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# Racism, Xenophobia and the Media

**Towards respect and understanding  
of all religions and cultures**

**An EU seminar  
in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership  
Vienna, 22-23 May 2006**

organised by:

- Austrian Presidency of the European Union
  - European Commission
- European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)

**Conference Report  
& Documentation**

**DISCLAIMER:** This report was compiled and edited by the European Commission and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The opinions and information it contains do not necessarily reflect the policy and position of the European Commission, nor of the EUMC.

## Foreword

*Racism is man's gravest threat to man*  
– *the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason*  
Abraham J. Heschel

The opening months of 2006 witnessed a heated debate on the role and responsibility of not just the media, but also political and societal actors, in intercultural relations. The so-called “cartoon crisis”, following the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, triggered an intensive international debate about freedom of expression, hate speech and the impact of the media on intercultural relations.

However, this debate should go beyond recent events and be broadened to discuss the long-standing issues of racist and xenophobic discourse and other forms of intolerance including against religious and non-religious beliefs. These challenges have concerned Euro-Mediterranean partners since the signing of the Barcelona declaration in 1995.

Protecting people from racist and xenophobic discourse is a basic principle of any democratic society. Hate speech undermines free expression: hate speech and incitement are deliberately intended to cause harm to people or groups of people. Protection from hate speech has to go hand in hand with the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression – only together do they make democracy meaningful.

Beyond the final recourse of legal action against racist discourse, what other avenues can be explored? Can we not work with and encourage the media to look at opportunities to improve reporting and editorial standards, and implement its own codes of conduct? There is much to be gained by all actors through the media working more closely with civil society and faith-based organisations.

Open and inclusive dialogue is the best way to address the challenge of racism and xenophobia and of promoting freedom of expression on the one hand and respect for religious beliefs on the other. That is what the Euro-Mediterranean seminar on ‘Xenophobia, Racism and the Media’ set out to do. It offered participants the stage for that dialogue while also encouraging them to put forward practical proposals to deal with the many related problems of racism and xenophobia. This report summarises those discussions and proposals.

They now need to be followed up. Therefore we commit ourselves to work towards that end, and in close partnership with all stakeholders involved – journalists and media organisations – consider how, together, we can turn these proposals into actions.

**Hans Winkler**  
Secretary of State  
Foreign Ministry  
Austria

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**  
European Commissioner  
External Relations &  
European Neighbourhood Policy

**Beate Winkler**  
Director  
EUMC

## Executive Summary

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has for a long time promoted dialogue between cultures in the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries.<sup>1</sup> Along with the Partnership's political and economic objectives, efforts are constantly being made to foster intercultural and interfaith dialogue. At the same time ways have been sought to strengthen initiatives aimed at fighting racism and xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, including against religious or non-religious beliefs. From the outset, the 'Euromed and the Media' initiative highlighted xenophobia and racism as one of the key areas for attention and action in its dialogue and engagement with leading media practitioners from the region.

These concerns led to the Euro-Mediterranean Conference "Racism, Xenophobia and the Media: Towards respect and understanding of all religions and cultures", held on 22-23 May 2006 in Vienna under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the EU in co-operation with the European Commission and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

Over 100 leading journalists, media practitioners and civil society representatives from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East convened to exchange views on the shared problem of racism or hate discourse, and to develop pragmatic and workable suggestions, and to explore together how media could have a positive influence on intercultural relations. There was representation from almost all EU countries and all of the EU's ten Mediterranean partners.

The topics under discussion included: improving reporting standards and accountability of journalists; self-regulation policies in the EU and in South-Mediterranean countries; impact of media reporting on ethnic and religious minorities; negative stereotyping (deliberately or inadvertently); recruitment practices in the media industry; balancing freedom of expression with the protection from hate speech; and making better use of expertise and experience of civil society.

After an open exchange of views, the conference participants mapped out, inter alia, improvements in journalism practice and structures that might enhance understanding about cultural differences. There was consensus that

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<sup>1</sup> The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership comprises 35 members: 25 EU Member States and 10 Mediterranean Partners (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). Libya has observer status since 1999.

freedom of expression comes with responsibility. While there was awareness about the role of regulatory systems, the emphasis throughout was on effective self-regulation through voluntary media standard bodies. There were also calls from journalists to learn (more) about cultural and religious diversity as part of their training.

