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**EURO-ARAB CULTURAL RELATIONS
REINFORCING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

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Introduction

The future of Euro-Arab relations is strongly influenced by the future of their cultural relations. With the end of colonialism, the end of the Cold War and the hope of a peaceful settlement between Israel and the Arab countries, there are many opportunities for international cooperation between Arabs and Europeans. This cooperation, however, runs the risk of being seriously impeded by cultural differences and the impact the latter may have on political and economic relations. Islamist movements and the weakness of a number of Arab governments in the difficult post-Cold War economic and political transition, which involves opening up markets as well as polities, are making Euro-Arab cultural oppositions seem more serious and far-reaching than they really are. This is true not only in the Arab-Muslim world but also in Europe. The response of both sides to the post-Cold War transition is conditioned by questions of cultural identity which also affect other parts of the world. A policy of cultural cooperation and rapprochement is therefore badly needed.

The basic idea of this presentation is that the challenges resulting from cultural processes in Arab and European countries and their international political implications can only be met by pragmatic policies of international cooperation. International cooperation is the narrow path we have to walk in order to escape the risk of clashing universalisms, on the one hand, and of cultural isolationism, on the other. After the long era of colonialism and cultural domination by Western powers, the countries and peoples which suffered as a result of this must be given the opportunity to regain their own unique identities. This search for identity, however, should take place within the framework of a dialectical mode of inter-cultural relations. Cultural self-confidence can be restored by international cultural cooperation. On the basis of broadly restored self-confidence, it may become possible to reach the goal of cultural understanding and convergence.

This presentation considers three main arguments as the rationale for international cooperation policies: (a) globalisation, as an expression of interdependence, cannot be reversed and compels peoples to work out ways and means to attain, more or less gradually, integration; (b) cultural policies should be able to introduce a dialectical element within the process of globalisation so as to make inter-cultural dialogue possible; (c) the search for cultural specificity must be respected. This last point requires a wider political response on the level of international politics in order to create an environment conducive to effective inter-cultural policies.

Once an element of dialogue has been introduced into globalisation and an appropriate political response has been provided, international cultural policies should be embodied in a programme of international cooperation. The principles and the main ramifications of this programme are pointed out in the last part of the presentation.

Interdependence, globalisation and integration

It is a truism to say that McLuhan's global village is more than ever an overwhelming reality. The astonishing and continuous progress in the field of communications increasingly compels human beings to interact in real time, despite remoteness and unrelatedness.

However, our global village is not as yet an integrated village, in the sense that differences and conflicts, be they political, economic or cultural, are by no means eliminated by the global character of international relations, nor are they necessarily made more manageable by the latter. On the contrary, globalisation usually tends to exacerbate differences.

What is the relation between globalisation and integration? Globalisation can be considered as the cultural/political dimension of interdependence, a trend in international relations generally associated with economic and political dimensions. Consequently, integration is an issue which is relevant to both interdependence and globalisation.

It is well known that, because of the expansion of international economic and financial relations, countries and peoples are more and more interdependent. Interdependence means that they are linked to one another independently of their will, that is to say by objective factors. For this reason, they are unable to govern interdependence and, in order to cope with this, some integration has to be introduced: countries and peoples have to make conscious efforts to share decisions and thus govern interdependence.

The same can be said of globalisation. Interdependence and globalisation are blind ties. As in the case of economic and political interdependence, some degree of integration would be needed in order to govern cultural trends.

However, international cultural integration is a much more difficult aim to achieve than integration directed at shaping international economic and political relations. While there are international political and economic institutions which are successfully integrated to a greater or lesser extent, what exists of international cultural relations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, is based on strict reciprocity and devoted more to maintaining the distinctiveness of given cultures than to creating convergence in new, shared cultural trends.

Furthermore, with the end of the Cold War, political and economic internationalism is losing ground: the US, for example, is more interested today in developing regionalism as opposed to the strict mondialism it tried to impress on international relations in the forty or fifty years after the Second World War. Similarly, European countries, after succeeding in establishing their Union up to the point of setting out the idea of sharing security and foreign policies, are now developing a tendency toward re-nationalizing their foreign policies. More broadly speaking, the end of the Cold War has reinforced nationalist and ethnic political trends by emphasizing cultural particularism all over the world.

