"Can we talk about this?"

Young people passing from monologues to dialogues for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean

Matina Magkou

A publication by the Euro-Med Youth Platform
“Can we talk about this?”
Young people passing from monologues to dialogues for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean

Matina Magkou
ITHACA

When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclops,
the angry Poseidon -- do not fear them:
You will never find such as these on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
emotion touches your spirit and your body.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclops,
the fierce Poseidon you will never encounter,
if you do not carry them within your soul,
if your soul does not set them up before you.

Pray that the road is long.
That the summer mornings are many, when,
with such pleasure, with such joy
you will enter ports seen for the first time;
stop at Phoenician markets,
and purchase fine merchandise,
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and sensual perfumes of all kinds,
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
visit many Egyptian cities,
to learn and learn from scholars.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for many years;
and to anchor at the island when you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.

Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.
Without her you would have never set out on the road.
She has nothing more to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not deceived you.
Wise as you have become, with so much experience,
you must already have understood what Ithacas mean.

Konstantinos Kavafis, Greek Poet
The Euro-Med Youth Platform recognizes that at the dawn of the 21st century, religion plays a central role in public life, and has become a significant identity marker. In our increasingly pluralistic societies, more inter-religious dialogue and cooperation is needed if conflict fueled by religion is to be constructively addressed. Spiritual and religious traditions are a source of values that can defend dignified life for all, these traditions need to be explored¹.

The Euro-Med Youth Platform aims to bring NGOs from the European and Mediterranean regions together in an environment of tolerance and mutual understanding by assisting them in networking and capacity building, increasing their participation and exchanging good practice. The aim of this study was to see the reality of inter-religious dialogue between youths in the Mediterranean region and further identify youths who have been active in this field.

It is important to keep in mind when reading this study that things have not been plain sailing for youths working in this area. Youth workers in this field have to keep overcoming issues of Xenophobia and prejudice in various parts of the Mediterranean to keep on working in this very contentious issue. It should be noted that the Arab Spring has also helped to bring about a positive change in the North African-Mediterranean countries and has opened the floor to further discussions on the importance of the sharing of cultures and dialogue between persons of different creeds.

The conclusion of this report is an important one whereby the author provides a positive outlook showing that young people are open to further discussion on inter religious faiths leading to a culture of understanding and acceptance in the region. It is important that the results of projects are disseminated further into all strands of society hoping that they can be catalysts of change to older generations.

The aims of the Euro-Med Youth Platform will remain to promote peace in the region and contribute to a peaceful coexistence of the adherents of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities and races. For that to be achieved, we believe that everyone must be respectful to the environment and to all creatures’ right to exist, believe in the sanctity of human rights and democracy and use all means at hand to make this coexistence possible². To this end, we remain committed to promote education, exchange of information, opinions and expertise, with a special focus on including as diverse a range of viewpoints as possible in our activities.

The Euro-Med Youth Platform hopes that this publication serves in reaching the goal of creating further awareness on the importance of inter-faith dialogue. We do strongly encourage that readers of this report keep actively involved in this topic through further research and submission of projects focusing on this theme.

Kevin Apap
Euro-Med Youth Platform
Programme Officer

¹ Immanuel Kant – Perpetual Peace
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Finding the right words to write something about myself after writing the profiles of the people I interviewed is more difficult than I expected.

Greek by birth and cosmopolitan by nature, I have always been curious to meet other cultures. I feel that the mobility experiences I’ve had so far and the people I’ve met on the way, have enriched me and have defined at a large extent who I am.

I have worked in the field of cultural management for around 10 years with a special focus on international cultural cooperation. I have studied Languages, Journalism, European Studies and Cultural Management and I am still eager to learn more, either from books, people that accompany me throughout the years or people I meet on the way. Currently I am a PhD student in Cultural Policy and my research focuses on the mobility of artists in the Euro- Mediterranean region and its relation to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and cosmopolitan identities.

I have been involved in youth structures since 2000, working for AEGEE, a European-wide students association. During 2003-2004 I was member of the European Youth Forum Bureau, where I was responsible for Human Rights and Equality. Since then I have been involved in youth initiatives, policies and projects mainly as a trainer or as a consultant. Since 2010 I have been following the Euro- Arab youth cooperation process which has taught me a lot and has given me the opportunity to meet and work with many different young people from the EuroMediterranean region and to explore the Mediterranean part of my identity. And so far I haven’t regretted it at all.

I am writing these words in December 2012, in Tunisia, just after the end of the Euro-Arab Training for Trainers in Democratic Youth Participation organised by the Council of Europe, the League of Arab States and the Tunisian Observatory for Youth. The research I did for the Euro-Med Youth Platform during the last months makes today even make more sense to me because I realise how important it is to bring young people closer, to share and to work together. I see this desire in young people’s eyes. I see it in their motivation to work more on the challenges that affect their everyday lives and to find synergies. The research has been inspiring and it gave me even more reasons to continue to work in this direction.

If I was asked to describe in a few words my attitude to life, I would see myself reflected in Mark Twain’s words that says that “broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime”.

That’s me.

Matina Magkou
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vi

Background note on the study vii

I. Understanding the Mediterranean 1

II. Intercultural and Interfaith dialogue 11

III. Young people’s journeys in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean 21

IV. An enhanced environment for EuroMediterranean cooperation in the field of youth 31

V. Some points for further action 45

VI. Suggestions for future research 49

Conclusion: A reflection process in progress 51

References 53
The writing of this study has been a fascinating experience, but one that could not have been possible without the help and cooperation of a number of people that should be thanked for giving feedback, ideas, suggestions and inspiration for the research. More specifically I would like to thank:

- the Euro-Med Youth Platform staff and the selection committee - that reviewed the proposals submitted after the open call for the research - for giving me the opportunity to dive into this adventure and providing all the support possible towards its realization;

- Rui Gomes and Menno Ettema from the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, Hanjo Schild and Viktoria Karpatska from the EU-CoE Youth Partnership and Chouaa Dassouki from the League of Arab States for giving me background information, reports from seminars and meetings as well as contacts of young people from the region;

- Corinne Grassi, Grants and Monitoring Programme Manager at the Anna-Lindh Foundation, Federica Demicheli from the SALTO-Youth, Angie Cotte, Secretary General of the Cimetta Fund, Rebecca Zeilinger from the Interkulturelles Zentrum Austria, Emiliano Paoletti, Secretary General and Alba Pedrini, Communications Officer of the Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean for their encouragement and the contacts they provided me;

- Guiseppe Porcaro, Secretary General of the European Youth Forum and Vania Freitas, United Nations & Global Youth Issues Coordinator for giving me access to background documents;

- Gisèle Evrard, Marios Epameinondas, Manfred Zentner, Salpy Eskidjian and Maria Paschou whose suggestions have been very valuable and their friendship makes the work I am doing more meaningful;

- Maram Hassan who has helped me to try to avoid seeing the Mediterranean from a European perspective, gave suggestions for people to contact and pointed out initiatives that have taken place especially in the Arab countries;

- a special thanks goes to the young people who generously gave their time to answer my questions and share their daily life stories, wherein each of them works to enjoy and transform their own cultural surrounding through tackling prejudice, conflict as well as stereotyped roles and expectations. Young women and men from the region definitely have the first and the last say in this research. I hope I reflected well their activities, preoccupations, enthusiasm and dedication in the work they are doing.

- a final thanks goes to my family and friends that understood that during the summer I had to spend more time in front of the computer and on skype than with them. Without their support this study would not have been possible.

Matina Magkou
Researcher, manager and consultant
on youth and cultural projects
of international cooperation
BACKGROUND NOTE ON THE STUDY

The Euro-Med Youth Platform launched a call in May 2012 for a study on the role of young people in intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Following an evaluation of the proposals received, the Platform commissioned me to undertake this study and the necessary adjustments to the proposal were made based on the financial and time framework foreseen.

The research, writing and editing phase of the study that you are now reading took place from mid-June to the end of September 2012. After a short review of relevant bibliography and of specific projects and reports from seminars and meetings on the topic (which was limited due to time constraints), a number of interviews with young people from the region were conducted.

WHAT WERE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH?

- to highlight the role of young people in intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region;
- to identify young people that are active in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region and look into their personal opinions, as a way of spotlighting key issues in the topic;
- to examine what are some of the barriers and challenges that are hindering young people from taking a more active role in promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region;
- to make reference to policies, support mechanisms and tools that young people have at their disposal;
- to identify examples of how young people overcome prejudice and xenophobia through their activities and give ideas for future projects.

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

In order to get a deeper understanding of this multi-faced and complex topic, the study opted for a qualitative methodological approach. The main tool for the study was semi-structured interviews conducted with a total of 30 young people and youth workers that are contributing with their activities in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region. This methodology was chosen because interviewing gives us access to the observations of others and allows us to learn about people’s interior experiences, while in the same time we learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions (Weiss, 1994:1). Further criteria were defined to guarantee a balanced representation of country of origin, gender, age groups, sector of activity, activity type etc, however due to time limitations and lack of replies from a number of organisations or people contacted, the young people interviewed represent a rather “spontaneous” body of respondents.

There are two distinct categories of potential responders to an interview-based study: “people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were privileged witnesses to an event; and people who, taken together, display what happens within a population affected by a situation or event” (Weiss, 1994:17). In this research, the young people interviewed were both ‘privileged witnesses’ of a set of activities and actions related to the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean and in the same time they were chosen because all together they form a ‘mosaic’ of what young people in the region do in relation to the topic. The selection of people interviewed was made through suggestions from institutions active in the field and from the network of personal contacts that directed me accordingly.

In any case, this study does not pretend to be a thorough analysis of the topic - for which more resources and further research should be undertaken if we want to have a clearer picture in the future. This study is just a first approach to the subject and for sure there are many more initiatives and activities taking place, which would be interesting to map as they can be very inspiring for young people and useful to policy-making.
Through complex dynamics of meaning-making, the opinions of young people both inform and are informed by the positions they as individuals or as part of a group occupy in the here and now. “Interviews can never be transparent windows in other people’s minds, in that all interviews and all conversations between people are in some sense performances: we tell ourselves in different ways to different people in accordance with who we think we are, and how we want them to see us” (Mathews, 2000:29). However, I should underline that most of the people I spoke to, managed to free themselves from any form of ‘representation’: they all spoke on their own, individual and personal capacity.

The interviews were either conducted in person in different cities where I had the opportunity to be during the time of the study or through skype. In very few cases and due to technological limitations, problems related to internet access and time differences, the questions were sent to the interviewees that replied back in writing. The fact that the study had to be conducted during the summer period posed some problems in getting immediate responses from several people.

Through questions on the personal life stories of the young people interviewed, I tried to find answers to a number of questions. What motivates young people to get engaged in activities that promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region? What kind of activities have taken place, what tools have been developed and what initiatives have been undertaken in this context in the region during the last few years? Do young people see any perceivable advantages for themselves for engaging in interfaith and intercultural dialogue in the region? How do they see their role in this direction? Which common values do they see that they could help to disseminate? How? What kind of support do they need to achieve this? What are the barriers they face and what solutions do they propose?

The choice to make a profile of each person interviewed was taken in order to give an overview of the different activities, initiatives and projects that reflect the role of young people in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region. In the same time, quotations of the young people are employed throughout the text, reflecting on their opinions and thoughts on the topic. And that’s simply for one reason:

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK BETTER FOR THEMSELVES.
I. Understanding the Mediterranean
I. Understanding the Mediterranean

What is the Mediterranean?

Obviously no single brief answer can be given to such a question.

Geographically speaking, the Mediterranean is a sea covering an approximate area of 2.5 million km² and almost completely enclosed by land: on the North by Europe and Anatolia, on the South by North Africa and on the East by the Levant. Geography has played an important role in the creation of the Mediterranean ‘region’. Despite the fact of being a sea, Trump (1980:3) even defines the Mediterranean as “a peninsula in reverse”. Being the meeting place of three continents - Africa, Asia and Europe - the Mediterranean has many of the qualities of a frontier where peoples and cultures meet and mix. But, “the Mediterranean is not merely geography” (Matvejevic, 1999:7). For its people, the Mediterranean is much more.

Historically speaking, it was around the Mediterranean sea that the Phoenician, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Arab and Persian cultures originated and developed. All these civilizations have always been crucial to understanding the development of modern civilizations up to the present day. Braudel (1985:157) argues that “the history of the Mediterranean constitutes a mass of knowledge that defies all reasonable synthesis”. But “the Mediterranean is not merely history” (Matvejevic, 1999:10). For its people, the Mediterranean is much more.

Geography and history bring to the Mediterranean a unique character. However, exactly because the Mediterranean has been “the meeting place of three continents and the melting pot of even more civilizations, it has never enjoyed a lasting power balance” (Gasteyger, 2006:3). Being a geographical frontier and a meeting point of many important civilisations, the Mediterranean has been a space where the quest for power and the effort to impose over the “Other” through conflict, have predominated. But the Mediterranean is not merely conflict. For its people, the Mediterranean is much more.

Geography, history and conflict unite and separate the Mediterranean in the same time. Even today, the Mediterranean basin, which counts as the ‘cradle of civilizations’, is still from one hand characterised by pronounced political, cultural and socio-economic heterogeneity and in the same time by conflicts between and within states and groups for political, historical or cultural reasons. “Nations and races have conjoined and disjoined here over the centuries; more people have lived with one another and clashed with one another here than perhaps anywhere on the planet” (Matvejevic, 1999:10). Trying to identify the similarities and outline the differences of the Mediterranean people could be a very challenging but over-aspiring exercise. For its people, the Mediterranean is much more.

Can the Mediterranean be felt?

Matvejevic (1999:3) argues that “anyone, regardless of place of birth or residence, can become a Mediterranean. Mediterraneanity is acquired, not inherited; it is a decision, not a privilege [...]. Being Mediterranean entails more than history or geography, tradition or memory, birthright or belief. The Mediterranean is destiny”. If the Mediterranean is destiny, it is linked with the life of its people, which means that there could be as many definitions of the Mediterranean as its people. We would say simply that we can find ‘mediterraneanity’ in the system of values, in the lived, in the experience.

Young people that live in the Mediterranean were asked what it means to them. Giovanni Corbo from Italy during the interview said that “there is a certain sense of belonging to a Mediterranean identity; people from the Mediterranean we do things the same way, we enjoy life, we are passionate and our
approach to people is warm and inclusive”. Eleni Michail from Cyprus, said that “Mediterranean people we are welcoming, open-hearted, helpful, kind and hospitable”. Yael Gidanyan from Israel said, “I have never been asked if I feel Mediterranean... now that you point it out, I would say yes, because when I’ve been in other Mediterranean countries, I’ve felt connected because of the food, the environment, the music, the atmosphere, peoples’ behavior, the common history...”. Ahmad Alhindawi from Jordan said that “four years ago I doubted if there was something like a Mediterranean identity; after I have been in 10 of the Mediterranean countries, I think there is: seeing the architecture, the food, the habits and the people made me change my mind completely”, while Abdel Aziz from Tunisia said that “my country is part of the ‘Mare Nostrum’; I adore the Mediterranean sea, the Mediterranean character and the fun side of the Mediterraneans, their loud voice and the way they worship life”. And to the question whether there are common Mediterranean values, Andreja Aušperger from Croatia said that “there are many shared values, but as the most common I see friendship, tolerance, respect, cooperation and recognizing the importance of all of these for the future”.

The Mediterranean is the result of the mix of human beings and the cross-fertilisation of ideas and

---

**Alessandro di Maio (28)**  
Student and Freelance Journalist based in Jerusalem, Italian

Alessandro always dreamt of becoming a journalist and started the adventure on his own: back in 2004 he created an on-line newspaper in six different languages where the content was produced by young people from all around the world¹. In 2009, he won the selection for the EuroMediterranean Academy for Journalists² and moved to Amsterdam for a short period of study. There he wrote two reportages about Muslim immigrants and then won two awards: the “Bonelli Italian Journalist Award” and the “Council of Europe Youth Media Award”.

Alessandro feels proud of being Mediterranean. “I come from the biggest island in the Mediterranean, Sicily, an island marked by integration and by war and I want to see my island in the future as it was in the past: a space of genuine cultural encounter”. Two years ago, Alessandro moved to Israel and today he lives in Jerusalem, “a place desired by everyone”. This autumn he will start a masters in Islamic and Middle East studies. Living in Israel gave him the opportunity to get to know the culture and the dynamics of this country, meet its people and break prejudices. But this works the other way as well. “I also feel that in a way I represent someone from the western world and I thus contribute in breaking stereotypes”, he says. When he goes back to Italy he feels that he will be able to maintain the connections and build bridges between the two countries.

Alessandro works as a free-lance journalist, but he feels sorry that the work of a journalist is conditioned by counting words and that there are very few media where one can publish real reportages, real stories. “A journalist has a great responsibility”, he says, “especially in breaking stereotypes”. “When I write”, he says, “I know that it is mainly Italians that read me, but what I try - in a small scale - is to bring material to a debate that is missing and is important for Italy because of its geographical proximity, the intercultural connections and the political impacts, especially the ones related to migration”. Alessandro wants to be a war journalist because “in war there is the worst and the best of human being: people become animals but in the same time they show their solidarity to humanity” and he wants to tell people these stories in order “to help them to grow”.