The present report summarises the identified actions and activities which can be taken forward in a positive practical way to address the issues. These findings will now become part of the portfolio of recommendations of the 'Euromed and the Media' exercise, for continued development and potential transfer to future programmes and projects. Where appropriate, they will also be presented to relevant international organisations and fora.

The key recommendations focused on the following areas and centred on a common thread running throughout the conference, how to report in a more comprehensive and balanced way on issues which impact on race, ethnicity and faith while respecting freedom of expression and editorial independence:

- better representation of minorities in newsrooms through targeted training and recruitment;
- more diversity in mainstream and non-fiction programmes;
- making training in intercultural understanding a standard component of journalist education;
- networking and sharing of information and best practice among media from different regions (twinning and exchange programmes, training, forums and regular contact);
- more dialogue between ethnic, religious and cultural groups and the media to improve the quality of reporting, to be fully aware of the sensitivities around intercultural relations, and to avoid negative stereotyping and language inciting to hatred;
- improved self-regulation and more own initiatives by media to promote ethical and professional standards in reporting;
- a greater emphasis on comprehensive reporting, including minority voices and highlighting positive intercultural initiatives and examples of good practice;
- continued European level support for intercultural dialogue and inter-faith initiatives;
- a forum for media owners to discuss racism, xenophobia and related issues and the impact of media reporting on intercultural relations.

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# 1. Background

While the subject matter of the conference was not new in Euro-Mediterranean affairs, it was brought into sharper focus after the domino effect of events and reactions in the wake of the ‘cartoons controversy’, following the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper in late 2005.

The original conference concept had foreseen discussions to be held solely at technical level, and for media practitioners and civil society organisations only. However, the political upgrading that followed in the wake of the ‘cartoons controversy’ caused a rethink. It was decided to append a public session to the proceedings in order to allow an active political and public debate and to give the conference, and its subject matter, appropriate visibility. It permitted political representatives, panellists and the public to engage in an animated debate. The working groups were still the private preserve of the media and civil society whose proceedings were conducted under Chatham House rules.<sup>2</sup>

The public session attracted a full house of approximately 200 participants, while the following expert discussions gathered around 100 leading journalists, media practitioners and civil society representatives from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. There was a broad representation from almost all 35 countries participating in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

## CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUT

The Euro-Mediterranean Conference provided policy-makers and media practitioners with a forum in which to share perspectives on different and common approaches to confront racism and xenophobia - and to promote respect towards all cultural and religious groups - in the media. The seminar

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<sup>2</sup> The Chatham House rule reads as follows: “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.” The Chatham House Rule originated at Chatham House with the aim of providing anonymity to speakers and to encourage openness and the sharing of information. It is now used throughout the world as an aid to free discussion. Source: Chatham House website: [www.riia.org/index.php?id=14](http://www.riia.org/index.php?id=14)

was built around three areas developed as a result of earlier discussions in the Euromed region:

1. Regulation (legislation and enforcement mechanisms);
2. Self-regulation (codes of conduct, editorial standards, complaints mechanisms);
3. Structural approaches (diversity training, recruitment, representation of cultural and religious groups in media programmes).

The programme of the conference was divided between plenary sessions and expert working groups. The opening plenary laid the groundwork for the discussion in the working group sessions. Working groups had a Chair and a Rapporteur responsible for reporting back to plenary and summarising the working group's key conclusions which in turn formed the basis for the general conference conclusions, summarised in this report.

The seminar identified actions and activities which can be taken forward in a positive practical way to tackle the shared problem of racism or hate discourse and the issue of religious and cultural diversity in the media. Participants were able to discuss and suggest initiatives in EU and South-Mediterranean countries both at an individual level and in areas of joint cooperation, taking into consideration commonalities and differences between the countries and regions.

## 2. Conference proceedings

### 2.1. OPENING SPEECHES BY THE ORGANISERS <sup>3</sup>

The conference was opened with speeches by the Austrian Secretary of State Hans Winkler, by the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and by the Director of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) Beate Winkler.

