizens. True enough, racism drove this fragile co-existence into a terrible end; yet the initial idea seems just and right to me. Getting to know ‘the other’ on the one hand, and opening the way for a meaningful integration for ‘the other’ and by ‘the other’ on the other hand, may alleviate the fear and hate of one side and frustration of the other.

In the debate of the last Advisory Committee, the following elements have been proposed as essential for a meaningful dialogue: reciprocity, giving way to the other's point of view, reflecting the historical and political context. Do you agree with these proposals? And/or do you wish to suggest other elements?

MCF: Let us not forget culture! Music, literature, plastic arts, theatre, but also culinary culture, the art of living...The Mediterranean is a space where – before religions caused divide – there were established many common features in terms of language, food, cultural habits...

TM: I would like to add hospitality as a prevailing principle of Mediterranean cultures.

AMG: I fully agree that reciprocity, giving way to the other's point of view and reflecting the historical and political context are essential for a meaningful dialogue. Allow me to comment on one of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio's statements with respect to the creation of national entities in the Middle East, under the direct influence of the West. Father Dall'Oglio is quoted as having said that the above mentioned process was executed through a national ideology that is external to the Islamic World. He then goes on to say that: immediately the Zionist nation was created in the heart of the Arab World (Islam and Oriental Christianity). Furthermore: capitalism and communism came to impose their logic and their internal fight upon the Arab Islamic World. I beg to differ: Zionism – the yearning for Zion – is no novelty of European origins in our region. Judaism and the Jews are an essential part of Mediterranean Civilization. The Jews are and have been a Mediterranean, Middle Eastern people and although expelled from their land after several defeats inflicted on them by the Romans, the Jews have never renounced their claim on the promised land nor have given up hope to be “next year in Jerusalem”. Excepting the period following the crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem, when both its Muslim and Jewish populations were exterminated, there have always been Jews living in Jerusalem – Zion and mourning its destruction. The history of my own Jerusalemite Meyuhas family bears witness to this historical fact. True enough, the lack of political power and the deplorable life conditions imposed on the Jewish people in exile, brought about the fact that the number of Jews in the Holy Land was very limited. Yet there were always Jews in Jerusalem. We are not new-comers to this region. We used to be a minority and have fought our way through so as to become the majority in our homeland.

What do we need to master critical situations of misunderstandings (such as the situations linked to the cartoons, or later the statement by the Pope)?

MCF: Offering excuses, and understanding where are the limits between “freedom of expression” and “respecting others”.

TM: I am taking neither the Pope nor the Danish newspaper serious. And I do not believe in misunderstandings in this context. I think that some people in Denmark acted deliberately the way they were doing. The issue with the Pope is not clear to me.

AMG: *Primum non nocere* is a sound principle not only where medicine is concerned but as a rule for life. Some words or expressions had better not be pronounced. Once a critical misunderstanding is caused, I would expect all the sane and moderate elements of the relevant communities to take conciliatory measures in order to address the situation, aiming at a peaceful solution.

How can we create better understanding of “sensitive issues” where feelings of religious or cultural groups are touched?

MCF: Understanding that the way we speak about others is also the way to speak about ourselves. Respect of others’ religion reflects how we are considering our own religious heritage, even if it is nothing more than cultural.

TM: We need to talk about such issues with more openness. We need to abolish the taboos, while showing respect.

AMG: I see no better way for understanding “sensitive issues” where feelings of religious or cultural groups are touched, than learning to know ‘the other’: namely the religious convictions cherished by ‘the other’ and the ways of life upheld by them.

It has been stated that “the Arabs are fed up with Dialogue”.
If you agree fully or to a certain extent: what is your explanation?

MCF: There is lack of respect of the “sacred”.

TM: I do not agree. According to the “message of Amman” (2004), the dialogue with the other cultures and religions is among the Qur’anic principles. How should the Arabs, including the Christian Arabs, not agree with the need for dialogue?

AMG: I can see the frustration of some Muslims not being accepted by the “Western world” as equals; the more so considering the crucial contribution of Muslim civilization to the world in general. On the other hand, some members of Muslim groups tend to proclaim the moral decadence of Western society and its ways of life. The same principle of mutual study and getting to know ‘the other’ applies here: the more Muslim schoolchildren learn about the Western world, the more they may be willing to accept it as it is. The more such schoolchildren are taught to respect gender equality, the more understanding they may become regarding Western ways of life.

What should we do against Islamophobia in Europe?

MCF: Islam is one of the religions practised in Europe, many Europeans are Muslims. The connotation of Islam and “non-European” is unacceptable.

TM: We need to explain more often that all Abrahamic religions have the same roots, and, therefore, are in reality the same thing.

AMG: Islamophobia is one form of Xenophobia. Unfortunately we have to admit that xenophobia is a common trait of the human race; it is common especially where minorities are concerned. Again, I repeat the need for education, for getting to know ‘the other’. The outcome may not be love for all human beings, but it may lessen tension, fear and hatred.

Father Paolo states: "Western culture, although very plural in its expressions, is in fact very ideological seen from outside."
Do you wish to comment?

MCF: Let us give the floor to everybody! Then we will listen to other points of view. Do the new migrants have their freedom of speech as citizens? Do the citizens whose parents or earlier generations were migrants assume their responsibilities in accepting and defending their history, their heritage, and sharing this with others – the new migrants and the "indigenous"?

TM: I could not agree more. Western culture is already ideological from inside. Even the concept of a "West" is very ideological; it does not at all reflect reality. We need to use more scientific terms, which means: more precise wording.

AMG: I am afraid that I have not grasped the full meaning of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio's statement. What is the meaning of "very ideological seen from outside"? I certainly do agree that Western culture is very plural in its expressions.

If you look at the new Programme 2007-2009 of the Anna Lindh Foundation: which are the three priorities you consider the most important?

MCF: Culture, culture, culture!

TM: Reinforcing the national networks; mobility of the various actors; more weight to contemporary popular cultures.

AMG: I consider the need to strengthen the Human Rights based dimension of Dialogue as a crucial element underlying the relationship among human beings. Father Paolo Dall'Oglio states that the UN organization depends on the culture of the Western countries that won the Second World War. Even so, the numerous Muslim countries, that have become members of the UN, did so out of their free accord, pursuing their own interests and therefore have to accept that equal dignity of all cultures is granted, provided that Human Rights are respected. Dialoguing needs to take into account differences and diversity and be based both on mutual respect and scholarly study of 'the other'. Last but not least: the study of history is crucial for a better understanding of the human race.

3.2 Mediterranean Dialogue is Unique

Salvatore Bono

Prof. Dr. Salvatore Bono is President of the International Society of Mediterranean Historians SIHMED – Italy. He had been invited to reply to the same questions as the experts in section 3.1 but preferred to contribute his own statement. Original text is French, translation TS.



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).

3.3 Inclusion within Diversity and Citizenship Rights in a Common Euro-Mediterranean Agenda

Gema Martín Muñoz



Prof. Dr. Gema Martín Muñoz is Director-General of the Casa Árabe, International Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, Madrid and Cordoba. She presented this text to the EuroMeSCo 2006 Annual Conference “Paths to Democracy and Inclusion within Diversity” on 4 to 5 October 2006 in Istanbul and as her contribution to the strategy debate within the Anna Lindh Foundation where she is member of the Advisory Committee. Photo: EFE

It is frequently argued that it is necessary to promote a “dialogue between cultures.” But cultures do not “talk,” individuals do. This often repeated “dialogue between cultures” phrase is not just a mistaken formula that has blossomed because it sounds attractive; it has survived because it evokes a specific kind of relationship between the Western universe and Islam. It is an ideologically charged view, revealing of the degree to which – consciously or unconsciously – we have recreated a relationship that counter-poses “us” against “them.” We have internalized a reductionist and monolithic image of “us” and of “them” (the two “cultures”) as if these were closed and unconnected universes in which millions of human beings who are either “Western” or “Muslims” represent totally uniform alien and even antagonistic cultures. A hierarchical notion of superiority and inferiority emerges from this radically binary vision. That is why, in the best case scenario, the call is for “tolerance,” a term loaded with insulting paternalism.

This concept of “cultures” in relations between the Muslim World and “us” is a product of a Western construct in which Islam and the more than one thousand two hundred million individuals within are fictitiously represented, labelled ideologically as a dominant global force, in a way that portrays the behaviour and the culture of that enormous mass of people as a uniform entity. They are all One, and the great variety of ways of

life, states, histories and cultures extending across an immense geographical area across Africa and Asia (as well as the millions of Muslims that are born and live in Western countries) is ignored. This is a consequence of the central role played by conflicts in the Middle East, and of the interest of some local and international actors in demonizing Islam as a whole, which is presented as a Single Islam that represents All Muslims and which is dominated by fanaticism, fundamentalism, exacerbated hatred and irrationality. In other words, instead of relating with real cultures and religions, we think that we have to deal with pathological phenomena called “Islam” and “Muslims.” The hostility and reductionism that feeds this reconstructed vision of a threatening, backward and violent *homo islamicus* turns Muslims into people requiring therapeutic and punitive interventions. Ultimately, as denounced by the Palestinian thinker Edward W. Said, they become “murder-able.”¹ Thus is the imperial and colonial path re-forged.

The concept of decadence is also abused in the way that Western society thinks about the supposedly monolithic culture of Muslim peoples. It is assumed, in the total absence of real knowledge, proof or argument, that these peoples are experiencing a prolonged process of decadence that anchors them to the past and distances them from the global march of progress. Without denying the unfulfilled needs that exist in the Arab and Muslim world as a result of economic underdevelopment and a clan-based monopoly on power – factors that affect many parts of the world – there has been a process of historical evolution with achievements, modernizing transformations and a creativity contributing to philosophy, culture, intellectual progress and art. The problem is that we are not aware of this progress because of a powerful resistance to integrating the Arab and Muslim cultural sphere into the World mosaic. To give just one example, the “phenomenon of decadence” is part of the essentialising and deterministic package that describes “them” that we have recreated and only to affirm a logic of inferiority-superiority vis-à-vis our culture, which is imposed as a universal model.

It is not difficult to imagine the anguish that an Arab or Muslim feels when faced with the implacable insistence on portraying his or her faith, culture, and identity as inherent sources of decadence, terrorism, violence and fundamentalism. The imagined culturalist clash that arises from these representations dilutes and obscures the provocations of the West, and is the *real* cause of exacerbation of relations between both worlds.

1 *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts determine how we see the Rest of the World*. New York, Vintage, 1997.

There is a widespread feeling of frustration in the Arab and Muslim World, or in the words of the Lebanese writer Samir Kassir, a profound feeling of *doom*.² Such feelings are not simply the product of the experience of underdevelopment (which I would not want to minimise), but also of the historical experience of impotence and dispossession.

In fact, the end of colonialism did not come with the end of European imperialism in the Greater Middle East. On the contrary, these lands and their peoples have continued to suffer from the power strategies that their geographical situation encourages the perpetuation of. Foreign domination apparently ended after the Second World War but it actually continued and so the populations of the region remain as unprotected from its threats as much as they were at the end of the First World War when Europeans carved up the world between them. The occupation of their lands and all the deaths that it entailed, and the experience of humiliation and domination have thus remained facts of life for over a century.

The particular context in which that frustration has taken root must also be taken into account. Arab and Muslim populations are mostly urban, and a large new generation of young people has had massive access to education. Thus, these are societies in which a large part of the population is highly politicized. In addition, there is a very strong collective memory of belonging to a certain part of the world (the cradle of great civilizations, with a key geo-political position, and an immense reserve of global hydrocarbon resources), that should mean influence and wellbeing. However, these benefits have remained outside their control for more than a century. These are sociological and psychological factors that aggravate the feeling of being dispossessed.

The complete lack of political efficacy (of the international community and local governments) to apply international law (UN resolutions, humanitarian and human rights conventions) in this part of the world also contributes to accentuate the culture of despair. To this should be added the universe of perceptions and the gaze of the Other: there is a sentiment that one is “impotent to be what one thinks one should be, to affirm the will to be in the face of an Other that denies one that possibility, that scorns and dominates one. The impotence to silence the feeling that one is no more than disposable & even though the game is being played on one’s territory.”³

² *Considérations sur le malheur arabe*. Paris, Sindbad, 2004.

³ Samir Kassir, *op. cit.* p. 16.

The complicated alchemy of all these feelings strengthens the culture of victim-hood among Muslims (why do they hate us?) and increases the risk of their withdrawing into themselves in their rancour and frustration. To counter this, deep reflection and action in the Muslim world is necessary to escape this pernicious closed circle of the “us” and “them.” Every time Muslim religion or culture is “insulted” in the Western world, the counter reaction cannot remain simply virulent and emotional (and often manipulated or consented to because as long as rage is directed against the West it is not being directed against the absence of the rule of law or democracy at home). Muslim scholars and intellectuals must respond serenely, rationally and scientifically (qualities that are entirely absent from Western provocations) to such essentialist and culturalist views of the Muslim World. The way forward is mobilisation through reason and science, with empirical arguments and observations, and through the creation of an intelligent lobby that can shape Western thinking. This is a challenge that Muslim intellectuals and thinkers have been unable to take on thus far. It is also crucial that the whole “cultural” issue should be addressed in terms of the need for respect for human dignity and the historical, cultural and religious legacy of each human being.

If history in the Muslim World does not progress in such a way as to allow citizens to control their own destinies; or if western knowledge of the diversity and creativity of that World does not grow, the well intentioned “dialogue” will become just another failure to add to others that litter relations between the West and the Muslim World.

3.4 Anna Lindh Foundation and the Arab League: Overcoming Major Misconceptions in Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue

Recommendations by a High-Level Experts Group

Upon a proposal by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (March 2006), an international group of experts was convened to assist in the development of a new strategy for the revitalization of the intercultural dialogue. At request of the Inter-governmental EuroMed Committee (April 2006), the subject was focused on “major misconceptions”. The experts acted in their personal capacity. Their meeting in Cairo on 15 and 16 October 2006 was preceded by exchange of comments and proposals among the experts on the basis of strategy documents submitted to them, in particular the papers “What went wrong..” and “Strategy for Re-launching the Dialogue” (sections 1 and 2.1), together with statements by Paolo Dall'Oglio (section 6.1).

1. The dichotomy **“Islam and the West”** is among the major misconceptions. It has roots in the historical European construct of “Orient” vs. “Occident”. It needs to be replaced, in relation to the context, either by geographical terms or by references to inter-religious or intercultural relations or to political groupings. Since, however, the dichotomy is widely used, it misguides both perceptions and actions. Remedial action should include appreciation of Islam as part of Europe’s history and identity, as well as of religious and cultural diversity within the Arab World; highlighting the principles of equality, partnership, good neighbourhood and living together in cultural and religious pluralism agreed upon in the Barcelona Declaration.
2. The misconception of a **“clash of civilisations”** cannot be overcome by denying or merely replacing negative with positive terms such as “alliance” or “dialogue between cultures”. The underlying concept of cultural determinism itself needs to be addressed

by better understanding of cultures and civilisations as both heritage and space of freedom for citizens enjoying their civic, cultural, economic and political rights agreed upon by the international community.

Since, however, the misconception of a “clash” seems to have taken root and can, therefore, easily be misused for fuelling conflicts, warnings against societies falling back into culturalism or even religious wars must be taken serious. Cultural and religious factors of conflicts need to be identified.

3. New measures of **prevention and early intervention** are necessary in order to avoid that critical situations (such as the cartoon issue) get out of control. Critical moments should be addressed by appropriate intergovernmental bodies at the earliest stage (e.g. EuroMed Committee/Senior Officials). Civil society actors are also called upon raising their voice in public against expression of conflicts in cultural or religious terms and in favour of respect of diversity and pluralism.
4. **Dialogue must be open for all groups in society.** Creating space of dialogue for so-called fundamentalists is a challenge that should no longer be neglected, without, however, imposing qualifications such as “moderate” or “fundamentalist” from outside.
5. The term “**dialogue between cultures**” itself is subject of profound misconceptions such as: an instrument for imposing opinions or values on others; participants “representing” cultures or civilisations; series of monologue statements. It is essential to conceive dialogues as open-ended events, based on principles of reciprocity and giving room to the expression of multiple, overlapping and dynamic cultural identities of participants (in line with the Universal Declaration and the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity).
6. **Intercultural or inter-religious dialogue** can contribute to a possible settlement of conflicts to the extent that it fully takes into account the historical, political and economic context and that it clarifies misuse of cultural and religious differences for fuelling conflicts. Above all, such dialogue should be conceived **as a learning opportunity** for filling gaps in mutual knowledge and interest and preparing ground for mutual respect and acceptance.
7. The distinction between “**common values**” and “**cultural or religious differences**” is a misconception to the extent that it insinuates an artificial dichotomy. As much as it is essential for a meaningful dialogue to include both dimensions, it is impor-

tant to take into account the diversity of options for putting universally shared values into practice, as well as the social and cultural reality representing many ways of similarities between individuals and groups perceived as “different”.

8. “Ensuring respect of cultural and religious pluralism”, one of the key objectives of the Barcelona Declaration, is compromised by a **“clash of ignorance”**. Providing knowledge about all major cultures and religions existing in the Euro-Mediterranean region to all citizens is an **educational challenge** calling for action by both Governments and civil society. Such knowledge should be made available through the regular school curriculum, in addition to specific religious instruction which usually, and by its very nature, focuses on one religion. The **municipality** should be the space of learning to live together in diversity. Examples of good practice in school and out-of-school education should be collected; innovative projects such as festivals of sacred music or guided visits of places of worship are further encouraged.
9. Since **the media** are the most important factor outside family and school for shaping mentalities, respect of cultural and religious diversity should be subject of major efforts to reach out to citizens through the media. Such efforts should include further development of a common **language and terminology facilitating understanding of cultural and religious diversity** beyond stereotypes or self-referential in-group communication.

Good practices and new ideas need to be further developed with media associations, professional organisations and research institutes. This includes codes of information ethics, codes of conduct, specific media awards, media exchange programmes, incentives for movies featuring living together, and a multilingual dictionary of culture-sensitive vocabulary. Good practice established in recent decades for gender relations (such as guidelines for non-sexist language) should be applied to intercultural relations.
10. **Intercultural exchange and training programmes**, as a cornerstone of all efforts aiming at overcoming misconceptions and stereotypes, need to be significantly increased. Priority should be given to modalities which have the most significant effect on mentalities and confidence-building, such as encounters with multi-faith initiatives, workshops aiming at sustainable results, training courses, combination of scholarships with exchange programmes, or cultural youth festivals.

11. Many of these conclusions build on recommendations made by the High-Level Group of Experts, convened by the former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi in 2003, without, however, exhausting them. A **new reading of the Report delivered by the “Prodi Groupe des Sages”** in December 2003 is, therefore, recommended.¹

Members of the High Level Group

From Egypt:

Prof. **Gamal El Ghitany**, Editor in Chief of the literature magazine Akhbar Al-Adab

Prof. **Dr. Aly El Samman**, Head of the Dialogue and Islamic Relations Committee, The Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs

Prof Dr. **Milad Hanna**, Chairman of the Coptic Society in Egypt

Dr. **Ahmed Kamal Aboul Magd**, Professor of Public Law, Cairo University, and Judge of the World Bank Administrative Tribunal

Dr. **Ahmed El Tayeb**, President of Al Azhar University

Counsellor **Hesham Youssef**, Chief of the Cabinet of the Secretary General, League of Arab States

Counsellor **Siham El Rifai**, Director of Civilizations Department, League of Arab States

1 “Dialogue Between Peoples and Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Area”. Report by the High-Level Advisory Group established at the initiative of the President of the European Commission. Brussels, October 2003 (“Prodi Groupe des Sages”). Online on many websites such as www.euromedalex.org or ec.europa.eu.

International Members:



Ambassador Prof. Dr. **Assia Ben Salah Alaoui**, Professor of International Law, Rabat, Morocco (Co-Chair of the Prodi Groupe des Sages). (Photo: ALF)

Prof. Dr. **Mohamed Arkoun**, Professor of Islamic History at Sorbonne III, Paris, France/Algeria



Dr. **Malek Chebel**, Psychologist, Anthropologist & Sexologist, Paris, France; member of the Prodi Groupe des Sages and of the Anna Lindh Foundation's Advisory Committee. (Photo: direct8.fr)

Father **Paolo Dall'Oglio SJ**, Founder of Deir Mar Musa Monastery, Syria

Ambassador Dr. **Senen Florensa**, President Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània (IE-Med), Barcelona, Spain

Mr. **Olaf Gerlach Hansen**, Former Director of the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, Copenhagen, Denmark

Amb. **Hassan Abu Nimah**, Director of Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Amman, Jordan

Dr. **Feisal Abdel Raouf**, Imam of Masjid al-Farah and Founder of ASMA Society, USA and Malaysia

Dr. **Abdul Aziz Said**, Founder and Director of the Center for Global Peace, and the International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program, American University in Washington

Amb. Dr. **Muhyieddeen Touq**, President of the Jordan Institute for Diplomacy, President of the Anna Lindh Foundation Board of Governors

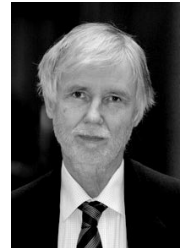
Coordinator: Dr. **Traugott Schoefthaler**

3.5 Reconciling Differences

Erkki Tuomioja

As Finland's Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the European Council, Erkki Tuomioja presented this speech at the public ceremony of awarding Father Paolo Dall'Oglio and the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian in Syria the Euro-Med Prize for the Dialogue between Cultures on 26 November 2006 in Tampere, Finland.