Alessandro likes taking photos that sometimes get published in international media. He says that “with words you cannot describe everything; although photos are not the reality itself, they are a representation of reality: behind colors or facial expressions, there is a world, a human story”. His photo exhibition about the daily life in Israel and Palestine toured Italy and Europe getting glowing reviews.

You can read Alessandro’s stories on his blog [http://www.alessandrodimaio.com](http://www.alessandrodimaio.com)

---

¹ [http://www.laspecula.com](http://www.laspecula.com)  
² The EuroMediterranean Academy for Young Journalists (EMAJ) is a workshop that brings together young journalists from the EU and MENA regions. Until today this has happened in three occasions: in 2008 in Amman, Jordan, in 2009 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands and in 2012 in Alexandria, Egypt. Since 2010, EMAJ is an independent non-profit organisation, based in Sweden and run by the members of the network. This has resulted in the EMAJ Magazine ([http://enajmagazine.com](http://enajmagazine.com)) which focuses on issues related to the European Union, Middle East and North Africa with special regard to the relationship between the regions as well as human rights, intercultural dialogue and immigration.
images. It is a geographical space but also a space nurtured by (collective) memories and nostalgia. It is a historical “matrix” where “antagonism and conflict, unity and diversity, complementarities and antagonism, dialogue and fanaticism, unity and diversity, fundamentalism and tolerance” (Morin: 2003:1998-1999) have coexisted throughout history and up to the present life. This highlights the role of the Mediterranean as “a mediator and boundary, as zone of transition and agent of comparison and differentiation” (Horden, 2000:460).

As a unique space for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, we would add. And this explains why young people, even those that do not live geographically in this region, are interested in the dynamics of the region for the potential it brings for the dialogue between cultures - something that they can also transfer into their own local environments. That’s why this study encompasses a general scope of EuroMediterranean dialogue and is not limited to initiatives or young people that live or come from one of the Mediterranean countries. It refers to all those who feel that the region offers a unique opportunity for the understanding of cultures.

Mediterranean separating boundaries

“A conflict begins and ends in the hearts and minds of people, not in the hilltops”

Amos Oz, Israeli writer

In the Barcelona Declaration¹ we read that there are “unifying” images of the Mediterranean, such as the “birthplace of three monotheistic religions” and an “area of cross-cultural fertilization”. Seen as a geographical and as a figured world, the Mediterranean boundaries “are drawn in neither space nor time. There

¹ The Barcelona Declaration signed in 1995 is the founding act of a comprehensive partnership between the European Union (EU) and twelve countries in the Southern Mediterranean. This partnership aims to turn the Mediterranean into a common area of peace, stability and prosperity through the reinforcement of political dialogue, security, and economic, financial, social and cultural cooperation.
is in fact no way of drawing them: they are neither ethnic nor historical, state or national; they are like a chalk circle that is constantly traced and erased, that the winds and waves, that obligations and inspirations expand or reduce” (Matvejevic, 1999:10). But the fact is that the Mediterranean has been a region of boundaries. Horden (2000:22) argues that “the most sharply defined boundaries […] that have customarily been taken to fracture any concept of the wholeness of the Mediterranean basin, are in every sense political” and he continues by explaining that this emphasis on politics is the result of:

- the creation of the nation-states and their determination to establish ‘national frontiers’ based on the criteria of ethnic exclusiveness;
- the use of war for the settlement of disputes;
- the long history of profound religions, mainly the division between Christendom and Islam which has further enhanced the division between North and South.

The region has been marked by conflicts and difference. These boundaries have brought people apart. In conceiving, however, peace as what we have when creative conflict transformation takes place non-violently (Galtung, 1996) and that region-building works through the construction of collective regional understandings, especially through the development of new and encompassing social identities (Adler and Crawford, 2006), we understand that this process cannot be a monolog. That’s where intercultural and interfaith dialogue come into the picture. And this is where young people meeting and working together can bring an added value for the

Elina Makri (30)
Journalist, Greek

Elina was born in Athens, where she still lives. She belongs to a generation that, in her own words, “is full of yeast” (as the Greek saying goes, placing the focus on the special characteristics of our generation). She talks about the ‘Greek revolution’, the opportunities that arise in a situation of general crisis (referring mainly to the economic crisis) and the dynamism that each young person has inside. Elina observes and writes. She is an engaged young journalist that believes that the Mediterranean is experiencing a historic moment. “The Mediterranean is in full swing”, she states smiling. Although she says that she is a bit afraid because young people are detached from politics and “this can be dangerous”, Elina believes that young people have the power to change the course of things.

Elina only left Greece to study Law in France and International and European Law in Belgium. Returning to Greece in 2006, she founded immediately the Greek branch of the pan European magazine cafebabel.com, which at the time was the first online European magazine for young people. She still manages Babel Greece and is a member of the Steering Committee of Babel International. She was among the people who initiated the project ‘Europe on the ground’ that won the 1st Charlemagne Youth Prize of the European Parliament 2012 and the 3rd Intercultural innovation award 2011 promoted by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The project consists in sending young citizen journalists in european cities to report on cultural diversity in order to combat racism and xenophobia in Europe.

Her Law studies helped her to develop a global vision of the world but professionally she dedicated herself in journalism. Elina is a producer and presenter of a web TV programme on innovation and start ups. She also works as project manager of journalistic ventures. Elina talked with enthusiasm about a new project she has initiated and is called Oikomedia (www.oikomedia.org). The project consists in the creation of a Mediterranean network of journalists and media fixers (professionals who help foreign correspondents and agencies in their investigations on the ground providing contacts, translations, background information and whatever a good story needs before ‘traveling’ to the media). Her vision and purpose behind this venture is to produce high quality journalism, with direct ‘ingress’ to local communities and local ‘addictions’, offering mainly bridges and avoiding fast conclusions over different realities of different societies. The project starts from the Mediterranean region and aims to become a global media network in the future. Elina is also currently working on a documentary with fellow young people from Turkey on the consecutive civilisations that have flourished and existed in the city of Istanbul.

Elina believes that media have an important role in the promotion of intercultural and interfait dialogue in the Mediterranean. “As journalists we train the consciousness of other people”, she says. And she adds that “only when you engage you can change the course of things- and this should never be done with a fanatic attitude”. 
The Mediterranean in ‘full swing’

Referring to Valery’s lecture ‘Inspirations Mediterranéennes’ in 1933, Lunel Armand observed: “The Mediterranean is in fashion at the moment. Perhaps, even more than a fashion that is spreading, it is a myth in a state of gestation”. In our days, more than eighty years later, one of the young people interviewed, Elina Makri, a young journalist from Greece, said that “today the Mediterranean cosmos is in full swing”, referring to the importance that the region has acquired in media and politics during the last few years. It seems that the Mediterranean ‘myth’ is contemporary in every historical moment. But as Alessandro di Maio, a young Italian journalist interviewed said, “in the 18th century there was an interest in the Mediterranean for being ‘exotic’; the western world wanted to know how people live there, their customs, how they make love… this interest evolved in a political, economic and social interest which in many cases resulted in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region that can be the basis of peace and stability.

Abdel Aziz Hali (32)
Blogger and Journalist-Reporter, Tunisian

“I haven’t always been a journalist”, says Abdel when I ask him to talk to me about himself. And he continues by telling me in details what he studied (engineering in petroleum, mining and hydraulic geology) and where (Tunisia and France) and on what he worked before (teacher in a elementary school, professor of chemistry) that combined with freelance journalism for some magazines and e-newspapers (Le Temps, L’Expression, Tunis Hebdo, Tekiano.com, investirentunisie.info) until he finally found his place: he became a full-time journalist-reporter.

Abdel Aziz writes in French for the daily newspaper “La Presse de Tunisie” and has his own blog “Journal-is-me”, where he publishes his articles. Abdel Aziz writes about the Tunisian society, about corruption, about the role of social media, about censorship and the freedom of expression, about the young people that brought the revolution, that questioned the society in which they were living and weren’t afraid to raise their voices. “But in general, I am a multi-task journalist”, he says smiling.

Abdel Aziz won in 2011 one of the Anna Lindh Journalist Awards, the Special Award on Democracy and Social Change for his series of articles ‘Once upon a time, there were two revolutions’ published in La Presse, where he was reflecting on the similarities of the revolutions in Tunisia and in Egypt, “two parallel roads that did not cross each other”, as he says. The award for him was a privilege. “It is the first time a Tunisian journalist gets such an award and it helped me meet other journalists and people that make me realise that my work is useful”, he says and adds that “I think it gives an example to other Tunisian young journalists that journalism in our country is not any more about propaganda, but it can really be a fourth power”.

Abdel Aziz observes that “in Tunisia we are about to see a regression; people do not regret the old regime, but the order that reigned (clean streets, civic awareness and respect for each other)- now there is a loss of identity”. Before the revolution, he says, his country has always been “open to all different cultures” and adds that “muslims, jews, christians, we all lived and coexisted peacefully together; it was part of our DNA”. And after the revolution? “What reigns now is radicalisation and excessive religiosity”, he says but this doesn’t prevent him to keep his smile. “I am optimist”, he says, “after the French Revolution in 1789, it took 100 years to the French to enjoy democracy and freedom of expression - we still have a long way here to go, but the work of young people that engage in civil society and that are active through social media is very promising”.

You can read Abdel’s articles in his blog: http://abdel-aziz-hali.blogspot.com

1 The Anna Lindh Journalist Award was created in 2006, and is organised in collaboration with COPEAM, the European Commission and the Allianz Cultural Foundation. Journalists of written press, television, radio and new media, citizens of the 42 countries of the Union for the Mediterranean are invited to submit their works that should tackle intercultural issues between and within the Euro-Mediterranean societies. More information on http://www.euromedalex.org/fields/media-activities/journalist-award/about-the-award (date accessed 09.09.2012)

2 Armand, Lunel, “Paul Valery, la Mediterranee et l’humanisme”, Cahiers du Sud 183 (May 1936), 401- 7 (p.401)
in colonialism; today we have the tools for a achieving a better debate based on a dialogue between equals”.

Undoubtedly, the Mediterranean is a buzzword at this moment. Federica Cicala from Italy said that “there is a lot of attention in the region, because there is a huge state of interests”. Unresolved conflicts that bring to the surface power relations, the democratic changes underway, economic interests in the region, the financial crisis, challenges posed by the climate change, the role of religion in social and political relations as well as the issue of increasing immigration flows from the Southern to the Northern part of the Mediterranean are some of the reasons why this region has attracted a lot of attention.

The Arab Spring has marked an important moment in the history of the Mediterranean. Hamid Dabashi in his book ‘The Arab Spring’ (2012) argues that the revolutionary uprisings that have engulfed multiple countries and political climes in the Southern Mediterranean, were driven by a “delayed defiance” - a point of rebellion against domestic tyranny and globalised disempowerment alike - that signifies no less than the end of postcolonialism. He also argues that what the Arab Spring brought to the surface was “a retrieval of a cosmopolitan worldliness that was always there but repressed under the duress of a dialectic sustained between domestic tyranny and globalized imperialism” (Dabashi, 2012:11). This sense of ‘cosmopolitan worldliness’ is what brought people together during the revolutions and what can open the avenues of future cooperations.

Rashida Gokcebag (18)
Student, Turkish Cypriot

Rashida just turned 18 and wants to study International Relations and Political science because, as she says, “when there is a change or a conflict on the international scene, I would like to be able to understand, to have access to it and through my studies I want to gain knowledge and experience that I could offer in conflict resolution, social work or humanitarian aid”.

In August 2011 Rachida participated in the Faith Based Youth Dialogue Forum that took place in the divided capital of Cyprus, Nicosia, at both sides of the buffer zone. The youth encounter brought together a total of 40 young people aged 15 to 17 from Cyprus (both Greek and Turkish Cypriots) as well as from Palestine and Israel. The idea behind the project was that although the Cyprus conflict is not a religious conflict, Christians and Muslims are separated and there is a responsibility within the religious communities and their leaders to look for ways to establish a dialogue. The choice of bringing young people form the two Mediterranean conflict zones was that, “although the Cyprus conflict and the Arab-Israeli one are geographically close to each other, they are very different in history and intensity” and since “both conflicts are suffering with strong images of the enemy […] bringing young people together from both conflicts, all parties had a possibility to learn from one another and to start building mutual trust and develop friendship”. Rashida and other Greek and Turkish Cypriot youth had for the first time the opportunity to learn about each others faith and culture, build bridges and work on peace and reconciliation. A documentary “Peace in My Land” is under production right now with young people as its protagonists, aiming to demonstrate the importance of dialogue in peace-building and the positive role religion can play in Cyprus.

Rachida considers that this kind of initiatives are very important for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean because young people get to debate about “their side of the story, and this is a real debate that does not remain on the superficial level”. “We didn’t necessarily agree, but at least we explained why”, she says.

Rachida has been raised in a religious environment, however religion to her “is not about sticking to obligatory duties but having the opportunity to turn to your religion every time you need answers and ask yourself who are your role models” and adds that “religion for me is everything not only because I am able to find it, but because it is there; lots of people just take it for granted - I wish they could feel it but I am happy if they can at least respect it and this can only be achieved through dialogue”.

1 The youth encounter was an idea that was born out of dialogue meetings between the head of the Church of Cyprus, HB Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus and all of Justinia and the Grand Mufti of Cyprus, HE Mr Talip Atalay and supported by the initiative on the religious track of the Cyprus peace process under the auspices of the Swedish Embassy in Cyprus.

2 Taken from the report of the Faith based Youth Dialogue Forum (Cyprus, July- August 2011)
However, the revolutions that took place during the Arab Spring, as Olga Rodriguez (2012:14) says in her book ‘Yo muero hoy’3, “have been a state of mind, an attitude dominated by an optimism adopted not from naivety or ignorance, but from the awareness of the risk that choices incur” because “only from the belief that change is possible, one can manifest, fight and even put his life into danger“.

A lot has been discussed and written on the role of young people in these revolutions. For many the revolution actually started from an episode that had as protagonist a young man: on the 17th of December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old vendor from Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia set himself on fire in protest against the confiscation of his produce cart. From that moment, the revolutions started in a domino process and young people took the lead. They ran to the squares and to the streets, they got together, they claimed their rights, they initiated and gave ‘rhythm’ to the protests. They dreamt a better life and used all the means they had to achieve it, including social media that were brought to the forefront of these protests and were converted in platforms of freedom of expression and democratic participation. The Arab Spring is often mentioned to have been the source of a contagious revolutionary mood for European youth as well: thousands of young people run to the streets from Spain to Greece and from there to the UK and other countries, expressing their indignation to the current political, social and economic situation and requesting better conditions. These revolutions brought

Yael Gidanyan  (26)
Student and youth activist, Israeli

Yael volunteers with an organization working with interfaith groups in Israel, the Interfaith Encounter Association1, established in 2001 and which supplements existing interfaith efforts by putting into place interactive strategies to draw larger numbers of individuals into the circle of interfaith dialogue that would result in true and lasting changes in the outlook and attitudes of participants. The associations mission statement says that “rather than being a cause of the problem, religion can and should be a source of the solution for conflicts that exist in the region and beyond”. Today the association has around 35 active groups around the Holy Land (including West Bank) that meet once a month and talk about different issues. “We avoid talking about politics, but politics often come up because things happen all the time; but if there is a good connection in the groups, we manage to bring people even closer together”, says Yael.

Yael is responsible for the coordination of the youth and student groups of the organisation and points out that in Israel “when you are 18, you go to the army - and then you are not considered youth anymore”. Yael feels that is urgent to reach young people beyond youth organisations, in universities or in places where they simply hang out. “Some young people are not connected to religion at all, but many times that I invite them to participate in a meeting, they see that there is a space where you can meet real people and the connections built are very strong; the group is becoming a family for them”. And on the other hand, this kind of activities give an opportunity to young people from religious backgrounds to come together and this is unique because “usually they do not associate with peace work and they don’t relate to the “Other”; but through these groups they find a way not to deny or intimidate their identity, but participate by being themselves”. Yael also feels that the fact that the organisation is not political, it helps bring people together. “But this is an ongoing work, you cannot achieve results in a limited time - connections are build throughout the years”, she says.

When Yael participates in exchanges or conferences abroad, she realizes how much Israeli and Palestinian people are close to each other. “When we meet Europeans, suddenly we become very close and people from Europe don’t recognise the difference; this brings us closer to each other”, she says. That’s why she considers that the work done in her association is crucial and says that “we need a long term process of reconciliation and there is no magical solution” and adds that “our way can be a solution, but I don’t know; I see that it builds peace, and resolves small conflict among people, but this is a very long process”.

Yael is currently writing her thesis for her Masters in Middle Eastern Studies on the conceptions of Palestinians towards European volunteers and workers that are working to support the Palestinian resistance or struggle. “I also do interviews, as you do”, she says, “and this helps me understand a lot the different realities”.

However, the revolutions that took place during the Arab Spring, as Olga Rodriguez (2012:14) says in her book ‘Yo muero hoy’, “have been a state of mind, an attitude dominated by an optimism adopted not from naivety or ignorance, but from the awareness of the risk that choices incur” because “only from the belief that change is possible, one can manifest, fight and even put his life into danger”.