**Hans Winkler**, *Secretary of State, Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Austria:*

“Freedom of expression and the freedom of the press are the hard-won fruits of years of struggle in Europe. They are fundamental rights of a functioning democracy. They must under no circumstances be put at risk. Those freedoms allow controversial ideas and discussions. The right to freedom of expression must however be exercised with responsibility especially when protection of the rights and feelings of others are involved,” said Austrian State Secretary Hans Winkler in opening the conference. “Freedom of expression and the mutual understanding and respect for the cultures and religions of others are not incompatible but complementary. Our main goal has to be a credible commitment of a democratic and pluralist Europe to the dialogue of cultures and civilizations.”

Winkler furthermore stressed that “change of attitude and social transformation will happen only if we can open our minds and hearts through education and consciousness.” The Austrian Secretary of State suggested: “One way to achieve a higher degree of objectivity and to foster understanding of the situation of members of minority groups would be to hire more journalists who belong to minority groups and support participation of immigrants in the media. This would give them a platform for self-representation, which might help to reduce prejudices and stereotypes that exist in their regard. At the same time, it might support minorities and in particular immigrants in their search for identity.”

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<sup>3</sup> For the full text of the speeches see Annex 2

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, European Commission*:

Europe was only too well aware, from its own bitter experience, about the threat that racism, xenophobia and intolerance represent, the Commissioner said in her opening remarks. From the cataclysm of intolerance that engulfed twentieth-century Europe the European Union was born. And today Europe is united by her diversity and determination to prevent such a threat overwhelming it again.

That is not, however, to deny that problems still exist. Europe still struggles to overcome the “oldest hatred” on its continent: anti-Semitism, she added. There still remains a lot of work to be done to fight prejudice in the media and society as a whole, whether that be Islamophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of religious or ethnic bias. The public’s concerns and fears are often prompted by perceptions – imagined or false. She cited the supposed danger to jobs and security posed by migrants, and added that migration is of necessity high on the EU agenda, while emphasising the positive elements of migration.

In a call to action to the gathered media, while underlining their pivotal role and given their power to shape societal attitudes, she urged them to act against racism and xenophobia.

On the subjects of freedom of expression and freedom of religion Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner stressed that both freedoms are non-negotiable, the latter a fundamental right of individuals and communities. Freedom of expression is a central tenet of Europe’s values, but its preservation depends on responsible behaviour by individuals. By extension, it was not for public authorities or the European Commission to regulate the media or impose codes of ethics. Regulation should come from within the media.

Closing her address with a reference to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008, the Commissioner underlined the need to reach out beyond the elites, to the man and woman on the street in the fight against racism and xenophobia. The media would play a key role in achieving that.

**Beate Winkler**, *Director of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)*:

“Dialogue between media, civil society, faith groups and policy-makers, is a central way forward to reduce racism,” said Beate Winkler. “The EUMC reports on Antisemitism, on Islamophobia as well as our Annual Reports

underline that media impact on the situation of cultural, religious or ethnic minorities. They can reflect and fuel existing intolerance in the public. This must be addressed. Protecting people from racist and xenophobic discourse is a basic principle of any democratic society. Therefore, all EU Member States maintain certain legitimate limits to freedom of expression in their legal system. Yet, the media is also our major ally in further developing a broad public awareness about how cultural differences enrich our societies and everyday life. Reflecting cultural diversity in mainstream programmes, employing journalists of different cultural backgrounds, and inter-cultural training of journalists, can reinforce this positive role that the media can play.”

Beate Winkler made three concrete proposals for further discussion at the seminar:

- to encourage media to follow the example of some public broadcasters and establish diversity desks that can advance these issues internally;
- to launch and support specific recruitment and training initiatives for members of minority groups which are underrepresented in the media; and
- to expand existing media training programmes and to include diversity education to help journalists and editors develop a better understanding of issues relating to racism and xenophobia, as well as religious and cultural differences.

## 2.2. KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON RACISM

The opening speeches were followed by a keynote address by **Doudou Diène**, *United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*:

In his speech, Doudou Diène highlighted the following trends relating to racism in Europe: the political instrumentalisation and banalisation of racism, characterised by the growing influence of racist political platforms of the extreme right in the political programmes of democratic parties; the intellectual legitimisation of racism by scholars and the media; and the increase of violent manifestations of racism and xenophobia, as witnessed in the recent killings in Belgium. According to him, besides the resurgence of old forms of racism against Blacks, Arabs and Jews, new forms of discrimination are appearing, as reflected in particular in the increase of political, legal and popular expressions of intolerance and discrimination

towards Muslims in Europe, especially since the 9/11 attacks against the US.