But, while tendencies toward international integration are weakening and cultural particularism is growing, interdependence and globalisation are definitely not decreasing. Quite the contrary is true since communications technologies are improving relentlessly and, despite attempts at prohibiting parabolic antennas in Iran or introducing "cultural exception" policies in France and (although the outcome here remains to be seen) in the European Union, globalisation continues to prove almost impossible to stop.

There is a strong element of contradiction in current international relations: objective conditions of growing interdependence and globalisation would require increasing amounts of political and cultural integration and decreasing amounts of particularism and specificity. What is occurring is, in fact, the opposite of this. Trends toward particularism and specificity (ethnicism, authenticity, identity, nationalism) are also increasing. Today this gap is already the cause of tension and has negative political consequences. Can the gap be narrowed? Can

globalisation be made compatible with a non-conflictual, preferably cooperative, development of inter-cultural relations or are we heading toward political clashes in which cultural factors will play a significant role?

Dialectical globalisation

In order to understand the role international cooperation can play in dealing with the opposition between globalisation and specificity and enabling some degree of cultural integration to occur, a more detailed consideration of the relation between globalisation and specificity is in order.

Like interdependence, globalisation has a profound and substantive impact on reality. The powerful and ceaseless globalisation brought about by the unprecedented growth of communications and the increase in mobility that characterizes our era is not without effect on the reality of inter-cultural relations. It is true that globalisation creates formidable tensions and that it may well happen that these tensions may remain unresolved for the time being. Globalisation, however, also forces people to look for a solution. In other words, it creates both the tensions and the forces for tensions to be resolved by moving toward some kind of integration.

In a well-known metaphor, Prof. Lévi-Strauss compared cultures to trains running along parallel tracks, at different speeds, so that from inside each train (culture), all that is possible is to cast a fleeting glance at the other trains (cultures) as they pass. It must be pointed out that, as a result of globalisation, today this is no longer true. In the last few decades groups of passengers have changed trains at every station, whether they wanted to or not, and the tracks of the hypothetical journey cross each other rather than run parallel¹.

It must be added that this process is to a large extent irreversible. Changes stemming from globalisation cannot be easily reversed, unless by repression. Indeed, conservative cultural policies have failed so far to stop not only globalisation but also its effects. For example, however regrettable this may be considered, in Muslim as well as in former Communist countries, the respective establishments have proved largely incapable of preventing the spread of habits borrowed from the West. In the same way, there is no doubt that France's and the EU's cultural exception policies are doomed to failure, however strictly the relevant markets are administered : cultural exceptions will be largely disregarded or outflanked by ordinary people.

The outcome of this globalizing process is something in the making, a mix of cultures, a hybrid outcome characterized by a high degree of instability.

For this reason, globalisation should be stabilized, that is governed so as to direct and attenuate its otherwise blind effects. In other words, globalisation demands policy responses. These responses can be provided by and within the framework of international cooperation.

But, how will stabilization take account of different cultures, that is of the cultural mix which globalisation brings about? How will different cultures be respected? Globalisation in itself is no more than a vehicle which may convey any culture. However, there is no doubt that, owing to political, economic and technical reasons, what globalisation is conveying today is mostly Western culture : this is the most powerful and popular train in Prof. Lévi-Strauss' metaphor. The cultural universalism brought about by the process of globalisation is perceived as one-sided. The cultural hybridization we have just talked about is felt to be given form and flavour by Western ingredients. In order to attain a more balanced mix of culture, a true

universalism, it would require, once again, a policy response within an international cooperative framework.

Culture and Politics

The broad conclusion of the analysis above is that the irreversible and unstoppable process of globalisation we are witnessing in our world brings about instability and ambiguities which have to be faced by implementing policies of international cooperation in the realm of culture. Cultural policies can introduce a dialectical element within the process of globalisation so as to make inter-cultural dialogue a reality. The implementation of a dialectical globalisation should be the goal of international cultural cooperation.

However, the tension between cultural plurality and the tendency toward the reduction of cultural differentiation cannot be solved by inter-cultural cooperation alone. This problem requires a political treatment and a political response because it is linked to power. Inter-cultural cooperation policies can certainly contribute to overcoming political opposition to the reductive character perceived by less powerful countries with respect to the processes of cultural globalisation, but it cannot solve this problem altogether. A few remarks on this issue are in order.