Photo: Magnus Fröderberg/norden.org



In recent years, the search for effective means of reconciling cultural differences has risen to the top of the international agenda. Even in the context of the war on terrorism, it has been acknowledged that international terrorism cannot be opposed by military means alone and that political, social, and economic measures are needed for long-term success.

Reconciling cultural differences is a topical issue not only in the international context – particularly between the Islamic World and the Western World – but also increasingly within societies in different parts of the world, certainly within many European countries. Although the road to reconciliation is very different at these two levels, sustainable solutions can only be found through respecting cultural diversity.

Religious differences are at the heart of cultural differences. Whereas after World War II, religion as a social force seemed to be weakening, since the 1980s and again since the fall of the Communist bloc this trend has reversed. Religion has increasingly become both a political force and a source of identity.

At the international level, much of the mistrust between particularly Western countries and countries in the Middle East which has grown since 9/11, is due to the difficulty of the Western world to see that, as with all other religions, Islam has a number of very different streams, only a few of them violent and only a small minority justifying a confrontational response. I have always stressed that it is our challenge to fight intolerance and fanaticism irrespective of the ideology or religion this is associated with.

In order to start reconciling the differences between Islamic countries and the West, I believe that we need a discriminating strategy that takes account of the diversity of outlooks within political Islamism. Many of the Islamist movements have a strong anti-western agenda, particularly with regard to the present conflicts in the Middle East and how the “War against Terror” is being conducted, but taking a critical view on these issues does not necessarily make these movements anti-democratic. Indeed, there is a diversity of movements that are non-violent, subscribe to democratic processes and methods in politics, and advocate their policies by taking part in elections, where possible.

At the national level, especially in the European context, the greatest challenge for reconciling cultural differences lies in integrating populations of immigrant origin to their new host societies and providing them with equal possibilities.

Contrary to common belief, European populations of immigrant origin have been rapidly and effectively incorporated to their host societies, but this incorporation has not necessarily led to successful integration, as more often than not, migrants have found their places at the margins of the labour market, faced persisting xenophobia, and their offspring (the second and subsequent generations) have partially failed to climb the social ladders of education, professional development and welfare – all signs of the failure of national policies regarding migrants.

Within the past fifty or so years, a new generation of European Muslims has emerged, which has resulted in a new way of thinking and talking about the nature of Islamic communities here. Old concepts that divided the world into two hostile camps – Islamic versus non-Islamic – are outdated and need to be reviewed. Religious principles should not be confused with the culture of origin: European Muslims should be Muslim instead of forever remaining North African, Pakistani or Turkish Muslims. Active citizenship and the development of a European Islamic culture need to be encouraged.

European governments need to create conditions propitious for the growth of Muslim thinking which would reflect the realities of European democratic and egalitarian societies. To achieve this, governments should focus on creating conditions for Muslims to build their human and organisational capacities to represent their own interests democratically and effectively within civil society. European governments should encourage moderate Muslim voices by engaging especially with democratically elected bodies that represent faith and minority groups. In other words, European Muslims should be empowered and anchored in the European reality.

As religious identities in general, and especially Muslim identities, have become politicized, religion has become one of the most important arenas for social negotiations regarding integration and social inclusion, where all kinds of issues are discussed, with or without the use of religious language. One of the greatest difficulties in secular European states has been the acceptance of “religious” demands of immigrants as legitimate, even though they might eventually not be so different, were those claims to be “translated” into secular language. Claims by ethnic and “racial” groups, for example, are more easily accepted.

There are no simple solutions to complex social phenomena, but there are several ways to improve mutual understanding and coexistence. Strong legal means of protecting religions from insults, unless it is a question of hate speech, do not seem realistic alternatives. Calls and cries for dialogue over perceived civilizational, cultural, ethnic and religions boundaries have been many in recent years. There is certainly a need to find a new status quo regarding tolerance and understanding of a changed world through all possible means, including education for combating ignorance, stereotypes and misunderstanding of religions.

Through the Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy, facilitated by the Governments of Finland and Tanzania, we have tried to address this and several other global challenges through multi-stakeholder dialogue, which I believe is the only way to find lasting solutions to urgent problems in our globalised world. During the course of last summer, two roundtables were organised to discuss how to promote political participation as an alternative to extremism, and to explore the role of religions in promoting reconciliation and sustainable peace.

The first roundtable, hosted by HRH Prince el Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, highlighted the importance of developing inclusive governance structures in order to find lasting solutions to the various conflicts in the greater Middle East region. Involving different stakeholders – civil society, the private sector as well as religious actors and organisations – would be crucial in order to work at the grass roots level and engage in constructive dialogue those who dominate the streets of communities and the minds of majorities.

The second roundtable, organised during the World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), built on the discussions of the Amman roundtable and focused in particular on the role of religions and religious leaders in creating sustainable peace and reconciling cultural differences. The meeting noted that the involvement

of religious leaders and organisations in peace processes may not be an instrument for resolving conflicts in the short term, but they could help in longer term processes such as building trust, breaking cycles of revenge, and preventing religion from being hijacked and mobilized as a weapon in ongoing and future conflicts. The meeting also underlined the important role religious communities could and should have in interreligious education. The work of Father Dall'Oglio and the Monastery of St. Moses the Abyssinian are a living testament to the effectiveness of such efforts.

In my view, these roundtables highlighted several important issues we need to consider. Religious communities need to discuss freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs within their own community and to pursue a dialogue with other religious communities in order to develop a common understanding of religious tolerance. Also, media professionals and their professional organizations should discuss media ethics with regard to religious beliefs and sensitivities, and develop their own codes of conduct in this respect.

European countries should seek to engage themselves in a dialogue with mainstream Muslims both internationally as well as nationally. If we wish our voice to be heard by the Muslims, we will have to listen to Muslims abroad as well as domestically. In the international fora, in the post cartoon world, we have to seek engagement with governments and intergovernmental bodies, the civil society, religious and spiritual leaders as well as intellectuals. It is also important that we develop a non-emotive lexicon for discussing the issues in order to avoid linking Islam to terrorism.

Many kinds of efforts are needed, but it must not be forgotten that public conflicts and discourse over religion also reflect a reality outside the realm of religion and freedom of expression. Dialogue may be useful, but it does not cure the illnesses of social reality, such as unemployment, feelings of unworthiness and marginalization. Social problems facing many of Europe's migrant populations cannot be changed by discussion, but by deeds.

4. Gender and Culture

4.1 Understanding Gender and Culture Relations

Are women better than men? Is French culture superior to Moroccan culture? Such questions are silly but pertinent. They reflect largely subconscious elements of human mentalities that interact with sediments of economic and political experiences. In the colourful market economy, every thing has a price tag and is advertised as “better than” other commodities. In the political arena, there is hardly any political party referring to others as an “alternative option”.

Hence, perceived differences are almost automatically valued. Our mentalities provide little room for enjoying diversity as a key element of quality of life. It took the international community 20 years to agree on the need to preserve bio-diversity as an essential factor for the survival of our planet. Public opinion quickly followed. Recent agreements on cultural diversity, however, are very far from being followed by public opinion. United Nations and UNESCO Declarations or even Conventions on “The Right to be Different” or on “Cultural Diversity” establish the right to cultural self-determination without any other discrimination than the need to respect the rights of others.

Almost everybody agrees that pluralism, freedom of opinion and non-discrimination along differences in ethnic or social origin, colour, gender, language, religion, or any other belief are key elements of democracy. This broad acceptance of human rights, however, has not yet penetrated deeply into our mentalities and does not interact much with the perception of differences. Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, followed by more than 100 Human Rights Declarations, Charters and Conventions, human rights are not yet mainstreamed within our academic and political discourse. The universal values of non-discrimination, core element of all

human rights documents, seem to be stored in our mentalities with a different software than the perception of differences and diversity. Interaction between these two mind sets seems to be extremely difficult.

Pre-scientific and pre-democratic perception of differences

A recent study on the role of women and men in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue by the Council of Europe (2005)¹ identifies a deeply rooted resentment in European societies also prevailing among organisers of dialogue events: the association of women with peace and tolerance and of men with war and violence. Women are better than men, by virtue of a small biological difference, according to the mentalities of most dialogue activists. How can we expect, then, small cultural differences such as religious belief or vernacular language be treated as diversity, and not be subjected to a priori value judgements? Everyday communication in our societies is largely resisting academic standards of statistics and mathematics: Reflection on the multitude of causes and consequences, “independent” and “dependent” variables has little space in public communication. Low-standard interpretations are on high demand: Almost every study indicating differences between men and women, Christians and Muslims, Europeans and Arabs finds its way into the news, with no or little consideration given to the question of whether a difference in opinion or behaviour of 52 to 48 per cent of women and men has any significance, or whether there are other factors involved. Our perception of differences is still pre-scientific and carries the burden of automatic value judgements.

In recent years, we got used to the term “gender” in order to recognise social and cultural differences associated to men and women in society. The term was created to sharpen our perception of discrimination. We are getting more and more used to the term “cultural diversity” in order to recognise the creativity of human beings. The term was created to allow us to perceive and accept the wealth of cultural expression.

1 Council of Europe, Directorate General Human Rights (Ed.): Rapport final du Groupe des spécialistes sur le rôle des femmes et des hommes dans le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux pour la prévention des conflits, la consolidation de la paix et la démocratisation. Strasbourg 2005 [document EG-S-DI (2004) RAP FIN]

It seems obvious that gender and cultural relations have many elements in common. In many societies, women have to be better than men in order to get the same opportunities. The same is true for human beings with skin colours other than pale and with other than so-called “Western” cultural background. Such everyday discrimination is, for good reason, subject of recurrent national and international campaigns and years against racism or for equality of opportunities. Such campaigns will need to be repeated, with little impact, unless our mentalities provide room for diversity.

Diversity and quality of life

We need a more balanced understanding of culture. Culture is underestimated as factor of change. Culture, in the broad sense of the term, results from human interaction with nature and generalized ways of social interaction, including knowledge, languages and belief systems shared by a number of people. The dominant perception of culture is, however, heritage, tangible and intangible, forming a cultural environment that shapes attitudes and behaviour and gives identity. Underestimated is the process of cultural creation. As knowledge is evolving, so are languages and belief systems. Every human being contributes as much to cultural changes as he or she is shaped by cultural heritage. Thus, diversity is inherent in culture, and no culture is an island.

Gender and cultural relations have also in common a number of options for change. Transfer of good practice in intercultural dialogue to gender relations is possible, and vice versa. Key qualifications for intercultural dialogue such as empathy, the ability to look at things from different perspectives, and appreciation of pluralism and diversity can be learned, can be developed through cultural creation, and can be communicated through quality media.

There are also lessons learnt from gender relations which would be needed for intercultural dialogue. The development of non-sexist language over the past 20 years, promoted and undertaken by public institutions, the media and professional organizations, is a success story for women organizations. If not merely imposed but resulting from public debate, terminology changes make people think and can induce changes in attitudes and behaviour. We definitely need also a more culture-sensitive language.

From parity to complex identities

In their daily work, educators, journalists and other cultural actors do not need to be visionary to know how to make a difference to gender relations. The principle of equality of men and women is not difficult to understand, if objectives are clarified. Many good practices oscillate between a “gender-neutral” and a “women only” approach. A human rights-based understanding of “gender-sensitive” action would mean: The principle of non-discrimination underlying the gender-neutral approach is the guideline.

There is, however, also need for some “women only” action. As long as most men do not invest as many efforts as would be necessary to balance the specific burden women are carrying, a gender-neutral policy includes necessarily women-specific elements of support. Problems would, however, rather be obscured by using the term “positive discrimination” whenever reflecting gender parity measures or specific support women need in public life. It is essential to ensure gender parity at all levels of society. Gender parity is of particular importance when issues of gender relations are discussed or measures for equality of opportunities are decided on. As long as gender relations are mostly left to women’s organisations, and debated at meetings with a majority of female participants, the deep structures of our mentalities remain unchanged.

The preparatory meeting in June 2006 in Rabat for the 2006 Euro-Mediterranean Ministers Conference on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society” provided good indicators of persisting problems. What interpretation should we make of the almost unanimous rejection of the proposal to cooperate with the Islamic feminist movement and Islamist women’s organisations? Do women have to keep out of organisations which are based on references to Islam, and leave this area to men who would, then, have a monopoly to speak for Islamist groups? Do women, by virtue of a small biological difference, have to behave differently from men? Such conclusions are very close to the mental roots of discrimination: Imposing attitudes or behaviour on human beings on the basis of only one characteristic has always been the key mechanism of discrimination. Women’s rights are human rights.

The right to be different – a right, not an obligation

In a similar vein, not much vision is needed for organising intercultural or inter-religious dialogue in a way that creates room for diversity in our mentalities. We need to discontinue “representative” forms of dialogue. Parity of linguistic, religious or cultural groups is essential for discussing and improving cultural relations. But we need to avoid inviting Christians to speak “as Christians”, Muslims to speak “as Muslims”, Europeans “as Europeans” or Arabs “as Arabs”. If we want to create room for diversity in our mentalities, we have to provide opportunities for all participants in intercultural or inter-religious dialogue events to express their multiple, overlapping and dynamic identities. By no means, they should feel reduced to only one element of their identity which would, then, be imposed on them as collective attitude or behaviour they have to follow. Our perception of differences is not only pre-scientific, it is also pre-democratic.

Gender and cultural relations are at the heart of democracy. The right to be different must be a right, not an obligation. Acting, thinking and considering oneself as different is a basic human right. Once a difference is imposed, the everyday logic of rejection and discrimination is working. The annual UNDP “Human Development Report”, for obvious reasons, gives high marks, in the human development index, to countries providing high levels of equality of opportunities to women and men. The United Nations working definition of “quality of life” refers to the “freedom to make choices”. Such freedom is vital for all human beings, whatever orientation they have developed in dealing with their cultural, religious or other heritage. Better understanding between men and women is a good first step for intercultural understanding. Appreciation of cultural diversity is a good first step to provide equal opportunities to men and women.

There are a number of good reasons for supporting the proposal, made by the European Parliament, to create as many synergies as possible between the European Years for Equality of Opportunities (2007) and for the Dialogue between Cultures (2008) – and to fully involve all members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

First published as: T. Schoefthaler, Understanding Gender and Culture Relations, in: Quaderns de la Mediterrània no. 7 “Women in the Mediterranean Mirror”, Ed. Maria-Angels Roque, European Institute for the Mediterranean (IEMed) Barcelona 2006, pp.19-22

4.2 Misunderstandings about Gender Equality and Islamic Feminism

More suspicion than expected has poisoned North-South relations across the Mediterranean Sea. In November 2005, a new Five-Year Work Programme for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was adopted by consensus. It includes a commitment by all 35 Member States to adopt measures to “achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women”. A plan of action should be prepared by a Ministerial Conference.

This conference took place in Istanbul from 14 to 15 November 2006. But its title had been changed at request of a number of Southern partners. The word “gender equality” has been replaced by “strengthening the role of women in society”.

I expected the 200 participants at the Preparatory Conference in Rabat (14 to 16 June), most of them representatives of civil society, to unite in protest against a perceived reduction in scope of the project. The three studies prepared for the conference had explained “gender equality” as a term indicating the objective of ensuring equal rights of men and women, and carrying the message that existing discriminatory situations should be changed through joint action by men and women. This applies to human rights (study by EuroMeSCo, the EuroMed network of political science institutes)¹, to access to education and economic participation (study by FEMISE, the EuroMed network of economic institutes)² as well as to attempts of changing mentalities through education, culture and communication (study by the Anna Lindh EuroMed Foundation network).³

Surprisingly, other subjects attracted more attention at the Rabat meeting. Above all, the recommendation by the EuroMeSCo study “to involve Islamist political parties and

1 Women as Full Participants in the Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States. A EuroMeSCo Report, April 2006 (www.euromesco.net)

2 Women and Economic Development in the Mediterranean. A FEMISE Report, April 2006 (www.femise.org)

3 Culture and Communication – Key Factors for Changing Mentalities and Societies. Study by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, April 2006 (www.euromedalex.org)

women rights organisations in the process of reform, in order to design policies that successfully encourage political reform and gender rights” was almost unanimously rejected after heated debates. The rejection did not address the proposal to involve Islamist political parties, but Islamist women’s organisations, defined by EuroMeSCo as equivalent to what is normally referred to in the literature as ‘Islamic feminism’.

United in opposing this idea, the participants did not want to accept the diversified picture of women’s organisations which are based on references to Islam, as portrayed by the study. EuroMeSCo justified its proposal by concrete opportunities to engage political Islam for strengthening at least “the public role of women” (which, ironically, comes close to the new theme of the Ministerial Conference). There was a climate of resentment. Many participants seem to consider feminist Islam a new trick for strengthening patriarchal tendencies of political Islam, misusing women for reinforcing their chains.

Whereas, in the West, generally dialogue with the political Islam, represented by men, is accepted or even seen as essential for countering terrorism, Islamic feminism is generally rejected. This adds to the already long list of double standards piling up in Western attitudes towards the world of Islam. EuroMeSCo’s proposal reflects the urgent need to support reforms that can be accepted as locally rooted. In my interpretation, the change of the theme for the Ministerial Conference results from the almost omnipresent suspicion against any “imposing” of Western values and concepts to the Arab world. Such fears cannot be dissipated with terminological disputes. We need to go deeper in dialogue and discussion, talking about common values but also about differences, about facts and feelings.

The Anna Lindh Foundation study was also subject of criticism: Some participants felt that it refers too often to cultural traditions and is not critical enough against Governments that should be fully held responsible for discrimination of women in their countries. This is a pertinent argument but leads to a new question: Is it easier to change a government or to change mentalities?

The contribution of the Anna Lindh Foundation to the 2006 EuroMed Women Ministerial Conference focuses on culture, education and communication media as key factors in changing attitudes, behaviour, and, more generally, societies. The authors take into account that neither education nor culture nor media can be seen as mere instruments, ready for achieving envisaged results from appropriate input. The challenges and recommendations gathered in this study are based on the assumption that real changes in gender relations can only be achieved with clear focus on the human being as learner, creator and communicator.

Almost everybody believes in the power of communication. Companies, Governments, NGOs and other social actors spend significant amounts of money in PR, information materials and visibility strategies, addressed to the public at large and always hoping that the mass media take up the message and spread it to citizens. Other than institutional communication, independent media add their credibility to information they disseminate. The intrinsic link between credibility and independence of media, however, is often underestimated. Failing Governments, for example, tend to replace their PR agents rather than changing their policy, while overestimating the power of their institutional communication.

Culture is underestimated as factor of change. The dominant perception of culture is heritage that shapes attitudes and behaviour and gives identity. But every human being contributes as much to cultural changes as he or she is shaped by cultural heritage. Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations scenario is not unique. It is an expression of culturalism being deeply rooted in our mentalities. There is urgent need to discover culture also as a space for creativity.

The power of education is definitely not to be overestimated. Too often, however, education is not fully perceived as interaction of teaching and learning, of formal schooling and informal learning in society. Modern concepts such as lifelong learning and learning society indicate growing awareness of the fact that, in the 21st century, learning has become as much important as teaching, if not even more.

The Barcelona Declaration (1995) refers to the role of women from a mainly economic point of view as it recognizes "the key role of women in development" and expresses commitment "to promote their active participation in economic and social life and in the creation of employment". As regards to the cultural partnership, women are not in focus.

Gender issues in the Euro-Mediterranean area were first specifically mentioned at the 5th Euro-Med Ministerial Conference in 2001⁴. The Governments endorsed the conclusions of the "Forum on the role of women in economic development" (Brussels, 14 July 2001), which highlighted the need to promote the role of women in economic life in a way consistent with religious and cultural values.

4 *Barcelona IV, Presidential Conclusions*. Brussels: 5/6 November 2001.
www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/conf/bxl/conc_fr.htm

The new “European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument” stipulates the objective of “supporting policies to promote social development and gender equality, employment and social protection including social dialogues, and respect for trade union rights and core labour standards”⁵.

The Euro-Mediterranean Summit of 2005 has adopted a working plan, designed to provide the basis for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for the next five years. This document addresses specifically the promotion of gender equality.

In all countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, many recent efforts aim at increasing the participation of women in political, social, cultural and economic decision-making positions. With a view to contributing to this objective, Euro-Mediterranean Partners have committed themselves to take measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women. It seems that, ironically, Governments and conservative Muslim communities can agree on measures for strengthening the role of women in society, but not yet on gender equality in concrete terms of legislation on family and other aspects of the daily life of women and men. It seems, indeed, more difficult to change mentalities than Governments.

Adapted from Traugott Schoefthaler: Editorial for the Anna Lindh Foundation Newsletter July-August 2006, and: “Introduction” to: Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures: “Culture and Communication – Key Factors for Changing Mentalities and Societies”, Alexandria, April 2006.

5 Proposal laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. COM(2004) 628, p. 15.

4.3 Equality in the Name of Islam

by Helen Hajjaj

Men's monopoly of interpreting the Qur'an has contributed to keeping women in the Muslim world down. Yet, a growing number of women believe that Muslim women should draw arguments from the Qur'an in their demands for equality.

The Woman in Islam

Imagine a world, where a woman has the right to divorce if her husband does not satisfy her sexual needs. Or where the man has to support the entire household economically, while the woman decides by herself how she wants to spend her income. That is how society would look if the teachings of Islam were implemented.

According to Muslim women around the world, Islam places the genders on equal footing in a way that neither Christianity nor Judaism does. Therefore it is with the Qur'an that the battle for equality should be won. This is what Asma Barlas, professor of political science with speciality in Islam at Ithaca College in the USA, believes. "The Qur'an establishes the complete ontological equality between women and men quite clearly," she says and therefore sees no hindrances in being both a Muslim and a feminist.