Mr. Diène identified the new targets of racism: foreigners, migrants and asylum seekers who are being criminalised and not treated according to international conventions. According to him, the most worrisome underlining factor is the non-recognition by Europeans elites, both political and intellectual, of the depth and significance of the identity crisis that European societies are undergoing. The clash between the old national identities, defined ethnically and religiously by education and history books, and the reality of the dynamics of multiculturalism in European societies lies at the root of the resurgence of racism and xenophobia in Europe. The Danish cartoon crisis is an illustration of this identity crisis. This identity crisis is a neglected issue on the European agenda.

Diène spoke of a “strip-tease” approach to integration in Europe; foreigners, migrants, asylum seekers are requested to enter “naked” in Europe, that is, without any cultural, religious or even ethnic specificity or identity – only then would they be accepted. Diène expressed understanding for the fact that European countries seek to impose certain values and norms. Yet, he called on Europeans to recognise and accept the fundamental reality that these people are not coming from the cosmos but from rich cultural and spiritual backgrounds and consequently that integration should be inspired by the spirit of intercultural dialogue, of giving and taking, and practising cultural diversity.

For Diène, the role of the media, in the full respect of freedom of expression and information, should be:

- To take more into account the historical depth of racism and xenophobia, and in particular of Islamophobia in Europe;
- To contextualise the resurgence of violent manifestations of racism and xenophobia, in particular the banalisation and political instrumentalisation of racism and xenophobia, and the threat that racism poses to the democratic process;
- To oppose the intellectual legitimisation of prejudice and hatred;
- To reflect more profoundly, editorially and structurally, the multicultural dynamics of European societies.

## 2.3. PANEL DISCUSSION AND PLENARY DEBATE

After the opening speeches and the keynote address, the issue of media and racism was addressed by a panel discussion with the following participants:

- **Isil Gachet**, *Executive Secretary, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Council of Europe*
- **Miklós Haraszti**, *OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media*
- **David Gardner**, *International Affairs Writer, Financial Times*
- **Aidan White**, *General Secretary, International Federation of Journalists*

The discussion was moderated by Gerfried Sperl, Editor-in-Chief of the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*.

Isil Gachet, Executive Secretary to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), referred in her statement to the work of ECRI, as an institution that “undertakes activities aimed at ensuring that the right to freedom from discrimination is enjoyed by all persons present on the territory of the Council of Europe.” Gachet pointed to three main areas for which ECRI has recommended measures and action: (1) legislation, (2) self-regulation and (3) structural approaches. According to her, these three areas must be approached in an integrated way. Gachet stressed that acts of racism needed to be criminalised. Freedom of expression may be restricted with a view to combatting racism in accordance with article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), as confirmed by case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. ECRI’s General Policy Recommendation N° 7 offers guidelines regarding national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination.<sup>4</sup> It also relates to provisions against racist expression. These do not address the media in a specific manner, but are to be applied generally, whether they are breached by the media or otherwise. The latter shall, however, only be the case, if offences are committed intentionally. She stressed: “This is perhaps the best safeguard for those who fear for the balance between the different fundamental rights.” In her final remark, Gachet pointed out that “it is entirely possible to combat racism while respecting freedom of expression.”

The second panellist was Miklós Haraszti, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. One of the Representative’s specific tasks is to fight

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<sup>4</sup> ECRI general policy recommendation N°7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination. Adopted by ECRI on 13 December 2002. [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/ecri/](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/)

intolerance in the media. At the 2004 OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia, however, he was given the additional task of combatting potential misuse of hate speech regulations in silencing legitimate dissent or alternative opinions. “The problem is that we don’t have universally applicable measurements for what is legitimate speech limitation. At the same time, there are a growing number of countries that, all in good faith, pass specific speech regulations.” That development can undermine freedom of expression as a universal value. In his intervention, Haraszti stressed that preserving dignity should not contradict freedom of speech, but be part of it. According to Haraszti, freedom of expression is a constitutionally secured form of tolerance, which historically, sociologically, and statistically is intertwined with freedom of religion. In this respect, he stressed the importance of building tolerance through intercultural dialogue.