Globalisation may be opposed on two different grounds: because it brings about the elimination of specific cultures by reducing them to one universal culture (however capable this universal culture may be of producing a balanced, truly integrated combination of previous cultures) or because it brings about domination by cultures which have the backup of political power at the expense of those which do not. Islamic culture, for example, because it is based on a divine revelation will oppose the first kind of globalisation. Whether Islam would oppose globalisation on the second ground mentioned above may be debatable, but, as we know, Islamists definitely oppose it.

Culture is an element of power, or so it is perceived by national elites. This is very clear today in the way in which Western culture is perceived by Third World elites, as an aspect and instrument of Western political and economic hegemony. It is also very clear in the way Islam is translated into a political instrument by both Middle Eastern Islamist and nationalist elites. Independently of their ideological standpoints, these elites use the necessity of maintaining cultural authenticity as an instrument to mobilize the population.

In this sense, elites tend to invent or re-invent cultural/national backgrounds in a ceaseless process of interaction between political and cultural factors. This is happening today in the Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe as it did in the past in Western Europe. These elites also tend to imagine and construe a cultural heritage as something very static, immutable and monolithic which must be preserved and defended from intrusions. This is particularly true in times such as the present, when they must also reckon with globalisation and interdependence.

As a matter of fact, cultures are no less dynamic than globalisation. They change whether exposed or not to globalisation and contact, although change will be more sweeping and rapid if cultures are exposed to these factors. Only a fundamentalist interpretation of cultures can maintain that they must be preserved from globalisation and other contacts. Change is a two-way process, the result of interaction between globalisation and the cultures themselves. Change, from both inside and outside, is a routine event in cultures.

Internal cultural changes and differences are normally unduly overlooked in the current

debate on cultural change and international inter-cultural relations, particularly in relation to the Arab Mediterranean area and the Middle East². However, internal changes and differences are probably more important than external ones and the debate among Muslims and Arabs inside their countries is probably more important than their debate with the Europeans.

Most of all, what is remarkable is the fact that this internal debate is taking place at all. The Muslim-Arab world is not simply reacting to stimuli coming from the West but is setting its own agenda, as part of a larger debate taking place all over the world. This debate is on modernity, human rights, democracy and the secular nature of the state. The simplistic view of the West is that this debate is taking place between secular pro-Western forces and non-secular anti-Western forces. On the contrary, secular forces taking part in this debate do not necessarily accept the Western view on modernity, secularism and democracy. They are very often committed to finding a place for Western and other modern concepts in a context which is above all Islamic and Arab. It is also important to consider the debate which is taking place within the religious field itself, on both the theological (Islamic) and the political (Islamist) sides.

Internal differences are also important within the wider Muslim circle. For example, Ali Mazrui has noted that "Arab Islam is by definition less multicultural than non-Arab Islam" and has pointed out that "Southeast Asian Islam may take the lead in accommodating cultural pluralism"³. There are also striking differences between Islamists in Egypt and in Algeria, to mention only two countries where political and cultural struggle is today particularly acute.

All in all, what should be emphasized is that, in the real world and in particular in the important civilizations settled around the Mediterranean area, the situation is not exactly that of an opposition between globalisation intruding from the North and specificity on the defensive in the areas south of the Mediterranean. The situation is far more complex than that. It reflects factors working across conventional cultural boundaries and a plurality of debates.

The West and the Europeans are impatient with respect to this complexity and do not fully understand that in order to give way to integration in the more or less distant future, cultures must find their own way toward universalism. Any interference by Europe and the West in this search is a political and cultural mistake.

What should be the policy response to such complexity? How can we respect cultural pluralism while leaving the door open to convergence? The response cannot be related to cultural policy alone. It must be, first of all, political, that is related to Euro-Arab political relations.

Policies of more or less strict conditionality on the part of the European Union, such as the one that appears at the very beginning of the European documents which have been drawn up in preparation for the November 1995 Barcelona Conference⁴, run the risk of hindering rather than facilitating cooperation.

The EU policy should be based on three principles : (a) it should be expressed, first of all, by a firm declaratory policy, reminding Arab and Muslim partners of the political principles guiding the EU and its members; (b) it should implement conditionality only indirectly and prudently within the framework of mutual trust created by common political institutions; (c) it should be directed more toward the civil society than governments and organized political forces. Broadly speaking, Western policy should be more relaxed.

This policy framework should permit international cultural cooperation to work by implementing culture-related policies. A policy based on confidence in and respect for the cultural debate which is presently going on in the Arab-Muslim world is the best way not only to prepare the ground for closer convergence in the future but also to allow conventional

cultural policies to work in the meantime.

