

Euromed Youth Cooperation: A Permanent Miracle

The cooperation for and with Euro-Mediterranean Youth can be described as a “permanent miracle”. Considering the geopolitical background, since the inception of Euromed cooperation in 2000, there was an event in 2001 that dramatically upset a number of things that happened thereafter, namely September 11. Then, in the aftermath, there were the second Gulf War; several terrorist attacks from both sides of “our sea”, the “years of lead” in Algeria and the Arab revolutions and now what is happening in Syria and the recent terrorist attacks on symbolic targets.

How can the SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices Resource Centre be an active element in a region looking like a powder keg in which causes are never easy to pinpoint?

Since 2000 and the creation of the SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres by the DG EAC-Youth Unit, it has always been very sensitive and challenging for SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices due to our specific geopolitical background: many events happened, clearly highlighting the increasingly relevant role played by Youth in the Euro Mediterranean arena.

SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices has faced many challenges in very close cooperation with National Agencies to better support their NGOs and Youth, to understand the current reality and to have appropriate tools to work in the youth field and the developing youth policy.

Glancing at the statistics, exchanges between the two sides of the shore have never been more important: every year more than 3,500 young people and youth leaders are the beneficiaries of the existing programmes. This would tend to prove that the need is there and, supported by a strong motivation, “you can move mountains, or at least build bridges”.

SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices - Key numbers since 2000

- » **157 activities**
- » **5899 participants**
- » **42 publications**
- » **5 229 « likes » on our « page » SALTO Euromed: at 26/01/2015**
- » **673 followers on Twitter at 26/01/2015**

The acute sensitivity of the context in which SALTO operates has, paradoxically, reinforced its legitimacy to act for the development of youth projects and for cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. At the beginning of SALTO EuroMed, some participants from the southern shore advised the team never to tackle topics such as politics, sex and religion; to avoid any trouble. Notwithstanding this well-meant advice, the SALTO participants have addressed all three without encountering any major difficulties. However, the necessary *savoir-faire* to tackle and sometimes manage these topics has been strained over the years in an increasingly complex geopolitical context and the need to have more and more competent trainers proved to be essential when events brought more tension or exacerbated the situation.

To read more on the *Geopolitical context*: “N°3- GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF MEDITERRANEAN YOUTHS: considering human security”; <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/EMlibrary/emeducpub/studiesandresearch/>

How SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices defined its strategy within the European Neighbourhood one?

“Change your strategies and tactics, but never change your principles”

This quotation by science fiction writer John Kessel perfectly sums up the evolution of the European strategy during the last decade; a strategy which it relies on its General Principles and a geographical area: create an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness.

Let’s compare the objectives of the 19th of June 2000:

“Common Strategy 2000/458/CFSP of the European Council of 19 June 2000 on the Mediterranean region” Extracts –

1. The Mediterranean region is of strategic importance to the EU. A prosperous, democratic, stable and secure region, with an open perspective towards Europe, is in the best interests of the EU and Europe as a whole.

2. The Mediterranean region continues to be faced with political, economic, judicial, ecological and social challenges. If these complex and diverse challenges are to be overcome, the EU and the Mediterranean partners must work together with a common vision, sensitivity and mutual respect.

3. The Union aspires to play its full part in bringing about stability and development in the Middle East. The Union will therefore support the efforts of the parties to implement the peace agreements. This Common Strategy will cover the EU’s contribution to the consolidation of peace in the Middle East once a comprehensive peace settlement has been achieved.

For those of 2001-2011, the EU reviewed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and put a strong focus on the promotion of deep and sustainable democracy, accompanied by inclusive economic development. Deep and sustainable democracy includes in particular, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, of assembly and of association, judicial independence, the fight against corruption and democratic control over the armed forces. The EU also stressed the role of civil society in bringing about deep and sustainable democracy. The EU unveiled the «more for more» principle, under which the EU will develop stronger partnerships with those neighbours that make more progress towards democratic reform.

The principles are the same but objectives were (had to be) adapted.

The repercussions of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East; violent sectarian conflict in Syria with its fallout in Jordan and Lebanon, as well as a new outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas, indicate that the ENP has been no longer successful to the south. The winner-takes-all approach that prevails after elections in many of these countries has intensified underlying political, economic, social, and religious tensions. It has become a barrier to “transition” toward a more inclusive form of liberal democracy. To sum up, a strategy has to be progressive.

Politics and religion, ancestral rivalry and geo-strategies interpenetrate each other endlessly. That is why, even at a very low level (realism and humility are required), it is needed to integrate

all these parameters so as to define the best-adapted strategy to reach objectives that were defined with every partner. It is this integrated approach which better characterised the SALTO EuroMed & Good Practices strategy:

- Do with it before you do for it!
- Create and promote a balance of “competences” between the two sides of the Mediterranean
- Promote and support the emergence of a Euro-Mediterranean trainers’ network

SALTO EuroMed & Good Practices has always implemented a 3-year-strategy since its creation. The use of this medium-term approach has enabled the Resource Centre to anticipate, change when needed, and get used to modifications - geopolitical, structural, and institutional - without ever losing its values or its “moral compass”.

