

EC Partners

Syrian Commission for Family Affairs

Syrian NGOs

Facts and Figures

- EC contribution: €200 000
- Duration: 2006-2010
- A total of four projects supported in Syria to date



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Civil Society

Euro-Med Youth Programme in Syria

Building bridges across the Mediterranean

"Many of the European youth originally had misleading images about Syria. These were dispelled once they saw Syria's modernity as well as its historical & cultural heritage. The Syrians in turn felt they could connect very easily with the Europeans - they saw that we were the same."

Bachar Shaban, Shams Director



Context

On both sides of the Mediterranean people often have false visions and ideas of the other which can lead to misunderstandings and tensions. Cultures, languages and religions sometimes divide people, but they can also be used to inspire tolerance and respect.

Objectives

- Stimulate mutual understanding, respect and tolerance between young people within the Euro-Mediterranean region, fighting stereotypes and prejudices
- Provide opportunities for young people to actively participate in the development of their society, enhancing their sense of solidarity
- Promote the exchange of information and good practices through the development of youth partnerships and networks
- Support and strengthen the contribution of non-governmental youth organisations in the development of civil society and democracy.

Impact

- *Euromed Youth Orchestra (Shams)*: 40 Syrian and 50 other young musicians from the EuroMed region met, rehearsed for ten days and performed together in Damascus.
- *Support to Youth Business Centre (Shabab)*: counselling and courses in career building, networking and business environment.
- *All are Equal, All are Different (JAFRA)*: creation of a platform for youth aged 18-15 from Slovakia, Spain, Bulgaria, Lebanon and Syria to engage international public opinion in support of the Palestinian right of return.
- *Creating Effective Business Trainers (JCI)*: building presentation and communication skills during training courses.

EuroMed Youth Orchestra: speaking the language of music

They were all between 18 and 24: 40 of them were Syrian, 50 came from other Mediterranean countries and Europe. They gathered in August 2008 in Damascus for 10 days. They had not met each other before, but at the end of this big week they performed, all together, an extraordinary concert at the Omayyad Palace in Damascus.

At the source of the project is 'Shams', a Syrian NGO which works with young people. Its director, Bachar Shaban, presented his idea to the Euromed Youth Programme: *"to invite young people from different Mediterranean countries to exchange experiences on music."* The European Union was convinced.

90 young musicians were selected by Shams' partner music associations and gathered in Damascus. *"Everyone came from a different country or a different city, but the participants broke the ice at the first rehearsal together"*, said Mr Shaban.

The young musicians spent one intense week preparing the concert. Part of the performance was dedicated to Western classical music, part to Arabic music. Mr. Shaban described the initial challenge: *"At the beginning, some of the European musicians found it difficult to play the Arabic music. At the end, this is the part they enjoyed the most."*

After the concert everybody had to go back home. They have since kept in touch and invited each other to their respective countries. Several Syrian musicians have managed to take up the invitation and travel to Romania. Mr. Shaban sees a future continuation to his successful musical gathering: *"They are all asking for another concert. We'll try to organise it."*

Mr. Shaban's describes their common hope and achievement: *"Beyond all the images we might have had of the other, we discovered that we can speak one language together: the musical one."*