

sie verleiht dieser alten Überzeugung einen neuen Sinn: daß Freiheit eine gelassene, flexible, tolerante Lebenshaltung heraufbeschwört, welche nicht nur das Eigene, sondern auch das Fremde respektiert, ja welche nicht nur die Hingebung zum Einen und Selben pflegt und fordert, sondern auch das Verständnis für das Andere und Differente weckt und ermöglicht.

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The Dialogue between the European Union and the Islamic World *

Introduction

In this paper we will present our research group, UNISCI, is doing in the field of North-South confidence building in the Mediterranean, and the possibilities of dialogue between the European Union and the countries of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

In 1994 we published the first results in this field in our research collection UNISCI Papers. The title was: *Confidence Building and Partnership in the Western Mediterranean: Task for the Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Avoidance*. Later on we published a new book, before the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona, entitled: *Confidence Building and Partnership in the Western Mediterranean: Issues and Policies for the 1995 Conference*.

At the present time we are developing new proposals about the North-South dialogue in the Mediterranean, taking into account the outcome of the Barcelona Conference.

The Question of Mutual Perception

The Islamic world seen from the North shows a serie of stereotypes. In general, Islam's relationship with the West has been marked by mutual ignorance. The conflict and confrontation has historical roots in the Mediterranean: The fall of the Byzantine Empire, the Crusades, the expulsion of the moors from Spain, the Ottoman Empire expansion, the colonisation of the Arab countries, the creation of the State

* This article was written four years ago as a discussion paper in the framework of the *Institute for European-Islamic Dialogue*. Most of the ideas presented here are still valid, talking into account the slow progress made in the third chapter of the Barcelona Declaration.

of Israel and at the present time, the impact of the Islamic fundamentalism, the Islamic revolution in Iran., the civil war in Lebanon, the impact of the Gulf War, the harassment and persecution of Christian churches in Sudan and Egypt, the Algerian civil war, the assassinations, hijackings and terrorist acts associated with the Islamic fundamentalists, all these facts have created a new enemy image. The media, and it was clear during the Gulf War, have contributed to the emergence of this image, by referring to „violent Islam“, „Islamic bombs“, „Islamic terrorism“, „Islamic gerrillas“, „Islamic demographic threat“ and „Holy War“.

The perception of Islam as something threatening is already a reality in the population and also in governments. It has to be added, the impact of the warnings coming from different Arab governments, devilishing the Islamic fundamentalist movements as extremist and terrorists. That is clear not only in the case of Algeria and Tunisia, but also in Libya, Egypt, Morocco to a less extent, and recently in Israel/Palestine.

All this has created an image of a monolithic Islam, strengthened by right wing politicians and parties which used the migration issues to exploit the fears of the populations in order to win its support and to increase its political position. It is a fact that there is a linkage between politics and demography. The growth of Muslim communities in the European Union is viewed increasingly as a potential threat. The Muslims assimilation is also a divisive issue in many countries. The fabric of European societies is considered to be in danger, and several important segments of the European societies have many doubts about the possibility or desirability of absorbing new immigrants culturally different. Their loyalty is put in question.

It can also be added the image of Islam as intolerant and antidemocratic religion. The democratic potential of Islam as a religion and culture remains highly controversial. Islam is often portrayed as incapable of tolerating diversity and political dissent. In this regard, the practices of Iran, Sudan, Pakistan, the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, the Salman Rushdie affair are common examples

used many times.¹

In the case of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, the historical experience, the impact of the Gulf War and the conflict in Bosnia has helped to develop images and stereotypes about the Western world and especially, the European Countries.

The Tunisian Foreign Minister explained very clearly the Southern perception of the North: „Disdainful and rich and in the process of closing its borders while building a European social and economic fortress. With this comes an attraction in the South to certain anachronistic ideologies that reject Western values, such as those touching on the universal. [...] In the North we are witnessing a concentration of wealth and technological capacity. [...] The arms trade, prospering to the detriment of development. [...] The sum of these and other challenges is insecurity and instability. [...] for the entire region“.²

Different North statements about the South has been also emphasised which are considered unacceptable. Such as:

1. The cultural identities confrontation;³
2. The clash of civilisations;⁴
3. The ideological conflict.⁵

However the devilishing process of the Western world and especially Europe, each time finds less echo in the South and in the Islamic fundamentalism writings. The Bosnia conflict has produced an analysis about war between civilisations; in contrast it has not produced black and white analysis because of the Alliance complexity. If the analysis are clear, they can show a great hostility and distrust.

