

MED FORUM 2016: CONCLUSIONS

MED FORUM of the Anna Lindh Foundation, from 23-25 October 2016 in Valletta, Malta, brought together 600 delegates from more than 40 countries, including heads of international organisations former Heads of State, policy-makers, private sector representatives, national civil society coordinators, city and local authority networks, and youth sector leaders.

The central two-day gathering has been the result of a far-reaching programming process launched at the regional preparation meeting in Valletta on 4th March and focused on transforming the renewed policy impetus for intercultural dialogue into an operational framework through which the Anna Lindh Foundation and partners can open up a new stage of Euro-Med cooperation.

The strategic themes generated through this process - which have framed and structured MED FORUM's policy debates, strategic sessions, and networking space - remain connected by the overarching aim of embedding and multiplying the reach and impact of intercultural dialogue, and bringing the Euro-Med project to the wider societies of the region.

This preliminary report, generated with the intercultural team of global rapporteurs, and drawing from the various statements and proposals captures and consolidates the emerging lessons and areas of action:

Several important areas of activities have been identified and presented as essential platforms of activity in the next period to enhance and further widen the scope and the efficiency of the Foundation's endeavours. Building on the results of the June Conference in Slovenia, Translation has emerged as an important instrument for intercultural dialogue and its fundamental role exemplified through the recognition and awards presented to several actors in the field. The establishment of the fund for translators as well as the establishment of a platform for the exchange of info among the several actors in the field stand among the objectives which need to be pursued alongside mobility and exchanges of actors as well as productions.

The Erasmus for associations was also presented as a new tool to promote and enhance exchanges between organisation on both shores of the Mediterranean and a project which carries a clear potential for significant impact as it deals with human contact and the direct exchange of ideas, experiences, expertise and common projects.

The launch on Monday 23 October of the Anna Lindh Foundation new project Young Mediterranean Voices represents a major endeavour also further facilitate the contacts between youth throughout the region and a scheme where concerns, aspirations, projects but also good practices will shared between youth from the southern Mediterranean with their peers in the North. It will also create an additional tool to enhance youth communication and capacity to access media in general through various programmes of training, advocacy and practice in the field.

INTERCULTURAL CITIES

There is an emerging consensus through the MED FORUM process that INTERCULTURAL CITIES represents the most significant strategic step in terms of the Anna Lindh Foundation's domain of future action.

Cities are showing the greatest rates of change in the EuroMediregion. The ways this is managed will decide their future. We arrive at a historically appropriate moment to create common intercultural Mediterranean projects.

Forum participants back the strategy to invest in cities as spaces for intercultural relations and as drivers of intercultural dialogue. The next step is to define the specific objectives, and conditions, as well as framing the activities for the short and long term action.

Two dimensions need to be distinguished within this strategy: **within the city**, with the support initiatives for intercultural interaction, **and internationally** by establishing cooperation with other cities. Networking and cooperation is necessary to understand the meaning of diversity within different cities, to exchange practices and knowledge on the management of diversity and in the promotion of intercultural relations. The establishment of “the Mediterranean Capital for Dialogue” can be a strong opportunity to increase the visibility of dialogue and attract engagement and investment.

RETHINKING LEARNING

From the opening plenary debate on “Beyond Extremism” to the networking sessions, MED FORUM brought out the centrality of education as the long-term solution to addressing many of the interconnected causes of negative trends in the region.

We need to shape a solid policy to embed intercultural learning in formal and non-formal education sectors. There should be a Call to establish a global fund for intercultural learning. The development of evidence-based research should support advocacy.

At the operational level of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the new Education Handbook on Intercultural Citizenship Education offers an opportune basis for building a shared, multiplier programme in the region.

Empowerment of educators in the formal and non-formal sector to be able to apply the new concepts, skills and methodologies presented in the Handbook through capacity building Promote international alliances/partnerships within the formal and non-formal education sector to facilitate exchange.

Build a platform for educators with the available resources, good practices, initiatives on intercultural learning is a clear role for the ALF

EXCHANGE 3.0

Mobility was a major theme of MED FORUM, expressed throughout the preparation process as a key issue and reflecting a major challenge that has been central to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation discussion since the launch of the Partnership in 1995.

For all the challenges, MED FORUM expressed the potential of a new stage of exchange and mobility, harnessing new tools and influencing regional policies, which could leverage people-to-people exchange at an unprecedented level.

Policy conclusions include ensuring that mobility is on the national agenda of countries. The positive elements of exchanges between NGOs across the Mediterranean needs to be emphasised by the media. The establishment of a Cultural passport recognised by the governments in the region could support facilitate obtaining visas.

Two schemes can encourage the mobility of minds, solutions and people. Launching a programme of intercultural visits to get to know other ways of life and investing on virtual exchanges. Mobility is to be promoted as a positive value and practice among different groups in society so that barriers can be reduced.