This opinion has spread over the last 15 years, where focus on the woman's role in Islam has grown both in the West and in Muslim countries, explains Riffat Hassan, professor of religious studies at the University of Louisville. "It all depends on how one defines feminism. To me feminism is a philosophy according to which women have the same right to develop as men. They are human beings and therefore have equal human rights. The Qur'an places so much emphasis on rights given to women, so I do not see a problem in being a Muslim and a feminist," she says.

The beginnings of equality between the sexes are seen in the Islamic version of the tale of Adam and Eve. Even though many Muslims, in line with Christians and Jews, at first

would say that Eve was created from Adams rib, nothing in the Qur'an supports this. Instead of *Adam and Eve*, generally common gender words like *the people* or *mankind* are used. The word *Adam* does appear but then it is most often meant as the self-conscious human and not as the man. That many Muslims still believe the tale of the rib is because of different Hadiths (the story about Prophet Muhammad's practices) that mention that the woman is created from a rib.

But it is not only in the Story of the Creation that the woman appears in a more positive light in Islam, author and lecturer Aminah Tønnsen tells us. "It says in the Story of the Creation that Satan made THEM – both Adam and Eve – stumble, THEY tasted from the tree. But, as famous Islamic scholars have argued many hundreds of years ago, a part of the assertions found in the Hadith literature was influenced by the local Jewish-Christian way of thinking," says Aminah Tønnsen.

Men's Monopoly

Tønnsen has lived ten years in Morocco, where she directly experienced the oppressive behaviour towards women, supported not only by tradition but also by legislation. It was not until she returned to Denmark, and converted to Islam that she realised the way women were being treated was influenced by religion. "As a Dane I naturally did not want to take on traditions that belonged to another culture and were contrary to my fundamental beliefs whose primary source is the Qur'an," says Aminah Tønnsen.

Most Muslim countries have laws discriminating women and justifying oppression in one form or another. This does not discourage Asma Barlas from using the Qur'an as a tool to gain more rights. "The problem is that historically only men have interpreted the Qur'an and that the political and sexual contexts that it has been interpreted in have been patriarchal. So it is not surprising that dominant Muslim readings of the Qur'an in themselves are patriarchal and support prejudice against women," she says.

Sherin Khankan from the Forum for Critical Muslims agrees with that assessment. "A female Pakistani scholar has discovered that in the Qur'an's over 6.000 verses there are only six verses that can be interpreted as an argument for a gender hierarchy. But they can also be interpreted the other way. The problem is that men have had a monopoly of the interpretation," she says.

Active Women

As a Muslim woman, Sherin Khankan is placed in the unusual role, in the Forum for Critical Muslims, of the head of a mixed group with both women and men. Among other things, the association wants to establish a Mosque in Denmark, where women can lead the Khutba (Friday sermon). In that way, girls and boys would be raised in listening to women and to see it as a natural thing that a woman is standing in front of the Mosque and speaking to the group.

“In the prophet’s time, women were active in spreading the message of Islam. And in Mecca, women and men walk around the Kaaba together. The pilgrimage is the ultimate symbol of equality, where all distinctions – gender, economical and racial – are lifted. Why not implement that in everyday life?” says Sherin Khankan.

A glimpse back in time shows that there are examples, where women, with the help of the Qur’an, have increased their rights. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, all women were at first thrown out of the universities that before had been for both sexes. But by referring to education as a fundamental Islamic right for both sexes, the women insisted that new universities be opened for them. And it happened!

It is exactly stories like this that make well-educated Muslim women see hope for the future. Because it shows that it is the culture and not the religion that keeps women down, Riffat Hassan emphasises. “But at the same time it is important to say that there is a difference between religion and culture. And these things are now being challenged. If you go to the Muslim world, you will see that the biggest steps of progress that have taken place over the last 30 years have come from women’s groups, for example about the knowledge of their own legal rights. This has been a big issue because women simply did not know their rights about marriage, divorce and inheritance. But now it is no longer taken for granted what the Mullahs are saying.”

Historically both Muslim men and women have turned to the Islamic scholars when they had to learn about the religion. There is no tradition for the individual person to interpret the religion by himself or herself. According to Aminah Tønnsen, it is therefore important that men also become involved in the fight for women’s rights.

“Women have gotten more education and therefore have better opportunities to read the scriptures themselves. But men have to be convinced that it is also to their advantage that

women get the rights given to them according to Islam. And actually in the last 15 years there have been only a few men who support women in their demands. But even if for example Morocco has changed the laws to give women more rights, it of course takes some time before these laws become judicial practice,” she says.

Even though the Qur’an equalizes the genders, all the women agree that there is still a long way to go. There is an increased awareness among both sexes in the Muslim world, but the societies are still organized in such a way that for many families – and especially women – it is a daily struggle just to survive. According to Asma Barlas, social, political, economical and cultural reforms are necessary to create an environment which would allow women to interpret the Qur’an themselves.

“To be able to read the Qur’an as a liberating text for women, Muslims need to approach it as the word from a God, who is just and who supports human rights, a God who is not masculine and a God who does not prefer men. If one begins with these theological assumptions, then one can reach a fundamentally different reading of the Qur’an which is favourable towards women,” she says.

This article, published in Danish in: Dagbladet Information, 6 March 2006, was awarded an honorary mention by the Anna Lindh Foundation and the International Federation of Journalists for their first Euro-Med Journalist Prize for Cultural Diversity on 10 September 2006. The article was published in English, French and Arabic translations in the ALF publication: EuroMed Journalist Prize for Cultural Diversity. The Winning Articles. Alexandria 2006. (www.euromedalex.org)

The Jury qualified Helen Hajjaj’s article as follows: “The article is on a hot potato named ‘Feminist Islam’. There are associations of Muslim women who firmly believe that true Islam places men and women on equal footing and do not want to leave the interpretation of Islam to men only. Similar to the feminist Christian movement, they insist that God is neither male nor female, and that God does not prefer men to women. Helen Hajjaj challenges standard European perceptions of Islam.”

Further reading: A very concise and factual analysis of Qur’anic references to equality or discrimination between men and women provides Ikbal al-Gharbi, “Les femmes”, in: Le Monde des Religions, septembre-octobre 2007, no. 25 “Ce que dit vraiment le Coran”, pp. 30-31.

5. Learning about Cultural Diversity

5.1 Cultural Diversity for All

How can you even think of “celebrating diversity” while the horrors of war in the Middle East affect millions of innocent people? I fully share this question that was addressed to me from many partners in 35 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region at the peak of the Israeli-Lebanese War in July and August 2006.

Dialogue at Times of War

There is one lesson that needs to be learned from emergency assistance: Giving food, clothing and shelter to victims is only a first step. Already in emergency situations, we need to prepare food for thought and rebuild an environment conducive for human creativity. Otherwise, we would assume responsibility for dehumanising victims of war and violence to mere beneficiaries of emergency assistance.

“Learning about cultural diversity” is a guiding principle for conflict prevention. It helps also finding orientation for educational action in conflict situations. During the recent war in Lebanon, the Anna Lindh Foundation had identified a number of new projects together with its national networks in Lebanon and Palestine, and also with new ideas from Israel and Jordan. One of the programmes was funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), with the objective to promote reading and development of public libraries in the Southern Mediterranean region, from Morocco to Syria. The programme on “children’s literature” started in Lebanon with reading and other cultural activities for children in refugee camps and other makeshift settlements. Such envi-

ronments, characterized by poverty, tristesse and despair, easily provide fertile ground for chain reactions of aggression, hatred and violence. Assistance to schools, teacher training, even a film festival and invitations to young graduates to join Euro-Mediterranean groups of young researchers from different countries help keeping brains, emotions, hope and spirits alive as human tools for shaping more decent social and cultural relations in the affected communities.

For many years now, dialogue in the region is already severely constrained by the failure of numerous attempts to revitalize the Middle East Peace Process, and the recent armed conflicts in Gaza. It can only be hoped that the Governments concerned do whatever they can in order to stop conflict, violence and war and the suffering of innocent people on all sides.

In addition to political efforts, we need men and women of good will to stop the hatred which always fuels new violence. Even during the Second World War and during the most dangerous times of the East-West conflict, such people raised their voice – intellectuals, young people and concerned citizens at all levels. They turned to be the vital element in reconstructing post-war societies.

Wars are the extreme form of political and economic conflicts. The more these conflicts are obscured by cultural and religious differences and claims, the more difficult are solutions to find. If we want to help political settlement, we need to dry out the cultural and religious fuel of such conflicts. We need to find new and more effective forms of a dialogue which starts with the assumption that the other might be right.

What we witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Europe, was that neighbours who lived for generations together, with little or invisible social and cultural differences of their lifestyles and their language, turned over night into bitter enemies. Christian Catholic Croats, Christian-Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim “Bosniaks” were told by some leaders to consider “the others” as enemies who deserve to be killed, raped, and pushed away. It is such misuse of normally only small cultural or religious differences that fuels conflicts and violence all over the world. But let us name it what it is: it is a misuse of culture or religion for masking economic or political purposes and making people believe that they would serve, when hating or killing “others” the “higher” goal of serving their community and values. It is definitely not a cultural conflict.

If there is a conflict situation, fuelled with cultural or religious differences, too often people choose the easiest way out: Listening to a speech, or telling each other, that they all share universal values. This does not help at all, it leads to the repetition of shallow conclusions, and the situation remains unchanged.

We definitely cannot eliminate causes of economic or political conflicts by cultural action. But we can unmask such conflicts, in analysing the real causes, claims for land, resources, or domination or freedom. And, equally important, we can learn more about cultural or religious diversity and pluralism. Without sufficient knowledge, there can not be respect.

Dialogue as a learning opportunity

Any real dialogue is an opportunity for learning. Religion is one important dimension of human culture and civilization, based on beliefs and tradition. There are too many human beings pretending that they would know exactly what God's (in Arabic, Maltese and some other languages: Allah's) will is. We as human beings need to be more modest: All of us have opinions and beliefs, inherited and inspired by traditions from our fathers and mothers and earlier generations. Human beings are subject to errors, including in their beliefs and religious practices. Nobody can claim that God justifies any conflict or violence on religious reasons. Such conflicts must be attributed to weakness of human beings. But how can we expect followers of different religions to respect each other's opinion and belief, if they do not even know about their differences?

A very good idea was practiced recently in Denmark: As part of an "Islam-Expo", organized by the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (DCCD), all Muslim *and* non-Muslim citizens of Copenhagen were invited to participate in a Friday Prayer in a Mosque, and to have a face-to-face talk on all matters of interest with a Muslim neighbour. We need more such creative ideas. As much as we need people who speak more than one language, we need people who know more than one religion. And we need to give young people an opportunity to discover cultural diversity as an element that makes our life richer and that is as essential for the survival of humankind as is biodiversity

for nature. We need to give citizens a perspective for a 21st century where political and economic conflicts are settled by those we are electing to represent us.

The – partly violent – mass protests of January and February 2006 in Arab and other mostly Islamic countries against the publication of “Muhammad cartoons” in some European newspapers have unleashed a new wave of alienation between North and South. European Muslims in particular get to feel this. The majority of the citizens of the European Union, who were in favour of Turkey’s entry until recently, has disappeared; and economic considerations are no longer in focus. According to recent polls (Allensbach, May 2006), “the Germans lost the readiness to maintain a tolerant attitude towards Islam; they feel threatened and consider Islam intolerant.” Hitherto minority views swell into majority opinions: 56% of the Germans now are against building of new mosques and believe that “a clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam” is in process.

A surge of cultural and religious resentment threatens all efforts for building confidence and cooperation in economic and political North-South relations. In a society poisoned by prejudice and resentment, rumours can kill. There was a rumour that French police had chased to death two young immigrants in a Paris suburb. It was the beginning of excessive violence for weeks in November and December 2005. There was a rumour that in a Coptic church in Alexandria a film ridiculizing Islam was shown. It was followed by fierce clashes, the first violent confrontations between young Muslims and Christians in the largest city of the Mediterranean with seven million citizens, which are still flickering up time and again. Twelve people died.

Europeans discovered that they were wrong in assuming to know their Southern neighbours well. What can education do to help coping with the current crisis? Traditional concepts are not sufficient and might even do harm. For instance, there is hardly any educational resource material on the cartoon issue which would not draw attention to the fact that there is no picture prohibition in the Qur’an and that it is “only” a matter of tradition. What can we expect non-Muslim youth – or even their parents – will be doing with this piece of information? I am afraid that not only Germans will show off at their next visit to Turkey or Egypt and teach lessons to their Muslim hosts.

Escaping the narrow mind of culturalism

We do not just need more knowledge. We need a fundamentally new understanding of culture and cultural identities. Most of the debate about Huntington's "clash of civilizations" scenario was superficial in offering a moralizing choice between clash and dialogue, without challenging Huntington's basic assumptions. There can be no doubt that cultural and religious traditions are shaping people. But the heritage dimension of cultural identities is only one side of the coin. Culture is also creativity. There is an active relationship between each individual with the cultural environment in which he or she was born. Rejection, adaptation and assimilation are options that everyone is entitled to have, according to the principles of human rights agreed upon by the international community. Our understanding of culture needs to be reconstructed on the fundamentals of human rights. The non-discrimination rules which are intrinsic to all human rights instruments support positive values such as the right to cultural self-determination, freedom of belief or any other opinion.

The superficiality of the Huntington debate is no coincidence. Two decades with thousands of international fora for cultural dialogue did not produce an instrument to cope with critical situations. We have oversimplified the matter. Once and again, such fora featured speakers and other participants as Christians (usually with confessional diversification), as Jews, as Moslems, or as Buddhists, or as Europeans (German, Polish, or French...), as Arabs (from the South or from migrant populations), as Africans or as Asians. People were invited to represent a collective entity, usually without being authorized by anybody to do so. The "representative" format of cultural dialogue remains within the logic of the Huntington scenario. This is why such dialogue usually does not go further than invoking common values.

What we are missing is a vivid cultural dialogue to address the issue of cultural and religious differences instead of leaving them behind in quickly passing on to common values. It is, however, essential not to limit our understanding of such differences to the predominant perspective of differences between nations, ethnic or religious groups or other entities. Human rights based understanding of culture sets higher stakes: cultural dialogue has to give room for the expression of each participant's way of dealing with his or her cultural environment, including religion.

I was impressed by a young Egyptian woman professor of sociology, who participated in an inter-religious dialogue meeting at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Speaking after many male representatives of churches and religions, she was asked to take the floor “as a Muslim”. She replied: “Although I am a member of the Umma, nobody authorized me to speak on behalf of Islam. I am speaking for myself.”

So we need to encourage more people to follow her example. And we need to create dialogue situations between people who develop interest in expressing themselves freely, explain their ways of thought and their own cultural preferences, their ways of dealing with traditions they were born into, all the variety of their belongings. Keen interest in other people and their own mixture of orientations and “identities” is a key factor. Since, however, such tradition of free expression and interest in others are usually not transmitted to citizens in our societies, we need to create dialogues as challenges for learning.

All different, all equal

Differences, however, should not artificially be opposed to commonalities, as it happens in too many intercultural debates. We are “all different, all equal”, this is the extremely important key message of the Council of Europe’s ongoing youth campaign. One of the most interesting proposals for new forms of youth workshops came from a number of young people participating in the Anna Lindh Foundation’s “Dialogue 21” Internet-based campaign in 2006. They proposed, as a specific subject, training in how to cope with group pressure. Culturalism is – in the last resort – a mindset for de-humanizing the individual person through imposing collective identities on it. Huntington’s scenario is not an exception. Culturalism embraces many facets, from the well-intended “representative” dialogue between cultures and religions, the national bias in history teaching, the media hype of national sports heroes or Nobel Prize winners, down to group pressure in intercultural youth encounters.

We need to change our parameters of “culture” if we want to educate democratic citizens for the 21st century. As much as democracy is based on pluralism of opinions and opportunities for expressing them, education for the 21st century must be guided

by the principle of multiple perspectives, overlapping cultural belongings and religious affiliations or preferences, by a strong commitment to escape the detrimental logic of reducing cultural identities to just one element – which then would make up collective identities.

Such education must also have its place in educational and cultural action with victims of conflicts, who deserve to be given a perspective for a different life upon settlement of the conflict. One of my Palestinian colleagues impressed me with his comment on young Israelis and Palestinians “living next door, side by side, but in totally different worlds”. “How can we expect them to live together in peace one day, if we do not start now giving them an opportunity to learn how to live together?”, he concluded.

New forms of cultural dialogue focus on the concept of cultural diversity which is not simply a new term for grasping the colours of culture or for portraying national, ethnic and religious differences. Every human being is bearer of cultural diversity in his or her configuration of cultural identities.

The “Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity”, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2001, is the first international normative instrument to acknowledge multiple and overlapping cultural identities of individuals and social groups. To quote from article 2: “In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity.”

Dialogue between cultures is essentially a dialogue between human beings, not between anonymous cultural entities. We need, therefore, to provide present and future generations with the tools necessary for dialogue. In the Euro-Mediterranean region, all citizens should have the opportunity to learn at least one, preferably more foreign languages and to acquire knowledge about all religious and cultural traditions that shaped this region as crossroads of civilizations.

The Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf made an interesting suggestion in his pamphlet “In the Name of Identity” (2000; French original title: *Les identités meurtrières*, 1996). Our Governments, he argues, spend tremendous resources on recording

the distinctive biological characteristics of their citizens, but they do not recognize their distinctive cultural identities, made up from a unique mixture of cultural orientations and belongings of every person. Maalouf suggests a “cultural ID card”. In one of our workshops this suggestion was creatively taken up: all participants received an empty box and a block of white paper. They appreciated the invitation to put down on paper their preferences in music, literature, food and beverage, sports, politics, their vision of partnership and understanding and moral and other values. The result was more exciting than most dialogue fora: All participants understood that every human being is a bearer of cultural diversity.

An important tool for intercultural learning is cooperation across frontiers. But such cooperation cannot be established by moral appeals, it must be based on shared interests. Two examples, tested in dialogue projects across the Mediterranean: When inviting teachers from different countries to learn together how they could teach on cultural diversity and religious pluralism, it is highly recommended to get them by a shared problem, for example the lack of school textbooks providing the needed learning resources for cultural diversity. So they are interested to learn from and with each other. Another example are groups of young researchers from different countries, invited to do a joint piece of research together. They know that experience in international teamwork is on high demand nowadays with future employers. And, at the end, they can be proud of their joint product. Learning and working together across frontiers is a key element for building mutual trust and confidence.

With the first Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio, we learned that preserving biodiversity is essential for the survival of our planet. For cultural diversity, a similar change of mentality still lies ahead. We need to transform fears of differences into positive attitudes towards diversity and pluralism. This can start with discussion of “globalization” that did not bring about cultural uniformity. This can also start with discussing gender relations. What a relief can be brought by an open debate on statistics about differences between men and women: If “60 per cent of women prefer group solidarity, whereas the majority of men prefers a more competing attitude” – to quote just one out of the myriads of similar findings – what about the others? What led 40 per cent of women and the “minority” of men preferring other options? The challenge can go on with Europeans and Arabs, believers and more secular people, and so many other categories of collective identities. Learning can be so interesting, once the learner starts with adventures in diversity.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 provides us with a common language for universal values. It does not make a single reference to any particular cultural or religious tradition. To cope with critical situations, we need a common language for cultural diversity, for understanding and respecting cultural differences. It is extremely important that such differences are understood in their complexity of all people “all different, all equal”. Discovering diversity starts with a boy and a girl coming from the same village and supporting the same soccer team. They might find more things they have in common. But it remains an educational challenge to provide them with skills for respecting their freedom to choose different gender roles, different political opinions, or different ways of practising their religion.

Adapted from contributions of the author to the World University Service Germany North-South Education Newsletter Nr. 52, June 2006, to the Journal Lifelong Learning in Europe, autumn 2006 issue, an open letter addressing the Israeli-Lebanese War, dated 27 July 2006 “Dialogue at Times of War”, and a keynote on “Can cultural action and dialogue contribute to conflict resolution”, addressed to a training seminar for youth workers and teachers in Nicosia, Cyprus, on 21 February 2007.

5.2 Learning Dialogue Skills

Dialogue between cultures?

Cultures do not dialogue. It is always human beings who communicate with each other. They are using languages and words which are part of “cultures” developed by many earlier generations and functioning as a medium of communication, for understanding as well as for misunderstanding. But as languages and the meaning of words are constantly evolving, so are cultures in general, cultures being understood in the wider sense adopted in 1982 by the UNESCO World Conference on Culture in Mexico City: Whatever human beings are doing in interaction with nature and with others, is culture, including languages, belief systems, values and habits they are passing on to the young ones. But since no culture is an island, there are always influences in all directions. Language is always a good example: words are borrowed from other languages, the new information and communication technologies give access to texts and images from all over the world: in this sense, there is a constant “dialogue between cultures”, but it is always a human being producing, sending and receiving information and adapting this to his or her own situation.

The true meaning of “dialogue” is, however, much more than such communication which I would describe as exchange of words, images, and gestures. In the words of an outstanding philosopher of the 20th century, Hans-Georg Gadamer, “dialogue starts with the assumption that the other might be right”.

Throughout history, the world was marked with both conflict and exchange, mistrust and cooperation, dialogue and monologue. History teaching has developed important tools for learning about history not only as a series of conflicts but also of mutual enrichment and exchange. This is important to encourage people of good will everywhere to continue to build bridges, well knowing that there will be always people with bad intentions who might destroy them. After the end of the Cold War, Europe has witnessed walls and borders falling down. We Europeans have a historic responsibility to share this with other regions, in particular with our Southern neighbours in the Mediterranean. But this requires a new thinking in Europe: with all enjoyment of new freedoms and liberties,

we should not incline towards inward-looking. Let us see what Southern traditions of hospitality have in common with European traditions of anti-racism; there is much room for mutual enrichment and learning.

