

**Speech given by the Honourable Secretary of State
for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation
at the meeting of the Committee on Improving Quality of Life,
Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture**

Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly
Lisbon, Assembly of the Republic, 22 February 2010

<p>Panel: Our shared history: culture and education (the University of the Mediterranean and <i>Erasmus Mundus</i>)</p>
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The Chairman of the Assembly of the Republic, M.P. Jaime Gama

The Chairman of the Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil
Societies and Culture, M.P. Eduardo Cabrita

The (ex-) Minister Mohamed Benaïssa,
Honourable Members of Parliament,

Allow me to begin by saying what a privilege it is to be here with you today in
Lisbon, which may not be a Mediterranean city in the most literal sense of the term
but is a city that cannot be completely understood without full comprehension of its
Mediterranean roots. Our greatest geographer of the 20th century, Orlando Ribeiro,
never hesitated in referring to our Mediterranean quality, for which reason I feel it
is completely appropriate to welcome you all to this Mediterranean zone beyond the
precise confines of our sea. And it is a happy coincidence that I am here to share the
stage with Mohamed Benaïssa, Mayor of Azilah, or Asilah, a land that is just as far
away from the Mediterranean in a merely geographical sense but with an ingrained
Mediterraneanism. A city, just like Lisbon, that has been a melting pot of cultures
throughout the centuries.

To speak of culture in a Mediterranean context is to speak of diversity and exchanges, of universality and mutual understanding. A departure point for global oceanic adventures, the Mediterranean bridged the gap between beliefs and continents and gave birth to the concept of the *World*. History's battlefields are also present within the same Mediterranean zone that has influence today upon the future of dialogue between populations, cultures and religions.

But let's be absolutely clear on the sea that brought about this intercultural existence. History has brought to us a paradox, that is to say, a complex and contradictory reality characterised by an unparalleled backdrop of intercultural riches entwined with the legacy of the numerous conflicts that have taken place over the course of the centuries. For one reason or another, attributable as much to the extraordinary positive surge from the Mediterranean as it is to the conflicts dating as far back as Greek mythology to today, I believe that the Mediterranean people and their representatives are particularly well-placed to respond to the difficult times in which we are living.

That was the fundamental ideology behind Barcelona 1995 and it is still valid today, even though we all share in the sorrow of not having seen the hopes of that historic moment realised.

In 1995 the Barcelona Declaration established a mechanism for dialogue between cultures, which is just as it should be, as an essential aspect of the EuroMediterranean Partnership because the Mediterranean people know more than anyone that it is not possible to disassociate culture from politics and economy. However the fact of the matter is that over ten years later, the cultural dimension has remained in the background. Notwithstanding the great importance of enterprises such as the Anna Lindh Foundation or the various regional heritage, audiovisual, youth, information and media initiatives, intercultural dialogue has never really as it should taken on a transversal dimension across the other policies and actions of the Partnership. Or rather, we are not managing to make the most of our heritages.

We can see, in the decade and a half since the Barcelona Process, that our multilateral and inclusive vision for relations between States and The People is being slowly worn away by the threat of terrorism. We can see international rights being put to the test by religious fanatics and security doctrines. We have allowed the simple yet profoundly misleading theory of the Shock of Civilizations to enter into academic reasoning and political practice. Strands of racism and intolerance are interwoven into our societies, fed by the populist speeches given by political leaders on both sides of the Mediterranean.

In Italy the demagogic association between immigration and criminality has become Law, permitting a foreign citizen to see his punishment aggravated, regardless of the crime that has been committed, by the fact that he finds himself in an illegal situation. In Switzerland the xenophobic discourse of some political parties has found its way into the popular referendum against the construction of minarets in Mosques, a symbol of a supposed Islamic threat against Western values. It is Fear and Ignorance that governs the norm, not Reason and Comprehension.

In the South of the Mediterranean, reform impulses are systematically undermined by religious extremism and identity conflicts. Eternal hostages of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Arab countries have shown themselves incapable of any real regional, political and economic integration that would allow them to deal with emerging regional blocks and raise the standard of living for their people.

Paradoxically, the Mediterranean zone, formerly the precursor of Mundialization, is now on the margins of the global economy and isolated by international politics.