Euro-Arab Policies for Cultural Cooperation

Assuming that the policy framework suggested above would be conducive to the implementation of a policy programme for upgrading cultural relations between Arabs and Europeans, what could such a programme be?

The IAI, the Italian International Affairs Institute, has published a Report⁴ on this point which draws up the lines of a programme for Euro-Arab cooperation. This programme is referred to below.

Whichever policies may be formulated, the people in the countries concerned must recognize their common historical and cultural background. This is a prerequisite for the development of cultural cooperation. Attention must be drawn to shared events, the lives of historical figures significant to both shores of the Mediterranean, the history of Mediterranean cities and the crossroads of the region, and common artistic traditions. The critical role of women in the development of Mediterranean culture must be stressed. The emergence of a Mediterranean image could form the basis of a shared identity. Such an identity is indispensable for the growth of dialogue and cooperation in the cultural domain. This objective cannot be pursued through a specific policy, but must be implicit in all the policies which are called for in this section.

Cultural cooperation should meet the following criteria: synergy between the public and the private sectors, continuity, visibility and decentralization. The three main areas in which it should operate are (a) common development needs, (b) exchanges between civil societies, (c) expansion of areas of convergence. It is in these three main areas that strategic sectors in which to concentrate efforts will be identified.

(a) Strategic sectors of common development needs in the cultural field are the enhancement of human resources, especially women and the young, and the promotion of research and development capacities. Channels for formal education can make an appreciable contribution in this direction, but their ability to adapt and create synergies must be adequately stimulated and supported.

Possible actions in education:

*establishment of a programme for trans-Mediterranean mobility for university studies, benefitting from the experience and linked to the existing programmes of the European Community in this sector: *Erasmus* (intraCommunity) and *Tempus* (EC-Central and Eastern Europe). Parallel to the EC programme *Avicenna*, for scientific and technological cooperation, this programme (which could be called *Averroës*) should not be limited to the movement of students and the enrichment of their pre-doctoral education (for which *Erasmus* has become well-known in Europe); taking the specificities of Mediterranean intercultural relations into consideration, it should also promote the mobility of teaching staff, thereby contributing to filling the gaps in the curricula of Mediterranean universities.

*transformation of the EC's *Med-Campus* programme into a permanent cooperation programme (the current project undertaken in the framework of the Mediterranean policy will end with the 1995-96 academic year), increasing the programme's financial resources and revising the mechanisms for participation so as to provide more support for non-governmental research centres.

*creation of a "Mediterranean Phd", that is, a doctoral programme common to all Mediterranean countries. This would make use of the educational facilities offered by the various universities, making them available to students from countries in the area. Students would receive academic recognition that would be valid in the participating Mediterranean countries. This project would create a high level of integration and dialogue, as it does not merely imply transferring knowledge from the North to the South using northern resources, but rather making resources from the South available to the North. This project is feasible almost immediately, as it can be worked out in keeping with the proposal of UNIMED's Mediterranean Universities consortium at limited cost (essentially required to permit the mobility of the students and the teaching staff).

(b) Government initiatives are not a driving force in cultural cooperation in the Mediterranean. Far more important is the network of private initiatives: twinship between cities and schools; direct collaboration between research centres, trade unions, and professional associations; and joint actions in the field of art, entertainment and sport.

This level of cooperation is implemented by a sector that is strategic for cultural cooperation: the so-called civil society, whose wealth and autonomy provide a fundamental guarantee of cultural pluralism. Civil society in Mediterranean countries also constitutes the most important laboratory for promoting a dialogue to overcome cleavages between global trends and distinctive identities -- a laboratory where cultural borrowing and delocalization has the greatest possibility contributing to economic and artistic production and social solidarity.

The rich flow of non-governmental cooperation does not need to be directed toward specific objectives. What is required is support and reinforcement by national governments and, above all, by regional and local governments, private foundations, and international organisations such as the EC and UNESCO. The most useful kind of support in this non-governmental sector is in the circulation of information on activities already under way so as to avoid duplication and to facilitate synergies and information on public and private channels willing to provide financing.

