

**EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN:
CIVIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TRANS-MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE
(L'Europa e il Mediterraneo
Contributi della società civile al dialogo transmediterraneo
Europa und das Mittelmeer
Zivilgesellschaftliche Beiträge zum transmediterranen Dialog)**

Villa Vigoni, March 21st-22nd 2013

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

- agenda and list of the participants: see Annex 1 -

After a welcome by Prof. Amodeo, who recalled how the idea of the conference was born (with the aim of preparing a larger conference in 2014 as well as other initiatives) each of the participants introduced him/herself and the own motivation for participating to the meeting.

Graf Strachwitz then made a short introductory presentation (Annex 2), reminding the group of the strong historical and cultural bridges across the Mediterranean and stressing the role of civic action for a better mutual relationship and understanding. He particularly emphasized the value of civil society belonging to a historically strongly interrelated area in creating an atmosphere of respect and human bonds destined to bypass national divides. Leveraging on past achievements – including in particular peace, enhanced prosperity, social change within cultural diversity – Europe is called to translate its proclaimed principles of modern society (democracy, rule of law, human and civil rights, cultural traditions) into a vision addressing its present challenges of which the “South” issue is one of the main elements. Overcoming past attitudes and perceptions, Europe should here shift its attention from the emphasis on differences among different peoples towards the identification of their commonalities and the sharing of chances. To this end Europe is required to act as a geographical and social entity representing the new natural habitat of its people vs. traditional national states which are beset by growing limitations in an increasingly globalised world.

The ensuing discussion developed along these lines following a four point agenda: Europe / the Mediterranean / approaches / potential for civic action:

EUROPE

Any realistic approach from the European side to the existing issues has to be based on its nucleus of shared values based on the principles of equal rights, solidarity, minority protection, freedom of moving. For its further development it has to be ensured that the above values are shared and applied by the actors in civil society.



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It was however pointed out by some participants that while Europe should definitely not be seen as a purely economic expression, solutions are to be supported by a true political and economical vision as framework for the development of a civil society in order to give real expression to the shared values.

The present trends under the effects of the ongoing economic crisis are detrimental to a political discourse driven by values. Expenditure is wound back, especially in socially sensitive areas and education (an example among others: Bologna project). Seen from the south Mediterranean countries Europe appears to close on itself disregarding expectations (“Europa schottet sich ab”). This has a negative impact when in Arab countries the set-up of alternatives to intolerant ideologies in the social area is bitterly needed.

Such developments contribute to a further contamination of the values as they are commonly understood (a particular example: the idea of secularity). Prudence is recommended when the idea of Europe is squeezed in a discrepancy between a proclaimed “wonderful reality” on one side and its identity crisis on the other while the idea itself of Europe among the public becomes less and less popular.

While time is needed to sort out existing problems avoiding at the same time that things fall apart, we have possibly to “use the crisis” finding in the original values/virtues (“Tugenden”) the way and means to overcome it. This is key in the approach to the non-European Mediterranean countries.

THE MEDITERRANEAN

While the undergoing deep political and social changes in the non-European Mediterranean area require an increased attention – making obsolete the old European top-down political approach which privileged undemocratic oligarchies –, the European Union appears to give less priority to the area, possibly as consequence of its enlargement in areas far from the Mediterranean area. Initiatives of the southern countries (i.a. the 5+5 dialogue) have so far had little impact.

Attention was drawn to the need for a proper reading of the events (e.g. of the Arab spring as a broad expression of strongly diversified upheavals against corrupted systems under the control of minorities) by the Europeans as a requirement for a realistic approach to the issues on the table. In this context complexity is produced by the strong differences existing among the non-European Mediterranean countries. An obvious distinction divides those countries where armed insurrections have taken or are taking place from those which try to adjust gradually to the new situation.

The migration issue was seen as a particular stumbling block; it was recognized that Italy is severely touched by its consequences.

Increasing islamophobe attitudes in Europe blur the situation and render a rational and constructive approach to the open issues politically more difficult.



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Demographic and economic numbers however will represent a strong catalyst for a rethinking and a refocusing of the European attention towards the Mediterranean area.

The European attitude is matched by a split reaction in Arab countries where the resurgence of a radical Islamism is also a reminder of the fact that it is to a good extent also the product of past European actions in distant and less distant times. For this very reason any vision about the future relationship between Europe and the non-European Mediterranean countries has to take very carefully into account historical legacies.

There was a consensus that Europe needs to apprehend the developments in the whole of the Mediterranean area. While Syria at this moment in history rightly attracts particular attention, developments in countries on the southern shore (e.g. Tunisia) should not be overlooked, and special attention should also be devoted to Turkey. The personal view of all participants was that Turkish efforts to join the European Union should be encouraged.

APPROACHES/POTENTIAL FOR CIVIC ACTION

The main potential for civil society and civic action is in bridging and actively promoting commonalities and alliances between citizens.

A bridge has to be created in a situation which a participant defined according to the latest developments in Egypt as the discrepancy between a world where “there is critical thinking but no vision” and another world where “there is vision but no action”. This “bridge” means to create an actionable link between the typical value based European approach (the good side of Europe) and the very tangible local and inter-relational problems of the south Mediterranean in the framework of a transformational partnership (“Transformations-partnerschaft” according to the definition of a participant) where the establishment of a culture of recognition (“Kultur der Anerkennung”) is actively pursued.

The above means in particular constructively addressing key issues discussed with intensity during the meeting and related to: migration, education, transfer of human resources and know-how, investments, corruption, religious tolerance, minority and women rights.

In this perspective there should be place for a broader involvement and engagement of civil society where room is given to the development of civic action.

OUTCOME

The group defined three areas for further action:

- 1) The migration issue: Here, the promotion of information and rethinking traditional positions is called for. It was felt that this could be achieved by helping existing civil society organizations (e.g. Mediendienst Migration) in their efforts by supplying them with material, contacts etc.



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- 2) The issue of Europe and the Mediterranean as a common cultural sphere: Following the analysis that the cultural commonalities are not universally realized and appreciated, and that a process of self-criticism, respect and mutual learning needs to be initiated, the idea of a publication was launched. Further details t.b.d.

- 3) The issue of civil society as a driving element for future development: The group adopted the suggestion that this issue merits a broader discussion in a conference to be held in 2014. The conference should concentrate on an evaluation of civil society experiences in the Mediterranean

FURTHER STEPS

Minutes of the meeting will be prepared and distributed in the coming days

The participants are encouraged to provide own comments and proposals how the process can be continued including further action flanking/leading to the above mentioned conference planned for 2014

Particular attention should be devoted to the future use/involvement of the media and other communication instruments (parallel: event organized by Ethnobarometer in Mai 2012 – a participant will try to procure and circulate the proceedings)

The Maecenata Foundation and Villa Vigoni will give feed-back on the process to the participants suggesting following steps (to this end and in order to facilitate communication a list of the participants including their coordinates will be circulated shortly).

Berlin, 27-III-2013
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