David Gardner, International Affairs Writer at the Financial Times, referred to the cartoons controversy and pointed out that, as a matter of principle, the Danish newspaper had the right to publish the cartoons, irrespective of how crude or stupid these may have been. He spoke against the political instrumentalisation of the “cartoons affair”. He expanded on the manipulation of the controversy and the interplay between certain governments and the ‘public’ demonstration of anger. It seemed to him that some governments were happy to see anger directed at the cartoons and their publishers as a justification of their own approach of keeping a tight rein on what could be printed. He emphasised the irony that the freedom of speech debate ultimately fed the wishes of many who wanted to see that freedom curtailed. Also, according to Gardener, freedom of speech should be regarded as an important right; however, it should not be abused. At the same time, he underlined that religions needed to accept that they can become subjects of satire.

Aidan White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, addressed the question of how media can be encouraged to positive action. In this regard, he pointed to the important role of political parties and leaders for setting the tone in discussions. According to White, politicians are to be held responsible for addressing the rise in racism, xenophobia, Antisemitism and Islamophobia. White agreed with Gardener that freedom of expression included the right to offend. But according to him, freedom of expression is not just about the right to publish; it is equally about the right not to publish. He stressed that in the end hardly one per cent of publications in Europe decided to publish the controversial cartoons. He warned against increasing government interference in media affairs and insisted that regulating ethics was the collective business of professional journalists alone. However, media should be encouraged to positive action in order to remove stereotypes, prevent fuelling racism and sensationalist

reporting. In this respect, White stressed the importance of dialogue with and among the media. According to White, “we do not need more positive images in the media; rather we need to tell the (whole) truth. We need the media to express truth and independence.” White concluded that there is a lack of context and lack of quality in parts of the media. Therefore, the media needed to launch an ethical journalism initiative that could reinforce ethics and credibility, improve the quality of journalism, reassert editorial independence and promote excellence in training and recruitment.

In the ensuing public plenary, representatives of Euromed countries, panellists and the public engaged in an animated debate. While the cartoon controversy and its effects was to the fore in the discussion there were diverging views regarding the responsibility of the media and of politicians for the escalation of events. However, a consensual theme was the need for journalists to realise and consider the political context in which they work and report.

This closed the public part of the conference and the following working group sessions were held at expert level between media professionals, civil society organisations and cultural/religious minority representatives.

## **2.4. WORKING GROUP SESSIONS**

### **2.4.1. Regulation and editorial policy in EU countries**

*Bettina Peters, Director of Programmes at the European Journalism Centre, chaired the working group. Keynote presentations were given by William Gore, Assistant Director of the UK Press Complaints Commission, and Fuad Nahdi, publisher of the Muslim magazine Q-News in the UK.*

The working group reviewed experiences and challenges with regards to:

- Regulation (laws, statutory bodies);
- Self-regulation (voluntary bodies in media industry); and
- Editorial practices and initiatives – what the media can do.

The working group discussed existing initiatives of statutory regulatory bodies, specifically referring to the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities ([www.epra.org](http://www.epra.org)), the Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities ([www.ririm.org](http://www.ririm.org)) and the Broadcasting Regulation and Cultural Diversity ([www.brccd.net](http://www.brccd.net)).

In developing recommendations, the working group agreed on the need to consider the context when talking about racism, xenophobia and the media. This context was seen to be characterised by fragile community relations, a volatile political environment which created sensitivities and suspicion, and a perceived conflict between the West and Islam. According to the participants, other influencing factors include a crisis of European identity and changes within the media industry itself (less mainstream, narrow cast, bloggers, higher competition, etc.).

#### **2.4.2. Regulation and editorial policy in the South-Mediterranean countries**

*Ramez Maluf, Director of the Beirut Institute of Media Arts, chaired the working group. Keynote presentations were given by Ibrahim Nawar from Arab Press Freedom Watch and Barbara Surk, Middle East correspondent with Delo newspaper.*

Thematically the working group covered the same issues for the South-Mediterranean countries as did working group 1 for the EU. With regards to the regional context, the working group identified five major deficits:

- Legal environment (press freedom, licensing systems);
- Almost state monopoly given to broadcasting media;
- Absence of press associations/journalist unions;
- Lack of self-regulatory schemes/frameworks;
- Professional practice does not reflect diversity of opinions within civil society.