A lot has been discussed and written on the role of young people in these revolutions. For many the revolution actually started from an episode that had as protagonist a young man: on the 17th of December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old vendor from Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia set himself on fire in protest against the confiscation of his produce cart. From that moment, the revolutions started in a domino process and young people took the lead. They ran to the squares and to the streets, they got together, they claimed their rights, they initiated and gave ‘rhythm’ to the protests. They dreamt a better life and used all the means they had to achieve it, including social media that were brought to the forefront of these protests and were converted in platforms of freedom of expression and democratic participation. The Arab Spring is often mentioned to have been the source of a contagious revolutionary mood for European youth as well: thousands of young people run to the streets from Spain to Greece and from there to the UK and other countries, expressing their indignation to the current political, social and economic situation and requesting better conditions. These revolutions brought

---

1  http://interfaithencounter.wordpress.com

3 “Yo muero hoy” means “I die today” and was one of the phrases that young people during the revolution used to express their determination of fighting for their cause.
hope and confirmed the interconnectedness of the EuroMediterranean region. And of course the important role that young people can and actually do play in it.

Almost all young people interviewed for the purpose of this research made a reference to the Arab Spring as being something that marks ‘a before’ and ‘an after’ in the EuroMediterranean relations. Most of the young people think that the Arab Spring contributed to a certain sense of ‘belonging’ which requires from young people to take a more and more active role in their societies through the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. “Because our daily life is affected by the geopolitics of the region”, said Giovanni Corbo from Italy, understanding this scenario is of primary importance. Dabashi (2012) explains that the “permanent revolutionary mood” that started with the Arab Spring has the potential to liberate not only those societies already ignited, but many others through a universal geopolitics of hope. The consequent wave of protests in Europe following the Arab Spring has undoubtedly proved that there are strong horizontal links between the North and the South Mediterranean and that these links are stronger than ever. They have also proved that youth can be a socio-political actor that brings change and this cannot be ignored and they have inspired other young people. Yael Gidanyan from Israel said “I believe in the power of young people, but I am not sure that it is in their state of mind; people are still quite individualistic, although the last two years with the Arab Spring, the protests in Europe and in Israel, there is a sign of change....”, while Rana Yazaji from Syria said that “the political change that brought 2011 has pushed young people to be activists not only inside their countries, but also outside: young people found themselves as spokespersons for their country and their generation”.

Sezen Tonguz (30)
Artist / Performer, Turkish

Her father calls her “citizen of the world”. She doesn’t like definitions though. “When I travel, I try to bring something of me and get something from where I am at that moment; traveling helps breaking preconceptions”, she says. Born and raised in Istanbul, Sezen lives, creates and performs in different cities around the world. She has spent many years in Portugal studying and working. At the moment of the interview she was in an artistic residency in the Netherlands. And she didn’t know where she would go next. “Hopefully one day I will have a house somewhere”, she said, but she realises that mobility is an intrinsic part of her profession and a unique opportunity to showcase her work, receive inspiration and encounter other artists from other countries and realities. “My dream is to create an artistic residency in Istanbul”, she says, “that would give the opportunity to young artists to work and explore other realities”.

In 2002 she became an active member of Catidans’, an association in Istanbul aiming at supporting and encouraging creative efforts within the field of contemporary dance and making connections with international partners. “Next week we have a workshop by Greek choreographers”, she says smiling and adds that “in the arts, the Turkish-Greek fights do not appear at all, this is a political game”. In 2007 Sezen was involved in the organization in Istanbul of the annual meeting of Danse Bassin Méditerranée (Mediterranean Dance Network), an international network that gathers Mediterranean artists and cultural operators with the goal of stimulating the production, research and distribution of contemporary dance within the region. “This kind of networks increase visibility of an artist’s work and give a platform for the exchange of ideas, however they need to be sustainable”, she says lamenting that the network has been quite inactive lately.

Her latest work, ‘Invisible act’ is an attempt to generate tactics of invisibility of the movement and the body. What she wants to show is “an invisible body that belongs to multiple origins, languages, geographies, nations” and through her performance “introduce different variations of being oneself with the potential of re-writing itself anytime”. Though photographic captures of the body, she explores the “boundaries between what belongs to us” and the territories that we have not stepped before, as these territories “lie at the tip of our finger”. “Where I’ve grown up reflects on my work and if people that saw the performance, knew I was from Turkey, they might make a connection with religion, from the fact that I am covering and uncovering my body- this is not my direct point though, there is a connection, but making assumptions can be a bit tricky”, she says, hoping that arts can help to break prejudices and preconceptions.

1 www.catidans.org
However, some of the people interviewed were also skeptical about the meaning of the Arab Spring (and the revolutions in Europe) and about the way it has been used as a metaphor to serve other political goals. “I am not that naive to think that the Arab spring started just from young people; things are more complicated”, said Elina Makri from Greece, while Abdel Aziz from Tunisia added that “the revolution was not as spontaneous as we want to think it was; however the geopolitics of the world are about to change”.

In general terms, almost all of the agreed that the Arab Spring “will bring a more vital role in the dialogue and in how people see themselves and are seen by the others”, as Anas Nowafleh from Jordan pointed out. Those young people who actually were and are involved in conceiving and managing social transformation are in reality imagining what is desirable but in the same time achievable. It goes without saying, that “this particular historical moment we are living in, is the first concrete window of opportunity to make a positive change since the ’70s, and it would be blind policy not to invest now in our future, as it is represented by youth” (Abrignani, 2011:4). Using the words of Ryan Mercieca from Malta, “young people should be interested because to a certain extent it will affect their way of living; as time is passing by, we are moving towards a more globalised world and the EuroMed countries are getting more and more closer” and he adds that “if youth lacks the understanding of this scenario and the importance of this relation, the more difficult or even dangerous it would be in the future”. This new environment poses a lot of responsibility upon the shoulders of young people, but it can also be seen as an opportunity. As Sonia Mejri from France pointed out, “we as young people, we need to take advantage of this ‘political coincidence’ to ask ourselves the right questions and get more engaged in the promotion of intercultural dialogue”.

So, if it is all about dialogue, “CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS?”
II. Intercultural and Interfaith dialogue
II. Intercultural and Interfaith dialogue

Can we talk about this?4

“People thus had three choices when they encountered the Other: they could chose war, they could build a wall around themselves, or they could enter into dialogue”

Ryszard Kapuscinski, Polish journalist

Since the end of the 20th century, the dialogue between cultures has been enhanced on a global level as a means of contrasting the process of culturalisation of conflicts and of bringing people together. Since the end of the Cold War and the advent of the internet era, intercultural dialogue has been often linked to cultural diplomacy which comprises all activities that occur outside the traditional enclaves of diplomacy and favor a more informal, citizen-to-citizen approach that emphasizes exchange and encounter. Often seen as a response to the famous ‘clash of civilizations’ understanding of the world promoted by the American scholar Samuel Huntington (1996), intercultural dialogue (understood as inclusive of interfaith dialogue) is much more than this.

There are many definitions of culture and intercultural dialogue and the scope of this study is not to go through them. We can say, that culture can be understood as “the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and which is transmitted from generation to generation through learning” and “the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people” (Bates and Plog, 1990). And using the Council of Europe’s definition”, intercultural dialogue is “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect”. It is a process that implies an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural or faith backgrounds, or even world views.

It is true that ‘intercultural dialogue’ is a concept widely used in European terms and has been promoted as the basis of the strive for open european ‘multicultural’ societies based on respect of the otherness. Today, even if one could say that multiculturalism, a strategy followed during the last decades in Europe in the name of cultural diversity is actually being questioned (Lentin and Tittley, 2011), the need for dialogue is still there. And if until so far intercultural dialogue has been a focus of attention in Europe, in Southern Mediterranean countries - although the need is still there - this issue has raised less attention, mainly because, as Ahmad Alhindawi from Jordan said, “intercultural dialogue is a hot topic in Europe because it is related to the question of identity and of migration and how it influences policies; in the Southern Mediterranean it is a topic, but we do not see it; there are so many other priority topics on the list - from democracy building to poverty - that asking about intercultural dialogue is like asking whether you want strawberry over the cream”.

In any case, intercultural and interfaith dialogue are recognised among young people as a necessary step for achieving peace and stability. And this because both concepts imply an opening, an invitation to understand. In their own words, these are some of the comments young people made in relation to intercultural and interfaith dialogue:

4 “Can we talk about this?” is the title of a performance by DV8, “a verbatim theater work investigating the interrelated issues of freedom of speech, multiculturalism and Islam as manifest in Western democracies”. More information at http://www.dv8.co.uk/projects/canwetalkaboutthis/ (date accessed 01.09.2012)
• “Intercultural and interfaith dialogue is the acceptance of diverse and different beliefs, ways of living, habits and worldviews without imposing yours as the one and only correct” (Andreja Aušperger, Croatia)
• “Intercultural and interfaith dialogue is a question of surviving; we are living more and more in mixed realities and we need to break the prejudices and learn who we really are” (Amanda Figueras, Spain)
• “Intercultural dialogue is the basis of tolerance and understanding that could lead to acceptance and peaceful coexistence. If we all agree on that purpose, then we will no longer need to speak of intercultural dialogue, as the term itself implies a form of segregation, therefore is a paradox in relation to its purpose” (Rania El Ampasy, Greek/ Egyptian)
• “For me interfaith and intercultural dialogue is not only a subject between people from different countries or different religions but also between people from the same orientation” (Reem Kaseem, Egypt)

What is also very important is what Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan from Morocco pointed out: “the most important thing about intercultural dialogue is that we should not try to play a role to please the other by responding to what he is expecting from us; young people might feel exploited if they realise they are there to prove something that they don’t really are; and this can be dangerous”. This means that intercultural dialogue is actually an invitation to being oneself.

Anas studied English Language and Literature in Jordan. Being interested in “understanding how this world runs”, he did a MA in Public Policy and Management in South Korea. Anas has developed extensive experience as a youth activist since his student years and he often participates as trainer in youth activities and meetings. His first international youth project participation experience, within the framework of peace building and intercultural dialogue, was in an international student festival in Norway in 2009 under the title ‘Peace-building through migration’ and since then he has been cooperating with many local and international NGOs and institutions, including the Leaders of Tomorrow youth network, MEPI, “We are all Jordan” and the Jordan network of the Anna Lindh Foundation and INJAZ (spin-off junior achievement Intl.). Moreover, he has taken part in many intercultural activities related to intercultural dialogue and understanding, peace building and development through cooperation.

Anas argues that “for Arab young people the matter of identity had been affected after the events of the 9/11”. To this negative image he adds that “some politicians in European and the West in general try to use xenophobia as a tool to gain support from the citizens” and that “media often are showing only one side of the story”. Anas makes reference to the Amman message, a statement issued on the 9th of November 2004 by King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan calling for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world and for an understanding of how Arabs in the region look at the world. But for achieving this kind of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, a kind of “introspection” needs to take place so that everyone becomes first of all aware of his own identity before engaging in the dialogue with the “Other”. Anas makes a special reference to an initiative of the organization Leaders of Tomorrow in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation under the title “The colors of our country”, a project that brings together young Jordanians from all the country to explore and give answers to the question “what does it mean to be Jordanian?”.

Anas believes in the important role of young people in policy making regarding the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region. But when asked why he thinks young people are not engaging in projects of such nature, he states that “economic reasons force them to put their attention to other issues”. However, he notes that “I would not call this ignorance, I would call it lack of awareness”. He also considers that young people have a great possibility through social media to express themselves easier and get other people to share their ideas, but, as he says, “this is a process that should be built upon trust and real shared values”.

Anas future plans are to contribute to better intercultural dialogue through policy research.
Among the aims of intercultural dialogue we could identify the following:

- to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices;
- to increase participation and the ability to make choices;
- to foster and promote equality;
- to embrace differences and universal values in any given culture;
- to help shatter historical and current stereotypes and illusions.

The term interfaith dialogue refers to the positive interaction between people of different religious traditions or spiritual beliefs and aims at promoting understanding among them to increase acceptance of others, and we prefer to use this term instead of ‘inter-religious dialogue’, to include other kind of humanistic beliefs. Also for the purpose of the study, we understand that intercultural dialogue encompasses interfaith dialogue, although it is a subject that gives a lot of food for reflection.

Intercultural dialogue therefore is understood as a process, not as an aim in itself. As Giovanni Corbo from Italy said, “intercultural dialogue is not an aim itself; it is a means to achieve other things and above all it is a means to understand one’s own identity and overcome feelings of xenophobia”. Intercultural dialogue is an attitude, a state of mind. It is about openness to difference.

Amanda Figueras Fernández
Journalist, Spanish

Amanda is a journalist and she works to promote a different vision on other cultures. “We focus only on anecdotes and we don’t see what there is behind”, she says. Raised in Madrid, Amanda holds a degree in Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid and she received an Erasmus grant to study at the Universidade Católica in Lisbon, Portugal. Amanda is a participant at the Abraham Interfaith Forum and since 2004 she has undertaken an informal study of islamic culture in numerous countries- a fact reflected by her numerous articles on muslim affairs. “My implication derives from my own personal experience, my own travels, my own life and from realizing the amount of ignorance that prevails in the spanish society on other cultures and religions”, she says. Amanda observes that the stories that are presented on spanish media are “over-generalistic, rather basic and feed into the prejudices talking only about what lies on the surface”. She says also that the issue of intercultural and interfaith dialogue has no visibility because it is not on the agenda, “neither the political nor the cultural one”. “Those topics are only discussed when there is a problem; there is no policy of prevention”, she says.

Amanda has a large experience working for elmundo.es website. She was the founder of the European Affairs section after winning twice a public grant from the European Parliament. In that period of time, Amanda had the opportunity to travel to almost all European countries and some of the EU’s candidates to produce video reports. She is particularly interested in minorities and the plight of refugees from war-torn nations in the border states of the EU and she has produced reports about the Roma population in Romania and Slovakia, or about the Afghan refugees in Greece. In the past year she has started to study about Muslim feminism.

Amanda believes that young people are more capable of learning and changing mental schemes and stresses the importance of receiving education on different religions. “In Spain education on religion is included in the subject of citizenship education; but we need more education on the different religions- not in order to convert young people but in order to let them know what each religion stands for.”

In 2012 Amanda was chosen as one of the twelve United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) fellows that travelled to Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. She was surprised that some of the western participants, despite of being well educated young people and experienced in their fields, had never had personal contacts with representatives from the other civilisations. This experience offered her a unique window to understand the situation in each visited country, to meet other young people as well as representatives from the civil society, the academic, political and media sphere in the visited countries, develop an interesting network of contacts and get more inspiration for her work that is reflected in her dedication to break existing prejudices through her capacity as a journalist.

You can have a look of her recent video on the following link (date accessed 10.08.2012): http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/07/20/internacional/1342795656.html

Among the aims of intercultural dialogue we could identify the following:

- to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices;
- to increase participation and the ability to make choices;
- to foster and promote equality;
- to embrace differences and universal values in any given culture;
- to help shatter historical and current stereotypes and illusions.

The term interfaith dialogue refers to the positive interaction between people of different religious traditions or spiritual beliefs and aims at promoting understanding among them to increase acceptance of others, and we prefer to use this term instead of ‘inter-religious dialogue’, to include other kind of humanistic beliefs. Also for the purpose of the study, we understand that intercultural dialogue encompasses interfaith dialogue, although it is a subject that gives a lot of food for reflection.

Intercultural dialogue therefore is understood as a process, not as an aim in itself. As Giovanni Corbo from Italy said, “intercultural dialogue is not an aim itself; it is a means to achieve other things and above all it is a means to understand one’s own identity and overcome feelings of xenophobia”. Intercultural dialogue is an attitude, a state of mind. It is about openness to difference.
However, we should acknowledge that the dialogue encompasses the fear that the ‘Other’ could suppose a threat to one’s own identity. “Because we don’t know each other, we fear each other”, said Haythem Kamel from Egypt. On the other hand, it is exactly in a condition of dialogue that the identity is experienced and manifested because in the capacity of establishing a dialogue, the ‘self’ is being realised. There is therefore an ambivalent character in the difference. From one hand it is necessary for the production of meaning and the formation of culture but in the same time it can be a threat and a source of hostility or aggression towards the ‘Other’. This “divided legacy” (Hall, 1997:238) is what makes difference so important. According to Hall (1997:234-238) ‘difference’ is essential to meaning because meaning depends on the difference between opposites. Also the ‘Other’ is essential to meaning because the dialogue with the ‘Other’ allows space for interaction that could eventually modify everything that we say or mean. Therefore, the ‘Other’ is fundamental to the construction of the self. As Anas Nawaflsheh from Jordan said, “one has first to be aware of his own cultural identity and be proud and willing to share it with the rest of the world”. But at the same time, the process of understanding one’s own identity can be the result of a dialogue with the ‘Other’. And this is not in the course of producing homogeneous identities. “I am allergic to the phrase “melting pot”, societies are not purees; I believe in the dialogue between equals”, said Elina Makri from Greece. Intercultural dialogue is about dialogue between equals.

An important element of intercultural dialogue is that it places emphasis on breaking stereotypes. “Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’”(Hall, 1997:258). There are many ways that these preconceptions have been fabricated. Media of course have influenced a lot the preconceptions that we have about different cultures and realities. “Media have the power to poison hidden social diseases”

Ryan Mercieca (27)
Youth activist, Maltese

Ryan studied Geography. And it is the geographical position of Malta- in the middle of the Mediterranean sea - that he considers that has nurtured his interest for the EuroMed cooperation and understanding of the different intercultural and interfaith dynamics that dominate in the region. In 2010 he completed an MA in Diplomacy where his thesis was about the role of Malta in the EuroArab Relations and currently he is studying towards a MA degree in Tourism. But he feels that this interest is not only his own. “Most young people in Malta are aware of the situation because of our geographical position - we are in the middle of the region and from a very small age we are nurtured with this scenario”, he says.

