

"A Thousand and One Nights..." EVS in EuroMed countries

INFOECK – Jugendinfo Tirol – is an EVS sending and hosting organization in Tyrol – an Austrian province in the Alps, in the "heart of Europe". People from other countries describe the Tyroleans as friendly people who favour traditional views and quite conservative values. Maybe these values are connected to our landscape which is characterized by high mountains and narrow valleys. Almost every valley has its own dialect...

Our main motivation to invite young people to join EuroMed projects was to fight the prevailing prejudice about Arabic cultures and Islamic religion among European citizens. Our idea was that these young people with their experience would be able to live and later on promote the EuroMed Youth Programme's objectives of peace, dialogue, tolerance and solidarity.

My first contact with organizations from MEDA countries involved in the Youth Programme was the training course "Step To".

As a result of this course, we started to cooperate with a local youth club and organized a youth exchange, which was the motivation to do more projects with partners from EuroMed countries.

During the Salto training course "Civilization and Education" in Marrakech, I had the chance to gain a deeper insight into the culture of Arabic countries. The participants shared information on their education systems, their culture, traditional food and performed songs and dances. One of the main aims of this training was to bring people together to create EVS projects – and we have been successful in this attempt...

Our organization has sent a young man to work for a local TV station, a young woman to assist in a community with disabled people and another one to work with children – all of them are enjoying their EVS in MEDA countries. Of course, it is a big challenge for

young Europeans to spend some months in a region where living conditions, regulations and traditions are very different from the life they are used to in Europe. However, after an "introduction" period most of them adapt themselves very well. Thanks to the hospitality of MEDA countries, the volunteers easily get in contact with the local community (which is sometimes quite difficult in our northern countries...).

As we all know the huge difference between the cultures offers a lot of learning experiences and adventures, but also a high chance of misunderstandings, conflicts and problems. So I think it is very important to elaborate the EVS project in all possible details : what are the tasks, the support, the rules, the living conditions, risk assessment...

For our organization, the personal contact with partners is vital because it is impossible to plan everything. In case of difficulties or problems, it is absolutely necessary to have a reliable partner.

Both of us are responsible for "our" young volunteer. In the cooperation with EuroMed countries, this mutual confidence and support is even more important.

For the benefit of our young people and our excellent cooperation with partners from MEDA countries, we will certainly realize more EVS projects in EuroMed – and we would like to encourage other organizations to participate as well! We hope that the EuroMed Youth Programme will start in both directions very soon.

For those who are interested in setting up a project, I recommend to take part in one of the trainings or seminars organized by Salto Youth EuroMed. As a participant of such a training, I got an idea of the EuroMed dimension and found trustworthy and motivated partners. With a good EVS project we will open new horizons for young people and bring people (and cultures) together.



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