

DECLARATION
BY THE HIGH-LEVEL ADVISORY GROUP
(BRUSSELS)

Since ancient times the Mediterranean world has raised culture - a living culture which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind - to the level of a universal principle. It is close to people's hearts, and it is also there to be of service to them.

We are now aware that culture, in its anthropological sense, is first and foremost a creative act for promoting the advancement of the human race, enabling it to capitalise on its knowledge and share its experience with others while respecting collective beliefs and individual customs. What really matters here is the question of content. What kind of culture do we want to pass on to our children? What values do we want them to learn from us? What is our message for the future?

Formed at the initiative of Mr Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, the High-Level Advisory Group has worked throughout the year to draw up a beacon programme which would translate this approach into practice. The many facets of culture underpin and colour every human exchange worthy of the name, and that is why the High-Level Advisory Group would like to see culture treated with the same respect as politics or economics.

Culture works on three levels: as a principle for living, as a moral anchor and as content. For these three dimensions to become a reality, Europe must first fully acknowledge the reach and importance of this protean culture and allocate sufficient resources to it.

The High-Level Advisory Group vigorously supports the idea of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue between cultures and civilisations as a very promising operational tool.

The Euro-Mediterranean Foundation will have a role as mediator between the different aspects of culture (the human aspect, of course, but also the aspect of creativity and exchange). This task will be particularly important as each of these different aspects will have its supporters in Europe and on the southern Mediterranean rim.

In the light of the current, and still evolving, geopolitical balances, both global and regional, and in view of enlargement to Eastern Europe, the purpose of culture in general and that of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation in particular will be to change mentalities, to ensure that respect for others and dialogue underlie a genuine and equitable process of sharing, to guarantee respect for individual rights - both women's rights and the rights of minorities - and, lastly, to work steadfastly and forcefully towards improving relations between neighbouring countries. These are the principles which, in the long term, will give Europe and the Mediterranean a peaceful, solid image. And an image of solidarity too?

When culture has become a sovereign value shared by everyone, beyond cross-civilisation divides and religious sensibilities, the exchange of ideas will be an inalienable right that all Euro-Mediterranean citizens will defend as an intrinsic part of themselves. We need to rapidly give tangible form to our aspirations. The High-Level Advisory Group also calls for careful consideration of what method should be used. Without a method, today's investment, however great, may prove futile and barren.

Education, the media, mobility of citizens and promotion of their common heritage, women and young people are by nature the actors as well as the essential ingredients of a relationship between the two shores of the Mediterranean that in the short term offers peace and for the longer term guarantees a wealth of exchanges based on hopes shared at last by all.

It is then that positive and healthy cultures, a culture of peace, a tolerant, friendly, participatory culture will triumph over the denial and suspicion which sometimes prevent them from flourishing.

High-Level Advisory Group