Ryan observes that during the Arab spring and at its aftermath, the role of young people in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region is placed on the agenda. “Young people see what is happening, discuss and share their opinions because also the issues is also discussed on the political level”, he says and he adds that “there has been a general feeling of a sort of belonging, of closeness to this issue because everyone feels that the Arab region is going through some kind of turbulence that will affect our everyday lives”. Ryan has been active in the youth field as a member of various organisations and entities during the last five years. At the moment he is Board Member of JECI-MIEC where he is responsible for Interfaith Dialogue and Vice-President/ responsible for International Affairs of the National Youth Council of Malta.

Ryan observes that today young people in the region, apart from getting more and better education, they also engage in entrepreneurship ventures “to fight the economic crisis”. Therefore, he feels that there is great room for joint ventures among young people in the Mediterranean. “Networking starts from a young age”, he says, “and this networking is not only reflected on the political or on the business level, but it is a unique opportunity establishing great friendships and through this achieve better results”.

Ryan stresses that what is important is that “youth needs first and foremost to understand what is happening and although for the maltese youth this might not be so difficult because our culture is shaped with the Arab influence, in the rest of Europe, young people live in a different climate - for them it is a bigger effort”. He observes that the instability that might still exist in countries of the Southern Mediterranean prevents young people from exploring these countries and thus meeting other young people and engaging in a real dialogue. However, he thinks that this should trigger the curiosity of young people and lead them “to explore, to visit, to understand and to cooperate”.

15
said Haythem Kamel from Egypt. Amanda Figueras from Spain for example, noted that “everything that we read on Islam is negative, as if they were weird creatures” and wondered “why examples of successful and prominent muslims are not projected in the media?” Dana Mourad from Palestine said that all her life “from one side we hear about the violation of human rights resolutions and on the other side we listen about terrorist attacks” and she added that “whoever goes by what is said on the media, is mislead”. The different interpretations of history can also be misleading. “A dialogue which is influenced by memories of collective history can get frustrating at some point”, said Rachida Gokcebag, a young Turkish Cypriot.

At the moment of the writing of this study, a major episode about a film tackling a sensitive religious issue had a lot of repercussion around the world and provoked many protests and violence. At these moments, when we see that religion can bring to the surface a lot of tension in social relations, the voices of the young people I was interviewing for the purpose of this study seemed to be even more important. Nayla Hajjar from Lebanon said that “we need to highlight the factor of religion in the constitution of our societies because it is highly interlinked with politics and often misused and manipulated by politics; this situation makes coexistence difficult in some countries because the extremist religious groups don’t allow people to think critically about interreligious dialogue”. Rachida Gokcebag also observed that “the title ‘interreligious’ either scares young people or doesn’t interest them at all because we live in secular societies” and she added that “some people associate their religion with their nationalistic identity rather than a separate thing”.

“Tolerance should not be based on condolence, but on respect - this is the only way to avoid conflicts”, said Rania El Ampasy, a young Greek/Egyptian. “We should, as humans, stop being selfish and start showing more responsibility through solidarity with each other, and respect for cultures” said Anas Nawafleh from

---

Ralitsa Trifonova (27)
Arabic Language teacher and NGO worker, Bulgarian

Together with other student colleagues from the Arabic Studies program, Ralitsa founded in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2009, the organisation Forum for Arab Culture: “to tell people more because of their fear about Islam; to speak about culture and present its real face; to build a bridge between muslim communities and the bulgarian population”. Ralitsa and her colleagues are studying the Arabic culture and what they wanted to achieve through their organisation was “to build a bridge, to talk about movies, traditions, music, cultural elements, to go beyond politics and to show the beautiful part of the Arab culture”. Observing that Arab communities are not included in the society, they are marginalized and stereotyped and that people don’t understand the severe conditions they tried to escape from, Ralitsa and her colleagues organised in 2011 the project ‘Please talk to me’ which consisted in organising language groups to bring together Arab migrant communities who want to learn Bulgarian with high school and university students that study Arabic and want to enhance their skills. “Our aim was to use the language as a means of communication in order to create friendships between the two groups and make the life of migrants in Bulgaria more pleasant”. Language was only the medium, “the common thing among the students and the migrants and refugees”, she says, while adding that “language is the centre of intercultural dialogue and allows the conversation about the values, the common things”. Through their knowledge of Arabic language, the members of the Forum also provide support to migrants and asylum seekers and refugees organising workshops on human rights, discrimination and legal matters. They also do advocacy work trying to follow all the channels to speak to institutions, although very often they face problems of mistrust from the side of the institutions.

Ralitsa says that religion is a sensitive topic in Bulgaria, as 10% of the population is Muslim and she sounds annoyed when she says that “there were protests recently on the ‘noise’ coming from the mosques that disturbs public order”. She observes that recently “young people are more keen to learn about Arab culture and other cultures in general; like if something has triggered their mind and their attention”.

1 http://arabculture.wordpress.com
Jordan. And all these can be achieved through dialogue. However, entering into a dialogue can also be a risk. A risk necessary to be taken through, if we wish to bring about change. As Ma’yan Weizman from Israel pointed out “*since our childhood we live in fixed ideas that come from our houses, our schools, the government, the media; and when at one point of your life you have to think on your own, people are afraid because there is a lot of hate in this - and in the minute you deal with hate, you deal with yourself*”.

And that’s what young people that engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean do: they go beyond preconceived ideas and prejudices and seek for real answers on their own. “*From chaos comes creativity*”, said Federica Cicala from Italy smiling.

**Spaces for intercultural and interfaith dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue can occur in different forms and in different environments. It would though be interesting at this point to reflect on the concept of ‘casual’ and ‘organised’ intercultural dialogue.

By ‘casual’ or ‘informal’ intercultural dialogue we refer to every human contact, given that culture is an intrinsic part of human life itself. Therefore, each person carries a very unique and personal ‘cultural world’ inside him that is present in our daily life contact. “And because we are carrying our ‘cultural world’ with us, Farah was 28 when, together with her husband, started the association Cross Cultural Learning and the Thaqafat Association. Today she is still dedicated in the cause of these associations and the use of non-formal education methods for intercultural understanding, both for young people from Morocco as well as for young foreigners that come to Morocco.

From her work with young people she realises that “people should not tell young people what to do, young people should say what they want and we should follow them; we cannot dictate to young people how to establish a dialogue and we cannot offer a ‘package-made’ recipe for them- we need to trust them and they need to feel trusted”. However, she says that “what we are discovering is that even though people are very involved, they lack leadership and coordination” and that “although they run to the streets, it was the ones who were already organised that paved the way”. Farah thinks that this is mainly due to “lack of skills that they don’t acquire through formal education” and she stresses the importance of non-formal education because it provides skills that “help young people feel comfortable to lead associations and projects”. Farah points out that in Morocco “only 1% of young people are members of political parties, while 9% are member of civil society organisations” and expresses the hope that “maybe in the future civil society will be more attractive to young people than political parties” and points out that the establishment of a Ministry for Civil Society in Morocco might be a good beginning towards this direction.

Concerning the material available for young people that could help them in the promotion of intercultural dialogue, Farah underlines that “the manuals that exist are made mainly for Europeans- the COMPASS for example states very clearly that it is for Europeans; in the Arab world we need people with the skills and competences to adopt them to our realities”. Farah was in the Editorial team of MOSAIC - the training kit of Euro-Mediterranean youth work in Arabic but she says this is not enough: “we need to make sure it is not simply distributed but exploited properly; we need to organise activities around these manuals to help others understand their importance”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan (42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth worker, Morocco</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Farah was 28 when, together with her husband, started the association Cross Cultural Learning and the Thaqafat Association. Today she is still dedicated in the cause of these associations and the use of non-formal education methods for intercultural understanding, both for young people from Morocco as well as for young foreigners that come to Morocco.

From her work with young people she realises that “people should not tell young people what to do, young people should say what they want and we should follow them; we cannot dictate to young people how to establish a dialogue and we cannot offer a ‘package-made’ recipe for them- we need to trust them and they need to feel trusted”.

However, she says that “what we are discovering is that even though people are very involved, they lack leadership and coordination” and that “although they run to the streets, it was the ones who were already organised that paved the way”. Farah thinks that this is mainly due to “lack of skills that they don’t acquire through formal education” and she stresses the importance of non-formal education because it provides skills that “help young people feel comfortable to lead associations and projects”. Farah points out that in Morocco “only 1% of young people are members of political parties, while 9% are member of civil society organisations” and expresses the hope that “maybe in the future civil society will be more attractive to young people than political parties” and points out that the establishment of a Ministry for Civil Society in Morocco might be a good beginning towards this direction.

Concerning the material available for young people that could help them in the promotion of intercultural dialogue, Farah underlines that “the manuals that exist are made mainly for Europeans- the COMPASS for example states very clearly that it is for Europeans; in the Arab world we need people with the skills and competences to adopt them to our realities”. Farah was in the Editorial team of MOSAIC - the training kit of Euro-Mediterranean youth work in Arabic but she says this is not enough: “we need to make sure it is not simply distributed but exploited properly; we need to organise activities around these manuals to help others understand their importance”.

1  www.ccci.ma
2  www.thaqafat.org.ma
3  The COMPASS is a Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People produced within the framework of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, which was launched in 2000 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. An updated version is underway at the moment of the publication and translation in different languages, including Arabic are available on the website http://eycb.coe.int/compass/ (date accessed 08.08.2012)
4  The MOSAIC - the training kit of Euro-Mediterranean youth work is one of the T-Kit series developed within the Youth Partnership, between the Council of Europe and the European Union. MOSAIC is intended to provide theoretical and practical tools for youth workers and trainers to work with and use when training people. More specifically, MOSAIC aims to be an intellectually stimulating tool that supplies youth workers, trainers and project leaders interested in EuroMediterranean youth co-operation with starting points, essential information and methodological proposals enabling them to understand, address and question common issues present in the reality of EuroMediterranean youth projects. Available at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/11/6577_T-KIT_11_A4_assemble.pdf (date accessed 23.07.2012)
all the messages are cultural messages, and all the dialogues are intercultural dialogues” (Banús, 2012:105). Seeing culture under this prism, we consider it as a kind of repertoire, where one person accumulates a number of cultural elements, ranging from attitudes and styles to rituals and beliefs, and based on them he constructs diverse strategies of action in concrete life contexts. Can we dare though to say that every encounter is a dialogue? How can we assure that there are the necessary parameters for turning these ‘casual’ encounters into genuine and enriching intercultural dialogues that can also be accounted as intercultural learning and understanding that can bring upon peace and stability in the region?

On the other hand, the concept of ‘organised’ intercultural dialogue refers mainly to activities and actions taking place in the framework of what we call ‘civil society’ in order to promote the understanding between cultures. Civil society initiatives provide a framework of opportunities for bringing together people that are willing to listen and share, which turns them into essential tools for participation, mutual knowledge and promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. In this context, “the youth association movement, when it is free, voluntary and not manipulated […] is itself an essential part for the functioning of society and a clear indicator of its democratic heart” (Baró, 2009:71). The challenge is to allow spaces where young people can...
actually feel and be themselves.

Another important point that needs to be underlined and was also brought to the surface during the interviews, was that intercultural and interfaith dialogue occurs in different levels: in the context of local realities and in the context of international realities. What do we mean by this? That societies have become increasingly more multicultural/ intercultural and this is reflected first of all on the local level, in our neighborhood. The ‘Other’ sometimes lives just next to us, not in another region or country. And there is a lot of work to be done at the local level as well regarding intercultural and interfaith dialogue. As Ahmad Alhindawi said “do your homework” meaning that sometimes young people get excited with international cooperation because it might be enriching in personal experiences and a unique platform of intercultural dialogue and forget to work on changing their local realities that offer unique opportunities for exploration and for building bridges for dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue is about meeting the ‘Other’ and passing from monologs to dialogue.

Federica Cicala (31)
Youth worker, Italian

Federica works as International Relations officer at FNG (Forum Nazionale dei Giovani, the Italian National Youth Council). She has been following the EuroAfrican cooperation in the field of youth since 2009 and the Euro-Mediterranean one since 2010 and working in the implementation ‘Act -Democracy’, a long term project promoted by Forum Nazionale Giovani (FNG) to provide continuity and re-launch the EuroArab and Mediterranean cooperation process after the political and social changes brought by the Arab spring. “Sometimes we are not really free to interact in the way we want, that’s why we have to be present in the discussions on the political level as well”, she says.

Federica is also a youth trainer expert in the field of Global education, European citizenship, regional cooperation processes. She also coordinates the National Pool of Trainers of FNG in, that offers competences in the design and implementation of youth events in the fields of active citizenship, structured dialogue, human rights, global education, advocacy, etc. Recently she has been involved in the work of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the Network of Universities on Youth and Global Citizenship which aim to create a political space where youth can act upon and acknowledge the role they play in global development and to initiate and encourage a debate aimed at defining the role youth play in elaborating development policies and in co-operation for development initiatives. “Non-formal education training is important to develop the key competences that match with the skills that young people need and brings out the potential young people have inside them”, she says and adds that “we need to create spaces where young people can practice to confront each other in order to learn from each other - that’s why we need to adopt a complementary approach to formal education that allows young people to interpret and to become active actors in their societies” and “we need to understand intercultural dialogue as a transversal approach to different subjects in schools”.

Federica insists that intercultural dialogue is not only between different countries, but it is inside our closer environments. “Even if young people are not interested, they are part of the intercultural dialogue; it is in everyday life, in the neighborhoods”, she says, and this “dialogue, helps us to ask ourselves the right questions and realise our own identity”. She thinks that young people in the Mediterranean have a lot to learn from each other and says that “in the Southern Mediterranean countries, they are currently ‘learning’ democracy, in the European Union it seems we have forgotten about it; isn’t this a great opportunity to learn from each other and work together?”.

1 http://www.forumnazionalelegiovani.it
2 For more information about the work of the North South Centre have a look at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/ (date accessed 08.08.2012)
Eleni Michail (27)  
Youth trainer, Cypriot

Eleni graduated as primary school teacher in 2007. However, she has been mainly involved in non formal education structures, than in the formal education system. One of her primary interests is the promotion of intercultural learning and interfaith dialogue and as a member of the Cyprus Youth Council and the Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU) Pool of Trainers she organises and delivers trainings for young people.

Realizing that the topic of interfaith dialogue in Cyprus has not been adequately raised among young people, Eleni and her colleagues from YEU decided to organise a ‘different’ exchange. The project 'Merry Holy Days' brought together young people from different religions (Christians, Jews and Muslims) in Cyprus in December 2010 to explore each other’s religions and understand the similarities and the differences. 35 participants coming from 7 different countries and representing at least three different religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) gathered for 6 days in Cyprus in a Christmas atmosphere and sought for similarities between their religions at different levels, “creed, cult, leadership, symbols, community, rituals, celebrations, services”. The aim of the project, that was supported under the sub-action 3.1.1 of “Youth in Action” programme, was to promote understanding, tolerance and respect for people coming from different religious backgrounds and was recognized as a best-practice project.

The project was accompanied by a research: a questionnaire was distributed among participants before the project and they had to fill in the same questionnaire at the end of the exchange in order to reflect on their own stereotypes, knowledge and understanding and examine if the non-formal education activity had an impact on their attitudes and conceptions. Moreover a focus group discussion took place during which 8 participants talked about their feelings and thoughts concerning the project.

Eleni feels that most of the times the impact of such projects is limited to participants themselves and not to the society as a whole. “If we want our activities to have a wider impact that is not only limited to the participants, we need to do activities in public and surprise the local community”, she says. However, she realises that “if young people through this kind of activities become more open-minded, they start multiplying their views to their friends, to their families and in this way they can change attitudes and stereotypes”.

A video of the project is available at the following link:  
III. Young people’s journeys in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean
III. Young people’s journeys in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean

Why can young people bring change?

Beyond the ‘glossy’ surface of geopolitics and media attention in the region due to the Arab Spring and the revolutions in the Southern Europe, the voices of young people in the region and their day-to-day preoccupations reflect a vivid society, a curious generation and a very dedicated one. In a little less than ten years, the Mediterranean region has undergone rapid changes which make the region especially interesting. All these alterations have had a large influence on young people and their role in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. But one thing is clear: young people have not only been affected by these transformations; they have and still are influencing them.

As Rasha Fityan from Palestine pointed out “the role of young people in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue depends basically on the ongoing changes happening in the world; young people are the key to promote this dialogue either positively or negatively; they are the tools to bring peace in the global sphere; they have the opportunity to travel, to meet, to exchange and to listen to different cultures and religions; to understand and promote the similarities and differences in creative ways”.