For all these reasons, the intention to create an area of shared peace, safety and prosperity, thereby transforming the Barcelona Process, remains strong with the Union for the Mediterranean. But we cannot make the same mistakes of the past. Even in the knowledge that the Dialogue between Societies and Cultures is not, in itself, a panacea for the inherent conflict between relations in the region, we believe

that it is essential to strategically assert culture and education as central pillars of this renewed Union.

A first important step has already been taken with the inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Slovenia, integrating 5 universities and 2 Portuguese think tanks. We want this University to be a success, a nerve centre in which to find and share knowledge and experiences from both sides of the Mediterranean, a pole of excellence known for the quality of its work within the system and potential multiplying effect on other training and educational institutions. Because only through Education is it possible to mobilise civil societies on both sides to engage in enlightened dialogue, and impregnate the social fabric with the desire to deepen this mutual knowledge. Therefore it is necessary to mobilise all agents of civil society - students, teachers, trainers - not only through their participation in European programmes such as Erasmus or Leonardo, but also by facilitating, for all countries, the allocation of visas to students and teachers.

The Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Strategy, announced at the ministerial meeting in Athens 2008, offers important guidelines for this common action. The Strategy must be concretised at the next Union for the Mediterranean Culture ministers meeting scheduled for June, as unfortunately it is yet to be confirmed. We will support the Spanish Presidency in its efforts to ensure that the meeting is effectively carried out, in general, as well as to remove the institutional impasse that the Union for the Mediterranean has been subject to for the past year. There are positive signs. We

welcome the Secretary-General's recent choice and believe that it is fundamental that the Secretariat statutes are approved at the Summit in June to be able to rapidly advance with the projects scheduled.

I also consider to be of utmost importance the role of the Alliance of Civilizations in strengthening intercultural dialogue and tolerance between Societies, and in the fight against racism and discrimination. As you are aware, the new Euro-Mediterranean Alliance Strategy should have been approved at the Conference in Alexandria on 8th-9th March but regrettably this has also been postponed. It is crucial that the European Union and the countries in the South of the Mediterranean, through their national coordinators and the Anna Lindh Foundation, undertake to collaborate with the Alliance for national implementation of this Strategy.

As I stand before the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), I could not leave without stating the obvious, that the intergovernmental dimension is not capable of fully dealing with the complexity of Euro-Mediterranean relations. The EMPA has shown itself to be the only parliamentary assembly that permits and governs dialogue and cooperation between all Member States of the European Union and all Parties involved in the Middle East peace process. It is, therefore, the expression of a common parliamentary culture, a forum for democratic learning and an example for the Regional Governments.

I would also like to say that I consider the citizens, more than the States, to be the principal agents of education and culture. The states are mere instruments. The fundamental responsibility needs to be shared. Local communities, civil society organisations, companies, religious and educational institutions all have a common task of building a political community where mutual trust and understanding reign. It is down to the States to ensure the democratic participation of its citizens in this community and equal access to education and culture.

To this regard I wish to highlight the situation of the immigrants, true agents of cultural diversity and, at the same time, the principal targets for racism, xenophobia and discrimination. It is the duty of the States to guarantee their safety and conditions under which they can effectively participate alongside the nationals in community life. For this reason I defend the immigrants' right to vote and believe that they should have the same rights as national citizens; for this reason I reject the criminalisation of illegality and denounce the actions of the States for the fragile circumstances that illegal citizens normally find themselves in. With the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union has the duty to adopt a common policy for the integration of immigrants, not just for their rejection. The Union for the Mediterranean does not have to be limited to the 6 projects referred to in the Paris Declaration and cannot remove the subject of immigration from the core of its political action.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of the media in strategically asseting culture and education in Euro-Mediterranean relations. Clear and objective information is essential in bringing down prejudices and contributing to the interpenetration of ideas and a common conscience. It is necessary to create conditions for the training and exchange of journalists on both sides of the Mediterranean. But it is more important still to ensure that the media is permitted to work independently in a setting where it has freedom of expression and information. Because culture is essentially a place for equality; dialogue and tolerance feed on liberty.

In brief, I wish to convey to you the idea that I consider your work to be centrally important to the destiny of the people living in the areas around our sea, *o mare nostrum*. The results will not be visible from one moment to the next, but we all know that history is built on small steps and slow actions. It falls to us to be the trustworthy interpreters of the potentials left behind by history's legacy, for the good of our common future.