Some Islamic fundamentalist movements have been instruments in giving a hostile image of the Christian North to strengthen their posi-

¹ See for instance J.L. ESPOSITO: Contemporary Images of Islam in the West. Paper presented to the Toledo Seminar on Europe and Islam, April 1996.

² H.B. YAHIA: Security and Stability in the Mediterranean: Regional and Interregional Changes. In: *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 1 (1993).

³ B. BUZAN: New World Real Politic: New Patterns of Global Security in the twenty-first Century. In: *International Affairs*, July 1991.

⁴ S. HUNTINGTON: The Clash of Civilisations. In: *Foreign Affairs*, 3 (1993).

⁵ G. FULLER: The next Ideology. In: *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1995.

tion in the struggle for power.

In the North, the history of mediterranean explanation has been focused many times on Christian and Muslims confrontation, but also, in the South it is full of misunderstandings and stereotypes.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference and the Cultural Dialogue

In the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference the importance of the cultural dialogue has been stressed in the inaugural speech by the Spanish Foreign Minister in the Final Conference Declaration and in the Work Programme.

The development of cooperation in the fields of culture, society and human relations was considered the third dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In the inaugural speech the cultural diversity of the Mediterranean was defined as one of its greatest and most important assets.⁶

The participants in the Conference of Barcelona tried to establish a comprehensive partnership (the so called Euro-Mediterranean partnership) through a greater emphasis on the social, cultural and human dimensions. Therefore, dialogue between the Mediterranean cultures and exchanges in human, scientific and technological fields are considered as an essential factor in order to improve the perception of each other. To that end, the partnership in social, cultural and human affairs is centered in the following aspects:

- The dialogue and respect between cultures and religions as a necessary precondition for bringing the peoples closer.
- The important role of the mass media in the recognition and understanding of cultures.
- The need to develop human resources, both as regards the education and training of young people, in particular in the area of culture.

⁶ Texts of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference, Barcelona, 27 and 28 November 1995, Oficina de Información Diplomática, Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry.

- The need to promote cultural exchanges and knowledge of other languages, respecting the cultural identity of each partner and to implement a lasting policy of educational and cultural programmes. In order to achieve this objective, the partners undertake to adopt measures to facilitate human exchanges, in particular by improving administrative procedures.
- The essential contribution of the civil society in the process of development of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership as an essential factor for greater understanding and closeness among peoples;
- The importance of decentralised co-operation and encouragement of exchanges with the leaders of political and civil society, universities, research communities, media organisations, trade unions and public and private enterprises;
- The importance of encouraging contacts and exchanges among young people in the context of programmes for decentralised co-operation;
- A significant emphasis is also made on the illegal immigration problem, but also on the important role played by migrations in the North-South relations. In the Conference it was agreed to strengthen cooperation in order to reduce migratory pressures, for instance through vocational training programmes and assistance in job creation.

In the cultural field, the North-South cooperation in the Mediterranean will be implemented through the following measures:

1. Developing human resources through regular dialogue on educational policies, initially focusing on vocational training, technology in education, the universities and other higher-education establishments and research. In this field, the active role to be played by women should be considered very seriously. Nevertheless, two educational Centres are created as basis for cultural cooperation: The Euro-Arab Business School in Granada and the European Foundation in Turin.

We also consider very positive for cultural dialogue the inclusion of measures such as the organisation of a meeting of representatives of the vocational training sector (policy makers, academics, trainers) with the aim of sharing modern management approaches, and another of representatives of universities and higher-education establishments. The European Commission has committed itself to strengthen the ongoing MED-Campus Programme.

2. In the field of dialogue between cultures and civilisations the Conference stresses the importance of improving mutual understanding by promoting cultural exchanges and knowledge of languages; officials and experts will meet in order to make concrete proposals for action in the cultural heritage, cultural and artistic events, coproductions (theatre and cinema), translations and other means of cultural dissemination and training. There is also the necessity of a greater understanding among the major religions in the Euro-Mediterranean region, in order to facilitate greater mutual tolerance and cooperation.
3. The European Union will actively promote a close interaction between the media by promoting the ongoing MED-Media programme, and by organising annual media-meeting.
4. Youth exchanges should also be the means to prepare future generations for a closer cooperation between the European-Mediterranean Partners, by establishing a Euro-Mediterranean youth exchange programme.
5. Finally, attention has been put in the exchanges between civil societies, especially those involving official, scientists, academics, businessman, students and sportsmen, including concrete measures such as the improvement and simplification of administrative procedures.