What are the characteristics of youth that make young people important actors in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue? Why should young people engage more in activities for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the EuroMediterranean region? When young people interviewed were asked this questions, they said:

• “Young people are more flexible and more open and their role is very important in breaking the stereotypes; you cannot wait for people to get older to change stereotypes” (Ralitsa Trifonova, Bulgaria)
• “We can have less influence on the opinions of our fathers, because adults have more fixed ideas, but young people can change a lot, starting from themselves” (Ma’ayan Weizman, Israel)
• “Young people have a big role because they can break the stereotypes they have. Now they are provided with wider education but we still need to work on developing their critical thinking because they are the future generation and they play a role in their families and in their future families” (Nayla Hajjar, Lebanon)
• “Young people can connect the cultures and the religions in their own way; if they do so in a creative way, I believe it will be the road to a peaceful world soon” (Rasha Fityan, Palestinian)
• “We are not going to be young forever, that’s why we should not only complain - this is easy; what is difficult is to work towards a world that we want to see being possible in the next years” (Federica Cicala, Italy)

From the profiles of the young people interviewed the reader of this study can get an idea of different activities and actions that young people undertake in order to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue. They are youth workers or trainers, they work in NGOs, they are journalists, artists, students. They organise exchanges, meetings, they engage in advocacy work and design campaigns, they write, they express themselves through art. And in a way or another they promote societies based on the values of understanding and dialogue that can bring peace and stability in the region.
Between Scylla and Charybdis - why don’t young people in the Mediterranean engage more in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue?

“Young people are not aware of the problems - it is easy to lose focus in other things that affect their lives. Very few young people actually care; young politicians, youth workers, young journalists manage to do something, but it is only small seeds that slowly slowly will need to grow”, said Alessandro di Maio from Italy. “It is the young people that belong to the intellectual class - the educated ones - that have the vocation and the will to change the course of things; but we should not forget the others” said Abdel Aziz from Tunisia. In general terms, many of the people interviewed agreed that there is a limited (and sometimes quite privileged) group of young people that actually engage in cross-border cooperation or in intercultural and interfaith activities in their everyday life. A number of reasons are behind this reality. Through the interviews we were able to identify the following:

Liga Efeja (24)
Latvian EVS volunteer in Lebanon

Having studied Intercultural Relations at the Latvian Academy of Culture in Riga, Latvia, and having been the National Coordinator of the Anna Lindh EuroMediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures in Latvia, she felt that if she wanted to continue working on this topic and improve, she had to have a personal experience of living and working in one of the countries in the Southern Mediterranean. At the time of the interview, Liga was spending her last days working for IndyACT, a non-governmental NGO in Lebanon within the framework of the European Voluntary Service/ Youth in Action programme of the European Commission that gave her the opportunity to spend a year of her life working on a local youth empowerment programme and the development of new projects and international partnerships.

Liga has been a youth leader since high-school. Over the time she has been involved in YWCA/ YMCA of Riga, UNICEF, the Latvian Youth Council, Amnesty International Friends in Latvia and YMCA Europe. She was a member of the European Youth Forum’s Working Group on non-formal education. From November 2010 to December 2011 she participated in the Long-term EuroArab training course for cooperation youth projects through non-formal learning, organised by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the League of Arab States. Liga strongly believes that youth projects and youth organisations give the opportunity for young people to meet in safe environments and discuss as individuals to express their opinions on different topics.

Being able to reflect on the situation both in Europe and in the Mediterranean countries, Liga states that “EuroMed cooperation is a trendy topic in Europe and youth organisations might be interested in engaging in such projects out of sheer interest; but in the Southern Mediterranean side young people are facing many other issues that are not as strongly addressed by the governments or civil society sectors, therefore the priorities are different” and she adds that “there is a huge focus on employability and professional growth and there is also a lot of family pressure to focus on this”.

Liga is moving to Berlin in September 2012 to study towards an MA in Intercultural Conflict Management.

1 The European Voluntary Service (EVS) provides young Europeans with the unique chance to express their personal commitment through unpaid and full-time voluntary activities in a foreign country within or outside the EU. The EuroMed Voluntary Service is a project offering young people an opportunity to carry out a long or short term volunteering activity in another country of the Euro-Mediterranean region. The volunteer/s is/are hosted in one particular organisation of a ENPI South country, which has precise missions for him/her/them to implement. Voluntary service enables volunteers to express their solidarity, to acquire a valuable intercultural experience and to develop new skills. It brings benefit to local communities and to the hosting organisation (grant beneficiary), through a new impulse, the mutual exchange and the international added-value. For more information have a look at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/european-voluntary-service_en.htm and http://euromedyouth.net (date accessed 08.08.2012)
Young people need to solve other problems before engaging in activities to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean

Young people in the Mediterranean face different challenges in their everyday life. The most important challenge is unemployment, which according to the UN World Youth Report Summary (2012), was one of the contributing factors to the recent Arab Spring uprisings6. Unemployment was also behind the ‘Indignados’ movement in Spain or in Greece as well. However, there is more than unemployment. The social and economic landscape in the Mediterranean countries places youth in a vulnerable situation as a result of a constant deterioration of social policy responses. Housing, access to social rights, precarious living conditions, health problems (of young people themselves or of their family members that they have to take care of), might create a less favorable environment for young people to engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. “Simply because they have other things to take care of”, said Ryan Mercieca from Malta.

In the same time, competition in the labor market and increasing demands from the academic world also require young people to devote a lot of time in their studies to make the best out of them, which results in

---

6 The total youth unemployment rate in 2010 was 25.5 per cent in the Middle East and 23.8 per cent in North Africa. Female youth unemployment in these regions was particularly striking, at 39.4 per cent in the Middle East and 34.1 per cent in North Africa. The report is available at http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport/2012.aspx (date accessed 03.09.2012)
limited leisure time they could dedicate in ‘alternative’ kind of activities.

- Some young people in the region still live in conflict areas
  The region is still characterized by intense and unresolved conflicts. “It is hard to look far away from what is happening in your country, because in your daily life you deal with whether there will be a war or not; you are so into your own country reality that you have trouble understanding what happens with other realities...”, said Ma’ayan Weizman from Israel and to this Yael Gudanyan from the same country added that “in Israel and Palestine there are many obstacles; young people are busy with their life and they are tired to talk about the conflict, especially because the society doesn’t want this encounter”. There are still many conflicts in the area, based on ethnicity, religion, post-war eras, that make the environment in which young people live quite insecure and unsafe in many situations.

- Young people lack the information
  Young people interviewed brought to the surface that actually it is not the lack of existing programs, structures or funding that prevents young people from getting engaged in activities and actions that promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue, but it is mainly the lack of information about existing possibilities they have to make their aspirations a reality. “Young people need to know that there are places (seminars, exchanges, camps etc) where things happen, where we can create things and activities together and then we can organise and coordinate our work on advocacy towards our governments, or organise talks in universities or where young people hang out to make them more active”, said Ma’ayan Weizman from Israel. Information is more accessible to young people that are active in youth organisations and work in networks, leaving the big majority of young people out of the ‘system’. This applies particularly to young people in marginalized situations or living in rural areas, that do not have the means to receive all the information. Liga Efeja from Latvia also observed that there is a gap in access to information between the North and the South. “In Europe knowledge is more accessible”, she said, while “in the Southern Mediterranean there is little knowledge about resources or funds; the cultural centers and embassies of the investing foreign countries have the

---

Ma’ayan Weizman (25)
Arts education student, Israeli

Ma’yan loves working with little kids. She is also an artist: she loves photography and drawing. Today she is studying arts education for kindergarten children in Tel Aviv, and in the future she wants to combine it with art therapy. “Maybe it could help in working on conflict resolution issues, I hadn’t thought about it before; art is a way to many things…”, she says at the end of the interview.

Ma’yan spent 7 years of her life working with the youth movement Histadrut HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed (The Federation of Working and Studying youth). Two years ago she participated at the Youth Peace Camp organised by the Council of Europe. “It was the first time I met Palestinians in my life”, she says, “we got the opportunity to talk and negotiate; it was very difficult sometimes but listening to stories from other conflict areas you understand better what is happening and you realize that there is not a one and single truth”. At the end of the camp, young people from conflict areas decided to do things together in the future. And so she did, together with Dana Mourad that was also a participant at the same camp and was interviewed for this research as well. Both of them were facilitators this year in the Camp. This experience has opened a new window for her.

Ma’ayan thinks that it is the everyday life and routine of young people that prevents them from getting engaged in more intercultural and interfaith activities. However, she observes that during the last two years in Israel, there has been “a transformation in social activism where young people took a powerful approach to get solutions to problems”, especially related to housing, health insurance and social rights. “If this power could be transferred to the field of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, maybe there is hope”, she says.

Ma’ayan thinks that young people are not very optimistic because the situation is disappointing and they see no end to the conflicts and the problems. “I want to believe that there is a chance for change, but there is a lot of ‘cargo’ on it. It is not easy to believe this even for me that I am optimistic and a believer, as my friends say”.

---
Reem Kaseem (28)
Cultural Manager and Activist, Egyptian

Reem has been engaged in activities promoting intercultural dialogue during the last ten years through her work in the Arts Department of the Library of Alexandria. In 2010 she became the Head of Performing Arts Programming. She has been programming and coordinating the monthly performing arts program and the performing arts festivals of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), including International Summer Arts Festivals, the Alexandrina World Music Festival, the Alexandrina Contemporary Music Biennale, and the Contemporary Dance. Reem has been managing the membership of the BA Arts Center in international networks and promoting its performing arts productions internationally.

However, the moment when she started working intensively to promote intercultural dialogue was when she established the organization AGORA for Arts and Culture in February 2011. AGORA is an organisation with the endeavor of reviving the concept of the real ancient Greek agora as a gathering place and a venue for “self-expression” through arts practice and provide an outlet for creative involvement through productions, education and dissemination of arts and culture. “People need places for encounter”, she says and adds that “from the ‘Agora’ in the Greek cities, throughout the ‘space’ in the islamic cities and finally to the ‘square’ in modern cities, we can easily monitor the important role of public spaces which give the opportunity to people to express themselves and verify the concepts of place democracy that tightens the sense of belonging and efficiently creates links between the members of the community”.

A recent project she initiated was ‘Artistic cooperation through intercultural learning’ in cooperation with the organisation Une Terre Culturelle (Marseille-France) and the Deutsch-französisches Forum junger Kunst (Bayrouth- Germany) and funded by L’Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse. The workshops organised aimed at bringing together young Artists and arts managers from three different countries (France, Germany and Egypt) in a series of three workshops in order to discover the cultural realities of the three cities and to produce a joint project that was presented in the Public Space festival in Alexandria in April 2012. Reem was one of the candidates of the 2012 Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue Between Cultures by the Anna Lindh EuroMediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures (ALF) and Fondazione Mediterraneo (FM).

main say in such communication on ‘intercultural’ issues” and according to her experience, what is needed is to “find the right channels to communicate with young people”.

• Young people have to deal with an unfriendly environment regarding youth participation

Many young people from the Southern part of the Mediterranean interviewed pointed out that the contemporary landscape in their countries suffers from a crisis of youth political empowerment, manifested in a sense of uncertainty and insecurity among them. Societies in Arabic countries are now striving for the recognition of their basic democratic rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom to active participate in society, in view to consolidating the role of democratic national institutions. “Civil society is not open to the international sphere for security reasons and because we need to use the politically correct words to avoid getting in trouble” said Rana Tazaji reflecting on the situation in her country, Syria.

There is also an imbalance between levels and structures for youth participation in the different sides of the shore. As Giovanni Corbo from Italy pointed out, “in the European Union we have achieved youth participation through the processes of structured dialogue and co-management, but youth participation has not been so far in the culture of the Southern Mediterranean countries” and he continued by saying that “the Arab Spring brought a different reality and the role of young people was very important in this; now we have to give the time to young activists to invest on structures and capacity building on a grass-root level in order for the youth movement to be sustainable and not erased by extremist groups”. In the same direction, Ahmad Alhindawi from Jordan pointed out that “in the Arab world we have good individuals, in Europe you have good structures”.

26
Young people interviewed underlined the fact that youth work is not properly recognized or supported, therefore young people need to find the arguments to explain to their environment why they wish to engage in such type of activities or projects. Liga Efeja from Latvia that was working as an EVS volunteer in Lebanon at the time of the interview observed that especially in Southern Mediterranean countries, “it is very hard and can be harmful to go against the opinion of your family and community”. This reflects that it is time to rethink about youth-led movements and their importance in bringing social change.

• Young people don’t have the necessary guidance and skills and are not taught to bring change

Many of the young people interviewed highlighted the fact that youth lacks the capacity to develop projects related to the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region. And this is due to the predominance of a formal education system that does not allow space for critical thought. Haythem Kamel from Egypt strongly believes that “young people need guidance” and he said that “young people run to the street from a tweet, but they might lack political vision”. Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan from Morocco reflecting on this said that “I don’t like the word guidance; what young people need is orientation, they need to feel they are able to do things”.

Language skills was also mentioned as a barrier that prevents young people from engaging in intercultural and interfaith activities. “Language is the first step in the communication”, said Federica Cicala from Italy and added that “we should invest more on translation and language courses”.

Haythem Kamel (35)
Youth trainer, Egyptian

Haythem is a youth activist with knowledge of the EuroArab civil society and actively involved in the area of youth development. He got the ‘virus’ of working on intercultural and interfaith dialogue projects and trainings after participating in a Peace Cruise around the Mediterranean organised by the Scouts in 1999. However, he considers as his major turning point the co-founding of the Sustainable Development Association (SDA) after organizing the Youth Employment Summit (YES) in 2002. Moreover, he is one of the Co-founders and board members of the Egyptian Youth NGOs Federation which led to better cooperation among youth organizations, and the Egyptian Youth Consultant Group in supporting the creation of a national youth employment policy in Egypt. Haythem also worked at the League of Arab States (LAS) for establishing and coordinating the LAS Youth Forum which multiplied into several youth activities, strengthened the Agenda for Youth Issues in the Arab Region, and built a stronger partnership between the League of Arab States and the Council of Europe. Later he worked at the Anna Lindh Euro Mediterranean Foundation for Intercultural Dialogue coordinating the Egyptian Network and organising the Arab regional training course for citizenship and intercultural dialogue.

Through his civil society and youth activities he has received a number of awards within the Scouting movement, the EuroMed Youth Award for organising one of the best youth project in the EuroMed YOUTH Programme II; and the Chevening Fellowship to study the governance relations with the NGOs and civil society at the University of Glasgow, UK. Now he is working as a freelance trainer/consultant with a number of international organizations.

Haythem highlights the problems that associations face in Egypt in terms of receiving funding from abroad and freely deciding on their work programme and he says that “before 2011 it was difficult to do outreach activities in Egypt, young people were not interested, there were security issues and civil society was associated with charity; now the level of awareness and participation has increased, however very often someone who takes an initiative outside of the mainstream is boycotted, so now what we need is new skills to enforce youth participation”. That’s why he stresses that young people need political education and know-how. Being a trainer himself, Haythem believes that “education is the solution to everything - education about ourselves and about the other, general cultural knowledge”. But he doesn’t refer only to formal or non-formal education. “Young people should not be lazy to read”, he says stressing that young people should be curious and look for opportunities to enhance their learning in order to better understand themselves and the world that surrounds them.
From a self-reflection perspective, some of the young people interviewed said that the most important obstacle young people have to face is themselves. “Very often young people make up the barriers for not taking action”, said Elina Makri and added that “what is needed is not only support, but exposure: having the courage to explore your dreams, what is a deeper reality for you and bring life into it”, underlying that “postponing is definitely not the solution”. In the same direction, Farah Cherif from Morocco also mentioned that “when you ask for rights, you also ask for responsibilities”.

Rasha Fityyan-Saleem (34)
Youth leader, Palestinian

Rasha Fityyan Saleem is an international youth activist working for building networks and partnerships with interested groups/organizations in the field of conflict resolution and peace building. Currently she is working as a management coordination advisor with the Ministry of Justice on the Palestinian justice enhancement program (PJEP). Before that she has worked during 10 years as program manager and capacity-building manager in TA’AWON Institute for conflict resolution, a Palestinian youth NGO. She says that “I feel the success when I see the change in the young people using effective dialogue instead of screaming and shouting, using the negotiation instead of the lethal tools or guns and mediating for peace”. Rasha is member of the League of Arab States Youth Advisory committee since 2008 and in 2011 she was a participant of the Fellowship Program of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Rasha is seeking to explore the diversity that exists in our world through her wide world communications and working for promoting the respect and understanding of differences.

Nayla Hajjar (26)
NGO activist, Lebanese

Nayla made a change in her career in 2010 when she joined ADYAN1, the Lebanese foundation for interreligious studies and spiritual solidarity, as Executive Director for the “Understanding” Program - an international educational initiative supported by Anna Lindh Foundation followed by the scientific coordination responsibility of the “Leaders for Interreligious Understanding” Program - a professional training for young professionals from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Denmark on the place and role of religion and interreligious dialogue in building peace, social cohesion and mutual understanding. Currently Nayla is the Development and International Relations Officer at ADYAN and a Masters candidate in International Affairs and Diplomacy.

Nayla believes that “religion could play a positive role in the relation between different communities facilitating the process of peace”. However, she wonders “why some Europeans fear the islamic world?” and she suggests that “they need to go and listen, to approach these countries and experience this diversity, and discover that the fear comes from the media for political reasons”. She points out that in the association where she works, they try to follow a philosophy of creating sustainable projects and activities and to develop follow-up strategies in this direction, which is necessary if we want to work towards “a paradigm shift in the role of religion in public and political life, from an identity-based role to a values-based paradigm”2.