Dialogue in Context

Some people dream of an age of dialogue between cultures, as a new era following the settlement of present conflicts. We should remain realistic: Dialogue is inter-personal and needs always to be established anew. But dialogue needs always to be situated within a larger context to be meaningful.

And here we are facing a profound problem: More than before, many people including political leaders, tell us since 9/11 that either we live in a century which will be marked by a “clash of cultures and civilisations”, or that we have to do everything to prevent this. Both positions share a too narrow understanding of culture. Definitely, the mixture of cultures in which human beings are raised, is powerful, it is cultural heritage providing tools for communication, orientations, traditions, and spaces to live in. But human beings are not slaves; they are born with the potential to make their own choices. This is, in a nutshell, the definition of “quality of life” by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which, in its Annual Human Development Report, gives highest rankings to countries where people are allowed to make many choices. This is why the Nordic countries traditionally are top, with their policies in favour of equal rights of women and men.

The actual dangers do not come from the images which are everywhere available in our globalised world and which are biased in their preference to dream worlds of rich people. This can be a root cause for conflicts, in creating anger of poor masses that feel – and actually are – disadvantaged and might be inclined to transform images of the inaccessible rich world into hostile conceptions guiding thought and action.

Since social conflicts between rich and poor exist in almost every country, I would not consider such confrontation of images a cultural conflict: Everybody is capable to see at least some root causes so that it remains a social conflict that calls for economic and political action. Real dangers start where social, economic or political conflicts

or tensions are masked by cultural differences. In most cases, it is not the distant “Other” who becomes victim of so-called cultural or religious clashes. The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina or of Ruanda lived for generations together, with even little or no visible social and cultural differences of their lifestyles and not even language. We have witnessed there and in many other places all over the world how very small cultural or religious differences can fuel conflicts and violence. The situation becomes dangerous wherever culture or religion is used for masking economic or political purposes. It is both a political and an educational challenge to disentangle political, economic, social, religious and cultural factors of conflicts and armed confrontation. It is essential to see how these factors interact. As soon as cultural pride and religious claims for truth enter a conflict scenario, its settlement through negotiation will become almost impossible. We need to see the whole context, but using the term “cultural conflict” is not appropriate, and it would be counter-productive.

Beyond self-referential frames

Invoking universal values does not help much in cases of tensions along cultural or religious dividing lines. What we have witnessed early in 2006 with the cartoon issue, is a huge gap, it is a “clash of ignorance” (Edward Saïd) especially between Europe and the neighbouring Arab world.

How could we fill this gap? Non-partisan information is on high demand. Christians will not be able to learn respecting Islam, if they are given a text full of references to the Qur’an, and Muslims will have the same difficulty if confronted with a text full of citations from the Bible. We need to talk about such differences in a way that is not always self-referential. And we need to understand what beliefs are: it is a human act, trying to formulate one’s relation with truth or ultimate values. But such beliefs are still subject to human limitation. Human beings can claim truth but must acknowledge that others might have different claims.

But dreaming of non-partisan information about diversity is as unrealistic as drafting an “objective” history. There are always different perspectives. Information about diversity needs to be pluralistic; but it also needs to be different from a compilation of partisan narratives. Comparative social studies have merits in this regard. In identifying “func-

tional equivalents” between different cultural or religious traditions, they give way to recognition of a diversity of expressions of similar interests or desires.

A very interesting approach was recently tested in Sweden. The Museum of the World's Cultures in Stockholm trained young volunteers as guides for citizens interested in visiting various places of worship in major Swedish cities. In listening to both, the host providing mostly the usual self-referential explanations of a Protestant or Catholic Church, a Sunnite or Shiite Mosque, or an Orthodox or Liberal Synagogue, and to the volunteers who add the element of an outside observer, the visitors start grasping the need to developing more than one perspective of looking at the same subject.

The real challenge is inviting people to dialogue who are not interested or even hostile. There should be no conditions. Europeans commit a major error when dividing Muslims into “moderates” and “fundamentalists”. Dialogue with strong believers can only start with an invitation to partners to explain their beliefs. And then dialogue needs to be nourished by modesty and respect which should not be requested in the first line but offered. It is always the first step that counts, the hand reached out, and not ready-made judgements.

It is an irony that comprehensive knowledge about religions is in most countries, if at all, only provided to those who call themselves non-believers. Those affiliated to religious communities receive, if there is religious education provided by schools, in most cases only instruction into their own religious tradition. But there are no non-believers. Human rights call upon non-discrimination along religion or any other belief and opinion. We do not even have an agreed definition of what “religions” are, as compared to “non-religious” people or organizations. There is urgent need to overcome self-reference in teaching and learning about cultural diversity and religious pluralism. The common frame of reference is the diversity of what human beings believe in, together with the non-discrimination principle of human rights.

“Learning about cultural diversity and religious pluralism” was one of the key recommendations of the High Level Group of Experts convened in 2003 by the then President of the European Commission Romano Prodi on “Dialogue between Peoples and Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. It is among the core recommendations of the United Nations High Level Group on an “Alliance of Civilizations” (2006). And it is advocated by the experts convened in October 2006 by the Arab League and the Anna Lindh Foundation to recommend measures for “overcoming major misconcep-

tions between ‘the West’ and ‘Islam’” (section 3.4 of this publication). The Council of Europe and the Anna Lindh Foundation in cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) started in 2006 a joint teacher training programme on cultural diversity and religious pluralism. A broad section of related teaching and learning materials is available in the Internet (www.coe.int and www.euromedalex.org).

We need more people who act wherever others are discriminated or attacked because of their opinion or belief, or cultural or ethnic origin. Showing such civil courage is not always rewarded. It is a dream that people showing modesty instead of pride, listening at least as much than speaking, offering respect instead of requesting it, will be more contagious than those abusing cultural or religious differences for masking their own interests. But each individual attempt in learning such dialogue skills, followed by curiosity to try them out, is one step closer to such dreams coming true.

Adapted from “New Avenues for the Dialogue between Cultures”, an interview with the author in February 2007 by the Egyptian sociologist Mona Taha for a handbook on intercultural dialogue to be published by the Swedish Institute in Alexandria.

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 Schoeffthaler, 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.

Adapted from a statement delivered at the 12th Annual Strategic Conference “France, the international community and peace in the Middle East”, colloques IRIS, Paris 6-7 March 2007

6. Religions don't Dialogue, Believers can

6.1 There is no peace without mutual respect amongst people of different religions or any other belief

*Traugott Schoefthaler interviewed in October 2006
Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, winner of the 2006 Euro-
Mediterranean Award for Dialogue and founder of
the Deir Mar Musa Monastery in the Syrian Desert
(www.deirmarmusa.org)*

1. Deir Mar Musa Monastery, respect and hospitality

*Father Paolo, let me first of all congratulate you on the
Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue for the Deir
Mar Musa Monastery in Syria which is under your lea-
dership. The Anna Lindh Foundation, being the youngest
institution of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, wants
to promote with this award 'Mutual respect among peo-
ple of different religion or any other belief'. What is Deir
Mar Musa doing to promote such respect?*



Father Paolo at the stairs
to his Monastery in the
Syrian Desert

Photo: Deir Mar Musa

First of all, a word of thanks to the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Award itself. I was astonished, as I had no expectations about this, but I am of course very happy for the group that works together, not only monks and nuns, but voluntary workers and others who together form a very interesting and committed group of people. I ask myself why and for what we have been awarded this. Probably this award is an occasion to know each other better and collaborate in the field of inter-religious dialogue in the Mediterranean context.

As to the concept of respect: this is often underlined in European documents; this is strange for us. Sometimes we respect what we are afraid of, as we teach children to have respect for electricity, it is not something automatic. Love, instead, proposes a basic feeling, an attitude that can help to avoid war and the tensions that lead to war. Respect is so far from being enough that therefore it is not on our agenda. Thank you for reminding us of this.

We are interested in the parallel concept of hospitality, to be able to welcome others 'under our tent' and accept, receive, appreciate their own hospitality. To be able to respect others, you have to recognize them as subjects worthy of being respected, having characteristics that enable respect. In hospitality, especially Semitic/Arabic hospitality, your guest is not somebody you will take advantage of, nor that you need his visit for your own purposes. By the very fact of being 'other' (nation, tribe, religion) he becomes an icon, an embodiment of 'otherhood', which, for religious people, is God Himself. In the name of God, the host receives the guest, recognizing in his face the image of God the Guest.

Back to respect: (not easy for me, it is so much "not enough") There is here a lack of interaction, the need to stay external, without engagement, looking to maintain equilibrium.

So, what is Deir Mar Musa trying to do? One, it offers a large room in our hearts and minds to Islamic/human/cultural reality, a warm room of consideration, curiosity appreciation, with a desire for friendship, communion and interaction, mystical, spiritual, embodied in a monastery, where there is the priority of prayer in human life. Thus we know deeply that we have brothers and sisters in the Islamic/Sufi tradition. In this monastery, we have been trying to rediscover and re-express, with more awareness and free choice, the ancient structure of inter-relationship between this kind of Christian institution and the still young Islamic community. Prophet Mohammed (peace and

blessings be upon him from the Lord), had been in contact with monks and the monastic tradition from his childhood, when he came in caravans. Monks at that time had been travelling across the desert, to the Gulf, Yemen, Ethiopia. It is a matter of fact that in Syria the monastic concept is considered very positive, the most loved face of Christianity amongst Islam. The Caliphs, the first generation after the Prophet, brought deep respect but also real protection to the monasteries, discovering places of interaction and deep meeting with Christian communities. We have witness of this in Arabic/Islamic literature, throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Even the Crusades and the colonialist occupation were not able to take away from the Islamic spiritual approach the positive connotations towards Christian monastic communities.

We are happy to say that the Muslims of this region consider this monastery as their own. We are honoured to see that Muslims and Christians, Syrians and foreigners, find in Deir Mar Musa a symbol of hope for a common future, to be built with a shared responsibility. Respect is only the always necessary first step.

2. Lack of mutual respect

Do you agree with the statement that lack of mutual respect is one of the most burning problems in our Euro-Mediterranean region? And what are the reasons?

I feel embarrassed in front of this second question. I feel somehow the big difficulty of Westerners to understand why Islam is so aggressive towards the occidental way of life and pyramid of values, principles and life style. Therefore, Westerners feel threatened by this and try to propose respect for at least a base for a common life internationally but also inside the societies.

The West finds it difficult to understand how deep the contention is. Why so much negativity? It depends probably on two things:

First, we have to accept that the Islamic world around the Mediterranean has been victim of colonial projects; even Turkey, though not directly, has been 'Westernized', and not probably through real free choice but through a tragic process in which Oriental Christians have paid a very high price. After colonialism, the creation of national entities

was seen under the direct influence of the West, through a national ideology which is external to the Islamic world. Then immediately, the Zionist nation was created in the heart of the Arab world (Islam and Oriental Christian). Furthermore, two empires (Capitalism and Communism), both of them from the West, came to impose their logic and their own internal fight upon the Arab/Islamic world.

Secondly, in the present day, the feeling of being economically colonized is so deep, the regimes being so dependent on Western economic interest – it is so evident. The impression that the Israeli/Arabic war is also a way of expanding spaces for Western markets, arms, and then after the end of the Cold War, this enormous feeling of being victim of a process of globalization, in which Western lifestyle is imposed as being the only reasonable, really human, feasible one, without the people in the West having the capacity to question the model, as to whether it is worthy of being proposed.

Having in Islam an enormous desire for emancipation, having a project for a future built on its own values, hope in its own literature, imagination, desires, aesthetics: Muslims in many different ways feel a need for fighting to resist Western/worldly power and for fighting back in order to create a space for Islamic hope. It is clear to me that there are many different 'Islams' as there are many different 'Wests'. (Remember that Eastern Churches are more deeply part of Arabic/Islamic civilization than somehow of Western civilization, participating in their own ways. So there are different Islams, from so-called 'terrorism' to so-called 'moderates'. Yes, I believe in respect, but for this, we have to come to an awareness of the lack of respect that characterizes our history; before judging the Islamic reaction, we have to come to an awareness of Western action. Obviously, we can go back to the Islamic conquest of Mediterranean coasts and before we can speak of Byzantine colonialism and Roman imperialism, Hellenistic invasion of the Eastern Mediterranean, and so back to before history. But this would not be a good way to understand the present time.

Western culture, although very plural in its expressions, is in fact very ideological seen from the outside. Once again, I agree about respect, but as something offered rather than requested or expected.

3. Allah has 99 names

Christians in Malta or in Egypt pray to Allah because this is the word for 'God' in their language. Most Muslims feel offended when Christians tell them that they would not pray to the same God. What is your position?

I know that there are Christians believing that their God is not the same God as the God of the Muslims. We Oriental Christians have been saying 'Allah' with Muslims for centuries, and even before, we have had such deep common experiences of relationship with the Divine. There is also a consciousness of pre-Islamic, pre-Christian Eastern populations, saying to the Almighty the same ancient Semitic common term, Elohim, Il, El, Aloho Allah.

What a tragedy that more than one billion people are thought to be misguided by a non-existing or non-right God. Our experience in Deir Mar Musa is deeply the one of a common worship and a common relationship with the One God, the Merciful Creator, the One who sides with the poor, oppressed, and abandoned, those little ones who are thirsty and hungry for justice.

4. The Abraham Path

Deir Mar Musa monastery prepares, with partners, for the Abraham Path Project, a pilgrimage from Istanbul through Syria, Jordan to Al-Khalil-Hebron and Al-Quds/Jerusalem. Can you tell us more about this project?

First of all, let me tell you that Istanbul is not on the path. Now, I would like to say that our monastic community has the name Al-Khalil, the community of Abraham, the friend of God. It is also the name of the town of his tomb in Palestine, known in Europe as Hebron. Therefore, the Abraham Path has been always interesting as the path of a man open to his future, crossing borders and 'belongings' and seeking a universal blessing. Then we discovered that Deir Mar Musa was somehow on the way. So many people come in the name of Abraham, walking, cycling, by public means, and when, during the Barcelona World Parliament of Religions, I came in touch with leaders of the Abraham Path Initiative from Harvard University, I felt that there was something very true to be developed.

We have tried to discover the tracks of this Abrahamic/ Islamic/ Christian/ Jewish memory in our region. We met for a marvellous night of prayer in Harran, on the night of Destiny, in the month of Ramadan, and Harran is the place of the call of Abraham: a decision to leave natural belongings in order to develop a new perspective, not determined by tribal logic.

We want very soon to open a permanent educational project. The Abraham Path will go from Harran, near Orfa in Upper Mesopotamia, to the Euphrates, to Aleppo, to the River Oront, then to Deir Mar Musa and on to Damascus. Deir Mar Musa will be one of the way stations. From there to the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem, to end in Khalil in Hebron, at Abraham's tomb, keeping in mind that the importance is not so much to know where he physically and materially walked, but to recognize a kind of symbol, a complex one, not easy because apart from common elements, there are as many Abrahams as there are communities. Everyone agreed that he was a true Faithful, he came out facing a universal blessing, he was generous and hospitable, and so spiritually concerned for others. Abraham is also the one understanding the relationship with God as a face-to-face one. Facing God instead of the Divine, and thus becoming a person.

Somehow the symbol of Abraham is important because he is a pre-religions Faithful, and probably we are all called to be post-religions Faithfuls. I would not be astonished if New Age People take Abraham as their own spiritual ancestor.

More concretely, the Abraham Path Initiative is a project for cultural/spiritual tourism with a strong environmental aspect, an educational project for inter-cultural harmony-building and we hope that it will be also a means of local economic development and a cultural instrument, in order to create a base for a long-lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

5. Limits of inter-faith dialogue

Inter-faith dialogue meetings usually end with conclusions on common values. What can we do in order to agree also to mutual respect of differences?

OK for mutual respect about differences, but what about liberation processes from unjust regimes, from aristocratic privileged systems, old-fashioned kingdoms or remnants of tyrannical, hyper-nationalistic power systems? What about liberation of territories from

illegal occupation, what about this prison of border-control, unobtainable visas? What is concretely the most universal system is mafias, by now international and on the way to being global. Respect is not a passive attribute, it is a fight.

After the unfortunate communication accident of Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg which provoked unwillingly a deep wound in Islamic feelings because it touches the very person of the prophet of Islam, a press communiqué came saying very sincerely that the Pope was sorry to have caused pain, and he confirmed to them his feelings of esteem and respect. I am happy after all that in the story, the question of the status of the prophet Mohammed and the need for esteem and respect come to be tied together. I see here a programme for the future of deep dialogue.

6. Equal dignity of religions

Between different religions, it is normally not too difficult to agree on the value of equal dignity of all human beings. It seems, however, very difficult to apply the United Nations principle of "Equal dignity of all cultures, provided that Human Rights are respected" to the coexistence of different religions. What can we do in this respect?

This is a difficult issue and I'm not sure if I have the right cultural background to address this. I am not a scholar in UN History and Human Rights. From an Islamic point of view, the UN organization depends so much on the culture of the Western countries that won the Second World War, that even the Declaration of Human Rights is felt to be a product of Western priorities. This doesn't mean that these are foreign, unknown, to Islam. For Islam, even the concept of the person is not like in the West, where it is centred on the individual in his rational capacities. The human person is more of a secret person whose value comes from his being created by God and being called to a relationship with God, and, consequently, with others. Some questions arise here about how to find equilibrium between the rights of individuals and groups, between religious tolerance, and conscience freedom on one side and, on the other side, the right to self-promotion and defence of cultural/religious identities. Once again, the concrete possibility of leading together depends on the concrete capacity of care for each other, not only respecting but with mutual recognition of others' values and by opening ourselves to living complementarily and with reciprocal consciousness of dynamic functions of integration.

Somewhere, this will create dynamic, successful societies, somewhere else, more a patchwork of ghettos. I hope that we will have as few 'walls' as possible, not only the Sharon Wall but bureaucratic walls, the walls of cultural discrimination. Fighting for the right of people to move, in a world that belongs to all of us.

We need to provoke each other on the theological/philosophical level, kindly but deeply, to pay attention to other desires and come to a sharing of desires, hoping and willing to have harmony as a destiny. It is important to create successful models and examples in order to fight pessimism.

7. Non-believers

Most religions have a word for 'non-believers', such as 'heathen', 'pagans', 'goijim' or 'kafir'. In practice, many members of religious communities have negative or even hostile associations with these words. In some cases, groups consider other groups, even within the same major religion, as non-believers. How can we change that?

The category of non-believing is a negative one, someone lacking something. On this level, it seems that our times are no longer times of polemic, active atheisms or agnostic movements. There is a shared new interest for spirituality and religious experience. But there is also, not only in the West, a more or less large part of the population that do not identify themselves with belonging to a religious belief community. That is why, somehow, universally, there is room for deep tolerance and cultural and spiritual complex identities, based more on syncretism than on exclusive belonging. This is an important component of modern human culture. I will not speak any more of 'non-believing' but on dynamically moving and complex beliefs.

This component of contemporary human culture is in different ways a challenge for traditional religious identities and I have been remarking more and more that, compared to the minorities of youth who are choosing religious sectarianism and exclusionism, there is appearing somehow a majority of youth who are judging the authenticity of the religious identities by their capacity for inclusiveness and desire for participation in building pluralistic harmony. The youth passing through Deir Mar Musa ask: How are you able

to achieve harmony between faithfulness to your tradition and deep, non-formal interest and welcoming to other traditions? In a sense, the less you are inclusive in your vision, and tolerant, the less 'believable' you are.

8. Relations with the world outside religious organizations

The Catholic Church has appointed a Cardinal for relations with non-believers. What can we do to improve relations between churches and other religious organizations of such non-believers?

There was in fact a special office in the Vatican, created after Vatican Council II, for dialogue with atheism: it was in the time of Communism. Then this office was dismantled and its role has been played by the Pontifical Council for Culture. The risk now is that some people are asking also to dismantle the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, reducing it to just inter-cultural dialogue.

I'm personally afraid that some Christians wish to see the Catholic Church as the symbolic representation of the superiority of the Western cultural model, to be proposed as truth for all humanity. These people are afraid of cultural pluralism and relativism, and they look at history as the confluence of nations all over the world coming to the highest human civilization model conceived, celebrated and realized by the Hellenistic Judeo/Christian-rooted West, just keeping, perhaps, some light folklore particularization.

I do not believe this is the right way of imagining the future. I hope for Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims around the Mediterranean to be able and to have the passionate desire to build together a pluralistic civilization. I believe in a stainless steel resistance to Western assimilation and forced global acculturation to keep and preserve treasures of human wisdom and divine experience for future generations. This is also true for other religious traditions.

I look with great hope to the deep spiritual traditions of India and China, as well as to the valuable spiritual personalities of pre-Christian black Africa and South America. Islam is

probably the most efficient system of resistance to globalization. Obviously I do understand the need to avoid terrorist attacks: it is a need for a capacity to choose strategies and refuse suicide tendencies. But nevertheless, the priority is to pay attention to the Islamic demand and contestation. The Islamic criticism of the Western economic, capitalistic model, secularized society and desecrated personal and family life, stays as a voice to be heard and paid attention to.

Going back to non-believers, we have in Arabic literature a real tradition of polemic scepticism, considered, at the end of day, as healthy for the society. In a perspective of a less polemic relationship with the West, we can easily foresee an Islamic world more open to its internal questioning, even through the dialectic between faith and atheism. Until now, atheism is felt as a Western product and therefore radically refused.