What are the key issues for SALTO-YOUTH EuroMed & Good Practices?

Youth participation is a phenomenon whose social relevance we need to really understand. The events which are currently taking place in the region, and particularly the role of young people involved in demonstrations and in the real changes in their own country, have to be considered. The significance of the participation of young women and men who are of different socio-cultural backgrounds and beliefs, but united by their desire for a better future for their country is not to be underestimated. Young people are the future of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation; and mutual understanding is the starting point for the new historical path that these young people have engaged in. In this context, the role of NGOs and youth organisations is very important in the development of active citizens and in supporting a better understanding of youth participation at local and national levels. In general, NGOs and youth organisations have a key role in civic participation and democracy; putting values such as solidarity and non-discrimination into action and contributing to the development of societies. Within the context of youth work, NGOs and

youth organisations can provide unique opportunities for young people to become active and responsible citizens in their societies through participation; to get informal (spontaneous and individual) and non-formal (more planned and structured) education opportunities; and to be included and integrated into the society.

Dialogue: The events of 11 September 2001 gave Huntington’s thesis on a looming “clash of civilizations”¹ new weight when decoding international relations.

But does the supposed centuries old hostility between the East and the West really exist? Has it a real basis in fact or is it no more than an “imaginary fracture” to quote Georges Corm?² The Greek and Cypriot National Agencies and the SALTO EuroMed & Good Practices Resources Centre have spent much of the year working on their contribution to the issue.

SALTO EuroMed took as a starting point the idea that our Civilizations are, and have always been, diverse, heterogeneous, changing and permeable and that they are more closely linked today than ever before; whether we call such ties “globalization”, with its negative inferences or prefer the term of “mutually enriching” in the humanist sense of the term.

While it is generally accepted that societies differ in terms of their internal organisation, the question is whether such differences necessarily produce different value systems.

As Fernand Braudel wrote³: “The notion of Civilization is at least dual, designating both moral and material values”.

To read more on *Youth participation* visit: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/EMlibrary/emeducpub/reportscollection/reportdialogue/>

1 Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996

2 Georges Corm, *Christiane Veauvy, Moyen-Orient et conscience historique. Entretien, FMSH-WP-2015-87*, February 2015.

3 Braudel, Fernand, *Grammaire des civilisations*, Paris, Arthaud, 1987

Democracy: “We believe we can show that existing cities would be completely transformed with just one change. While it is true that this change is neither unimportant nor easy, it is possible”.

Those are Plato’s words, from his work entitled “The Republic”, written many years ago.

Like Glaucon, we can also wonder what such a change might be; a transformation with almost miraculous powers, able to change lead into gold. For Plato, it was philosophy: He believed that if politicians possessed such knowledge, anything would become possible, since philosophy was truth. Nothing could be stronger than truth, making it the ideal means of bringing about such a metamorphosis.

This close link between ethics and politics in the Greek world is central to Plato’s philosophical approach: he believed that “A fair city breeds a fair man”.

At that time, a citizen was a person who enjoyed the right of citizenship, which in turn was inseparable from democracy. Despite the fact that the term “citizenship” suffers from a myriad of definitions, it would appear to be an integral element of the concept of democracy. For the thinkers who contributed to the promotion of the democratic movement, democracy was a synonym for Good: not merely a form of political organisation but also a value that represented the inalienable right of mankind to take charge of its destiny, both individually and collectively.

Today, everywhere in the world, attempts to reinvent the citizen as not only a sovereign being, but also and more specifically as a new political challenge are evident.

Modern official structures linked to the right to vote tend to ask people WHO they want, rather than WHAT they want. This has helped bring about a form of membership democracy where the power of the people is restricted to choosing who will decide on their behalf.

As G. Burdeau wrote: “The freedom of people is limited to the power they hold to appoint and dismiss their masters, no longer implying any responsibility to influence based on the requirements of an ethical form of community life”⁴.

This is reflected in the far-reaching mistrust and pessimism expressed by many toward a world they often feel they no longer control, which has led them to accept being governed by the outward forms of democracy.

The democratic process as it is lived by many can thus be summarized as either “being in the city or being outside”: in other words, being an active and intelligent cell in a body or merely being an appendix delegated to other vital functions.

How can we give a new impetus to democracy and citizenship? How can we ensure that it allows for “the free and full development of personality”, as set out in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man (s.29)?

What does being a citizen mean today?