Nayla understands the importance of young people’s role in promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue and uses every opportunity to strive for this. During 2011, she was one of the 4 youth leaders invited as speakers by the League of Arab States for the 13th meeting of Heads of national councils and committees on population in Qatar and was a speaker in a panel related to Arab Spring in the 9th UN General Youth Assembly in New York. She was invited to different international consultancy meetings and has attended different international trainings and seminars. In 2012, she was one of the 12 selected young leaders from the MENA region for the United Nations Alliance of Civilization fellowship. But she underlines that “young people need analytical reflection so that they can play the role of multipliers for promoting a real understanding of the diversity; education systems should promote this critical thinking to develop an attitude that would raise awareness among young people”.

---

1 http://www.taawonyouth.org/english.php
2 This phrase comes from the concept note of the International conference “Religion and Democracy in Europe and the Arab world” that took place on the 29th and 30th of November 2012 at the Lebanese American University in Byblos, Lebanon. More information is available at the following link: http://www.adyanonline.net/mod/page/view.php?id=747 (date accessed 07.07.2012)
Young people face obstacles in mobility

Dialogue implies meeting the “Other” in person. Although internet and new social media have multiplied the opportunities for encounters in the virtual space, the issue of limited financial resources to actually travel and meet people that live in other countries was often raised in the interviews. Yael Gidanyan from Israel pointed out that although programs such as ‘EuroMed Youth’ require only a limited financial contribution from the side of the participants, “most young people, especially from rural areas cannot cover the remaining 30%, therefore only privileged young people actually get to benefit from this kind of programs”.

Moreover, the free movement of people, which is a right and an unconscious privilege for the majority of Europeans, is not so easy for many young people from the Southern part of the Mediterranean. “I feel privileged because I have a ‘good’ passport that allows me to travel”, said Sonia Mejri, a French teacher with Tunisian background. Visa issues still cause a barrier to dialogue because they prevent people from meeting in real environments. This is not only the case when young people from the Southern Mediterranean countries wish to spend some time in European countries. As Haythem Kamel from Egypt points out, “there is also a lack of cooperation among Arab Mediterranean countries and for example visas for young people are not facilitated”.

Sakhri Khalil (30)
Doctor and NGO activist, Algerian

Khalil is a doctor and what we would call an ‘active citizen’. In 2002 he founded and was President of the Association Club Scientifique de la Faculté des Sciences Médicales de Sétif, an association that gave him the opportunity to explore his dreams and bring people together. But this was not an easy task; Khalil during the interview highlights the difficulties of running an association in Algeria - that go from bureaucratic obligations to the fact that leaders of the civil society are not well trained to run associations and especially to think on the long- term and implement projects that could leave a legacy. “We URGENTLY need training”, he said, reflecting also on the fact that although the association laws in Algeria have been revised, the operational context of civil society organisations has not yet been fully facilitated.

In the framework of his association there are different working groups on scientific, cultural and humanitarian issues and they organise solidarity campaigns and consultations on different neighborhoods in Algeria. In his capacity as a doctor, he has been educated thoroughly on the HIV/AIDS issue and he has developed and run different projects involving students and young people and he is a trainer on the national level for other students. He also participated at the Algerian Youth Leadership Program. The exploration of the opportunities offered by the EuroMed program and the SALTO Euromed allowed him to travel and meet people from other counties and work with them on different projects. “Before the EuroMed program I was as the medium Algerian”, he says.

Khalil stressed the importance of finding links between the civil society and the media world in order to promote the role of young people in intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean. “I made contacts and interviews to different media in order to encourage my peers to do the same thing”, he said. Khalil’s interviews have been published in different media in Algeria and he is often called to talk about the role of young people in civil society processes. “We cannot leave out politics”, he says, “because politics is culture and a cultured citizen is a political citizen, an active one”.

Living in a “more or less homogeneous country”, Khalil mentions that “the generation of my fathers had a certain mentality, there was a spirit of co-existence, but our generation in Algeria has had less opportunities for mobility, for encounter, for discovering another culture” and he adds that “this has been the result of economic conditions, of the language barriers and of the visa issue”.

---

7 A program supported by the European Commission, for more information, have a look at http://euromedyouth.net (date accessed 09.09.2012)
Rue La Méditerranée - The Mediterranean Street. A street sign in Hammam Sousse, Tunisia.

Photo by Matina Magkou
IV. An enhanced environment for EuroMediterranean cooperation in the field of youth
IV. An enhanced environment for EuroMediterranean cooperation in the field of youth

Promoting intercultural dialogue and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean has been a priority for many international organisations, especially during the last decades. An intense effort has been put in place by various institutions and stakeholders to bring together young people from both shores of the Mediterranean basin in order to raise awareness of their role in the promotion of a culture of dialogue and in transforming present realities and shaping future ones. We can observe an increased focus of activities on the topic and an improvement of internal and external coordination between different institutions in order to establish additional synergies.

What needs to be highlighted is that young people have not been left out of this process: there have been many attempts to include young people in the decision-making and many fora, activities, exchanges have taken place in order to allow to young people to share experiences and engage in dialogues related to their cultural backgrounds, political views and religious beliefs.

The political background - the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean

The Barcelona process was launched in November 1995 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the then 15 EU members and 14 Mediterranean partners, as the framework to manage both bilateral and regional relations. “Stressing the strategic importance of the Mediterranean and moved by the will to give their future relations a new dimension” the agreement to establish a comprehensive partnership among the participants of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was taken. According to the Barcelona Declaration, adopted at the EuroMediterranean Conference (27-28 November 1995), three fields of action were identified and that remain until today the broad working areas of the partnership:

a) political and security partnership, establishing a common area of peace and stability;
b) economic and financial partnership, creating an area of shared prosperity;
c) partnership in social, cultural and human affairs, developing human resources, promoting understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies, and particularly between women and young people.

With the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) introduced in 2004, the Barcelona Process became the multilateral forum of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners while complementary bilateral relations are managed mainly under the ENP and through Association Agreements signed with each partner country. In 2005, the Barcelona Summit agreed on a five-year work program and a EuroMediterranean Code of Conduct for Countering Terrorism and migration was added as a fourth key pillar of the Partnership. The cooperation agreements were re-launched in 2008 under the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and this re-launch was an opportunity to render relations both more concrete and more visible with the initiation of new regional and sub-regional projects with real relevance for those living in the region.

---

11 More about the Union of the Mediterranean at http://www.ufmsecretariat.org (date accessed 03.09.2012)
The importance of the Barcelona Process is that, apart from establishing a greater cooperation in the region as a priority of a political nature, it emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of this cooperation and brings them to the same level of attention as the political and economic cooperation. The Barcelona Declaration underlines that “dialogue and respect among cultures and religions are a necessary pre-condition for bringing the peoples closer”. Special attention is also given to the promotion of “dialogue between cultures and civilizations”, where it is stated that “given 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, inter alia, in the following fields: cultural and creative heritage, cultural and artistic events, co-productions (theatre and cinema), translations and other means of cultural dissemination, training”. Moreover, the Declaration underlines that “greater understanding among the major religions present in the EuroMediterranean region will facilitate greater mutual tolerance and cooperation” and that “support will be given to periodic meetings of representatives of religions and religious institutions, as well as theologians, academics and others concerned, with the aim of breaking down prejudice, ignorance and fanaticism and fostering cooperation at grassroots level”.

In the Declaration, the role of young people is highlighted and young people are recognized as focal partners for the promotion and implementation of dialogue both within their own communities, as well as with other countries and cultures in the region. There is a special mentioning to the role of youth exchanges that are recognized as “the means to prepare future generations for a closer cooperation between the EuroMediterranean partners”.

Giovanni Corbo (31)
Secretary General FNG, Italian

Giovanni is since July 2012 Secretary General of the Italian National Youth Council (FNG-Foro Nazionale Giovani). Before that he was member of the board of the association, responsible for International Affairs and non-formal education. However his path in the youth movement dates years ago when he was an active member of the Movement of Italian Volunteers. Giovanni is also member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, consisting of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks who provide opinions and input on all youth sector activities.

In 2008 Giovanni participated in the 2nd Euro-Arab Cooperation Meeting of Youth Organisations that took place in Assilah in 2009. Since then he has been involved in EuroMediterranean cooperation in the field of youth following the processes that take place on the political and institutional level. Giovanni underlines the importance of the involvement of young people in the decision-making process for issues that affect their lives, that’s why he thinks that youth-led events and activities are of primary importance in this cooperation, as “youth-led activities can bring real results: more young people can get engaged and give their input while institutions can take a step back from the leading role they assume and listen to what young people really want”. In May 2012, FNG organised a EuroArab Forum, where young people gathered together and prepared an action plan reflecting where do they want to see this cooperation going, what can they do themselves and for what they need the support from institutions.

Giovanni thinks that by promoting intercultural dialogue, young people “we also help our country to build a more inclusive system towards immigrants coming from this region and take measures to deal with illegal migration” and he makes reference to the EuroArab Youth Conference “Mare Nostrum: Youth, Migration and Development” that FNG organised in 2010 in Ragusa, together with the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum and the League of Arab States. Young people that participated at the Forum went by boat from Tunis to Sicily to experience the journey of an immigrant. “It was a 12 hour trip, there was a tempest, people fell sick, but this is of course only a small thing compared to the severe situations an immigrant has to face” he says and adds that “we are privileged young people and additionally we were together in this trip- and this connection helped us build bridges between us”.

1 http://www.forumnazionalegiovani.it/
2 http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/coe_youth/advisory%20council/Advisory_Council_on_Youth.asp
3 More information available in the following link http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/EuroArabYouthConference.pdf (date accessed 09.09.2012)
Institutions and young people working together for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region

“Young people are key multipliers, but we should not forget that we are part of a system; we cannot talk about intercultural dialogue without taking into account the general socio-economic system”, said Federica Cicla from Italy and added that “we cannot be the objects of the discussions, we need to be the subjects of the discussion and become real actors of change”. Keeping this in mind, many institutions have indeed centered their forces to empower young people through training and research and they have created funding opportunities and spaces for encounter. Today we can talk of a history of around 15 years of EuroMediterranean youth cooperation.

Ahmad Alhindawi from Jordan, referring to the first steps of this cooperation, said that “it is funny to say this is a partnership - if you put the money, you drive the car, therefore I cannot blame Europe for being eurocentric, I blame the Arab counterparts because they cannot bring their own agenda” and he added that if the cooperation was not so ‘European-driven’, “it would be more healthy and everybody’s views would be more reflected” but underlined that “of course a lot has changed with the involvement of the League of Arab States”.

A more enhanced framework for the EuroMed youth policy cooperation started in 2005, involving the Partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States (LAS) as well as other actors. The cooperation aimed at developing a common understanding and exchange of ideas on specific issues of concern for youth policy in Europe and the South Mediterranean region.

Ahmad Alhindawi (28) 
Youth Development Expert, Jordan

Reading Ahmad’s curriculum, one would see a great number of collaborations in the field of youth with different international organizations (ranging from the United Nations (UNFPA) to the League of Arab States and from Save the Children to the Anna Lindh Foundation) and many representations at high level meetings on youth policies. Then, meeting Ahmad is even more inspiring: a warm and dedicated approach to youth issues, from someone who listens, reflects and then talks.

“When you start getting involved when you are 20, I doubt you are driven by objectives; you are mainly driven by opportunities” he says, but adds that “today I have developed the experience that allows me to make choices and to contribute where I can in my best capacity”. Ahmad engaged in the EuroMed cooperation in the field of youth in 2004, “during its golden age”, as he says. “If you are a youth activist in the region, you cannot avoid getting involved. The EuroMed title brings many opportunities and is a big window for youth participation and for young people to realise their objectives”. Participating in this “community of EuroMed youth activists”, Ahmad learnt a lot. “The EuroMed experience opened for me a new way of thinking about youth work, I realized that youth work is not only about activism and volunteering, but it is a whole science and has a scientific foundation based on research”. Ahmad also observes that “for dialogue we need structures” and that in the Arab countries “organizations lack structures and the individuals that get engaged, are busy with international and regional exchange and forget about the field work and the knowledge transfer”. That’s why he always repeats to other youth activists “don’t forget to do your homework”.

Ahmad’s travels and participation in different fora has enabled him to have a good understanding of structures and policies on both sides of the Mediterranean. “There are two levels of youth participation in the region: on the first level you have the organizations that serve youth on a supranational level and have a funding political mandate to work with civil society, and on the other hand you have the youth organizations, the beneficiaries”, he says, “but in the Arab countries we do not have coordination mechanisms and that’s why sometimes we cannot engage in the dialogue”. Ahmad supports the creation of youth structures and networks on local, national or regional level, but he underlines that “even by having them, it doesn’t mean we represent all young people”. That’s why he believes in the power of youth movements, more than youth organizations. “Youth work can be organised without being institutionalised”, he says.

At the moment of the interview Ahmad was moving to Cairo to work for the UNFPA regional program on youth.
Since 2006, other national and international stakeholders of youth policy in European and South Mediterranean countries have become involved thus extending the framework of this informal cooperation. The activities undertaken so far have brought together youth researchers, governmental institutions responsible for youth policy and non-governmental youth organisations in European and the Southern Mediterranean countries and have provided opportunities for capacity-building of civil society youth organisations through training courses on human rights education, intercultural dialogue and youth participation.

Among the stakeholders in this partnership and platforms where young people can search for assistance, guidance or funding we should mention the following:

**The EU-CoE Youth Partnership and its work in intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the EuroMediterranean context**

Since 1998 the Council of Europe and the European Commission have joined forces and have developed a close cooperation in the field of youth. Starting with an agreement on “European Youth Worker and Youth Leader training” that was completed in 2008, the two institutions endorsed two further covenants, one on “EuroMediterranean youth cooperation” and another one on “Youth research”. The year 2005 was a decisive step in this process, since a single Partnership Agreement was established with the aim to provide a solid framework for the development of a coherent strategy in the field of youth and especially in youth workers training, youth policy and youth research. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by both institutions in 2007 providing a new framework for enhanced co-operation and political dialogue between the two institutions. The current EU-CoE Youth Partnership Agreement covers the period between the 1st of July 2010 and the 31st of December 2013. The main objectives and activities of the Youth Partnership are centered in the following

---

**Rania El Ampasy**

**NGO worker, Greek / Egyptian**

Rania works in the Education Department of the Greek Section of Amnesty International, dealing mainly with human rights education, which is about learning and developing knowledge and understanding about human rights, attitudes and behaviour respectful of human rights and skills to uphold and protect human rights. Apart from creating and publishing relevant material, Rania’s Department also works in close cooperation with schools. They do educational activities with children and young adults and sometimes trainings for teachers as well. “Schools are becoming more and more multicultural and tutors have already reported incidents of racism or violence based on discrimination, so with our work we try to change the attitudes and teach young people to understand the cultural differences and respect them without building walls, in their attempt to feel safer standing against what is different to them”. In their work, Rania and her colleagues use games, simulations, role plays so that young people can experience in a substantial way the values of human rights and “accept the ‘Other’ but also their own identity”. They also work on training teachers in human rights education concepts and non-formal education methods. Rania says that she has been positively surprised by the enthusiasm of many teachers “but still there is a lot to be done to change the attitudes of school management and parent’s associations and make them more open to these kind of approaches and methods, especially in regions that it is mostly needed”.

Raised in an intercultural and inter-religious environment, by an Egyptian father and a Greek mother, Rania has experienced what interculturality means in real life. “Besides the differences, I was raised in an environment of mutual respect and this has determined everything I am and work for”, she says. That’s why she also feels that intercultural dialogue is needed in everyday life, “in the neighborhoods”. “But it is also necessary that it is included in the political discourse as well”, she adds while criticising the hate-speech and racist comments that sometimes come from the political level or from the media. That’s the reason why she studied Media and Communication, “to get a broader understanding of the world and be able to convey messages to different publics”.

Rania feels that the recent crisis in the European countries could be an opportunity for people “to get in the shoes of the less privileged ones and don’t judge according to prejudices; it is an opportunity for human values to come to the surface and help people realize what unites them and makes them citizens of the same world”.

1 www.amnesty.gr.org
fields: social inclusion, democracy and human rights, democratic citizenship and youth participation and Intercultural dialogue and diversity. In the framework of the Partnership, different thematic fora, seminars and events have been and are being organised in order to enhance knowledge on youth. We should make a special reference to the EuroMediterranean seminar on “Indicators for Intercultural Dialogue in non-formal education activities”\(^\text{12}\), that took place in Mollina, Spain (22-24 September 2011) in the framework of the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) University on Youth and Development aiming at discussing, proposing and setting the basis for the validation of possible indicators. This is an ongoing process and there is the intention of testing the indicators in different activities in the future.

Moreover, the Partnership publishes training kits, the Coyote magazine and the series of Youth Knowledge books. In the partnership between the two institutions in the youth field, the T-kit on Intercultural learning\(^\text{13}\) and the T-kit on Mediterranean youth work, MOSAIC\(^\text{14}\) represent possibly the best combination of experiences in the youth sector as far as intercultural learning is concerned.

The Youth in Action program of the European Commission

The Youth in Action\(^\text{15}\) is the European Union’s programme directed to young people, regardless of their educational, social or cultural background. The aim of the programme is to inspire a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union’s future.