9. Learning about religious pluralism

The international community imposed on Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the atrocities of the war between Serb-Orthodox, Croat-Catholics and Bosnian-Muslims, a core curriculum for all schools on “the culture of religions”, providing a minimum of knowledge of all religions in this country to the young generation. It has been proposed to promote this also in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region. Would you support this proposal? And how could such learning about religious pluralism be organized?

Yes, I agree, and I am ready to participate if your organization wants to promote it. I don't think so much about a kind of universal inter-religious catechism but more an elaboration of a pluralistic pedagogy in meeting others and conceiving ‘otherness’ that will then help to rewrite new catechisms for the different traditions, and for different ages, children, youth, adults, with their own particular exigencies. I have an old dream of writing a nice and very illustrated catechism for Arab Christian kids living in very little minorities in the midst of Arabic/Islamic societies, to develop for them a possibility of identification not based on opposition to otherness and resistance to assimilation, but on discovery of positive interaction and of function in a society in which I understand, as a child, that my family tradition has a positive role for the good of the given society, blessed with Islam but also blessed by my little presence in it. I think particular examples like that can help to develop larger projects.

10. Proselytism and missionary activities

30 years ago, there was a majority in the ecumenical movement, organized by the World Council of Churches in Geneva, in favour of stopping proselytism, missionary activities, as a means to promote peace among religions. Today, this majority no longer exists. What is your position?

My position is that it is very difficult to stop missionary movements and proselytism attitudes without wounding the principle of conscience freedom and religious freedom. At the same time, those same movements provoke violent reactions of identity defensiveness. Probably it would be good to develop laws that, without fighting directly against proselytism, are able to fight against the worst expression of it, starting from concrete “criminal” behaviour, such as lack of respect for the education responsibilities of families for minority-age youth, attraction of people through economic or sexual power appeal, use of cult violence (like in forms of Satanism), practice of non-transparency without the control by the believers on the behaviour of their religious leaders, sexual/racial/social discriminations. Such laws are to be determined pragmatically through democracy, accepting pluralism between one society and another in the definition of these “criminal” attitudes. But at the same time, seeking as much as possible the building of common universal principles.

11. On Modesty of Believers

In Europe and in the whole Mediterranean area, some or even many Christians, Jews and Muslims pretend to know exactly God's will and, therefore, try to impose it on others. Should we promote more modesty in this regard, as a means to further mutual respect?

Paradoxically, I am tempted to say that it is because we do not know enough God's will that by consequence we try to impose our own issues on others, in order to heal the anguish that comes from fearing an undefined world and an unknown future. I do feel that if the children of Abraham deepened their knowledge of the will of God, they would discover a marvellous place of harmony. It needs the active and particular participation of each of them.

12. Obligations of Governments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on universal values which don't allow any discrimination according to origin, race, colour, language, religion or any other opinion or belief. The Barcelona Declaration, signed by all 35 governments of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, includes the commitment to ensure "respect of thought, conscience and religion, both individually and together with other members of the same group." What should churches and other religious communities do to remind Governments of this obligation?

For the Catholic Church, that I know better, I have noted a regular and dynamic activity of using all the possible opportunities to remind Governments about moral principles underlining the importance of human rights declarations and international agreements. From this point of view, the Vatican diplomacy can have a very positive impact certainly larger than the interests of the Catholic Church itself. In different ways, also other Churches and religious Jewish and Muslim organizations feel the duty to remind Governments about their obligations. It is a matter of fact that often religions ask Governments for privileges and to consecrate discriminations according to what they consider their own interests. I think that we need today more and more a movement of global democracy where the religious organized membership is balanced by transversal opinion movements, organized like syndicates, surely larger than nations and more universal than religions, although not violently opposing religions. I dream of a system of dynamic, internet-based federations in which the elaboration of common current aims defines an opinion front, able to put pressure on both civil and religious authorities. Something in the mood of Anti-Globalization Forums.

At the end of this painful summer of the war in Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Sudan, let us rejoice that a bigger majority of human beings is coming to the deep conviction that worshipping force and violence is not worthy of human spirituality. Coming to the strong belief that the active will of peace and justice, of so many people, around the Mediterranean Sea, will determine the direction of human history from now on.

This interview was published by the EuroMed Dialogue and Qantara electronic Newsletters in October 2006.

6.2 Interreligious and/or Intercultural Dialogue?

Abdul Aziz Saïd and Paolo Dall'Oglio

Comments on Paolo Dall'Oglio by Abdul Aziz Saïd

Understanding the many contexts that shape expressions of religious identity and belief – especially cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts – is one of the great challenges of interreligious dialogue. Father Paolo has done an excellent job of disentangling Islamic spirituality and core values from the complicated and painful history of modern Western-Islamic relations.

Father Paolo is also wise in recognizing that “there are as many different” ‘Islams’ as there are many different ‘Wests’.” And his acknowledgment of Western triumphalism (“Western culture, although very plural in its expressions, is in fact very ideological seen from the outside”) is worth discussing. Western culture has much to offer, but efforts to assert the “finality” or unique merit of Western values are experienced by contemporary Muslims as intolerant and humiliating.

Honest people can differ in their reading of Pope Benedict's intentions as expressed in the Regensburg address, and all people of goodwill should reject the actions of those who used his remarks as an excuse for deeds that have deepened the Christian-Muslim divide. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to suspect that the more offensive passages in his speech were not altogether accidental (as stated on point 5¹), and that they reflect inexperience in interfaith relations, particularly Muslim-Christian relations. Pope Benedict is a skilled theologian; let us hope that he will begin to reflect on his theology of religious diversity in new ways, within a context of human and spiritual relatedness. Let us also hope that he will take advantage of the knowledge attained by the many deeply learned Catholics (including Father Paolo) who are deeply committed to dialogue

1 The author comments on the Interview with Paolo Dall'Oglio, section 6.1 of this book.

with Islam. This possibility was suggested when, several days after Regensburg, Pope Benedict invoked the spirit of Vatican II by quoting its eloquent affirmation of beliefs and values that Muslims and Christians share.

Whatever our evaluation of the Regensburg address, there is a point that has been raised by Pope Benedict that we ought to take up: the issue of *reciprocity*. Pope Benedict has focused on reciprocity primarily as it relates to freedom of religious practice and expression, in the West and in the Islamic world. This is a valid concern. Let us not stop with this issue; however, let us also consider the many other reciprocities that might be cultivated in interfaith and intercultural relations: reciprocities of respect, of spiritual recognition, of acknowledging relatedness, of political cooperation, of commitment to conflict resolution and human rights. Father Paolo touches on this possibility when he speaks of “mutual recognition of others’ values” (point 6). Reciprocity should not be a narrow demand from one side to another; rather, it should be a framework for dialogue, a basis for improving relations in many spheres, and for building consensus about shared values.

Father Paolo has quite wisely pointed out that “it is because we do not know enough God’s will that by consequence we try to impose our own issues on others &. [I]f the children of Abraham deepened their knowledge of the will of God, they would discover a marvellous place of harmony” (point 11). Islam and the West, like Islam and Christianity, are “between stories.” The old stories of confrontation have become tired and deeply constraining. The illusions upon which they are based have become transparent. Let us rededicate ourselves to creating new stories of cooperation and complementarity.



Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Saïd is Founder and Director of the Center for Global Peace, and the International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program, American University in Washington, DC. He contributed this comment in his capacity as member of the High Level Group of Experts on overcoming major misconceptions between “the West” and “Islam” (see section 3.4, and also his comment on the strategy in section 2.1).

Photo: Aramco ExPats

Preliminary Conclusions by Paolo Dall'Oglio

I will assume here that inter-religious dialogue is a part of inter-cultural dialogue, and that religion is an aspect of culture. Believers can conceive religion as super-cultural or extra-cultural, but the psychosocial phenomena happen anyway in the cultural context.

The major misconceptions come from the uncritical and unconscious projection of one's own conceptions onto others' cultural worlds. This produces impressions and judgments perceived by the other as not correct, as unjust, or even as persecution, and which provoke reactions that can be violent.

For example, what is called "common sense" is very often uncommon; what is considered "evident" can be questionable for others, and what is considered "rational", "objective", "absolute", and "essential" can be seen otherwise by others. Even the Declaration of Human Rights can be perceived as an imposed Western scheme of reference. Items like "person" or "individual" in his relation to the group can be seen in deeply different ways. Therefore, priorities in rights and values can also be seen very differently.

What empowers a concept to become "shared enough" to build a society? It can be by force (force can be globalization, technical and scientific superiority, dominance of one language, number, historical weight...) or by conviction, never completely free from "force influences" (the weight of belonging, the anguish of loneliness, the fear of exclusion...). Even democracy can be perceived as a system of force to be resisted.

So, what can we build inter-religious, common life on? And what does respect mean? Answering these questions is already the object and the fruit of dialogue. To believe in dialogue is already ideology or religion. It is bearing witness to one's own values. You will not meet others if you are afraid to be yourself. Each one will bear witness to his own experience of truth, and meeting others is an essential part of that experience of truth.

In my opinion, misconceptions come from the pretension of understanding the other without the active participati-



Photo: ALF

on of the other, whereas concepts come out of a dialogue process. Is this opinion shared in the context of inter-religious interaction in the Euro-Mediterranean cultural area? By looking at how people are behaving, it is not shared. Just ask the three Abrahamic traditions: What is the Holy Land? What does Jerusalem mean? What does prophecy mean? And violence? And law?

However, you will probably find some people from the three traditions able and willing to understand each other in deep dialogue about their dynamic experience of conceptualization. Will they win elections? Or have they other means to attract the populations of the area to the fruit of their shared experience? Wouldn't this be a good occasion for a "jihad" of resistance to force?

6.3 Cardinal Errors in Dialogue

September 2005, the cartoons, September 2006, the Pope. Although both incidents have little in common, they have been perceived in Muslim countries as symptoms of Western arrogance. Thus, they indicate major problems of understanding between the West and the Islamic world.

On his first visit to the University of Regensburg in Germany, where he taught Catholic theology for decades, Pope Benedict XVI gave an academic lecture. He performed again as Professor Ratzinger, one of the most brilliant intellectuals among German theologians. Focus of his lecture was on one of the basic problems of any religion, the relationship between religious truth and scientific knowledge, belief and reason. As profound as always, the Pope highlighted contradictions and problems inherent in the Christian tradition: the mainstream of theology combines belief that God transcends all human imagination, being eternal and therefore totally different from all earthlings, with the belief that there is a spark of divinity in every human being. In line with humanistic and earlier thought, such spark is believed to be in what humans consider makes them different from animals: reason. The lecture culminated in harsh criticism of the tendency to overestimate the power of reason and to forget about human limitations, resulting in growing distance from God. Most Christian leaders and, with minor modifications, also leaders of other religions could agree with such a call for modesty. Most Christian and Islamic theologians would also agree with the Pope's comparative statement that God is seen more transcendent in Islamic than in Christian belief, in the words of the Pope: "absolutely transcendent". Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociology of religion, has established the term of "magic origins of Christianity", referring to a historical period in which "making miracles happen" was a common place in all stories about outstanding personalities, Jesus included.

Pope Benedict's lecture could have animated a very interesting academic debate or even an inter-religious dialogue with social scientists participating. However, almost nothing about the main message of his lecture reached such audiences. Media and public opinion focused on the Pope quoting from an almost forgotten historical inter-faith dialogue that took place in 1391 between the Emperor of what was then left of the Roman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, Manuel II Paleologos, and an Islamic scholar whose name was not recorded in Christian archives. Manuel invited his counterpart to show him what

was new in what Mohammed has brought to the world, “apart from spreading belief through the sword”. It would have been interesting to know what answer he got. According to what is known about the Pope’s speech, he limited his quoting to the question. In this context, his focus was not on opening up to answers other than those defending Catholic claims. Like almost every religious leader, the Pope felt it necessary, in this part of his lecture, to suggest that his religious tradition would be closest to truth.

Returning to Rome, the Pope made extra-ordinary efforts to calm down the waves his historical citation had provoked among Muslims all over the world. He reconfirmed his commitment to the principles of peace, understanding and respect between religious communities. Different from many European political leaders and journalists some months earlier, he did not engage himself in a public showdown about freedom of speech against religious feelings. The fact that the Pope gave not in to such temptations marks a clear distinction between the aftermaths of the cartoons and of the Regensburg incident.

There are many lessons to be learned. Measured against the principles of an open dialogue, the Pope’s historical citation represents a number of cardinal errors which seem to be so common that they went almost unnoticed in public reactions.

The *first problem* that could have been avoided are historical references out of context. Manuel II was one of the last leaders of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1391, Constantinople (today Istanbul) was already surrounded by Turkish troops, soon besieged before falling 60 years later. Manuel was definitely not in the best mood for an open Christian-Islamic dialogue. Throughout this historical period, the whole Euro-Mediterranean space was marked by confrontations between troops fighting under Christian and Islamic banners: Turks close to Vienna, the defeat of the Serbian army by Sultan Murad’s troops in what is today Kosovo, Cordoba falling to the catholic reconquista of Al Andalus, the Middle East still wounded of the atrocities by Christian crusaders. There would have been many other Christian voices worth being cited but besieged Emperor Manuel. Among them the new Christian Governors of Cordoba who continued for more than hundred years the regime of religious tolerance that was established by the Islamic Al Andalus Empire since the 8th century on the Iberian peninsula. It was completely abandoned in Southern Spain upon completion of its reconquista by the Catholic rulers, when there was no more competition between two systems of governance in Spain.

The *second problem* concerns theory and practice, and the internal diversity of the major religions. Too often, inter-religious dialogue focuses on what is highlighted as “true”

Christianity or Islam. Practice should be at least equally important. In almost every religion, there are spiritual movements who have often more in common across religions than with other movements within their own tradition. There are other tendencies which sociologists describe as hierarchical and well organised, and there are others focused on local leadership or even grassroots principles. There are religious communities that contest science, and others that have no problem with coexistence of religious truth and scientific knowledge. There are very strong and less strong believers living within the same religious community. And there are numerous attempts to fuel hatred and violence with religious differences. As much as for historical references, it is important for a contemporary dialogue to be evidence-based in making comparative judgements.

The *third problem* is an attitude towards excessive self-referencing which is shared by mainstream Christianity and Islam. The poor Manuel's question might have played its role in Christian training seminars in skills of "apologetics", of elaborating partisan claims for truth. There is, however, no possibility for dialogue in which each side insists in its own terminology and tradition instead of giving way to the other's point of view. Dialogue starts with the assumption that the other might be right. And dialogue requires efforts to find a common language for understanding and respecting differences.

This text is adapted from the Editorial (TS) to the September/October 2006 Newsletter "Euro-Med Dialogue" of the Anna Lindh Foundation. The Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict prompted 38 leaders of Muslim communities to address an open letter to the Pope, explaining their view of Islam and stressing the principle that "there is no coercion in matters of religion". In September 2007, 138 leaders of Muslim communities all over the world added a new and much longer open letter to not only the Pope but leaders of all major Christian churches, stressing the large number of shared values and shared traditions. It seems as if Pope Benedict XVI, well beyond his intentions, would have first provoked and then encouraged Muslim communities to leave behind their traditional defensive approach and try new modalities of inter-faith dialogue. (The texts are available under www.acommonword.org)

7. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – Success or Failure?

Richard Youngs and Traugott Schoefthaler

Richard Youngs is Senior researcher and Coordinator of the Democratization programme at the Madrid-based think tank FRIDE (Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior). He argues that on almost all counts Europe's decade-old Mediterranean strategy for creating new links and partnerships with the Arab world has been a failure, but that it also has seen Europe's political influence wane further. He sets out a "to do list" for EU policymakers. Traugott Schoefthaler, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, agrees that the concept of a "partnership" was hardly filled with life, whereas the Barcelona Process has served to some extent the political and economic interests of EU Member States. He advocates more weight for the too long neglected "third pillar" of the Barcelona Process, cooperation and exchange in education, culture, science, and the media. The following discussion was published in the Autumn 2006 No. 4, 2006 issue of 'Europe's World', the only Europe-wide Policy Journal, Brussels, pp. 26 – 33.

How Europe's Mediterranean policy went so badly wrong

Richard Youngs

It is now more than a decade since the European Union and its southern Mediterranean neighbours set themselves the ambitious objectives of the Barcelona Process, so it is now fair to say that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), as it is formally called, has been a failure. This year's conflict in Lebanon demonstrates the extent to which the EU has failed in its aim of creating a "co-operative security community" across the Southern Mediterranean. Certainly, any resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict looks more distant today than at the inception of the Barcelona Process.



Photo: Frideric Madrid

Economic modernisation and growth has most definitely not taken off in the Arab countries, European investment in the region remains at a depressingly low level and migration is a more divisive issue than ever. The cultural divide between Europe and the Middle East has widened, not narrowed. European intolerance has deepened and Arab anger against the West appears to have intensified. The political mood of the countries linked to the Barcelona Process was neatly encapsulated last November when its tenth anniversary summit turned out to be one of its most acrimonious to date. The summit attracted only one Arab head of state, and the ill-starred event was dominated by an unsuccessful attempt to agree on a definition of terrorism.

Hamas' January 2006 election victory in Palestine confirmed that the Barcelona Process and efforts to forge closer links with Europe has not been matched by the rise of more moderate liberal forces in the Middle East. At the same time, credible European leadership in the region has become increasingly hard to detect; Jacques Chirac is much weakened domestically, Tony Blair appears widely discredited, Spain's Zapatero government lacks strategic vision and in Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel is still only just finding her foreign policy feet at the head of her unwieldy coalition.

A number of the more important current policy challenges have been conspicuously addressed outside the framework of the Barcelona Process. The latter didn't play any significant role in tempering tensions between Lebanon and Syria in the aftermath of Rafik Hariri's assassination. Rather, an unusual exercise in bi-lateral French-American diplomacy has been the key development. Indeed, EMP instruments were not employed to any meaningful degree either to assist Lebanon, disarm Hezbollah or to pressure Israel on the human rights deficiencies of its security doctrine – all joint causes of the current conflagration.

In the Palestinian Territories, the focus has been on the Quartet and on the European Commission's sizeable bi-lateral aid programme. In the run up to Hamas' election victory in January, the instruments of the Barcelona Process failed to become a reference point for influencing either Israeli actions or the internal development of Palestinian politics. By much the same token, the negotiations that led to Colonel Gaddafi's decision to abandon Libya's WMD programmes were mediated through London and Washington, and Libya chooses to remain outside the scope of the EU's Mediterranean strategy. In other words, the pan-Mediterranean instruments for fostering regional cooperation that the Barcelona Process has been pushing have not prevented the EU from being squeezed out of the strategic picture in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, US interest in the Mediterranean has intensified. Morocco is set to receive large amounts of US financial assistance from the Bush administration's so-called Millennium Challenge Account. And an increasingly close security partnership has been taking shape between Washington and the Algerian government headed by Abdelaziz Bouteflika. American involvement could over the longer term, and with significant changes in US strategies, eventually provide a fillip to European aims. But it also means that Europe faces new competition in the region, particularly with regard to the traditionally dominant French profile in North Africa. America's policymakers now argue that among the reasons for their growing interest in the Mediterranean is the failure of the Barcelona Process.

One area where debate has progressed notably since the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) is regarding the issue of democratic change in the Arab world. Here too, though, it is doubtful that European policies have had a significant impact. The democratisation issue is more openly debated in the Middle East than before, but far-reaching political change has not occurred and in some Arab countries authoritarian regimes seem as firmly ensconced as ever. Even in countries like Morocco where human rights reforms have been implemented, civil society actors argue this has overwhelm-

ingly been to do with internal changes, so EU strategy has not been a positive factor. In Egypt, American rhetoric on the promotion of democracy has, for good or ill, been the main focal point of debate, not European policy. Despite its mid-1990s Barcelona commitment to supporting democracy in the southern Mediterranean, the EU has still not convinced Arab public opinion that it is genuine about this.

Recommendations for reforming Europe's Mediterranean policy commonly propose incremental increases to the EMP acquis. But the primary need is not for more activity or for a broader range of policy initiatives. A vast array of "Euro-Med" branded dialogue and cooperation now takes place across the Mediterranean, but it is doubtful that much more impact could be gained through more summits, a "Mr. Med" special representative, a common definition of this, or a new charter on that, or through more institutional structures like the often-proposed Euro-Med Development Bank. It is unlikely even that throwing more money at the EU's Mediterranean strategy would be effective when the large amounts of resources already provided are not working as intended.

The problem is rather the way in which current initiatives are implemented. Europe needs, for example, to change the way it supports civil society in Arab countries. It is often asserted that one of the EMP's strengths is its inclusion of civil society organisations as a complement to formal governmental relations. But the way in which civil society has been included so far has in fact favoured the status quo. High hopes have also been invested in the new Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures, but this is oriented towards civil society participants who are chosen directly by governments. The much-vaunted effort to strengthen cultural cooperation has been significant in scale, but in truth it has been dominated by exchanges between cultural elites. This may help explain why no inroads have been made on altering Europeans' largely negative perceptions of Islam.

At last year's tenth anniversary summit of the Barcelona Process, EU governments accepted language in the final declaration that appeared to circumscribe the EU's freedom to engage with NGOs that are not favoured by Arab regimes. And this is an area where "doing more of the same" is definitely not enough; present policy is in danger of moving fundamentally in the wrong direction. The EU does not need to go out of its way to favour Islamist civil society organisations; but it should not discriminate against them when offering inclusion in European initiatives. Such changes to the nature of civil society support could usefully be implemented through the independent European foundation for democracy under discussion in Brussels. This could permit a more

flexible and arms-length funding mechanism, depending on how ongoing debates over such a foundation are resolved.