Previous Considerations on Cultural Dialogue

In order to manage an efficient dialogue it has to be taken into account some obstacles that could make it difficult:

1. There are difficulties in the religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. For the Christians Jesus is God and he died in the cross; but he was a non-crucified Prophet for the Muslims. For the Muslims the Bible was voluntarily forged in order to hide the mission of the Prophet Muhammad.
2. The definition and the content for our understanding of Islam. The Muslims have still not reached an agreement on the specific content of the cultural dialogue.
3. We must avoid to take the common cultural part as the only important thing, that is real, denying importance to the difference that would lead to ambiguity and misunderstanding.
4. We must not insist on the differences, refusing to see the common aspects, which would lead to a standstill dialogue.
5. The Islamic civilisation with its reference to the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet and its world-view of human beings can not be reduced to simple cultural categories. According to Fatima Mernissi, „the present Western civilisation is based on the ideas contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereas the Islamic civilisation leans on the Koran. Both texts appear as universal at any time or place. But the first one is founded on a positive and consensual law. Whereas the second one is based on divine and inalterable law“.
6. Any intersociety dialogue must address the impact of images. These are influenced by historic and religious traditions but also by fears with respect of the future.

Conceptual Framework of an Intercultural Dialogue

North-South cooperation requires a climate of mutual trust and predictability. Our colleague Hans Günter Brauch has suggested several new terms:

1. Partnership building measures.
2. Exchange or Tolerance Furthering Measures that aim at an intercultural and interreligious dialogue on those issues. That may contribute avoid to the emergence of „enemy“ images in the North and in the South.

The dialogue should go on at different intersociety levels: E.g. cities, women's groups, laymen. The goal of scholars, religious leaders civil society in general in the cultural dialogue would be the avoidance of a „clash of civilisations“ theory.

Taking into consideration all of the above, we suggest some concrete measures in order to implement the „Spirit of Barcelona“. These measures can be useful in order to create confidence in the cultural field and also, they can serve to develop the too ambiguous objectives and purposes defined in the Barcelona's Final Declaration and in their Work Programme.

In first place:

- To continue with the cultural dialogue.⁷

In second Place:⁸

- Start by suppressing from the schoolbooks what is fable or calumny about each other;
- revise programmes and texts of secondary and higher education levels with the same purpose;
- re-examine the history for getting rid of look for coincidences;
- recheck the functioning of Social Science University Departments,

⁷ See J. A. SAINZ DE LA PEÑA: Confidence Building within the Frame of Cultural Dialogue. In: A. MARQUINA, H. G. BRAUCH: *Confidence Building and Partnership in the Western Mediterranean: Task for Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Avoidance*, UNISCI Papers, No. 1, Madrid 1994. See also H. G. BRAUCH: Tolerance Furthering Measures. Paper presented to the Toledo Seminar on Euro-Arab Dialogue, October 1994.

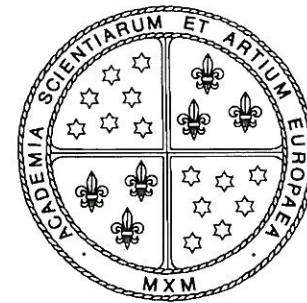
⁸ For these measures see J. A. SAINZ DE LA PEÑA (note 7).

in order to achieve a better knowledge of the other's culture, deepening in the criticism of both civilisations;

- promote the exchange of professors and grants for students;
- know the other's real situation through the media, specially on television;
- promote periodical cultural meetings;
- develop common cultural programmes and conservation programmes related to the historical cultural patrimony;
- exchange information about cultural activities and encourage its creation,
- the European Union support for a Med-Culture programme (such as the MED-Campus, MED-Media, MED-Techno Programmes).
- a more active role should be given to the NGO's in this field, especially in education. But we have to take into consideration the weakness of the civil societies in the countries of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean. At the present time, the NGO's margin of manoeuvre in these countries is very limited.

Nevertheless, in order to influence the process of intercultural dialogue we have to previously assess the initiatives. We have also to identify the challenges and as a consequence, open an hermeneutic dialogue in order to search for common ground and common solutions.

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