\(^{12}\) More information can be found on the Call for participants available at the following link: http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youthpartnership/documents/Euromed/ICD/2011PresentationxcallforpaxseminarICDindicatorsSep2011.pdf (date accessed 03.08.2012)
\(^{13}\) Available at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/4/Tkit_4_EN (date accessed 08.08.2012)
\(^{14}\) Available at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/11/6577_T-Kit_11_A4_assemble.pdf (date accessed 08.08.2012)
\(^{15}\) More information on the programme can be found on the following link: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/
The program has a total budget of 885 million euros for the period 2007 to 2013 and has five fields of actions:

- Action I: Youth in Europe
- Action II: European Voluntary Service
- Action III: Youth in the world
- Action IV: Youth Support Systems
- Action V: Support for European cooperation in the youth field

Action III of the Youth in Action programme supports projects and youth exchanges coming from applicants based in one of the 27 EU member states and involve other regions of the world (in this case the Mediterranean partners), while young people from the Mediterranean partner countries apply to the Euro-Med Youth Programme.

The Euro-Med Youth Programme is a regional programme set up within the framework of the third field of action of the Union for the Mediterranean (previously called Barcelona Process), namely “Partnership in social, cultural and human affairs”. Proposals to be funded under the Euro-Med Youth Programme are presented

Laura Ghaninejad (33)
Cultural Manager, France

One and half year ago, Laura and her partner David Yon (also working on a film project in Algeria) set up Cine(m)assalia, Débats et cinemas autour de la Mediterranée, in Marseille. “Massalia is the original name of Marseille, given to the port from the Greeks”, she says. The idea of setting up Cine(m)assalia came a few years ago when the second issue of a cultural publication which she manages (together with Noria Haddadi, Jeremy Gravayat and Damien Monnier), Les Dérives which included a book and 2 DVDs, was about two film makers based in Lebanon and Algeria, Akram Zaatari and Tariq Teguia. At that moment she realized that there was a need to showcase the work of independent filmakers in the Mediterranean and question the production and circulation of images in the region. Cine(m)assalia aims at tracing the changing history of the places and of the people that live in the Mediterranean, using cinema as the medium to achieve this.

Cine(m)assalia organises film screenings of Mediterranean artists in Marseille and in other french cities, followed by a debate. “Images allow to touch contemporary social issues; today everyone has the possibility to make images - and this has a value of a testimony; but cinema, especially documentary cinema, can be our eyes in other parts of the world” she says, although she underlines that “art can help to build intercultural dialogue, but this is not the only goal of art; artists create for deeper reasons”.

The Cimetta Fund gave the opportunity to Laura and David, to work on a project in Lebanon, called Marseille - Beyrouth where they organised a screening of French filmakers living in Marseille, that will follow a screening of Lebanese filmakers in Marseille. The experience was intense and she learnt a lot from it. “It doesn’t work the same way in both sides of the Mediterranean; it depends if you are at the ‘good’ side, or the ‘bad’ side”, she says taking into account the priviledged conditions that artists and cultural managers have in the European side, as they are able to travel more easily.

“What is most important is to meet the people; to go where they live, to see how they create, how they work, what is the economic and social situation in which they live and not only watch it in movies”, she says. “Then we can work together, but first we need to meet”, she adds and recognizes that with the Union for the Mediterranean “there are more exchanges, structures and opportunities to do this; although we should be aware that there are other interests as well behind with the Union of the Mediterranean”.

1 Debates and Cinema around the Mediterranean http://cinemassalia.org
2 http://www.derives.tv
3 The Roberto Cimetta Fund, is an international non-profit making organisation created in 1999 to respond rapidly and directly to artists and cultural managers who wish to travel in order to develop contemporary artistic cooperation projects in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and in particular throughout the Arab world. More information at http://www.cimettafund.org

16 More information on the programme can be found on the following link: http://www.euromedyouhth.net/IMG/pdf/leaflet_how_does_the_euromed_youth_iv_programme_work-gb-print-2.pdf (date accessed 03.08.2012)
by applicants based in one of the 8 participating Mediterranean Partner Countries and are based on call for proposals issued by their relevant EuroMed Youth Unit (EMYU). Currently the programme is going through its Phase IV (2010-2013)\(^{17}\) and has a budget of 5 million euros. The general objective of the Programme consists in supporting and strengthening the participation and contribution of youth organisations and young people from the EuroMediterranean region towards the implementation of civil society and democracy. The specific objectives are:

- to stimulate and encourage mutual understanding between young people within the EuroMediterranean region and to fight against stereotypes and prejudices;
- to promote active citizenship among young people and enhance their sense of solidarity;
- to contribute to the development of youth policies in the different partner countries.

Same as the Youth in Action Programme, the Euro-Med Youth Programme operates under the decentralization process principle through the establishment of EuroMed Youth Units in the different member countries that work in close cooperation with the Youth in Action National Agencies in order to guarantee a greater proximity to the final beneficiaries and the adaptation to the diversity of national systems and realities in the field of youth\(^{18}\). The topics that youth activities under the Euro-Med Youth Programme focus on are

---

17 Previous phases of the Programme were EuroMed Youth Phase I- 1999 to 2001, EuroMed Youth Phase II- 2001- 2004, EuroMed Youth Phase III- 2005 to 2008. Despite the success of the second phase, the programme was interrupted almost for three years, and although the Youth in Action programme continued to facilitate ties between youth and voluntary organisations on both sides of the Mediterranean sea, there were no projects taking place in the Barcelona process countries outside the European Union.

18 A list of the EuroMed Youth IV Units can be found on the following link: www.euromedyouth.net/About-EuroMed-Youth-Program,51 (date accessed 03.08.2012)
heritage and environment, women in EuroMed, human rights. The Programme focuses on the mobility of young people and the understanding of people in the region through the support of three different kind of actions:

- EuroMed Youth Exchanges, which consists in transnational partnerships between two or more organisations from different countries and that take place in one of the ENPI South countries, bringing together young people from the Euro-Mediterranean region on a topic of mutual interest;
- EuroMed Youth Voluntary Service, that gives the opportunity to young people to participate in a short or long-term volunteering project in a ENPI South country, and through this thus unique intercultural experience, participate actively in the society while developing new skills and competences;
- EuroMed Youth Training and Networking, which consists in supporting measures like study visits, networking activities, seminars and training courses for the exchange of experiences, expertise and good practice and for engaging in new projects, partnerships and networks.
- Participation and active citizenship.

Moreover, in order to enhance a further understanding of youth realities in EuroMediterranean partner countries, the European Commission commissioned a number of studies that would give an overview of the situation of young people and the provisions available for them in some partner countries. The studies present the situation in these countries regarding young people’s rights and entitlements as active citizens, the challenges faced by youth (such as unemployment, immigration, housing, generational and cultural conflict, young women’s role in society), young people’s reactions in response to such challenges and a general description of leisure time activities and non-formal education provision through governmental or/and non-governmental youth institutions and organisations. The studies bring to the spotlight the fact that explicit national youth policies are not put in place in the partner countries and that despite the existence of directives, legislation and strategies that address youth issues, in most cases youth is not regarded as a priority and non-formal education is placed on a secondary level in comparison to formal education.

The Council of Europe (www.coe.int/youth)

The Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe has been playing a key role in awareness raising and training on these matters, notably through the provision of intercultural education and training activities in the European Youth Centres of Strasbourg and Budapest, the funding of intercultural youth projects through the European Youth Foundation, and the development of youth policy strategies that take into account the multicultural realities of young people in Europe today. Moreover, it has been involved in EuroMediterranean and EuroArab activities since several years. After an intensive series of activities of EuroArab political youth cooperation in the end of the 1990’s, the cooperation became more practical and relevant for youth policy after the setting up of a specific partnership on EuroMediterranean cooperation with the European Commission in 2004, in close cooperation with the North-South Centre.

A cornerstone of the Council’s of Europe work was the European youth campaign against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and discrimination, ‘All Different - All Equal’, that run in 1995 and ten years later. This campaign highlighted the importance of intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue for addressing discrimination and exclusion, together with public awareness and political action. It stressed the need for giving a positive dimension to cultural diversity while acknowledging the inherent equal value of all cultures.


20 The studies on youth policies in Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey can be found in the following link: www.euromedyouth.net/Studies-on-EuroMed-Youth-Policies (date accessed 02.08.2012)
The Education Pack ‘All Different - All Equal’ and, later, ‘COMPASS’ - the manual on human rights education with young people - were only two of the long lasting results of that campaign. The Youth Programme of Human Rights Education and Intercultural Dialogue (2006-2008) has built on these experiences and extended them, notably in EuroMediterranean activities carried out within the framework of the Partnership on Youth with the European Union. In 2008 a ‘White Paper on Intercultural dialogue’ was adopted by the governments of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe aiming to clarify how intercultural dialogue may appreciate diversity while sustaining social cohesion.

The European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity of the Council of Europe, commonly known as the ‘North-South Centre’ also runs a programme on intercultural dialogue aiming at the elaboration of strategies and mechanisms of dialogue between Europe and the neighbor regions (particularly the South Mediterranean and Africa ones) in order to strengthen regional stability by a better reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding.

The programme is based on the following dimensions:

- migrations and their socio-cultural aspects;
- women as agents of change in Mediterranean societies;
- media as tools of dialogue and
- the reinforcement of democratic processes and human rights in the EuroMediterranean region.

The Anna Lindh Foundation (www.euromedalex.org)

The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) was established in 2005 in the framework of the EuroMediterranean Partnership and is based in Alexandria, Egypt. The aim of the ALF is to bring people together from across the Mediterranean in order to improve mutual respect between cultures, to support civil society that is working towards a common future in the region and to contribute to the creation of a space of prosperity, peace through restoring trust in dialogue and bridging the gaps in mutual conceptions, as well as promoting diversity and coexistence. The ALF has launched and supported actions across fields impacting on mutual conceptions among people of different cultures and beliefs. Moreover, it has developed a network of over 3,000 civil society organisations and it has published a report on EuroMed Intercultural Trends (2010).

Education and youth have been central themes in the civil work within the EuroMediterranean space, not only because the region is demographically young but also because it is a precious investment in the future. As one of the important actors in the 43 countries of the EuroMediterranean space working on the third pillar of the Barcelona Process, from the very beginning the Anna Lindh Foundation has tried to place youth at the centre of its priorities.

One example of a project supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation was Peace Bag for EuroMed Youth (2010-2011), a long-term project coordinated by the Fundació Catalunya Voluntària, in partnership with 17 youth organisations from 14 countries: Algeria, Bulgaria, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Romania, Palestine, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey. The aim of the project was to mainstream peace education and intercultural dialogue in youth work. Though a number of

---

21 Available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Education_Pack_en.pdf (date accessed 08.08.2012)
22 Available at http://eycb.coe.int/compass/ (date accessed 08.08.2012)
trainings, the project resulted in the Peace Bag Toolkit that features working tools, 
methods, case studies, key concepts and information, and practical activities that 
youth workers can use and adapt according to their own needs. This training guide 
aims to help youths understand how peace and intercultural dialogue is related to the 
day-to-day work of young people. More information at: http://peacebag.org/

The League of Arab States (www.lasportal.org)

The League of Arab States’ main goal is to enhance the relations between its 22 member states and 
co-ordinate collaboration between them and to take care of the affairs and interests of Arab countries. Within 
its Population Policies and Migration Department (PPMD) it supports activities related to youth and addresses 
different issues and challenges at the Arab regional level as well as in partnership with other national, Arab 
of international bodies. Moreover, though the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation 
(ALESCO) and the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League’s Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU), it 
facilitates scientific, social or cultural programmes related to youth. The League of Arab States has been involved 
in the EuroMediterranean cooperation in the field of youth and is the main counterpart in the process.

SALTO - Youth and the SALTO-EuroMed Resource Center (www.salto-youth.net)

SALTO-Youth is a network of 8 Resource Centers working on European priority areas in the field of 
youth. SALTO stands for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities. Established in 2000 as part 
of the European Commission’s Training Strategy within the Youth in Action programme, the network works in 
partnership with other actors in the field and provides youth work and training resources and organises training 
and contact-making activities to support organisations and National Agencies\(^25\) within the framework of the 
European Commission’s Youth in Action programme and beyond. SALTO-Youth also works together with the 
Partnership on European Youth Worker Training between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on 
publications (like Coyote and T-kits) and by organising trainer meetings. Finally, it cooperates with the European 
Youth Forum and TOY, the database of youth trainers (www.salto-youth.net/tools/toy) includes the members of 
the European Youth Forum’s Pool of Trainers.

One of the Resource Centers of SALTO-Youth focuses and specializes on EuroMed cooperation\(^26\) in the 
field of youth by offering trainings, events, educational tools and space for the exchange of practices and 
by providing support to the EuroMed Youth Units, the network and its partners. It is hosted by INJEP (French 
National Institute for Youth and non-formal education) and is part of the French National Agency for the Youth 
in Action programme\(^27\). The SALTO-Youth EuroMed organises thematic trainings, seminars and conferences on 
EuroMed youth priorities.

The Euro-Med Youth Platform (www.euromedp.org)

The Euro-Med Youth Platform was launched in September 2003 to contribute to the implementation of

---

\(^{25}\) The National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme promote and implement the programme at national level and act as a link between the European Commission, project promoters at national, regional and local level and the young people themselves. The Agencies are the primary sources of information for the users of the Youth in Action programme, they are responsible for disseminating general information about it as well as encouraging and facilitating the establishment of partnerships. For a list of the National Agencies, consult: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth/doc152_en.htm#sectNAS (date accessed 03.09.2012)

\(^{26}\) More information available at www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/saltoeuromed (date accessed 03.09.2012)

\(^{27}\) Another important Resource Centre is the one on Cultural Diversity based in London-UK, that although it is not focusing directly on EuroMed cooperation, provides tools, methods, materials and links related to training, learning and resources for youth leaders looking issues related to culture, identity, faith, ethnicity etc. More information can be found at the following link: www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/about/ (date accessed 03.09.2012)
the Youth in Action Programme. Based in Malta, the Euro-Med Youth Platform’s aim is to bring together NGOs from the European and Mediterranean regions in an environment of tolerance and mutual understanding by assisting them in networking and capacity building, while increasing their participation and promoting the exchange of good practice. The Platform was re-launched in 2008 as the result of a restructuring process and since that date the Platform embarked in a new path in order to strengthen its identity, structures and credibility in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

One of the principal initiatives of the Platform since 2009 is the organisation of the ‘Our White Sea’ seminar that provides opportunities for young people to engage in capacity building and networking between NGOs in programme countries of the European Union and the MEDA region (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership). Based on the belief that overcoming the difficulties young people face in cooperating because of lack of opportunities, xenophobia, prejudice and ignorance and recognizing the role of young people for future cooperation between countries in the region, the ‘Our White Sea’ seminar bring together representatives of youth NGOs and the civil society in general, youth policy experts and researchers from the region in order to identify problems and reflect on possible solutions.

The Euro-Med Youth Platform has a partner-finding database that allows youth organisations to look for partners for their projects. Moreover, the Platform publishes annually a trilingual magazine named, Le Reseau, ‘The Network’ which includes articles from different young people and actors in the field of youth from the EuroMed region. Finally, the Platform commissions research and edits publications on issues that are related to civil society cooperation in the youth field in the region.

**The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (www.unaoc.org)**

The United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. Aiming to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and to counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism, the Alliance of Civilizations works in four areas of action: youth, media, education and migration.

Recognizing that youth can be an essential asset that plays a critical role in addressing the challenges related to global and local stability and stressing the importance of highlighting young people’s own contribution to promoting respect and understanding and fostering dialogue among people of different backgrounds, UNAOC has established a Youth program. The long-term visions of the UNAOC Youth programming is to mainstream youth at all levels of action and decision-making through raising awareness, strengthening capacity and sharing information.

The Youth Program of the UNAOC includes a Youth Solidarity Fund that provides seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. One of the highlight projects of the Alliance of Civilizations is the Fellowship Programme that aims to enhance mutual knowledge and understanding between people and societies from Muslim-majority countries in the Arab world, Europe and North America. UNAOC also organises a Youth Event close to the UNAOC Forum, bringing together a vast array of participants to work on joint actions to improve relations across cultures and religions and build a lasting peace.

---

28 We should remind to the reader that this research is funded by the EuroMed Youth Platform.
Youth organisations and institutions working together

The European Youth Forum (YFJ)\(^{31}\), the platform of youth organisations in Europe, has been at the forefront of youth cooperation with the Mediterranean and Arab region. From this work, developed in partnership with the Council of Europe (CoE), the League of Arab States (LAS), the World Bank-MENA Region and ICMYO organisations emerged the Euro-Arab Coordination Meetings of Youth Organisations (EACMYO) and the participation of European youth representatives in the Youth Forums of the League of Arab States and other inter-regional meetings\(^{32}\).