A thorough re-think of Europe's approach to economic reform is also needed. Economic liberalisation has to be introduced in a more balanced fashion with greater European understanding of the complex impact that past, present and future market reforms have in the Middle East. Large amounts of EU money have been pumped into the Mediterranean region in the cause of economic reform, but little effort has been made to assess the political and social impact of these measures. An assessment of this sort should be given high priority as an integral part of the work plan agreed last year at Barcelona, and it should be completed during the coming year when preparations for a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area are due to intensify.

The European commitment made at Barcelona in November 2005 to move at long last towards opening EU markets to southern Mediterranean produce could prove significant. It is a promise that is still laced with caveats and references to possible "exceptions", and the EU's tendency not to respect its market-opening commitments of this sort suggests that European governments will need to be held firmly to account on this. It is an issue on which Arab NGOs should take the lead, collaborating across borders and using the newly-created Euro-Mediterranean non-governmental platform to scrutinise the actions of individual European governments.

The EU's European Neighbourhood Policy now gathers within a single new framework the states on the Union's southern and eastern peripheries, and could provide the means of injecting new dynamism into the Mediterranean picture, although so far its development has chiefly bred confusion. But by focusing on bi-lateral action plans with individual southern Mediterranean states, the Neighbourhood Policy offers a chance to unblock efforts or closer cooperation with some states that have until now been held back by regional tensions in the Middle East. It is unclear, however, whether such an approach can be carried forward without undermining the region-building spirit of the Barcelona Process. And so far this new policy has in practice not been organised on a neighbourhood-wide basis. If the EU is to develop a new neighbourhood basis to its relations, it should at least ensure that there actually is a tangible "east-south" dimension to its various practical policy initiatives. A new civil society forum could be created for reformers from both the eastern and southern parts of the EU's neighbourhood to share perspectives on ENP Action Plans, and to develop "advocacy strategies" for these plans' mid-term reviews.

Most crucially of all, the relationship between short-term security imperatives and long-term reform efforts needs to be assessed in far greater depth. It is often rather simplistically assumed that security and human rights policies are mutually exclusive, and indeed for the moment European governments' prioritisation of counter-terrorist cooperation with Arab regimes does indeed seem to have given autocrats greater leverage to defend their power. But European policies cannot be the pre-eminent factor in propelling economic and political change in the southern Mediterranean. In the best of cases, Europe could play a marginal role and correct those of its policies that make reform harder to achieve in the Middle East. Paradoxically, both greater clarity and more humility are needed from Europe. The democracy agenda cannot be couched in terms of "exporting" democratic values to the region. Yet that makes it no less imperative that Europe should re-think its policies so as to play at least a modest role in facilitating political change.

The current conflict in the Middle East presents the EU with a variety of challenges. It should reassess the decision to limit contact with the Hamas government. A temporary implementation mechanism, which circumvents the Hamas-controlled administration, has allowed much European aid to continue to flow to the Occupied Territories. But the EU's cold-shouldering of Hamas has been interpreted in the region as another case, like that of Algeria a decade ago, of Europe being unwilling to accept democratic elections when they don't yield the results desired by the West. The reluctance of European donors (with the exception of France) to channel large amounts of money to help Lebanon build stronger state institutions has already proved a costly misjudgement. We know that effective pressure on Israel can only come from a change in the US position, but the EU must demonstrate that its engagement with Syria through the EMP can be harnessed to help provide a broader, long term solution.

RYoungs@fride.org

It is not too late to rekindle Barcelona's flame

Commentary by Traugott Schoefthaler

If Richard Youngs did not borrow the rhetoric of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), his already sceptical analysis of its shortcomings might be even sharper and more astringent. Ten years after Barcelona, the EMP has not yet taken root and it has instead turned into an instrument of “external action”, cared for by the European Commission and chaired by the rotating EU Presidency. Almost all its budgets are decided upon within the EU's structures, and follow its administrative and financial rules. Everything is a “project”, leaving little space for synergies and strategies, and not much room for joint decision-making. The language of development assistance divides partners into “donors” and “beneficiaries”.

So the actions undertaken as part of the EMP should not be assessed in terms of the Barcelona Declaration, but against the EU's own objectives. The achievements include the establishment of a political instrument that enables frequent meetings of senior officials from all 35 countries, including Israel, Palestine and Syria, as well as periodic ministerial meetings. Bilateral association agreements have been signed between the EU and all its Mediterranean partners, which have since increased their trade with the EU by an average of over 50%. The EU has become the leading provider of foreign investment, and the prospects for a Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone by 2010 are good.

Should we blame this policy for not having achieved peace in the Middle East? The Israeli-Arab conflict is not the only one where EU is just one actor of a quartet, and it is not even fully empowered by its citizens to undertake conflict settlement in Cyprus or the Balkans.

The spirit of the Barcelona Declaration derives from two words, culture and civil society. These are to be found in its third chapter, and few would deny that they are the poor cousins of political and economic cooperation. Youngs is right when he says that the cultural divide between Europe and the Middle East has widened. Perhaps it took the

cartoon crisis of early 2006 for Europeans to begin to understand how the prevailing concept of inter-cultural dialogue went wrong, and why it could not cope with critical situations like that. Thousands of dialogue events, attended by “representatives” of different religions and major cultural entities, ended with shallow conclusions about common values, but failed to arrive at common perceptions of differences. Only recently has a departure from the logic of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilisations” scenario found its way onto the agenda of almost every stakeholder in the inter-cultural dialogue.

We at the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures have a mandate to provide new ideas, opportunities and skills needed for a more meaningful dialogue, especially with young people. It is the first common institution of the Barcelona Process with its headquarters in Egypt that is also co-financed by all 35 partner countries – a first step towards co-ownership of the EMP. Its intergovernmental Board of Governors, for the first three years identical with the Euro-Med Committee, is the first political EMP instrument where majority decisions (although at the extremely high threshold of a 6/7th majority) can be made – a first step towards better governance.

The Euro-Med Foundation started operations in August 2005 as a network of 35 national networks, bringing together more than 1,000 institutions in the worlds of education, culture, science, media and women and youth organisations. Our first joint product is a study with practical recommendations on education, culture and the media as key factors for changing mentalities between men and women. With the Council of Europe and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), a Euro-Mediterranean teacher training programme on cultural and religious diversity has been put in place; 1,000 young artists are expected in Alexandria for a Biennale on “creative diversity”; 1,000 young people between 18 and 25 participate in the “Dialogue 21” project.

The Foundation has been created top-down, yes; but it has also developed mechanisms to reach out to civil society at large, together with the three other Euro-Mediterranean networks EuroMeSCo (political science institutes), FEMISE (economic institutes) and the Non-Governmental Platform.

It is not too late to rekindle the flame of Barcelona. Ten years after Helsinki, most western Europeans considered the Helsinki process a failure – too early. We need to revitalise our ambitions, with more patience and perseverance.

t.schoefthaler@gmx.net

8. The European Values Dilemma: Laicity and Religious Cultures

The terms “laicity” and “religion” are closely related to European Enlightenment, and they are very helpful for understanding the diversity and characteristics of Europe as one of the cultural spaces of the world society. But we should be careful enough to avoid the traps provided by terminological dichotomies. According to recent research, neither is laicity a French specificity, nor do the two terms indicate two clearly distinct features of what is European reality today. The usefulness of the two terms lies mainly in their function as tools for de- and re-constructing existing interpretations of the European cultural space, in relation to history as well as to relations with other cultural spaces.

There are more than 200 years of dynamic development of all sciences, emancipated from religious limitations or directives; but there is also dynamic development of theological science, and of the various scientific approaches to religion – a shared space for theology and other social sciences.

Since Renaissance and the quest for discoveries and colonisation of other regions of the world, there are more than 500 years of shaping the European cultural space in permanent interaction with other cultural spaces. Enlightenment gave this interaction its fundamental values: Napoleon and his temporary Prussian allies were soon defeated in their quest for dominating the European continent; but their innovative model of using “enlightened” universalism of thought (in terms of civic rights, modern governance and free trade) as justification of conquest became the blueprint of almost all subsequent relations between Europe and other regions. Ironically, even the style of Christian mission outside Europe tuned into the pattern of “spreading civilization and culture”.

The ongoing development of the European Union provides an extremely important platform for transforming the heritage of 19th and 20th century of nationalisms and fixation at “national cultures” into a broader understanding of “unity in diversity”. The increasing reference made in political discourse and in the media to “European values”, however, implies heavy ideological backpack: EU-Europe has developed a – mostly subconscious – tendency of presenting itself as incarnation of universal values. Building new cultural

frontiers puts the international contract on universal values, marked by founding the United Nations and progressive agreement on human rights standard setting instruments, at risk.

I advocate new efforts for reconstructing our understanding of the European cultural space. Laicity is neither specific to France nor to Europe; we need more knowledge about the diversity of cultures and cultural, including religious, expression. In Europe, universal values are usually taken for granted as fruit of Enlightenment. We need a better informed understanding of such values, to quote from the preambular paragraph of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as “common standards of achievement for all” the international community, notwithstanding specific cultural and religious heritage. And we need a new commitment to a European cultural space, rooted in openness to and permanent interaction with the whole world, and, thus, not in need of excessive self-reference.

1. “European Values” – the Ideology of Fortress Europe?

The term “European values” has lost much of its innocence during the so-called cartoon crisis early in 2006. One out of numerous examples to indicate the problem is the press release issued by the European Commission on 15 February 2006, echoing statements of almost all EU Governments: “Freedom of expression and press freedom are ranking very high in our European values”, is the core message addressed to the public both in Europe and in Arab and other mostly Muslim countries. Is the value base of Human rights a specificity of Europe, marking a civilizational frontier to other regions? Many had hoped that the use of human rights as an ideological weapon during the Cold War would have come to an end with the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993, solemnly declaring all human rights as “a coherent whole”.

The recent debate about “European values” highlights two alternative options – a *substantive option*, insisting in deeply rooted cultural differences between Europe and other regions, and a *commitment option*, focusing on Europe’s commitment to the implementation of universal values which are – at least on paper – shared by the international community.

The first option guides the new European values network, established by Czech, Polish and German civil society organizations. It insists in the specificity of “European values”

vis-à-vis other regions and, especially, vis-à-vis Islam (for details, see the network's website <http://www.europeanvalues.net>).

An alternative option was developed by the European Parliament Democracy Caucus together with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and several political Foundations such as the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The proposal for a "European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership" promotes intercultural dialogue as a key dimension of co-development of Europe and "all regions with which Europe maintains relations". "The values of the European Union" are seen as commitment in terms of support for democracy, integration and social development rather than substantive cultural differences between Europe and other regions. This "commitment option" was developed in the context of the debate on the social agenda of the European Union, with focus on pluralism, social cohesion, quality of life, solidarity and justice.¹

Given its anticipated outcomes, including public support for or rejection of Turkey's accession to the EU and the relations with Muslim communities, the debate on Europe's specificity in terms of cultural values can be considered an essential dimension of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue 2008. "Preservation of the 'European way of life' and opposing Turkish membership in the EU" are listed among the objectives for campaigning of the new European values Network. The – failed – European Constitution project included a definition of European values much more in line with the above-cited "commitment option". It seems worthwhile checking references to European values in the new EU agreement approved under Portuguese Presidency.

20 years ago, Jacques Delors as the then President of the European Commission promoted the idea to "give Europe a soul", quoting almost forgotten words of Robert Schuman. Delors saw the need to overcome the image of EU institutions as mainly bureaucratic entities. This opened an ongoing dialogue between the European Commission and civil society, including churches and religious organizations. It seems as if many contemporary actors in this field would prefer – consciously or not – sealing off a whole package of cultural self-references for Europe, rather than building on Europe's tradition of shaping its diversity and pluralism in constant interaction with other regions of the world.

1 See the relevant communication "European values in a globalised world" by the European Commission to the EP, COM (2005) 525 final under <http://europa.eu/cgi-bin/etal.pl>.

At the early stage of the Cold War, the – then mainly Western – Council of Europe (with Turkey as founding member) took up the task from United Nations to define in more detail the Human Rights listed in the Universal Declaration of 1948. The 1950 European Convention of Human Rights was instrumental for forging a common understanding of civil, political, social and cultural rights of European citizens. This Convention is now – with all its implementation tools – the value base of all geographical Europe. In elaborating on the right to cultural self-determination, the convention reflects an understanding of culture that is not limited to heritage but remains open to creativity and change. It seems, however, that many voices in today's value discourse in Europe are not as well informed as necessary: 1966, more than 40 years ago, the whole substance of the European Human Rights Convention was adopted by the United Nations, under the format of the two covenants on civic and political, economic, social and cultural rights. The specificity of Europe does not rely in values which would not be shared by the international community. The characteristics of the European cultural space lie in instruments for their implementation, such as the European Court of Human Rights.

As regards public commitment, I would not subscribe myself to an assertion that Europeans would be always *avant-garde* in defending human rights and their values. When the press release on the cartoon row was issued in Brussels in February last year, I was invited by Arab Press Freedom Watch – an association of journalists' unions in all Arab countries, for their meeting in Cairo. Let me quote from their communiqué, March 2006: "We are defending daily freedom of expression. Other than most of our colleagues in Europe, many of us go to jail in defence of this right, are often victims of severe punishment, and are constantly threatened by political and economic power suing us for libel. Our core values are not different from those of our European colleagues. We hope, therefore, that our appeal to respect religious feelings of Muslims will also be shared by European media."

It seems as if the two discourses on human rights and on culture would very often not share a common framework of values and understanding.

2. Deeply rooted: unfinished Enlightenment

European Enlightenment is an unfinished project. The most convincing arguments have been provided by European emigrants to the United States, from Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's quest for "Dialectics of Enlightenment" to Hungarian born Agnes

Heller's appeal for a "second Renaissance" (1990). There is a widespread feeling of a serious lack of self-criticism in this fundamental tradition of European identities. The problem, in short, is the mostly unreflected connotation between universalism of scientific thinking and ethical universalism. Ironically, the promotion of new secular universal values follows an apologetic pattern quite similar to religious traditions: as much as religious leaders insisted in the distinction between moral values and the weakness of human beings, preventing them from always following ethical standards, the secular thinkers were almost all far from considering so-called "abuse" of universalist values for colonial purposes/ domination as a problem for the concept itself. The idea of uni-linear progress was, too long, preventing deeper reflection on the fundament of universal values and ethics.

Between the 16th and the 19th century, there was not much systematic reflection on the ideological potential of European modernity. Michel de Montaigne's lucid distinction between the evolution of thinking (where he saw Europe far ahead of "barbarian peoples") and "barbarian" morals (where Europeans were more prone to cruelty than most colonized populations) is among the few non-religious reflections of contradictions between knowledge and ethics, at the end of the 16th century. 300 years later, Emile Durkheim's reflections on "chauvinism" which would be an appropriate term for European colonial policy, are another rare example. It is part of our European history that romanticism (Germany and Poland) and early nationalism contributed critical perspectives at the Enlightenment project. Let me quote one of the most eloquent arguments formulated by the German writer, composer and civil servant to the Saxonian court E.T.A. Hoffmann. In one of his animal stories, he writes: "In seeking his own benefit, the clever man pretends to act always on behalf of others who, in return, feel obliged to do whatever the clever man had intended them to do."

The lack of self-criticism in Europe's intellectual and moral roots led to myriads of sterile confrontations between proponents of universalism and relativism which include contemporary disputes about social cohesion and integration. There is much room between the two seemingly opposed classical European types of dealing with cultural diversity: the traditions of French "republican" integration policy, which sometimes is accused of disregarding cultural specificities of ethnic or religious groups, and the UK model of different communities living side by side, which sometimes is accused of communitarism. There is not only one way of pursuing universal values, as much as there is not only one standard of measuring progress towards democracy and pluralism.

The political discourse on Europe and its values would benefit from the intellectual instruments provided by modern philosophy and social sciences. Among the common denominators of so-called pragmatism or constructivism (hermeneutics/analytical philosophy) from John Dewey to Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas (despite their significant differences) are the position of “observers”, including the social actors themselves, and the critical reflection of communication on truth and what is right and what is wrong. If our “concepts are real in their consequences” (Dewey), there can’t be any longer a pre-established code of universal ethics and moral values without substantive questioning. Our construction of reality must be open-ended and subject to reconstruction and change. The corresponding concept of values is that of agreed standards to be achieved rather than the deadlocked opposition of universal values versus culture-specific morals. As much as claims for scientific truth must be contested, claims for “moral rightness”, for ways to achieve agreed normative standards, must also be subject of discourse and reconstruction.

Public and especially political discourse in Europe still seems to be guided by the simplified “enlightened” dichotomy of secular knowledge versus religious faith. Both – formerly opposed – sides have changed, and focus on claims or beliefs replaced former insistence in possession of truth. The much criticized Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict XVI (12 September 2006) is a good indicator of such changes. His main message was addressed to his own constituency. He warned against excessive pride of human reasoning. He qualified reason as a “spark of divinity” in every human being, thus reconciling secular and religious traditions. His secondary message was classical apologetics against Islam, accused of insisting in “total transcendence” of God, and thus de-valuing or making totally contingent individual reasoning on truth and moral rightness.

The ensuing debate both in Christian and Muslim communities was fascinating. In my view, it provided a number of extremely important arguments for animating intercultural and interreligious dialogue beyond sterile preaching of common values. The message to the Pope by 38 Muslim leaders (September 2006) insists in the principle that “there is no coercion in religion”, and that, therefore “belief” is an act of free will. Other contributions referred to everyday religion in contrast to dogmatic differences, thus highlighting internal diversity of all religious communities, which include varieties of fundamentalists, spiritual movements, believers in strict hierarchy, and openness to critical (“prophetical”) currents. Concerning the issue of relations between religion and violence, the arguments converged into addressing the attitude of those claiming to be in possession of truth versus the more modest believers, across different world views, secular as well as religious.

3. Knowledge Base: Research on Cultural Diversity and Religious Pluralism

The origins of modern sociology, in particular the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, provided a good theoretical framework for research into cultural diversity and pluralism in Europe. It took, however, until the end of the 20th century to accumulate a sound empirical basis in this field (the most comprehensive analysis of research is provided in Charles Taylor's "Secular Age", 2007). Too often, and this indicates the dangers of the trap established by the dichotomy laicity versus religious cultures, the "religious factor" (Gerhard Lenski) was given the status of an independent variable, and religion was "isolated into a separate cultural sphere" (Farley 2005, p.7).

Neither Durkheim nor Weber should be held responsible for this delay. The mainstream interpretation of Max Weber's famous essay on "Protestantism and the spirit of Capitalism" simplified it into an argument stressing religious roots of profit-seeking investment and corresponding hard work. A more careful reading of Weber reveals that, rather than stressing causality, he restricted himself to elaborating similarities in the mindsets of Calvinist believers in divine pre-selection becoming visible already during their lifetime and early protagonists of American Capitalism. In terms of later theories (Parsons, Luhmann), Weber's argument elaborates functional equivalents between secular and religious motivation, thus providing a bridge between secular and religious cultures rather than isolating them from each other.

A large part of knowledge about cultural and religious pluralism is assembled in Jean-Paul Willaime's study "Europe et religions" (2004). He defines "laicity" no longer in formal terms of complete separation between state and religion but in terms of pluralism, based on constitutional guarantees of freedom of thought, dissociation of citizenship and religious affiliation, with corresponding levels of autonomy of public and religious or other belief or world view associations. Such laicity, according to Willaime, is shared by European countries having a so-called State religion (Nordic countries), provision of recognition of religions by the State – with a diversity of contractual relationships originating in secularization of properties formerly owned by churches (Germany, Russia, UK, Spain, Italy), or complete separation between State and religion (such as France). None of those types is "pure" (e.g. the special case of Alsace, and public subvention of church projects including publications in France). Consequently, Willaime appeals

for leaving behind historical contentions such as traditional secularized mistrust against religions, and advocates public policies of integrating religious contributions to social, cultural and ethical developments in society.

Willaime maintains the argument that religions are providing structure to the life of many citizens, including those defining themselves as “non-religious”. His research on cultural and religious pluralism supports his recent recommendation to the Council of Europe to refrain from engaging itself in inter-religious dialogue (which would affect the autonomy of religious communities) but to seek increased contribution of such communities to the secular endeavour of inter-cultural dialogue (Willaime 2007).

Another sociologist, Ghalioun Burhan, Director of the Orient Research Centre at Sorbonne-Nouvelle Paris III University, enlarges Willaime’s laicity argument beyond Europe. He describes the 20th century developments in the Arab world as “secularization without laicity”, referring to modernization of public administration vis-à-vis attitudes and behaviour of individuals and social groups. His explanation is interesting, insofar as he presents modernization of Arab societies essentially as combating external domination, and not – as it happened in most European societies – combating internal oppression. This way, he provides a social science perspective which contests the popular argument that secularization would be specific to European cultures or religions (Burhan 2000).

Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, complements such argumentation in his analysis of obstacles to democratic practice in an environment where “the principles of democracy have been accepted”. He recalls the “many agonies” through which the US, the UK, France, Germany, or Italy had to go “before they achieved not only their current systems of democratic government with their distinctive characteristics, but also the broad based support of their people in the exercise of that democratic system” (Serageldin 2007, p 13). Europe, only recently abandoning the conceptual isolation of religion into a separate cultural sphere, should not repeat this historical error in assessing other regions of the world.