In identifying suggestions for improvements and recommendations, the working group also discussed the situation in the EU where it was felt that the media was conveying a stereotypical portrayal of different religions and cultural groups. The need for more knowledge transfer and the exchange of experiences between “North” and “South” was a key message coming out of this working group.

In response to the lack of self-regulatory schemes, COPEAM (Conference of Audiovisual Mediterranean Operators) established the Seville Charter (7 May 2005) containing self-commitments by broadcasters from northern and southern Mediterranean countries (<http://www.copeam.org>). The Charter has so far been signed by 26 Euro-Mediterranean radio and TV public broadcasters.

### **2.4.3. Cultural diversity in media programme and structures**

*Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson of the EUMC Management Board, chaired the working group. Keynote presentations came from Noha Mellor, Senior Lecturer at the University of East London, from Michael Jempson, Director of MediaWise Trust, and from Edouard Pellet, Delegate for Diversity and Integration at France Télévisions.*

The working group discussed the representation of cultural and religious minorities in the media. It identified barriers to cultural diversity in media programmes and structures, and developed suggestions for improvements. Recruitment policy and diversity management in the media industry was a particular focus of the discussion. In this context, the working group heard from one of the keynote speakers about positive experiences with introducing a diversity desk at a national public broadcaster. The working group also discussed the importance of giving ethnic and cultural minorities a voice in the media, including through alternative media but mostly by gaining access to mainstream media. Lastly, the need for more media education and international media dialogue about cultural and religious differences was highlighted.

### **2.4.4. Relations between media, civil society and institutional mechanisms to combat racism & xenophobia**

*Dr. Traugott Schoefthaller, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, chaired the working group. Keynote presentations were given by Zeynep Tugrul from the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers & Migrants (Turkey) and David Meyer, Executive Board member of the Centre Européen Juif d'Information.*

The working group discussed how to introduce the perspectives of people with minority background and faith communities in the media and how a constructive relationship can be built between civil society and the media. The working group discussed cultural sensitivities regarding language used in public and media discourse. The working group heard from one of the keynote speakers about the misconceptions associated with refugees which can be a result of media coverage, such as failure to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Additionally, the working group heard about examples of good practice and initiatives between members of Jewish and Muslim communities. In this context, it was highlighted that such initiatives do not receive sufficient coverage in the media. This was to some extent ascribed to the inability of civil society organisations to create

newsworthy material for media. The working group considered intercultural dialogue, and media's role in it to be the key to reducing stereotypical images of different religious and cultural groups.

## WORKING GROUP CONCLUSIONS

Each working group developed practical recommendations on how to make improvements in the areas discussed. These recommendations are summarised as proposals for action in the conclusions section of this report.

### 2.5. CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The conference closed with a keynote address by **Thomas Hammarberg**, *Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights*:

Drawing on his own professional experience as a journalist, Thomas Hammarberg called on political institutions to understand better journalists' professional ethics. Journalists needed to be wary of two main external threats undermining their independence: censorship and economic interest. Therefore, their professional instinct would be to oppose instrumentalisation for any specific political or social goal – even if they were desirable: “Journalists do not like to be megaphones of certain political interests. Yet, they are happy to contribute to positive developments simply by being good journalists.” Hammarberg accepted that ethical standards were the prerogative of journalists themselves. However, he saw the need to evaluate how effective self-regulation and voluntary bodies (complaints councils, media ombudsmen) had been. Hammarberg recognised the sensitivity of finding the right balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. According to him, more clarity is needed to define what constitutes a legitimate restriction of freedom of expression for the protection of the rights of others. He considered that more such cases must be brought in front of the European Court on Human Rights in order to define these limits through case-law.

The Human Rights Commissioner concluded that racist discourse in the media could be confronted by activities in four interrelated areas:

1. Strengthening human rights education;
2. Countering xenophobic discourse in political campaigning;
3. Encouraging NGOs to feed the media on human rights issues; and
4. More dialogue to improve mutual understanding for cultural differences.

### **3. Conclusions, recommendations and proposals for action**

The workshops led to concrete and practical recommendations on how to tackle the shared problem of racism or hate discourse and how to promote inter-cultural understanding and respect.

