

CONCLUSIONS

Within the context of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Directors-General responsible for the International Cultural Relations of the 27 Member States devoted a large part of their six-monthly meeting to the Dialogue between European and Arab-Maghreb countries on topics relating to modern issues.

If ever there was an area in which bilateral and multilateral co-operation in matters of culture, education and research could play an important role when dealing with the issues which affect society, it is dialogue between Europeans and neighbouring Arab and Maghreb countries.

The official cherishing of cultural diversity as the return of religion into the public domain in both Europe as well as the Arab world and the sometimes difficult reconciliation of these tendencies with universal values provide much scope for reflection, exchanges of views and action.

From the point of view of international co-operation, the DGs considered it essential to strengthen dialogue which was concerned with modern values understood in the sense of principles which are universally cherished in international agreements relating to basic human rights in matters of politics, economics, philosophy, religion and culture. At a time of "soft power", the areas of culture and education understood in a wide sense make it possible to return to this theme.

In the presence of the invited Arab delegates, including the President of the Anna Lindh Foundation, as well as representatives of the European Commission and the President of the EUNIC, the Directors-General evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of this dialogue; they have compared their good practice and have discussed new initiatives to be taken either with the Commission or in an intergovernmental form.

The participants were able to familiarise themselves with the recent report of the Anna Lindh Foundation « Euromed Cultural Trends 2010 » which contains the highly revealing result of a survey of opinion regarding mutual perceptions within the area of the Mediterranean Union.

During the discussion, the participants met to discuss a **number of principles** which aim to enrich the dialogue between Europeans and Arab countries :

- The reminder that historical links such as the geographical proximity and the intermingling of the populations make Europe and the countries of the Maghreb and Machrek special partners in the dialogue.
- The fact that the return of archaisms in the Arab world would increase the risk of ostracism or even racism in Europe; a withdrawal in the domains of

reason, humanity, justice and otherness; the taking hostage of societies and international relations by religious discourse and the making of religion into a political tool ; and, in the face of this, the establishment of the limits of international diplomacy.

- The need to resecularise the teaching of the Arabic language. This involves the teaching of foreign languages to people in the Arab world.
- It also involves the learning of Arabic by Europeans and a programme of translation into Arabic of written, audiovisual and new media products. Some have mentioned the possibility of an open digital site: a kind of Wikipedia for Euro-Arab translation.
- The finding of an asymmetry in the reciprocal knowledge of the cultures which is to the detriment of Arab countries. European media does not draw sufficient attention to the specific features of the different countries or specific features within the countries. This nourishes an ignorance or a stereotypical view on cultures of the Arab world.
- The need to encourage diversity within the Arab world by having an adequate public policy with a view to ensuring minorities a fair and acknowledged status in their society.
- In order to combat prejudice, the challenge is for Europeans and Arab-Maghreb countries to construct a "mutual legitimacy", that is to say an acceptance of the status and projected worldview of the other. This obviously presupposes that each of the parties will construct a legitimate status and projected worldview which are based on values accepted by the other, for example, in the case of Europeans, the specific implementation of the objectives and values of the European Union as described in the Treaty of Lisbon, a plan for society which provides an optimal solution for ensuring equality and liberty, growth and sustainable development, freedom of worship and the neutrality of the State ... and not to give the impression that the EU defines human rights in different ways depending on whom it is talking to in order to regain the trust of Arab populations and to strengthen the credibility of European policy.
- The promotion of the concept of responsibility and of responsible citizenship and the establishment that, in the north as well as in the south of the Mediterranean, societies are faced with the need to invent alternatives to the traditional nation state and new forms of citizen commitment within the context of the development of civil societies in favour of the new communications technologies. What do the notions of liberty, equality and solidarity mean today ?
- The acknowledgement that cultural diversity cannot serve as a pretext for the relativisation of basic rights.

