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مؤسسة أناليند الأورو-متوسطية للحوار بين الثقافات

Diversity, not simplification - Benchmarks for Quality Journalism

"Ensure respect of cultural diversity and religious pluralism" is one of the most important commitments in the Barcelona Declaration, signed 1995 by the Foreign Ministers of the EU Member States and their Mediterranean neighbours. It is a shared value for the now 37 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). In this region, there is much diversity, but there is little respect. There is not even enough mutual knowledge. This creates for journalists in our region a real challenge. They need to be encouraged to make the EMP principle their personal commitment.

Tarik Ramadan, one of the most brilliant advocates of recognising Islam as part of European identities, formulated recently a very persuasive argument: "The others are as complex as we are." There are never people who are completely different. "The others" are "all equal, all different" in terms of the Council of Europe's recent youth campaign. Amin Maalouf, in his manifesto on "murderous identities", did not only explain the mechanisms for transforming stereotypes into bullets; he also developed very convincing arguments for respecting the right of each citizen to cultural self-determination. Our Governments, he argues, invest tremendous resources in personal ID documents indicating the uniqueness of every person, but they do not recognise the unique mixture of cultural orientations and identities of the same person. Creating "cultural ID cards" is one of the most revealing techniques for intercultural workshops.

Wars are the extreme form of political and economic conflicts. The more these conflicts are obscured by cultural and religious differences and claims, the more difficult are solutions to find. If we want to help political settlement, we need to dry out the cultural and religious fuel of such conflicts.

What we witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Europe, was that neighbours who lived for generations together, with even little or no visible social and cultural differences of their life-styles and not even lan-

guage, turned over night into bitter enemies. Christian Catholic Croats, Christian-Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Bosniaks were told by some leaders to consider "the others" as enemies who deserve to be killed, raped, and pushed away. It is such misuse of normally only small cultural or religious differences that fuels conflicts and violence all over the world. But let us name it what it is: it is a misuse of culture or religion for masking economic or political purposes, and making people believe that they would serve, when hating or killing "others" the "higher" goal of serving their community and values. It is definitely not a cultural conflict.

We definitely cannot eliminate causes of economic or political conflicts by quality journalism and media. But we can unmask such conflicts, in analysing the real causes, claims for land, resources, or domination or freedom. And, equally important, we can learn more about cultural or religious differences. Without sufficient knowledge, there can not be respect.

We are living in a climate of resentments where rumours can kill, what a challenge for the media. It is a matter of fact that the large majority of Muslims feel that Islam is the only major religion which is discriminated everywhere outside majority Muslim countries. And the majority believes strongly in what they call an American-Zionist conspiracy governing international affairs. Our times are fertile in bringing about more conspiracy theories. A recent one is called "Eurabia", the "Euro-Arab Axis", increasingly popular in Internet blogs. The EU, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and also the Anna Lindh Foundation are accused of an appeasement policy towards Arab and Muslim claims, betraying the so-called "European values". Journalists and media cannot be silent on such streams of resentment which are poisoning our hopes for a peaceful living together in cultural diversity and mutual respect.

Almost all media associations and professional journalists associations have elaborated ethical codes. They include, for example, the principle of non-discrimination in reporting about "native" and "immigrant" criminal offenders. It is obvious that existing resentments can be reinforced by police reports which highlight ethnic origin only in non-native cases.

Articles following such ethical codes might be more difficult to sell, and journalists, too often, fear the killing argument of "political correctness".

Probably, ethical standards are not a very good motivation for journalists. Invoking professional standards of "quality journalism" might be better. The women movement has been extremely successful in promoting a non-sexist language. No political leader can afford neglecting that there are women and men in the electorate. The profession of history teachers has developed the principle of multi-perspectivity as an indicator for school textbooks which allow access to the motivation and reasons of the various actors. There are numerous benchmarks for a quality journalism that invites readers to choose among different perspectives. One of the many problems is processing of information provided by interested parties including Governments. Most journalists have adopted, after 9/11, a cautious attitude in dealing with the term "terrorist" if there is an ideological context, even in documents originating from the White House or the

Kremlin. The same caution is much less visible in dealing with terms such as "Israeli Arabs". Copy-pasting this term from official bulletins could give support to a biased perspective suggesting that the Palestinians whose families did not join the refugees after the establishment of the State of Israel would have lost their ethnic identity, and the Green line would also divide unidentified Arabs with and Palestinians without Israeli pass-ports.

With the first edition of our Euro-Med Journalistic Prize for Cultural Diversity we found, together with the International Federation of Journalists, numerous talents among young journalists in the whole region who have adopted respect of diversity as a benchmark for the quality of their work. Among the winners, there is a journalist from Ha'aretz who portrays the citizens of a mostly Palestinian city in Israel in all their diversified lifestyles, cultural, religious and political preferences. There is an Egyptian journalist who reports about the various attitudes of native Egyptians towards Sudanese refugees, and another one who portrays the complex relations between Muslim and Coptic citizens as well as within these communities.

The Anna Lindh Foundation has recently joined a consortium for a new Audiovisual Journalists Award on Cultural Diversity, with the European Broadcasting Union, COPEAM - the Permanent Conference of Audiovisual Operators in the Mediterranean, and UNESCO. We need to encourage journalists in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region to join the increasing number of media professionals who make the commitment to recognising cultural diversity their own, as a main component of quality journalism.