Mark Lilla, professor of Humanities at Columbia University in New York, has accumulated historical evidence against the myth of the “great separation” between religion and secular political systems. In his recent book “The stillborn God” (Lilla 2007), he argues eloquently about similarities between “enlightened” Hegelian political theory and the development of Protestant as well as Jewish liberal theology into a kind of “deification” of authoritarian governance, with protestant support to Nazi regime and

Jewish support to Stalinism as extremes. He left out parallel developments with Catholic support for Spanish and Italian fascism. The core argument is that Christian or Jewish leaders in American and European history of the 20th century have in large numbers misused their religious authority for declaring undemocratic governance as instruments for implementation of God's will. Such political theology, according to Lilla, has more resemblances with political Islam than most Westerners would be aware of.

Lilla is strongly defending the idea of separating church and state. But he is also strongly opposed to a Western hypocrisy that sees political Islam as the exception in an otherwise successful history of secularisation. His research helps better understanding the so-called revival of religion. President George W. Bush's religious affirmation of his policy as much as widespread syncretism of superstition and religious feelings (Lilla gives as an example the publication of "The Da Vinci Code" and subsequent public enthusiasm in discovery of so-called religious "secrets") are not at all new elements in the history of so-called secular Western societies.

4. Normative Instruments are available

The discovery of diversity as a cultural resource was a long process for the international community. Today, we can observe increasing acceptance of cultural diversity being a value rather than a threat to modern societies. The first Earth Summit in Rio 1992 resulted in normative action and public awareness of the fact that bio-diversity is essential for the survival of nature. Similarly, cultural diversity has become a central theme for international standard-setting in a more and more open public environment. "Unity in Diversity" was chosen as central theme for the European Union with, however, some focus on diversity between Member States. Internal diversity in each country is not considered among the fields of EU competence. The Barcelona Declaration agreed upon in 1995 between the EU Member States and their Southern and Eastern Mediterranean neighbours marks an important step, insofar as it includes a political commitment to "ensure cultural diversity and religious pluralism" in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region.

The Report by the UN/UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, chaired by former UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuéllar, in 1996, was given the appealing title "Our Creative Diversity". Endorsed by the World Conference on Culture

and Development 1998 in Stockholm, this report paved the way for the first world-wide normative instrument recognizing “diversified, multiple and dynamic cultural identities” of individuals and social groups – the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity approved in November 2001 by the General Conference of UNESCO. It was preceded by a similar document of the Council of Europe in February 2001. The new UNESCO Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expression which entered into force in May 2007 is the most recent standard, reflecting national and international commitments to – in terms of earlier codified Human Rights – the right to cultural self-determination. The new UN Alliance of Civilizations project can build on refined common standards for bringing together the discourse on Human Rights with that on Culture – and we can leave behind not only the obsolete dichotomy of laicity and religion but also its offspring, a cultural determinism which has been deeply rooted in European history long before Huntington.

5. Pragmatic Proposals for overcoming religious and cultural illiteracy

The tensions after 9/11 were aggravated by widespread protests among Muslim communities against a perceived discrimination of Islam in Europe (not to the same extent in the US), related to the cartoon issue early in 2006. Political and media messages from Europe insisting in “our European values”, as being very different from those in other regions of the world, ended up in a communication disaster. Three consecutive confrontations between “the West against Islam and the rest” in the UN General Assembly and in the UN Human Rights Council over the issue “defamation of religion”, the recent one in April 2007, indicate the extent to which both sides have developed an attitude of digging in their heels.

The cartoon row revealed the low level of mutual knowledge about cultural and religious realities in different societies. It is not the absence of abstract knowledge about Islam in Europe; it is rather the absence of quality interaction with Muslim communities. One typical example: Educational materials prepared by well-resourced German pedagogical institutions for use at German schools in the aftermath of the cartoon disaster invite young Germans to learn that “it is not in the Qur’an” that pictorial representations of Prophet Muhammad are not allowed. How could this help intercultural understanding? Should young Germans teach lessons about the Qur’an to their fellow Muslim students?

It has become obvious that public education in Europe does not provide a sufficient level of cultural and religious literacy, with religion – still in the tradition of the laicity-religion dichotomy – largely being considered a matter of those concerned by specific beliefs only. Most of the European countries which offer religious education at public schools divide students for such lessons according to their religious affiliation. Catholics learn about Catholicism, Protestants about Protestantism, Jews about Judaism, and Muslims about Islam. Ironically, the best resourced group are often students that do not have a religious affiliation, since they can benefit from so-called alternative secular lessons about comparative religion, morals and ethics.

Only in October and November 2006, two international high-level expert groups provided recommendations on the need for all educational institutions to provide learners with a minimum knowledge about cultural diversity and religious pluralism: one group was the expert group established by the Arab League and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures², the other was the High-Level Group established by the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations project.³

Their recommendations gave renewed attention to the report on “l’enseignement du fait religieux dans l’école laïque”, prepared by Régis Debray in 2002 at request of the then French Minister of national education Jack Lang. This report advocates substantive efforts in overcoming “religious illiteracy” through dealing with religions as “elements of civilization” in all related subjects such as history, geography, languages, and arts. Debray characterizes the prevailing attitude of laicity in France as “laïcité d’incompétence” which would need to be replaced by a “laïcité d’intelligence”.

Debray does not limit himself to a critical review of French schools. With reference to practice in countries such as Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, Belgium or Turkey, he notes the absence of convincing standards and models for learning about religious pluralism: “Each collective mentality muddles through its specific heritage and reflects home-grown relations between symbolic forces” (Debray 2002, p.23). Debray’s recommendations are very rich in arguments for the need to learn more about historical and present relations between religious and secular expressions. He advocates a way

2 See section 3.4 of this book for the full text of their recommendations.

3 Alliance of Civilizations. Report of the High Level Group, 13 November 2006 (the full text can be downloaded from the website www.unaoc.org); Recommendation 3 on Education.

of learning about religious pluralism which is not confined to dogmatic or catechism knowledge but deals also with everyday religious life and practice. He insists in the need to provide a non-denominational learning about religious pluralism as part of cultural diversity. Debray has elaborated further his approach to religion in his study “Le feu sacré: fonctions du religieux” (2003) where he reconciles the Feuerbach-Marx view at religion with elements of sociological systems theory. He qualifies religion as “vitamin of the weak”, thus still reflecting a French tradition of “laïcité”.

A visible result of Debray’s report is the European Institute for Scientific Studies of Religions, established at the Sorbonne only two months after the presentation of the report. This Institute, chaired for more than two years by Régis Debray, is now recognized as an avant-garde institution for social studies of religions in Europe, and it has helped revitalising this field of academic study. Less visible are changes in schools. Such changes need time, especially if they should follow the interdisciplinary approach advocated by Debray.

A recent bibliography prepared by the new institute and partners in 2006 on “education and religion in Europe” presents more than 100 new publications in French language alone, which is an indicator of increasing attention to the problem. Ten years ago, the international community imposed on Bosnia and Herzegovina the inclusion of the subject “culture of religions” into the core curriculum for all public schools. There is hope that the challenge of overcoming religious illiteracy will not be limited to one country in Europe that has witnessed neighbours turning over night into enemies along religious dividing lines. Quality education is among the key factors in preventing abuse of religion and culture for political or economic interests.

6. Challenges for the 21st Century: Reconstructing our Understanding of Culture

Culturalism can be seen as an offspring of 19th and 20th century nation-building, which, as a rule, relied heavily on extolling national pride through re-writing history and constructing “national cultures”, as an instrument for national cohesion. European unification provides a frame for Europeanization of such culturalism. Weighed against the nationalist excesses of the past, such cultural Europeanization can and must

be appreciated. But from looking at Europe from outside, such new culturalism is catastrophic. Enlightenment is still unfinished. Huntington was never an outsider; his scenario fits into the mainstream of a Europe that seeks self-assertion by insisting in the specificity of European values. Moral opposition to a “clash” and expressing preference for good relations or even an alliance between civilizations does not mean escaping a culturalist scenario. Fortunately, the members of the UN Alliance of Civilizations High Level Group addressed the bias of culturalism.

Pluralism requires using the plural as much as the singular. European identity is based on pluralism; we should, therefore, speak more often about European identities. And such pluralism is not limited to the diversity between nation states. European human rights policy insists in all international fora that the decisive step towards accepting diversity is done within each society. The Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, in his manifesto on “murderous identities” (1996), did not only explain the mechanisms for transforming stereotypes into bullets; he also developed very convincing arguments for respecting the right of each citizen to cultural self-determination. Our Governments, he argues, invest tremendous resources in personal ID documents indicating the uniqueness of every person, but they do not recognize the unique mixture of cultural orientations and identities of the same person. Creating “cultural ID cards” is one of the most revealing techniques for intercultural workshops. It is an educational tool for promoting the new international standards on cultural diversity – which recognize multiple, overlapping and dynamic cultural identities of the individual and of social groups.

Jacques Derrida, with his philosophical reconstruction of “hospitality”, has completed Immanuel Kant’s enlightened reflection about perpetual peace, based on a “cosmopolitan right”, which is “limited to conditions of universal hospitality”. Derrida’s (1997/2000) analysis results in the argument that sovereignty of the recipient host about his house is essential for hospitality. This was so persuasive that “hospitality” could enter, as a shared positive objective, recent proposals to revitalize the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EuroMeSCo, 2005). We could go one step further than Derrida: So-called specific European values such as anti-racism or anti-xenophobia are incorporated in the hospitality concept which, then, would be a value shared between Europe and other regions.

All modalities of culturalism – from the excesses of the Nazi and the Apartheid ideologies to armchair reasoning about cultural or religious differences being root causes of conflicts – are in opposition to human rights. We need to reconstruct our understanding of culture. The term has its roots in human interaction with nature. When the first UNESCO World

Conference on Culture (1982 in Mexico City) adopted such an “extended definition of culture”, the mainstream of cultural policies considered such broader understanding as not very practical, or even a product of romantic dreamers. The new international standards on cultural diversity indicate the objective: A human rights-based understanding of culture gives as much attention to creativity, to culture as an activity, as it gives to cultural heritage in which every individual is raised. Culture, in this understanding, is both: it is shaping the individual, and it is created by the individual.

In terms of intercultural dialogue, progress beyond shallow conclusions concerning shared values – the typical product of dialogue symposia – relies on new modalities of dialogue: We should no longer afford investing human and financial resources in representative dialogue – with a Jew, a Muslim, a Protestant, a Catholic, and – if we are generous – a non-believer on the podium. We need to address substance in the cultural dialogue, especially between Europe and its neighbours.

Tariq Ramadan, one of the most brilliant advocates of recognising Islam as part of European identities, formulated recently a very persuasive argument: “Never forget that ‘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.

Following good arguments of Régis Debray, we are invited to have a new look at religions, as part of our cultural history and present diversity. Further to Debray, we need to reconstruct our understanding of culture in re-asserting the intrinsic links between human rights, democracy, and the pluralism and diversity of cultural expressions.

Modern history textbooks apply the method of multi-perspectivity. Readers are invited to consider history from the viewpoint of different actors, to consult original documents rather than a ready-made harmonizing interpretation. My hope for Europe is that a uniform European way of looking at culture and values can be avoided. I would like to see, in Austrian, Hungarian or German classrooms, not only the one-sided interpretation of “defending the Christian occident against the Turks” in Vienna (1529 and 1683) or Belgrade (1688) in history lessons on the 16th and 17th centuries. The other side of the coin is equally interesting: the cultural achievements of the Ottoman Empire, including civil rights, economy, and other cultural aspects, shaping large parts of the European continent. In human rights lessons, I would like to see an analytical and not mainly exotic view at Al Andalus, large parts of Spain under Arab rule with living together of

Muslims, Christians and Jews long before religious freedom was even considered in other parts of Europe. The competition between political systems, culture and science of the Castilian kings and Al Andalus in Spain between the 12th century, the early stage of the reconquista, and the fall of Granada 1492, is one of the most fascinating chapters of European history.

Lord Byron was largely considered a romantic when he visited Ali Pasha Tepelene, the Ottoman Governor of what is today southern Albania and Northern Greece in 1809 because he wanted to learn about a perspective at the Ottoman Empire from within. I would like to see more Europeans today developing an active interest in discovering the wealth of cultural diversity of Europe, past and present. This includes the decisive role which Muslim communities and Islam continue to play in our continent. And I would like to see European visitors to Arab countries expressing a keen interest in discovering more than touristic places when they are guests of our hospitable southern neighbours.

Bibliography

ADORNO, Theodor W. and Max HORKHEIMER: *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. London: Verso 1979 (Original German "Dialektik der Aufklärung", Amsterdam: Querido 1947)

BURHAN, Ghalioun: « Islam, modernité et laïcité : les sociétés arabes contemporaines », in : *Confluences Méditerranée* no. 33, Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, printemps 2000

CRITCHLEY, Simon, DERRIDA, Jacques, LACLAU, Ernesto, RORTY, Richard: *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. New York: Routledge 1996

DEBRAY, Régis: *L'enseignement du fait religieux dans l'école laïque*. Paris: Ministère de l'éducation nationale 2002, 35 pp.

DEBRAY, Régis : *Le feu sacré. Fonctions du religieux*. Paris: Fayard 2003

DERRIDA, Jacques: « Hospitalité », in: *Cogito* vol. 85, special issue « Pera Peras Poros », 1999, pp. 17-44 (English translation, with comments: « Hospitality », in: *Lasse*

Thomassen, Ed., *The Derrida-Habermas Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2006, pp. 208-230.

DURKHEIM, Emile: *L'éducation morale*. Paris 1925 (English: *Moral Education*, London 1973)

EUROMESCO: *Barcelona Plus: Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States*. Lisbon: EuroMeSCo 2005

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *European Values in a Globalised World*. Communication to the European Parliament of 20 October 2005, Brussels, COM (2005) 525

FARLEY, Edward: "Fundamentalism: A Theory", in: *Cross Currents* vol.55, Fall 2005, no. 3

HABERMAS, Jürgen: *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies on Political Theory*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1998

HELLER, Agnes: *A Theory of Modernity*. Malden MA: Blackwell 1999

INSTITUT EUROPEEN EN SCIENCES DES RELIGIONS (IESR): *Europe et religions. Bibliographie sur le thème 'éducation et religion en Europe'*. Paris: IESR 2006

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST AND ETHICAL UNION (IHEU), UK NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY: "Concerns about undue religious influence and religious activities compromising human rights", contribution to the Council of Europe Consultation for the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, London, 31 July 2007

JANSEN, Thomas: "Europe and Religions: the Dialogue between the European Commission and Churches or Religious Communities", in: *Social Compass* vol. 47, no. 1, 2000, pp. 103-112.

LIENARD, Georges C.: "Secular Europe under attack from militant religion", in: *Report on the 18th Conference on Secularism*, ed. Eric Remacle, Brussels: Cedil 2006

LILLA, Mark: *The Stillborn God. Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2007

MAALOUE, Amin: *Les identités meurtrières*. Paris: Grasset 1996 (English: *In the Name of Identity*. New York: Penguin 2003; first English translation by Arcade publishers, 2000)

MONTAIGNE, Michel de: Chapitre xxx. *Des Cannibales*, in: *Essais*, Livre I. Paris: Abel Langelier 1595 (translated in Modern French : Paris : Gallimard 2007 ; English : *The complete Essays*. London : Penguin 2006).

NEUBERT, Stefan: *Pragmatism and Constructivism in Contemporary Philosophical Discourse*. Cologne: University of Cologne 2001

SCHOEFTHALER, Traugott: “La théorie systémique dans la sociologie de la religion”, in: *Social Compass* vol. XXVII, 1980 vol. 1, pp. 63-74

SERAGELDIN, Ismail: “Islam and Democracy. Reflecting on a Glorious Past to Build a Brilliant Future”, address to a seminar organized by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and “Religions for Peace”, Oslo 20 June 2007

TAYLOR, Charles: *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press 2007.

WILLAIME, Jean-Paul: *Europe et religions. Les enjeux du XXI^e siècle*. Paris : Fayard 2004.

WILLAIME, Jean-Paul: «Réflexions et propositions suite à la consultation des communautés religieuses par le Conseil de l'Europe», contribution au colloque «Promouvoir le dialogue interculturel: enjeux et perspectives du Conseil de l'Europe» du Centre Nord-Sud du Conseil de l'Europe, Lisbonne 22-24 juin 2007.

Edited version of a lecture given at the International Symposium: European Identity and the Challenges of Inter-Cultural Dialogue (Luxembourg, 21 – 22 September 2007), organized by the Institut International Jacques Maritain, Rome, the Institut Pierre Werner, and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Luxembourg.

9. From Tolerance to Hospitality

A brief history of tolerance

Over centuries, the term tolerance was and is used to address a perceived or agreed need to overcome intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia, or hatred. Quite often, tolerance indicates an attitude of “tolerating something different from me and my way of life”, either for rational grounds and/or for sake of being left in peace. Tolerance has usually a somewhat defending or passive connotation, unless it is explicitly combined with virtues such as “hospitality”, “friendliness”, or “openness”.

Tolerance is often claimed to be a value fundamental for the European Enlightenment, and only to a lesser extent for other regions. There is, however, not much room for Euro-centric pride. From Charlemagne’s genocide among pagan peoples who were not willing to convert to Christian faith, up to the American Bill of Rights 1776 and the French Code of Citizen’s Rights some years later, it took Europe about 1000 years to abide to principles of at least religious tolerance. Interim tolerance edicts such as that of Nantes 1598 were revoked after the war of 30 years (1618-1648), that devastated large parts of Europe under Catholic and Protestant banners and ended with an agreement on “religious cleansing” in almost all of the around 1000 territories and states then existing in the continent. By the way, the Edict of Nantes did not show substantial progress, as compared to similar edicts of Roman emperors in the 2nd and 3rd century, and definitely not to the legislation on religious tolerance in Al Andalus, Spain under Arab rule, or in the Ottoman Empire. From a historical point of view, religious tolerance in Europe had to be imposed by enlightened leaders or revolutionary movements against long-standing opposition of Christian churches. The continent had to survive two world wars before the other essential aspects of tolerance of differences became subject to an international agreement, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which left us with a very comprehensive list of categories for non-discrimination “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”.

The basic value of non-discrimination is more than tolerance. The Universal Declaration on Tolerance, adopted 1985 by the General Conference of UNESCO, promotes therefore “active tolerance”, embracing and not only tolerating differences. This is exactly the core meaning of what we call today “diversity”, to be recognized as wealth rather than burden

for humankind, to be preserved as essential for the survival of humanity, as much as is biodiversity for nature. The finest definitions can be found in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which is the first international standard recognizing diversity not only between states or whole ethnic or linguistic groups but at the level of the individual and social groups – with their multiple, overlapping and dynamic cultural identities.

This latest development reflects atrocities and genocides that happened recently, in Ruanda as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at too many other places of the world where neighbours turned over night into enemies. The mechanism is the same: only one aspect of identity is singled out as justification for mass killings, murder, rape and robbery. As a German, I can't forget that murderous Nazi ideology dehumanizing people by reducing them to one aspect of their multiple identities: Jewish, Sinti, Roma, Gay or Communist, before killing them for just that aspect.

We desperately need more tolerance, but tolerance is not enough. We need human rights fundamentalists, willing to intervene wherever human beings are discriminated – just for one aspect of their multiple belongings and identities.

Should we, then, bury the concept of tolerance? Not so fast. After such a long history of intolerance, we need to keep alive and revitalize commitment to active tolerance, mindful of a past that does not pass away. We need to grow strong motivation for working on providing human rights as “a common standard of achievement for all”, to quote from the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

And we should also have a closer look at the history of Enlightened Europe: Achieving religious tolerance against Christian churches was one thing; but this did not preclude racism, colonization and wars undertaken by secular governments in the name of progress and civilization.

Europe gained civil rights and liberties against a mainstream of religious sectarianism. But the confrontation or separation of laicity and religious cultures had prevented the development of the necessary minimum of self-criticism in European Enlightenment. The last two centuries are marked by an ideology of enlightened universal reason claiming also moral rightness. We need an active civil society, constantly critical of claims for moral rightness of actors in a pluralist society. We need public dispute on what is ethically or morally right. We do not need ideologies which make people believe that those who are considered to be right would automatically do the right thing. For good reasons, modern social sciences promoted deconstruction and reconstruction of our categories of perception, thinking

and communication. Pragmatists from John Dewey to Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Juergen Habermas – despite their conceptual differences, all of them have advocated civil society movements challenging, in public, claims for who and for what is right. In a pluralist society, we need visible contributions of all religious groups. We have to overcome the artificial confrontation between “secular” and “religious” sectors of our societies. For very good reasons, the United Nations never defined “religion”. Freedom of opinion includes not only freedom of belief, but also the freedom to make personal choices in building personal identities, composed of a multitude of belongings.

There remains one key question. Where are the limits of tolerance? The two most frequent responses are either: We cannot tolerate those who are themselves intolerant. Or: There can be no tolerance of those who are not respecting human rights. Who decides about who is eligible? This is a very tricky question which in Europe is answered mostly by oversimplification. There are Us who inherited the universal values (we Europeans), and Them (all the others) who need to be checked first because they are bound to cultural relativism or communitarian bias.

The world map of human rights cannot be drawn in black and white colours alone. Human rights are, according to an agreement achieved by the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, an indivisible whole. Neither the regular country reports nor the results of special reports on the various human rights conventions allow for a simple classification of countries in those that are respecting human rights, and in those that are not. Nobody is perfect. Human rights are a common standard of achievement for all, a set of values universally agreed upon, a road map rather than a world map.