The summary below lists the main proposals for action, addressed to the various stakeholders.

This summary cannot do justice to the regional and national specificities, which were represented in the working groups. Therefore some of the more general recommendations may not be equally relevant for all countries in the Euromed region. The summary is intended to provide an overview of the action that participants deemed necessary in the region as a whole.

#### **3.1. PROPOSALS FOR CONSIDERATION BY MEDIA ORGANISATIONS**

##### **Strengthening self-regulation and ethical standards**

*Voluntary bodies of media organisations can play a constructive role in self-regulating the industry and reinforcing ethical standards while respecting editorial independence. They can monitor compliance with existing codes of conduct and adjudicate citizen complaints. To ensure that press complaints bodies, media ombudsman and other self-regulatory bodies are effective, participants suggest that media organisations:*

- Ensure that self-regulation is user-friendly and based on a clear code and an easy, free-of-charge complaints procedure; that self-regulatory bodies act quickly and transparently and have the support of the media industry so that decisions are credibly enforced;
- Make self-regulation more visible to the public. More coordination and publicising at European level coupled with more dialogue among self-regulatory bodies on both sides of the Mediterranean;
- Share European knowledge and experiences of self-regulatory systems with media in the South-Mediterranean countries;
- Raise awareness among journalists and editors about existing codes and ethical standards.

## **Ensuring diversity of the workforce in the media industry**

*Diversity in the workforce will not automatically lead to a better representation of minority concerns in mainstream programmes. However, having more members of ethnic, cultural or religious minorities succeed in the media will ensure that the industry reasonably reflects the diversity in society. Multicultural human resources can also be a factor in media's economic success as they enable media to cater for an increasingly diverse audience. Participants encourage mainstream media:*

- To make use of provisions in anti-discrimination legislation, where existing, and to enhance the number of minority journalists through equal opportunities policies coupled with positive action (e.g. targeted recruitment, bursaries, training);
- To introduce diversity desks with the responsibility to undertake diversity audits and to develop diversity action programmes for the management;
- Investigate the potential for making intercultural competence a mandatory job requirement for media professionals.

## **Engaging with civil society and minority groups in programme production**

*There is a need for better understanding between civil society and media on issues relating to cultural and religious differences. Engaging with minority groups in particular will help the media to improve the quality of reporting, to be fully aware of the sensitivities around intercultural relations, and to avoid negative stereotyping. Participants recommend to media professionals:*

- To make full use of the diversity in sources of information and to give minority communities and the subjects of reports a voice (i.e. refugees, immigrants, religious groups);
- To develop programme formats on members of different communities and their daily lives (non-fiction);
- To show diversity as a normal feature of society in popular programmes (fiction).

## **Dialogue and cooperation between media professionals of different cultures**

*Media professionals need to continue discussing editorial standards with regards to intercultural relations. International exchanges raise awareness on restraints on freedom of expression in different societies and enhance professional solidarity between journalists. Participants suggest to media organisations:*

- To create a forum for media owners to discuss racism and xenophobia issues and the impact of media reporting on intercultural relations;
- To promote the exchange of good practice of responsible and ethical journalism and to discuss how to avoid language that incites prejudice, hostility and inter-community tensions (including in consultation with community leaders);
- To adopt a “Diversity charter”, a declaration with specific commitments by media (with political backing), and annually report on progress (on a designated “Diversity Day”);
- To use and expand international twinning programmes between media professionals, with a focus on young journalists to ensure that tomorrow’s media practitioners are exposed to different cultures;
- To engage in international co-productions that can enhance intercultural understanding;
- To give more access and link to Southern experts in Northern media as special columnists, commentators, etc.;
- To institutionalise Euromed media cooperation by establishing secretariats, networks or specific information tools (e.g. a newsletter for female journalists).