The ALF can provide leadership in the field as a platform for connecting engaged actors and for the presentation of the existing exchange opportunities in the EuroMed region and good practices which could be replicated.

Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship emerged as an important vehicle to promote dialogue and generate income among civil society actors and youth in particular.

There is the need to strengthen support systems to promote creative social entrepreneurship in the region through education, mentoring and business development strategies.

Policy should promote the inclusion of women in social enterprise and seek to remove barriers to entry (socio-cultural realities, childcare issues, issues about travelling alone, male dominated business environment) and include marginalised groups, such as refugees, in entrepreneurial activities

Promote the notion of special legal status for social enterprise in some countries to enable them to operate as both a profit generating entity whilst concurrently be able to access government, NGO and charity trust funding and/or benefit from tax exemptions.

For the ALF we need to work to leverage our institutional partnerships and draw on the expertise within the network members to develop and implement policies on training, mentoring, networking, business skills development, access to finance, incubator and accelerator schemes. We also need to create a platform for sharing good practices and methodologies across the Euro-Mediterranean space. This cooperation could take the form of work exchanges, mobilization of emerging cultural entrepreneur to facilitate knowledge exchange, creation of new physical and virtual knowledge networks. This cooperation would provide a space for intercultural dialogue and promote shared values.

Furthermore, we also need to leverage public-private sector support to invest in organisations to develop their capacity to generate income. In operational terms the public-private support can be ensured through mentorship, job shadowing, participation of business sector in the NGO Board of Directors.

The idea of Facilitate a social enterprise passport was shared to enable social enterprise exchanges and networking and minimise the risk of visa denials.

Youth

The Youth has been the central target group identified during MED Forum as the drivers for change and for dialogue. Investment in the empowerment of youth is a priority and also the creation of consultation mechanisms between youth and decision-makers where policy-makers take seriously youth recommendations going beyond practices of online media consultations. Furthermore it is important to invest in programmes for youth mobility and exchanges with a particular investment on the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Media

Media is not homogeneous in terms of the quality of cross-cultural reporting. It is difficult to achieve balance, accountability and evidence based-news in a region where trust has been eroded and perceptions about each other have deteriorated further. This leads to further polarisation of society. The problem of media credibility is not only in mainstream media but also with social media.

Media coverage does not cover the vibrant civil society that exists in the region so more investment in connecting media operators and civil society actors should be deployed. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure young people have opportunities to engage with media and to open up dialogue between media and its audiences, with the help of civil society.

Counter-narratives will help us achieve important results but they need to be further strengthened by our own campaign to highlight the positive and constructive aspects of the alternative that we represent through our shared values.

It will be important to develop an observatory on how media covers issues of intercultural relations and to provide evidence-base resources to impact on the practice of journalists. Training of journalists and media practitioners is necessary to give appropriate coverage of sensitive issues disseminating a code of ethics.

Women

The MED Forum emphasised the importance of women as actors for peace in the Mediterranean. There cannot be stability nor peace without gender equality. Women invest 80% of their income in their families but only 28% of women in the south are working. It is important to strengthen political participation. Only 18% in the south are politically active.

Legislation and treaties to ensure gender equality have been adopted in several countries but policies have not been implemented for gender equality.

There should be a revision of curricula and training of teachers in citizenship and gender equality and prioritise projects that give women the means to become more independent. Gender equality and women needs to be referred to in documents.

Arts

MED Forum underlined the important of artists for their representation of the rich and complex realities in the region and the role they can have in building between different countries and engage audiences.

Policy should be shaped to develop strategies with chamber of commerce, music expos, governments and artists to raise the profile of arts and develop new roots in established and potential markets and therefore promoting sustainability. This approach would contribute to the establishment of creative groups or spaces in small and medium cities. (creativity is currently in the capital cities – decentralisation of creativity spaces). Investment in the visibility of art work could raise attention to the sector and contribute to its promotion.

There is a need to facilitate exchange especially of young emerging artists. The funding process should be less restrictive to enable emerging artists to participate, and a visa scheme should be established with governments to facilitate south-south and north-south exchange.

The ALF could invest in arts development across the network through incubator and training and enterprises, and network members could use the ALF platform to work with network partners to support emerging artists to help them raise funds, establish networks and move into the Euromed space.

Impact and sustainability and reach

It is important to maximise impact. We need to encourage initiatives by young people informal groups with simple procedures. We need to understand what sort of education is needed in such a dynamic changing Mediterranean society and to invest it in. It will be important to stimulate creativity and innovation in order to develop initiatives which can become sustainable.

Sustainability of projects is one of the biggest challenges we face in creating change in the region. We must explore partnerships and schemes that use the initiatives and engagement of people, while establishing long-lasting relationships that can transform society. Networks and networking should be a central feature of this.

Impact is largely based on with ownership of project outcomes. We need to invest in follow-up activities needed to create evidence-based outcomes.

Reach of project activities and results to be done through a structured dialogue between civil society and media through the use of online platforms and mainstream media built in the project since its beginning