- Cultural diversity must be reflected in political, social and economic rights and in particular while concluding international bilateral or multilateral economic agreements.
- The establishment that the settlement of the Palestinian question is essential to the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and that it will contribute to a better Euro-Arab dialogue.

Aware of the numerous forms of action which are already being taken within the context of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and the potential which the Union has to offer the Mediterranean, they identified the following themes for the creation of new initiatives :

- In the media sector and where public authorities are concerned, the participants have wished to see the development of the co-production of documentaries and fictional programmes, with several having argued the case for a real Euro-Arab television channel based on the model of the Franco-German channel Arte.
- The plan to have a European university in an Arab country. In this perspective it should be examined if it would be possible to unite the already existing initiatives which were set up by various Member States.
- The importance of federating numerous initiatives pursued by Europeans in this domain on the territory of third-party countries. In this context, the prospect of combined forms of action on the part of the Anna LINDH Foundation and EUNIC has been favourably received, with some organisations also belonging to the two networks.
- With regard to the tools established by the EU:
 - The Mediterranean partners are invited to take full advantage of the possibilities for technical assistance (TAIEX) afforded by the EU for the purposes of the development of their policies in the domain of youth, culture and education ;
 - The tools of the EU which aim to support Euro-Mediterranean co-operation in the domain of culture should be made available to new cultural sectors and operators apart from the audiovisual and heritage sectors ;
 - The tools of the EU in matters concerned with youth and education should be mobilised for the purposes of contributing to the cultural dimension of the partnership, including the permitting of co-operation with the cultural players.
- The role of immigrants in Europe as forming natural bridges between their countries of origin and their adopted countries; they can also be vehicles for qualification.

- Meetings of creative women both in the cultural sector as well as in the social or economic sector.
- Work on the notion of universal values which aims to show that the latter are not synonymous with Western values or European ones.
- While recognising the notion of universal values, reciprocal knowledge of the meaning of cultural concepts such as emancipation should be developed. The support of women organisations is necessary, but at the same time they should get the opportunity to set their own priorities.
- Work on stereotypes with intellectuals, including press media.
- Meetings of journalists.
- Translation programme facilitating the distribution of productions (whether they are written, audiovisual or created through new technologies) in Arab.
- Promotion of new digital technologies in order to facilitate the distribution and the accessibility of cultural content and products in Arabic.
- Promotion of the role of social media as one of the engines for the creation of a responsible citizenship.
- Work on the theme of science and religion.

Moreover, the Directors-General were able to listen to Minister Fadila LAANAN, who is the President of the Culture Committee of the EU for Belgium ; on her return from New York, where the 65th AG of the UN was held, she was able to report on the Final Declaration of the High-Level Conference on the Objectives of the Millennium, integrating the cultural dimension as a transversal vehicle for the realisation of the World Customs Organisation.

The possibility to organise back to back meetings with the Directors general in charge of Culture could be further examined. These meetings could enrich the discussions and strengthen the link between the cultural policies and the external relations as it was also put forward in the European Agenda for Culture published by the Commission in 2007.

The DGs also agree about the format of the database for the tools and targets of the external cultural policies of the Member States.

Realistically, it would seem preferable to us to confine ourselves initially to the domain of Culture, more specifically the following fields of activity :

- Promotion of the language of the country
- Cultural co-operation

- Support for cultural industries
- Audiovisual
- Culture and development
- Diplomacy/promotion of culture

The proposed sections are :

- Country involved:
 - Name of country
 - Institutions (name and co-ordinates, including websites)
 1. Central institutions
 - a. Institution primarily responsible for external cultural relations
 - b. Other central institutions playing a role in external cultural relations
 2. Decentralised institutions which are under public control, not including local powers
 3. Decentralised, non-governmental institutions
 4. Representation abroad
 - Target country :
 - Name of country
 - Domain of action
 - (Local partners : optional)
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Representative of Hungary announces that the future meeting, probably in June 2011, will take place in PECS, the European Capital of Culture 2010, a city being a traditional symbol of a cultural diversity in South Hungary.