Based on such dynamic understanding of human rights, the recently refined human rights clause fits into the new international consensus on cultural diversity. To quote the compatibility clause from the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005):

Article 2 – Guiding principles

1. Principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

Cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural expressions, are guaranteed. No one may invoke the provisions of this Convention in order to infringe human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or guaranteed by international law, or to limit the scope thereof.

Have religions become a polarizing or unifying force in the 21st century compared with the past? What are the causes?

From a historical or sociological point of view, religion has united and separated people over millennia as much as ethnicity or language did. As a dimension of human culture, religion unites first and foremost those who share the same. But no culture and no religion is an island, they are evolving, subject to exchange of heritage, syncretism, and creativity. And: no organized religion is homogeneous. The classical distinction provided by Max Weber, one of the founders of sociology of religion, is very pertinent: Every religious organization, he argues, started as a sectarian movement. And it develops at least four internal varieties: one guided by priests, others by laymen, or by prophets, or by spiritual-mystic leaders. Internal diversity of organized religions is too often disregarded; most spiritual movements, for example, share more features across different religions than with “fundamentalist” movements of the same religious tradition.

Consequently, I would not recommend a culturalist approach to answering the question. Neither culture nor its religious dimension is an independent factor. It is true that more than thousand years of European history are marked by tensions and wars along confessional or religious dividing lines. And, after the end of bloc confrontation during the Cold War, hundreds and thousands of smaller confrontations started to oppose people along dividing lines drawn along ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences. This point was made by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, qualifying those new confrontations as “narcissism of small differences”, which in fact masks conflicts over scarce resources, in addition to the strife for cultural and religious rights of individuals and ethnic groups.

The split between laicity or secularism and religious cultures, which dominated more than hundred years after European Enlightenment, was a polarizing force that has mostly disappeared from the surface. The Catholic Church was one of the last major religious organizations accepting the international agreements on human rights as legitimate values, even without religious justification. The historical split, however, still exists in attitudes of people on both sides, whenever it comes to debates on “knowledge” versus “belief”, where superiority-inferiority feelings seem to obscure many otherwise clear minds.

The inter-faith movement has gained ground and visibility, in particular over the last ten years. The first World’s Parliament of Religions was convened already in 1893 in Chicago, at that time initiated by mostly spiritual movements from East and West. It

was revitalized only hundred years later, with now involving almost all major religions, including so-called traditional religions from the Polar circle or from Africa. The agenda has changed from spiritual issues to major world problems, as they are also on the Agenda of the United Nations: mitigation of religiously motivated violence, AIDS, access so safe water, refugees, external debt of developing countries, and reconciliation with aboriginal peoples are on the agenda of recent and forthcoming meetings.

To resume: in the windfall of predominantly secular governance, also religious communities changed. The monks of Burma are just one recent example for religious communities assuming responsibility for peace, justice and development inside their countries as well as at international level, as activists within civil society, and not as agents of polarization.

Main cause is the following: The international community, represented by the United Nations, has, finally, with the Millennium Declaration of 2000, agreed on the most pressing issues. And even fundamentalist secular movements, with only a few exceptions, have joined the call on religions for motivating people to act along the agreed-upon lines, putting the Millennium Agenda into practice.

The misuse of culture or religion for masking political or economic objectives was identified as one of the major risks by recent inter-religious and inter-cultural meetings.

Another risk has not yet been addressed to the necessary extent: the claim for possession of full truth, a virus that has infected in particular Christian and Muslim traditions, and created a fertile ground for all kinds of injustice and aggression. The problem is so fundamental that it cannot be properly addressed by only condemning violent religious fundamentalism.

Are religions, both within the realm of each religious belief, and in the relationship that individual religions bear with one another, currently factors of tolerance or intolerance?

My name is Traugott. Translated into Arabic, it could be: Jihad. The ongoing discussion on whether Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and whether all those who call for violence with reference to Jihad – which means special effort of believers – would follow a totally wrong interpretation of Islam, all this seems to me too limited in scope.

Each major religion has diversified since its very beginnings, and there is no such thing as "the true Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist belief". The word "belief"

is the key: we are talking about what human beings are doing, in putting into words and action what they believe in.

If we would just check the text of the Christian Bible (which incorporates the Jewish Torah) against the text of the Qur'an for references to tolerance, we would come to a surprising result: the Bible has only two direct references (in St. Paul's letters to his followers in Ephesus and Colossus), and the meaning is "tolerate those who are different with love and patience". The Qur'an is more specific, in recognizing that Allah has created diversity in humankind.

As a learned theologian, I am opposed to dealing with religious texts out of their historical context. A good example is the Qur'anic institution of a poll tax for non-Muslims living under protection of Muslim Governments. The Qur'an reflects a particular adaptation of tribute payments imposed on whole peoples or regions in the Roman and earlier empires which was developed in the Arabian Peninsula: a per head tax for Non-Muslims who did not pay the Islamic Zakat but received citizenship and protection in exchange for such taxes. Such taxation was a contemporary symbol for the respect of other religions and became fundamental for inter-religious tolerance in Al Andalus and in the Ottoman Empire, at times when Christian-governed parts of Europe did not provide their people with such an option.

More important than isolated quotations from holy books is the way in which believers in different faiths have taken guidance from those books for developing and practicing tolerance or intolerance. As a matter of fact, almost all religious and secular traditions share the moral principle of reciprocity, the "Golden Rule" which was raised by Immanuel Kant to the level of "categorical imperative" but which has a variety of roots, from moral advice in Pharaonic Egypt to Confucius' teachings in 6th century B.C.

Equally important is the principle that "there is no coercion in religion", implicitly shared by most religious organizations. It is explicitly stated in the Qur'an (suras 2:256, 10:99, and 18:29), and it was the key message sent in September 2006 to Pope Benedict XVI by 38 leaders of Muslim communities all over the world.¹

1 Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, written and signed by leading Muslim scholars and leaders in response to Pope Benedict XVI's remarks on Islam at the Regensburg lecture on September 12, 2006, in: *Islamica Magazine* no. 18, 2006, pp. 25-32; online, with 100 signatures: http://www.islamicamagazine.com/is-sue18/openletter18_lowres.pdf.

Whereas it seems not too difficult to agree on such standards of morality between religions, it is important to acknowledge, in the light of inter-faith encounters over the last few decades, limits of interreligious dialogue and consensus. It seems as if faith-based organizations would have a built-in mechanism preventing them from full adherence to standards of non-discrimination. This mechanism is derived from another feature shared by most religions: salvation is reserved for true believers only. In everyday religious life, it is this claim for absolute truth that compromises the non-coercion principle or even the Golden Rule.

From a human rights perspective, the three following questions have been introduced to inter-religious encounters since 1948:

- Does the principle of equal dignity of cultures (with the human rights clause²) include recognition of equal dignity of all religions?
- Does it also include acknowledgment of equal dignity of secular groups and movements?
- Are religious organizations willing to cease missionary activities and active proselytism?

I recall a meeting, more than 30 years ago, organized by the World Council of Churches, which ended with a majority in favour of ceasing missionary activities, and strong minorities in favour of yes to the first and second questions.

Today, there are no more majorities for ceasing active mission anymore among Christian and Muslim organizations. Major Christian Churches fear the increasing success of what they call Christian sects. And it might, indeed, be unrealistic to expect that a religious leader would fully embrace religious pluralism, as this could undermine the claims for religious truth – the *raison d'être* of such organizations. Notable exceptions are a large number of spiritual movements.

In order not to overstress inter-religious encounters, it seems that we would need to focus the three questions to two issues: (1) the equal dignity of all human beings; and (2) the elaboration of a code of conduct for missionary activities, combined with the recognition

2 Most recent wording from the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity is cited above on page 161.

of so-called traditional religions (which is practised for the last ten years by the World Council of Churches). The new agenda of the World Parliament of Religions includes the concept that religions shall make their contributions to solve major global problems. It also includes stimulations of a public debate about what is right and what is wrong, side by side with secular groups and organizations.

What possible strategies, complementary or alternative to intercultural dialogue, can one envisage in order to building an enabling environment for tolerance to prevail?

No more “representative” dialogue

I share the advice recently addressed by Jean-Pierre Willaime, one of the leading European specialists in sociology of religions, to the Council of Europe: While recognizing the importance of religions in society, secular organizations should refrain from engaging themselves in inter-religious dialogue; they should deal with the cultural dimension of religion in the context of inter-cultural dialogue.

Indeed, whenever secular organizations went to hand-picking “religious leaders” for a podium, the dialogue event usually ended with shallow results, because the participants felt caught in the jacket of representatives of whole religions. The situation in most dialogue events organized by religious communities is different: Increasingly, even non-hierarchical religious communities have started to designate speakers for such events, including traditional African religions such as the Yoruba religion from Nigeria. This is very helpful for enlisting communities to participate in solving common problems. But as soon as inter-faith issues are on the table, the straitjacket is back.

As a matter of principle, “representative” forms of intercultural dialogue should be avoided, whether the religious dimension is on the agenda or not, unless inter-organizational agreements are to be negotiated.

Good practice

There is good practice in inter-religious dialogue that could inspire dealing with religion in inter-cultural dialogue events: Since, for example, the Parliament of the World’s

Religions and the World Council of Churches address increasingly global problems, religious participants in inter-cultural dialogue should not be constantly invited to address the “religious dimension”. They should be given a chance to address whatever issue, and religious communities should be invited to play their role in public debates along with other civil society organizations.

On the other hand, the increasing level of mutuality and joint reflection in inter-cultural dialogue could inspire inter-religious undertakings. European and Arab experts are now able to consider jointly Islamic Art (which is one of the success stories of the Euro-Mediterranean Heritage project). Why should participants in inter-religious meetings always be confined to speaking about their own religious tradition and belief? There would be a healthy climate change resulting from open invitations of Christian churches to Muslims to express their perception of Christian beliefs, and the other way round. There is no monopoly in interpretation of religions.

Culture-sensitive language

If we see “active tolerance” as a core ingredient of building commitment of civil society to working for the “common standards of achievement for all”, established with the Human Rights, and to solving global problems, we need to work hard in developing a common language which is culture-sensitive. The Human Rights have been formulated without any explicit recourse to specific cultures or religions. But the language is not as motivating as it could be in everyday life. Every approach to link human rights to specific cultural or religious environments runs high risks: Cultural traditions can be invoked as an excuse for limiting the scope of human rights – this is why the United Nations had to develop the compatibility clause in normative texts on diversity. But we could and should be more creative. Rather than looking for cultural exceptions, we should look for good practice in ensuring human rights in different cultural contexts, for functionally equivalent cultural expressions of human rights.

One example would be to bring together the tradition of “hospitality” and the “anti-movements”, “anti racism”, “anti-xenophobia”, “anti-anti-Semitism” or “anti-Islamophobia”. A more assertive use of diversity can be motivating: The Council of Europe has found persuasive wording for its recent youth campaign, with the title “all different, all equal”. Adding to this the spice of hospitality could create a common language for discussion not only about what different cultures have in common, but also about differences.

Addressing religious differences

Involving religious communities in the development of a common language about differences seems to be particularly difficult. Usually, when it comes to address human rights in a given religious context, religious believers tend to insist in their religious values being either more important or at least being the roots and, therefore, deeper. The “Sharia clause” invoked by a number of Islamic States in the ratification of human rights conventions, or the difficulties encountered by the Catholic Church before expressing full approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are outstanding examples of such tendencies. I am advocating a more embracing strategy. We need to address crucial issues inherent to most religions such as the tension between the recognition of belief as an act of free will (the *no-coercion* principle) and claims for absolute truth. Almost all religious leaders would agree with a call for modesty of the believer, who never can be in possession of absolute truth, who is subject to errors and wrong perceptions or conclusions, as compared to God.

All religions share a call on believers to follow a code of ethics. A religious-sensitive language could address the motivating ground, be it fear of the final Day of Judgment, or, more assertive, “working for the arrival of the Kingdom of God”. Using religion-specific terms in the context of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue should not be avoided but encouraged, given that the functional equivalence between such expressions of specific beliefs is communicated. Most attempts to formulate a global ethics restrict themselves to what religions have in common, such as the Golden Rule. It is important to go one step further in also addressing differences between and within religious traditions and beliefs.

The search for a common language about differences should also build bridges between so-called secular and religious people. A key issue is the relation between religious and scientific truth. Usually, this issue is badly addressed, with one side ridiculizing belief as “lack of knowledge”, and the other relativizing scientific knowledge as lacking the element of absolute truth which only religion could provide. Such unhealthy confrontation can be avoided with more sensitive and pertinent language: Whereas scientific truth is subject to change every day, with acquisition of new knowledge, religious truth is believed being eternal. With a little bit of modesty on both sides, secular and religious communities can participate in public discourse on claims for what is wrong and what is right, on scientific and on religious truth, and join forces to work towards common standards of achievement for all.

Cooperation is dialogue in practice

Intercultural dialogue is, too often, limited to discourse. Verbal communication is not the only and, possibly, not always the best instrument for learning how to appreciate diversity. All those with experience in youth exchange will agree that the dynamics of intercultural youth encounters rely on the possibility of face-to-face meetings without rigid agendas. One of my most rewarding experiences was a double-entry simulation game with young people from Europe and the Arab States region. The young women had been invited to perform as male Government ministers of another country, and the young men to perform as their chief advisors on gender issues. The performance was interesting. Even more interesting were the two days preceding this performance: I could see young people sitting together and seeking first-hand information from other countries and the other gender, instead of hitting alone their keyboards and googling the information required – it was one of the most enjoyable experiences with informal inter-cultural learning.

Another dimension is music and arts: There is no better field for learning that diversity is making us richer, instead of being a threat.

Finally, working together is an experience that cannot be replaced by verbal communication. Sharing the pride of joint products creates very strong bonds across otherwise dividing lines. It is important to provide enough space for teamwork in intercultural encounters. The effect will be the more lasting, the more the joint product is something that can be shared with others, such as a jointly produced video, a piece of art, or a report. Working together across cultures needs to be established not only during occasional encounters; it should be a longer-term option. One of the most appealing projects I could support during my term of office as Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures is the establishment of multi-national teams of young researchers. Joint research without borders should not be a privilege of senior scientists or teams being considered for a Nobel Prize. Acquisition and sharing of knowledge in multi-national teams should be an opportunity for all young people interested in such experience – my personal recommendation for the next decade of AFS International.

Bibliographical References

COUNCIL FOR A PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS: www.cpwr.org

EL-FADL, Khaled Abou: "The place of tolerance in Islam. On reading the Qur'an – and misreading it", in: Boston Review, December 2001/January 2002 issue.

INSTITUT FUER AUSLANDSBEZIEHUNGEN (IfA), Stuttgart: "Toleranz und ihre Grenzen", Kulturaustausch, no. III, 2007

PEREZ DE CUELLAR, Javier: "President's Foreword", in: Our Creative Diversity. Report by the World Commission on Culture and Development. Paris: UNESCO 1996

Paper presented to the World Peace Forum in New York on 27 October 2007, held on the occasion of the AFS (International Youth Exchange) 60th anniversary. The questions have been formulated by Claudio Allais, Aga Khan Foundation.

Postscript

Lessons from Alexandria

In June 2004, I was appointed by the then 35 Member States of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to set up the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation as a new common institution. “Learning about Cultural Diversity” was identified as its main objective, according to the recommendations by a High Level Group of Experts convened by the former President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi.

Establishing the Foundation in the South was a signal for change. Another one was the proposal by the Egyptian Government to name it after the late Anna Lindh, the Swedish Foreign Minister assassinated on 10 September 2003. Her lifetime commitment to equal partnership between North and South and to multilateral action as a means to overcome unhealthy donor-beneficiary relations became the guiding principle for the Foundation. The challenge was to create new forms of dialogue which would provide learning opportunities for the benefit of all participants.

The first lesson I had to learn was that there is a huge gap between the international consensus on cultural diversity being something positive for humanity, and reality both in intergovernmental and in interpersonal relations. It is not just the usual difference between agreements signed by Governments and real life in their societies. The gap derives from a fundamental misconception of diversity as a dividing line between countries or even continents, or large cultural or religious entities. It seems as if most Governments, when adopting in November 2001 the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris, had perceived the text just as an opportunity to call for peace and dialogue against the scenario of a predicted “clash of civilisations”.

What Governments had agreed upon, is much more: it is a manifesto of cultural self-determination, of the freedom to accept, reject or adapt cultural or religious orientations prevailing in societies. The Declaration recognises “plural, varied and dynamic identities of people (*not peoples, TS*) and groups”. More than ten years ago, the Barcelona Declaration, basic document of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, included a commitment “to ensure respect of cultural diversity and religious pluralism”. It seems to have become victim of a similar misunderstanding.

Citizens with all their overlapping cultural orientations are not yet in focus. Europeans continue to invoke “European values”, and their Arab partners call for values derived from “Arab culture and civilisation”. In the debate on Turkey’s membership in the European Union, we are daily witnessing the extent to which – in Europe – cultural and religious arguments are misused for covering political purposes. There is still a climate of mutual mistrust and bloc-thinking. Intergovernmental tensions are mirrored in ordinary people’s thought and attitudes.

Almost every citizen of Arab countries, irrespective of his or her affiliation to religious or any other belief, feels as victim of discrimination and lack of respect. Most Europeans have difficulties whenever communication reaches this point. Small talk or lessons about democracy and the rule of law are the usual ways out. The situation becomes more uncomfortable when Arab partners open up with expressing bitterness about the world being governed by an American-Zionist conspiracy, and the West having lost its moral and ethical values by allowing pornography and applying double standards. Most citizens in the Arab world share such feelings and believe that Islam is the only major religion which is discriminated in other regions of the world.

Father Paolo Dall’Oglio, spiritual leader of a Muslim-Christian community at the Deir Mar Musa Monastery in the Syrian Desert, taught me a way out of such confrontation. Offering respect instead of requesting it is a key to open hearts and minds. Doing this first step combines the best of Southern traditions of hospitality and Northern traditions of fighting against racism and xenophobia.

In meeting religious leaders, I found a second key which is “modesty of the believer”. No matter what fundamental differences there are between claims of ultimate truth, at the end each human being has limitations in making up and communicating his or her personal beliefs. Merciless people claim possession of absolute truth. The open letter addressed in October 2006 by 38 eminent leaders of Islamic communities all over the world to Pope Benedict XVI was an important contribution to an open dialogue in insisting on the principle that “there is no coercion in religion”.

A third key lesson comes from talking to Ismail Serageldin, the Librarian of Alexandria. He encouraged me to build on the difference between scientific and religious truth. I tried his argument several times, and, hélas, it works. The strongest believer accepts the argument that his or her claim for ultimate truth could only be compromised if it would

be based on scientific evidence. We are acquiring new scientific knowledge every day whereas most claims for religious truth are meant eternal. Even Mohammed Mahathir, former Prime Minister of Malaysia and known for his sharp attitude towards “Western values”, is now defending this argument in calling for a new opening of the Islamic world towards science and technology.

Looking at Europe from the South changes perspectives. Too many European views are spiced with arrogance. The colonial attitude of preaching universal values for the benefit of particular interests has become a dominant feature, poisoning even the best intentions. European visitors to Africa come very soon, in their conversation with their hosts, to the question “please tell me more about your problems”. They give little or no room to talking about other issues such as climate change, ethics of science and technology, or the repercussions of the enlargement of the European Union. I owe this observation to Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Policy who has earned high reputation as crisis manager by his commitment to creating a conversation climate of mutual respect.

Such respect will never result from moral appeals. It can be acquired through a dialogue which is based on the assumption that “the other might be right” and which is designed as a learning opportunity. Already in its initial phase, the Anna Lindh Foundation has developed a number of modalities for such learning. Youth workshops invite young men to perform as young women from another country, and vice versa; teacher-training seminars invite teachers from all Euro-Mediterranean countries to study together the many facets of cultural diversity and modalities of a non-partisan introduction into religious pluralism; young artists enjoy diversity in joint creation; young scientists are invited to take the floor in high-level academic meetings and to make their first experience in joint research without frontiers; young journalists are rewarded for showing their talent in reporting about people with diversified cultural identities living together.

The Anna Lindh Foundation has grown into a network of 37 national networks, bringing together more than 1500 institutions and organisations committed to dialogue between cultures. Cooperation agreements have been concluded with a number of regional and international partners, thus creating multiplier effects and synergies which are essential for a young institution.

I am confident that the second phase of the Anna Lindh Foundation will consolidate and further develop the concept of dialogue as a learning opportunity for all participants and fill the gap between international agreements on cultural diversity and real life of our citizens.

At the end of my term as Founding Director, I left Alexandria with many lessons learnt.

Cover photo: The new Bibliotheca Alexandrina was opened in 2002. In December 2004, it became also the host of the new Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures. The futurist building, designed by the Norwegian architect team Snøhetta, was winner of the 2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Photo: Snøhetta/BA.

Published by: German Commission for UNESCO
Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V.
Colmantstr. 15, 53115 Bonn, Germany
www.unesco.de

Printing/Layout: Grafische Werkstatt Druckerei und Verlag
Gebrüder Kopp GmbH & Co KG Köln

Edition: 1000

All rights reserved

© Traugott Schoefthaler / Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V.
Bonn/Germany, December 2007

The ideas and opinions expressed in this book are those of the individual authors and not necessarily represent the views of the German Commission for UNESCO.

Original text: English; with the exception of contributions from Salvatore Bono, Marie-Therèse Foblets and Tuomo Melasuo (Original: French, translation by Traugott Schoefthaler), and Helen Hajjaj (Original: Danish, translation provided by the author).

The German National Library listed this publication in the German National Bibliography. Detailed bibliographical data can be downloaded from <http://dnb.ddb.de>

ISBN 3-927907-99-5