



**ME.DIA.T.E.**

**M**editerranean **D**IAlogue **T**hrough **E**mpowerment

## **From Conflict to Reconciliation : the Consolidation of dialogue among NGOs and Civil Society in the Mediterranean Countries**

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**Introduction by Guido Barbera – President of Me.Dia.T.E.**

The Mediterranean has never been just a sea separating Europe from Africa and the East. It has always united around it different populations and cultures, nomadic peoples and settlers, desert and town, traditional and modern civilizations, more and more modern cities with towns rooted in their own history, that are often rivals, often in conflict...

The Mediterranean is, above all, a “cradle” of civilizations!

This is the sea that created civilizations, united and divided them, and saw them in good relationship and in heavy conflicts: the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Rome; histories of peoples, cultures and civilizations that marked the history of entire humanity and that are the “mother” of our Europe. In the Mediterranean were born and developed the great cultures that later designed the identity of Europe and of the northern Africa Countries. In this countries got strength the principle of monotheism, of a God that unite the different, the contraries...of a God capable to unite the diverse Arabic, Hebrew and Christian sensitivities; a God that can make order and justice reign the world. And it's around this sea where philosophy was born, with its idea of “polis”, its first orders that defined and consolidated many political civilizations.

Dialogue and conflict, peace and war, made history of the Mediterranean, where civilisations, cultures, ideas, forces, peoples clashed with each other...nowadays, conflicts and tensions inside the Mediterranean countries are fight of philosophies, of different approaches towards life and the world...more than clashes between opposite interests. These do not justify the strength and the absoluteness some conflicts reached in recent years. Only the cultural fight may lead to non-recognizing each other and straight to the final clash for life or death. Only the clash for our own identity can lead to a mutual destruction.

How many times did the States and the European politicians, really comprehend the nature of these relationships and conflicts? Maybe we find interesting declarations and principles in speeches and in some document; but facts clearly demonstrate their failure; the failure of a kind of politics that should be, as a part of its duty, an instrument of dialogue, compromise and agreement.

Wars, social tensions, clashes, which followed one another year after year, are always motivated with geo-political reasons, and with vain attempts to re-define the economic-political balances. Important but insufficient factors.

To have a true Peace, it is necessary and decisive a dialogue among and with the Mediterranean cultures, in a framework of civil society growth, through a mutual recognition.

It is not possible to build Peace, without dialogue

It is not possible to have Democracy, without dialogue

It is not possible to respect the Person, without dialogue

It is not possible to make Politics, without dialogue

It is not possible to have Civilizations, without dialogue

It is not possible to have Development, without dialogue.

Today we have the conditions for this dialogue. We have the conditions so that the Mediterranean can regain its historical role at a European and worldly level.

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona in 1995, marked the beginning of the euro-Mediterranean partnership. A process based upon political, economic and social relationships among the 15 European Union Countries and the 12 States of the south Mediterranean basin.

An ambitious initiative having three great purposes:

1. The definition of a common space of Peace and Stability, through the strengthening of the dialogue on politics and safety;
2. The building of a prosperity area, through an economic and financial partnership aiming at the creation of a free trade zone;
3. The approach of populations through a social, cultural and human partnership, aimed at fostering the comprehension among cultures and the exchanges among civil societies.

Much of what was scheduled by the Barcelona Agreement and was the object of the following meetings has to be accomplished, yet. The social partnership, above all, has still to find the definition of its role, spaces and actions.

In this contest, the different cultures existing in the Mediterranean have to find again a terrain of confrontation, to rediscover the richness and the reasons of each other.

It is not only ideology or diplomacy.

It is about the history every culture have; the richness of experiences; of facts and sufferance of the different peoples; learning and knowledge transmitted through generations; work, techniques, the everyday...life.

Today the Mediterranean is a priority geo-political area in the international theatre, especially after the enlargement to east of the Union had no obstacles. Ex President Prodi has stressed more than once that the Mediterranean, cradle of our civilization, can only represent the centre of the new Europe. For this reason the European Union, interpreting the needs of its population, sees the Mediterranean area as a human, social and historic reality which imposes, ever more urgently, courageous and long-lasting interventions.

In this contest, it emerges more and more important the civil society participation in the various processes of reconciliation and development. "There can be no development, without the civil society participation", affirms the European Commission in a written communication.

Dialogue is, in fact, an answer to the growing demand for participation coming from actors of the civil society, and may represent a strong factor of approach and enrichment for both the Mediterranean shores. It is an effective mean to interpret and solve common problems, through the personal meeting of the parties. Inside Europe itself, it can be an effective element of integration to the millions immigrants living inside its borders.

Today the civil society is the true seat of confrontation in the various fields where to debate and improve such themes, where the confrontation among governments is difficult or even came to a standstill. For this reason the populations and civil societies are the reference actors and interlocutors, essential for the political role of the United Nations themselves.

In order to structure the dialogue in a stable, long-lasting perspective, it is necessary to create euro-Mediterranean centres of dialogue and cooperation passing through the promotion of partnership and synergy among the different actors and institutions operating and representing civil society, through integrated programmes which aim at reducing social inequalities between and inside the two Mediterranean shores; and which promote occupation.

These are the reasons why in our meeting in Naples of March 2003, we started the route that lead us to the constitution of Me.Dia.T.E.

Civil society is one of the pillars of politics and development. To ensure the widest participation, it is necessary a solid and durable cooperation with civil society, involving all sectors of society and creating either the conditions to an effective equality among citizens of the Mediterranean sides, or a wider participation of the lower classes, particularly in the northern African countries, to the advantages of economic development and of strengthening of democracy in society.

Europe, that trespasses its traditional boundaries to enlarge itself in a globalised world, has to look at the Mediterranean as the seat of a great cultural and historical meeting, cradle of right to life and capable of development, peace and civilization.

Europe has politics on the Mediterranean, but has to develop it eradicating it in the populations of the Mediterranean countries, and so making them protagonists. Only a direct confrontation will make the force of interlocutors grow and will make European politics easier, particularly in this new era of globalisation.

I thank you for the attention you delivered to me and I wish you'll have an interesting and concrete seminar, capable to produce incentives, knowledge and partnership to build together relationships of justice, solidarity and Peace.