Possible actions by non-governmental organisations include the following:

*organisation of top-quality cultural events specifically dedicated to the Mediterranean or extended to the Mediterranean, following the example of the "RomaEuropa" Foundation Festival, Montpellier Festival, etc.;

*establishment of a centre for Mediterranean initiatives which would create: a directory of regular cooperation activities (festivals, networks, fairs, etc.); a directory of regular sources of financing (foundations, bilateral and multilateral intergovernmental agreements, awards, etc.); and up-dated databases on activities and financing in each sector;

*adaptation of the experience gained by the EC *Med-Invest* and *Med-Campus* programmes to Mediterranean cultural cooperation. The programme should provide incentives for association between private and public institutions in preparing, implementing and financing projects in entertainment, cultural tourism, publishing and the fashion industry;

*establishment of Mediterranean Consultative Groupings (including women, trade unions, publishers, local authorities, etc.) on various aspects of cooperation (e.g. human rights, primary education, etc.) to give independent opinions on the lines of cooperation to be pursued and the instruments required to do so. These consultative groupings should also be integrated into the decision-making process of intergovernmental cooperation. Elected representatives of the associations involved would participate in these bodies on a rotational basis.

(c) The actions explicitly aimed at expansion of areas of cultural convergence among Mediterranean societies are the most important for cooperation. Formal and informal education and the media (particularly television) are strategic sectors in which to concentrate action.

Possible actions in this sector include:

*use of Mediterranean university cooperation programmes (see above) and/or the creation of *ad hoc* chairs to fill the gaps in the humanistic curricula of Mediterranean universities with courses on comparative study of Mediterranean history, in particular, studies of the contributions of pre-Islamic Mediterranean civilizations (Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek-Hellenist) to the Arab-Islamic civilization; studies of the contribution of Arab-Islamic civilizations to European culture (history of science, history of philosophy, history of art) and that of the Ottoman culture;

*joint preparation and administration of educational units for the pre-university teaching of the history and geography of Europe and Arab countries; these educational units could be used for preparation of a "Mediterranean Day" to be held annually in primary and secondary schools in selected regions (on a rotational basis) in the participating countries; the preparation, up-dating and teaching of these units could become a part of teacher- training programmes;

*joint preparation of information units (orientation to history, doctrine, law, customs and habits) on the three great Mediterranean religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam); after adaptation to the various national situations, the units could be brought into the training courses (and exams) for professionals in the social services (nurses, social workers, police forces);

*joint preparation of information units on human rights, particularly women's rights, to be integrated into the formal and informal education mentioned above. All units should be the product of cooperation among the interested professional associations (teachers, social workers, etc.), public and private research centres, competent local and national institutions;

*revision of history textbooks to reflect a common perception of historical and cultural events in the area;

*promotion of collaboration and development in the field of electronic information systems;

*rationalization and strengthening of existing bilateral and multilateral initiatives in support of the coproduction of fiction and nonfiction for cinema and television. For example, actions to strengthen support for decentralized cooperation, following the EC *Med-Media* model; bilateral agreements among public television corporations of the interested states for planning of quotas for Mediterranean products (whether coproductions or not). It is very important for people to see that cooperation initiatives are linked to concrete images of Mediterranean cultural solidarity. To this end, it would be useful, as has been said, to produce documentaries on common historical events, the lives of historical figures significant to both shores of the Mediterranean, the history of Mediterranean cities and crossroads, and shared artistic traditions;

*more translations and a wider circulation of the masterpieces of the Mediterranean literatures (such as the works of the Andalous writer Ibn Hazm or Cervante's *Don Quixote*).

Notes

(1) This argument is developed by Laura Guazzone, "Coopération méditerranéenne et processus de paix: la dimension culturelle", *Università del Mediterraneo* (Rome, revue de l'Unimed), no. 2, Printemps 1995, pp. 70-73, who quotes Lévi-Strauss.

(2) This point is emphasized, among others, by Domingo del Pino, "El Islam, ortodoxia y

- pluralismo", *Politica Exterior*, vol. 8, no. 42, 1994/1995, pp. 132-146 and Andrea Riccardi, "Come rispondere al fondamentalismo", *Liberal*, no. 1, 1995. pp. 66-70.
- (3) Ali A. Mazrui, "Islam and the End of History", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 7, no.1, pp. 1-30.
- (4) *Europe.Documents*, no. 1930/31. 27th April 1995.
- (5) "Cooperation and Stability in the Mediterranean: An Agenda for Partnership", *The International Spectator*, vol. XXIX, no. 3, July-September 1994, pp. 5-20.