If we start from the premise that democracy is also a form of teaching (in the etymological sense of “bringing about”), then we must accept that the components of democracy are more diverse than are usually stated. Such an acceptance facilitates the logical involvement of young people, from birth to their coming of age, alongside adults, the existence of an area of dialogue with young people and the invention of democracy at local level.

Adults still play a predominant role. The impetus to reinvent local democracy can only come from adults and if the objective is to improve voting numbers (the most visible expression of democracy), make local institutions more efficient and boost the participation and expression of citizens, then adopting an educational approach would seem the obvious path to follow. Non-formal education projects are a particularly rich and privileged source of resources to do so.

To ensure that space is truly set aside for our youngest citizens in the modern city, decision-makers such as politicians and associations must be prepared to move beyond the trap of mere “showcasing” and instead become vehicles for the expression of representative democracy; preparing the ground for a move to a real participatory democracy further down the road. Youth workers have a role to play in the process as the interface between institutions and individuals.

4 Burdeau, G. “La Démocratie” 1956

By choosing Venice and its “Republic”, which provided us with a Brechtian “Abyss” and by using “role play” activities, the Italian National Agency and the SALTO Euromed & Good Practices Resource Centre provided a special dimension to the debate on Democracy within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean region. “Illusion or Reality?” directly challenges socio-political relations between the two sides of “Mare Nostrum”.

There is little left to add, except that politicians, by showing willingness and youth leaders via their actions, need to pay special attention to the methods they employ to prepare young people for governing the City.

Every learning process is long and difficult and that leading to freedom is no exception.

To read more on *Democracy* visit: www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/EMlibrary/emeducpub/reportscollection/reportdemocracy/

Intercultural Learning is another Key issue:

“The participants recognise that the traditions of culture and civilisation throughout the Mediterranean region, and dialogue between these cultures and exchanges at human, scientific and technological level are an essential factor in bringing people closer, promoting understanding between them and improving their perception of each other.”

(Barcelona Declaration, 1995)

The richness of European and Mediterranean societies lies in cultural diversity expressed by the variety of religious, ethnic and cultural groups and communities which have been present across the region for many centuries. In this context, intercultural dialogue is essential to counter and overcome mutual prejudices and the clash of civilisations, and instead to learn “to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world. Because, otherwise, we are doomed to be people who are full of fear, anger and enmity in our Euro-Mediterranean environment”⁵.

5 See: [Mosaic: The Training Kit for Euro-mediterranean Youth Work](#), Council of Europe

Understanding another culture, but also recognising and accepting it.

Respect for diversity and the fight against racism and xenophobia, is at the heart of many EU initiatives, including former Youth in Action, now Erasmus+ Programme and the EuroMed Youth ones. These programmes support projects and activities in which young people from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds can work together.

The aim is to promote “intercultural learning” that encourages tolerance, mutual respect and understanding between participants but also in society in general. Projects should harness intercultural working methods that reflect on the potentially diverse nature of participants, allowing them to take part on an equal footing.

To stimulate and encourage mutual understanding between young people within the Euro-Mediterranean region and to fight against stereotypes and prejudices...

- It is especially important to encourage intercultural dialogue among young people, at a time they are still developing their own vision of the world and acquiring skills and competences for their future
- Contact and interaction with cultures other than their own stimulates their curiosity and the desire to connect with peers from around the world.
- Intercultural dialogue also generates new ideas and fosters an understanding of society. It allows them to discover the richness of cultural diversity for their own development as well as for society.
- EU policy recognises the valuable contribution that young people can make through their active participation in society and encourages young people to travel and experience new cultures.

To read more on *Intercultural learning* visit: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/euromed/EMlibrary/emeducpub/reportscollection/report3culturesen/>

Do you know the Reality of the work done by SALTO EuroMed & Good Practices?

It is like the Myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was a hero of Greek mythology. His name means “wise man”. He is the son of Aeolus, god of wind and Merope daughter of Atlas.

Because he opposed and ridiculed Zeus, Hades the god of the dead, and Ares the god of war, Zeus sentenced him to eternal punishment. So Sisyphus was condemned to roll a huge boulder up a mountain, which fell each time to the other side and Sisyphus had to bring back to the top.

SALTO EuroMed & Good Practices over the past 15 years has been good sometimes, often patient, persevering all the time and especially learned that humility is the main quality.

When we thought we had reached the top we had to deal with multiple things: The permanent turnover of trainers, National Agency staff, European Commission colleagues, EU Delegations and EMYUs colleagues in which a human and training investment had been made; new programmes and rules that suspend and change the long term strategic vision, not to mention the geopolitical instability in the region.

Yet despite all this it worked, works and will work again because the human factor, which is and will be an added value to everything, and still makes the difference. This should never be underestimated; and because our differences are a richness.

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*SALTO EUROMED & GOOD PRACTICES
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