### **3.2. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION BY JOURNALIST TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL BODIES**

#### **Supporting training and diversity education for journalists and editors**

*Excellence in training and education of journalists should reinforce professional standards and fight ignorance about cultural differences and concerns. Participants encourage journalist training institutions (e.g. schools of journalism) and journalist professional bodies (associations and unions):*

- To identify gaps in teaching programmes and to develop specific training initiatives to improve support for quality education on racism issues. Training initiatives should be targeted towards editors, practising journalists, professors of journalism and self-regulatory bodies;
- To make diversity training a standard element of journalist training curricula, including learning about religious and cultural differences;
- To reach out to minority groups and encourage minority youth to pursue journalism as a career (e.g. through bursaries);
- To develop training programmes that bring professionals from the “North” to the “South” and vice versa;
- Produce manuals, toolkits, glossaries, and other self-learning material for journalists (for example: ‘Online Tool for Journalists Reporting on Migration’, [www.emn.at/media](http://www.emn.at/media)).

### **3.3. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY / MINORITY GROUPS**

#### **Building media capacities in civil society**

*Civil society organisations and minority groups can make their voices heard in the media if they succeed in developing pro-active communication strategies and provide journalists with consistent and reliable information. This will also help in countering the standard portrayal of cultural communities as monolithic blocs. Participants propose that civil society:*

- Build mature media relations by designating and training specialised spokespersons who can explain the issues in journalistic jargon and can speak on behalf of minority communities and vulnerable groups;
- Produce media guides on the diverse groups in society with background, sources, reliable data etc. (example: ‘British Muslims: Media Guide’, [http://www.fairuk.org/docs/British\\_Muslims\\_Media\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.fairuk.org/docs/British_Muslims_Media_Guide.pdf));
- Develop and support media initiatives from within civil society – as alternative sources of information to mainstream media;
- Encourage minority youth to pursue journalism as a career.

#### **Strengthening media monitoring capacity of civil society**

*Civil society can play a key role as media watchdogs. Participants recommend:*

- To develop skills and capacity to monitor media reporting and to interact with complaints bodies (ombudsmen, equality bodies, press councils) to report cases of racism or hate discourse.

### **3.4. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION BY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

#### **Developing and publicising innovative interfaith initiatives**

*Religious leaders have a high moral standing in their respective communities. Therefore, they can play an important, conciliatory role in inter-faith and intercultural relations. Innovative interfaith initiatives can also offer newsworthy feature stories for the media. Participants propose that religious community leaders:*

- a) Undertake twinning projects among synagogues, churches and mosques and support newsletter exchanges between places of worship;
- b) Create exhibitions on other faiths in places of worship;
- c) Continue with intercultural and interfaith initiatives and publicise these among one's congregations.

### **3.5. PROPOSALS FOR SUPPORT BY EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Providing support to media research and networking**

*European/international institutions and foundations can facilitate the process of dialogue between media professionals and civil society groups in a meaningful way. International seminars, conferences and workshops improve the exchange of knowledge on different cultures and values between regions and support transmitting this to the broader population. Participants encourage European/international institutions and foundations:*

- To organise a workshop / roundtable for editors-in-chief and commissioning editors from all 35 Euromed countries to discuss racism and xenophobia at the highest media level;
- To fund the publication of a White Paper for media highlighting laws, policies and practises relating to regulation and diversity;

- To support the production by Euromed media of a White Paper on common standards on journalism;
- To support networking and training initiatives such as reporting diversity, ethics in practice and ethical journalism initiatives across borders;
- To continue journalist exchanges and media initiatives such as the Euromed Journalist Prize on Cultural Diversity;
- To fund research examining the presence and form of discriminatory discourse in the media and the impact of such discourse on public perceptions and attitudes;
- To support interfaith and intercultural initiatives and projects.

### **Creating an enabling environment for good editorial practice by the media**

*Political institutions are responsible for creating a political and legal framework that promotes diversity in the media and works to curb racism. The basic legal framework is in place, and includes, inter alia, the European Convention on Human Rights (art. 10 in particular), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in the EU, its anti-discrimination legislation. This needs to be complemented with transparent and effective media regulatory mechanisms. Participants propose that political institutions:*

- Prescribe clearly the role and position of regulatory mechanisms in law and to protect regulatory systems from any undue interference;
- Address the root causes of racism and prejudice through the education system, e.g. by introducing intercultural elements in standard school curricula;
- Create links between EU and UN Years which focus on issues relevant to tackling racism and improving intercultural understanding, for example during the proposed European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008;
- Establish a World Tolerance Day on Religion which can be part of a broader media campaign to explain the three Abrahamic religions.