The EACMYO meetings that have taken place so far are:

- the 1\(^{st}\) EACMYO meeting that took place in Amman, Jordan in November 2008, preceding the 2\(^{nd}\) League of Arab States Youth Forum on Youth and Intercultural Dialogue. The results of this meeting were the adoption of a framework for EuroArab cooperation amongst youth organisations;
- the 2\(^{nd}\) EACMYO meeting that took place in Assilah, Morocco in November 2009, in the framework of the 3\(^{rd}\) League of Arab Stated Youth Forum on ‘Youth and Migrations: a human rights based approach’. This meeting resulted in the adoption of the Assilah Appeal which called on facilitation of youth mobility, promotion of youth exchanges and the rights of young migrants;
- the 3\(^{rd}\) EACMYO meeting that took place in Tunis, Tunisia in July 2010 in the framework of the seminar “the role of youth organisation in promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding” organised by LAS. Following this meeting, the 1\(^{st}\) EuroArab Youth Conference Mare Nostrum-Youth, Migration and Development was organised by Foro Nazionale dei Giovani (FNG - the Italian National Youth Council) in Ragusa, Italy in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, the Council of Europe and the League of Arab States.

In 2012 a new impetus was given to the EuroMed cooperation in the field of youth and three important meetings have taken place:


This seminar gathered around 40 participants from 19 countries and focused on the role of youth organisations, youth movements and young people as crucial actors in the development and consolidation of inclusive, participatory and pluralistic democracies based on human rights and the rule of law. It also analysed the interconnections between youth and the Arab Spring revolutions, as well as the role of social media and social networks in this direction. “One of the outcomes of the seminar was a list of proposals and recommendations from the participants, which would serve as a basis to the preparation of the forthcoming event in Tunis (August 2012) but also for institutions and partners to stimulate their reflections on future priorities and related cooperation strategies”\(^{33}\).

---

\(^{31}\) The European Youth Forum (YFJ- www.youthforum.org) is a pan-European platform of youth organisations working in the fields of youth policy and youth work development. The YFJ focuses its work on European youth policy matters, whilst through engagement on the global level it is enhancing capacities of its members and promote global interdependence. In its daily work the The YFJ represents the views and opinions of young people in all relevant policy areas and promotes the cross-sectoral nature of youth policy towards a variety of institutional actors. The principles of equality and sustainable development are mainstreamed in the work of the YFJ. The European Youth Forum bases its work on the values of participation, empowerment of young people, equality, gender equality and equal opportunities, inclusiveness, intercultural understanding, democracy, respect for human rights, solidarity with all young people, global responsibility, diversity and mutual respect and peace. YFJ has undertaken the past study visits in Southern Mediterranean countries with the aim to contribute and support youth policy development in the region and is supporting the creation of a coordination platform of youth organisations in Arab countries.

\(^{32}\) Information about these meetings is compiled from background documents of the European Youth Forum and the Concept note of the EuroArab Youth Leaders Meeting prepared by FNG.

\(^{33}\) Information taken by the Executive Summary of the Seminar on Empowerment of Youth Organisations and Youth-led Civil Society Initiatives in the South-Mediterranean Framework”, prepared by Gisèle Evrard.
• ‘EuroArab and Mediterranean Youth Leaders Meeting: Networking and Partnership Development’, Rome 7-12 May 2012

This meeting gathered 28 youth leaders coming from membership-based, democratic and independent organisations which have a regional scope both in the European and the Arab region and an interest in enhancing the political dialogue and cooperation at regional level. The meeting was organised by the Italian National Youth Forum-Forum Nazionale dei Giovani (FNG) in order “to give a new impetus to the EuroArab and Mediterranean youth cooperation processes following the political and social changes of the Arab Spring” and build “a common strategy and an action-oriented plan on the development of youth participation in democratic decision-making processes” for the period 2012-2015. The meeting was part of the long term project “Act Democracy-Youth participation and active citizenship for peace, democracy and social promotion” promoted by FNG. The document was presented to the institutional partners present at an institutional meeting that took place on the 10th of May34.

• Symposium ‘Arab spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms’, Tunisia. 27-29 August 2012

This symposium aimed to raise awareness and establish an understanding based on the needs identified by young people in Malta and the action plan adopted in Rome and to discuss how the empowerment of youth in a democratic society could be supported and enhanced through strategies and projects promoting civic participation, to promote youth policy and participation models and discuss their relevance for the regional context, to develop concrete proposals for the development and support of youth participation, youth policy institutions and youth research that could help to reinforce and further develop the youth cooperation between the Southern Mediterranean and Europe. The symposium was co-organised by the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the League of Arab States, the Tunisian governmental authorities, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the Euro-Med Platform, the United Nations Population Fund and the European Youth Forum35.

In light of the above, there is no doubt that a lot has been done to increase awareness of the need for intercultural and interfaith dialogue among Mediterranean youth from an institutional point of view. International institutions have put in place strategies and have brought an ‘added value’ but there is great room for improvement. In the same time youth organisations have taken an active part in the process, have participated actively in the activities proposed by institutional partners and have initiated their own processes in order to meet with their peers and exchange experiences, while in the same time finding the space to formulate their requests and putting forward their claims for further policy decisions.

However, lots is still needed to further enhance the role of young people in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the region. There is still the need to stress the shared values that bring young people together and to identify the barriers that young people face and propose tools that could help reduce and eventually remove there barriers. It is also very important to look for ways for involving as many young people as possible in this process.

34 Information taken by the report “Euro-Arab and Mediterranean Youth Leaders Meeting: Networking and Partnership Development” final report facilitated by FNG.
V. Some points for further action
V. Some points for further action

A lot has been achieved so far and there is a lot of legacy to build upon, however young people identify some areas where more emphasis should be placed.

Education

“Education is important because it gives more chances to young people to look inside them and around them and to develop a wider view of the world and society”, said Alessandro di Maio from Italy. Formal education can play an important role in the development of the consciousness of the need of overcoming mental borders and creating spaces for dialogue, thus creating “experts in daily life intercultural dialogue” (Banús, 2012:109). Rachida Gokcebag, a young Turkish Cypriot, said that “we need a change in the education system, especially in the teaching of history, and we need to include moral studies and training on how to be tolerant”, although she also stressed that “education is not enough; home is important too…”.

The need to find bridges between formal and non-formal education has been highlighted in many of the interviews. “Youth organisations can provide expertise to the formal education system but the educational system has to be open to them”, pointed out Ralitsa Trifonova from Bulgaria. “Intercultural education should be a systematic process” proposed Anas Nawaflesh from Jordan and asked “why can’t we teach something at universities, for example whatever your major is, you should take a course in intercultural understanding or world history” and he concluded by saying that “we should integrate intercultural learning in the formal education system”.

ARTiculating values: youngsters act in EuroMed, a creative initiative for inter-religious dialogue and a peoples-connecting values approach” was a project by the Interkulturelles Zentrum Austria that brought together 16 schools and 6 organisations from Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands and Turkey. Using theater, creative writing and non-formal education activities, the project aimed to be platform for both formal and non-formal education which allows an exchange of good practices and to have an essential impact regarding peaceful co-existence and citizenship. More information at: http://en.iz.or.at/start.asp?ID=230907&b=4028 (date accessed 03.09.2012)

Bringing in both perspectives

Although most of the young people pointed out that there is quite some material and manuals on intercultural and interfaith dialogue that they can consult and use in their activities, they stressed out that most of them are conceived from a european perspective. “We don`t need projects about intercultural and interfaith dialogue designed from a european perspective because it is not the same context we are talking about and in the Southern Mediterranean countries we have the experts and the experience”, said Nayla Hajjar from Lebanon, adding that “we don’t need training resources from European NGOs and Institutions that do not fit the context of Arab countries; in training activities, trainers should be from both sides of the shore to bring in both perspectives”. This is important because as Ralitsa Trifonova from Bulgaria mentioned, “we need to give to young people the insight, the understanding of all points of view, not only the information”.

Giovanni Gorbo from Italy also recognised that “I am sometimes afraid that in the cooperation process we are dreaming that our role as European counterparts is to export and to teach, but we need to realize that the realities are totally different in the other side of the Mediterranean and what works here might not work there”.

46
More opportunities for mobility and people-to-people exchanges

Rachida Gokcebag, a Turkish-Cypriot young girl interviewed said that “young people need opportunities to travel; when you are stuck in your place, you think that this is all what the world is about...”. People exchanges is most probably one of the most enduring means of increasing understanding (Mitchell, 1986:19).

Liga Efeja from Latvia, proposed that since “mobility is an issue for many young people because either they might not be allowed to travel or do not trust themselves to travel on their own or face hardships due to visa regulations and procedures and travel costs, youth exchanges and programmes can thus provide invaluable help to make mobility more accessible to young people”. Eleni Michail from Cyprus said that “if young people get to participate in more exchanges, they can start passing their experience to their friends, they become more open-minded and multipliers of their experience, so even if they don’t engage in concrete actions, just talking to other people about their experience is already an added value”. Andreja Aušperger from Croatia pointed out that “young people are enthusiastic with the learning they get from youth projects, especially youth exchanges; most of them didn’t have the opportunity before to meet directly someone from another nationality or a different culture and they feel inspired to discover and explore more and get involved in new, similar projects”.

Involving as many young people as possible

Some of the people interviewed pointed out that the projects and activities, especially the ones initiated from an institutional point of view, don’t reach the vast majority of young people. They also pointed out that in most of the activities, it is the same young people that participate, that could even be characterized as ‘professional participants’. Also the fact that some young people get engaged in this kind of initiatives to get personal benefits was criticised with skepticism by some of the interviewees. Undeniably, youth organizations provide a safe space for encounter with the “Other”, but as Eleni Michail from Cyprus said “generally speaking, young people who engage in youth organizations are open and flexible to difference; what is difficult is to reach out at those who are not”. And Sonia Mejri from France pointed out that “we need activities beyond the capitals and with people who live outside them”.

Funding issues

Many of the young people interviewed pointed out that most of the funding for activities related to the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue comes from the european and the international level, and not so much from the national or local level or from the Southern Mediterranean countries. Haythem Kamel from Egypt also pointed out that “although Southern Mediterranean countries have the resources, they don’t allocate the necessary funding for the empowerment of young people”.

However, some of them argued that there is enough funding, but the problem is that young people don’t know where to find information or they don’t have the necessary capacity to build project proposals. Elina Makri from Greece pointed out that “there are many available funding resources but you need to become reliable and get the trust of the institutions; you need to believe in your project, be persistent and patient-nothing comes to you in a magic way”. In the same line, Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan from Morocco pointed out that “when young people feel the vulnerability that they are not strong enough, they blame it to the lack of funding. The question that young people should ask themselves is ‘what would I do if I had the money?’ and from there start to build something concrete. We don`t miss ideas, but we miss realistic objectives”.

47
More visibility to youth projects and initiatives

This seems to be a two-fold aspect. From one side, youth projects and initiatives should get more visibility in the media or recognition on the institutional level. On the other hand, there is a self-criticism concerning the effort that young people invest in the promotion of their activities and a questioning on how to create more sustainable and effective links with the rest of the society. The issue of assuring sustainability in the projects was also raised. Moreover, some interviewees said that youth projects and initiatives should not take place behind closed doors. “We need to do activities in public to surprise the local community—flash mobs, frozen images, play the hidden treasure...”, said Eleni Michail from Cyprus.

More activities related to common concerns and not explicitly on intercultural and interfaith dialogue

Many of the young people interviewed underlined that in order to enhance intercultural and interfaith dialogue, it is perhaps more effective to organise activities and project around issues of common concern. “We need to talk about our similar interests, about music, studies, health, employment and then discuss about values”, said Liga Efeja from Latvia. “Exchanges, projects and activities should not be organised around what makes us different, but instead around what are the common challenges young people in the Mediterranean face: unemployment, entrepreneurship, recognition of youth work, youth participation, democracy, social inclusion...”, said Haythem Kamel from Egypt. And Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan from Morocco said that “if we talk about poverty, unemployment, education, intergenerational gap, there are things that in the Mediterranean we have in common; we can work on these topics to get results or ideas” and added that “this way we are setting a solid foundation to start a solid dialogue”. Working in this kind of topics generates reciprocity, new forms of trust, the discovery of new interests and even collective identities.

More institutional support

Young people wish to feel that there is commitment to help build a firm ground for a genuine cooperation to flourish and for this reason they also request more institutional support in their activities. Anas Nawafleh from Jordan pointed out that “young people might have the feeling of being exploited especially if they are asked to come up with recommendations and these recommendations are not taken seriously” and Haythem Kamel from Egypt said that “a mutual benefit should be created: institutions gain in soft power and young people in experiences and exposure to international environments”. Support from religious structures was also emphasised.

Strengthening civil society and youth policies in the Southern Mediterranean

Only if the youth sector is strong and flourishing at home can it engage in successful and sustainable cooperation across borders. Therefore a lot of emphasis was placed on the need to increase levels of youth participation where it is still weak and to put in place youth policies.

The role of youth organisations and youth workers in this direction was also stressed, both in educating young people in democratic values, but also informing and guiding them throughout the process. Youth structures can provide solutions to the fact that “although manuals exist, you have to be curious or pushed by someone to open them, and although there are many ideas, young people don’t know how to put them in practice and they need someone to accompany them in the process”, as Farah Cherif D’Ouezzan from Morocco pointed out.
VI. Suggestions for future research
VI. Suggestions for future research

This study tried to shed some light to the central role that young people and especially youth organizations play in disseminating universal values, taking into account cultural and religious sensitivities in the region. Young people and youth organizations can reinforce respect for diversity but also make obvious to people of different backgrounds that share similar values. This study tried to bring to the surface the important role and contribution of young people in shaping and conveying values among their immediate community and to underline that this role should be emphasized and supported through programmes focused on enhancing their capacity to share their potential for dialogue and the conveying of common values across the EuroMediterranean societies. Arguably though, for their activities and actions to be successful, a better understanding of the driving forces that shape the way that young people in both southern and northern Mediterranean countries understand common values, is required. An understanding also of the ways that young people beyond youth organisations engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. A first attempt to do this was through interviews with a few young journalists and artists from the region, but this is simply a hint. Furthermore, we must determine the nature of the main challenges, those in common as well as the different ones, that young people face in their attempts to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue and establish lasting co-operation. The aim of such dialogue is to help them take up some of the greatest challenges facing us all today. It is essential to conduct a thorough appraisal of the changes which have occurred in the last two decades, so as to improve our understanding and gain a more accurate picture of the real situation.

After more than 15 years of youth projects and partnerships running to bring together youth of both sides of the shore, there is a need to step back and reflect on how cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean has actually taken shape, what it means for those concerned and whether we are still asking ourselves the right questions. Since young people have been actively engaged in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean, there is quite a legacy to build on. As Ahmad Alhindawi from Jordan said, “the EuroMed cooperation in the field of youth has been going up and down; the Union for the Mediterranean was a momentum, now the Arab spring is a new momentum”. But hopefully this momentum will go beyond the ‘Med in full swing’ trend that exists at the moment and will be the basis of more sustainable and coordinated strategies in the field.
Conclusion:
A reflection process in progress
CONCLUSION: A REFLECTION PROCESS IN PROGRESS

This publication presents the main findings of a reflection process. You have read the voices of some of the young people that contribute to the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean and you have found examples of projects that demonstrate youth cooperation for intercultural and interfaith dialogue at work. I hope that this publication will reflect what has been done so far and highlight the extraordinary level of creativity and dedication of young people and their capacity to act in difficult circumstances. And finally, I hope that this small study will help to reinforce the idea that young people have a leading role to play in finding innovative ways of successfully working in turbulent political environments for the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, while remaining “young” in their way of thinking.

An important question that the study may raise, is whether the 30 people I interviewed can really represent their societies’ struggles over cultural identity, conflict transformation, intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Although this can be considered a limitation to the study, I argue that to some extent they can. But this requires the recognition of an undeniable reality: the young people interviewed are often among the elite in their societies and do not necessarily represent the majority of young people in the Mediterranean. This is something that young people interviewed highlighted themselves: young people do not have as many opportunities to participate, to be actors of social change in the region, either because they have to face different kind of problems in their everyday life that require their attention and effort or because they lack the information, capacity-building or confidence to take action. Most of the people interviewed have the educational background and the economic liberty to think about questions that less well-off young people in their societies - and in the world in general - might view as an idle luxury. Young people interviewed regard themselves as privileged: they are the ones that have had opportunities to study abroad, to participate in exchanges, to get involved in youth organizations, to meet the “Other” in person and engage in actions. But what differs them from their fellows is a matter of degree rather than of kind, and their struggles, their opinions and their actions resonate throughout their societies that the role of young people in the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue is of an important value and cannot be neglected.

The challenge now is to bring the experience and the conclusions to a broader arena, where they could be shared with a larger group of young people and where they will also attract the attention of media and policy makers and have an impact on the way instruments for youth participation and cooperation are designed and implemented in the future.

Using the Greek poet’s, Kavafis, words, the journey is “long, full of adventure, full of knowledge”, but hopefully when young people arrive to their “Ithaca”, they will arrive “wise” and “with so much experience”, that they will definitely have understood “what Ithacas mean”.

52
References
REFERENCES


Council of Europe (2010). Mosaic-The training kit for EuroMediterranean youth work. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. Strasbourg: Council of Europe


WEBSITES
(more on the relevant chapter footnotes)

Anna Lindh Foundation
www.euromedalex.org

Council of Europe Youth Department
www.coe.int/youth

Euro-Med Youth Platform
www.euromedp.org

European Commission, Youth Program
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm

Euro-Med Youth Program
www.euromedyouth.net

European Youth Forum
www.youthforum.org

League of Arab States
www.lasportal.org

Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union
www.youth-partnership.net

SALTO-Youth
www.salto-youth.net