Opportunities for Strengthening Mutual Understanding and Tackling Key Challenges through Media

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Analysing the role of media reporting in intercultural dialogue, Shadi Abu-Ayyash focuses on television, the key source of information for both European and SEM respondents, addressing the need for policymakers to pay greater attention to the role that media can play in addressing social challenges as an information source and bridge for dialogue. Argument is made for media-orientated initiatives, including specialised co-produced media literacy programmes and audio-visual for younger generations, to effect positive impact on intercultural understanding and societal change.

This article explores the impacts of media consumption across the Mediterranean on intercultural dialogue between European countries and countries on the Southern and Eastern shore of the Mediterranean (SEM), based on data from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Intercultural Trends Survey. In doing so, it explores the challenges and opportunities that media platforms provide for intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean context.
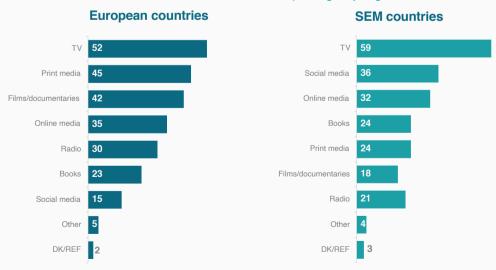
Whilst digital diplomacy and political communication are seen as contemporary methods for enhancing international relations in our digitized world, less attention is given to the roles that media can play in addressing social challenges. Media, in its various forms – as a communicative tool for mediation or disseminating ideas – can play a key role in strengthening dialogue and cross-cultural relations at the grassroots level, among peoples of different cultural contexts, including people on both shores of the Mediterranean.

In this context, policymakers should pay greater attention to the media in its various roles, both as an informative agency and as a bridge for dialogue, and should incorporate media-based strategies into policies and programmes that aim to address social challenges and promote intercultural dialogue.

This article advances the argument that dedicated media-oriented initiatives, including specialised media literacy programmes for younger generations and audio-visual co-production of TV, print and online media content, could have a positive impact on mutual understanding and social change.

Chart 8.1: Most trusted media sources for cross-cultural reporting - by region

European countries

TV	52
Print media	45
Films/documentaries	42
Online media	35
Radio	30
Books	23
Social media	15
Other	5
DK/REF	2

SEM countries

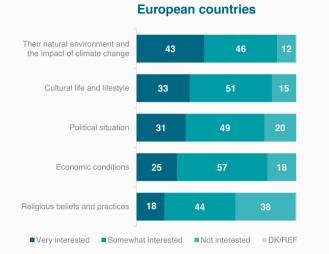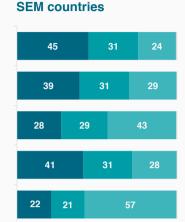|	
TV	59
Social media	36
Online media	32
Books	24
Print media	24
Films/documentaries	18
Radio	21
Other	4
DK/REF	3

Survey question: Which of the following sources do you trust most for information about countries bordering the southern and eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (asked in European countries)/European countries (asked in SEM countries)? **Base:** All respondents (%), by region (©Anna Lindh/Ipsos 2020).

Chart 8.2: Interest in news and information consumption in European and SEM countries

European countries

Topic	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested	DK/REF
Their natural environment and the impact of climate change	43	46	12	
Cultural life and lifestyle	33	51	15	
Political situation	31	49	20	
Economic conditions	25	57	18	
Religious beliefs and practices	18	44	38	

SEM countries

Topic	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested	DK/REF
Their natural environment and the impact of climate change	45	31	24	
Cultural life and lifestyle	39	31	29	
Political situation	28	29	43	
Economic conditions	41	31	28	
Religious beliefs and practices	22	21	57	

■ Very interested ■ Somewhat interested ■ Not interested ■ DK/REF

? **Survey question:** Thinking about the countries bordering the southern and eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (asked in European countries)/European countries (asked in SEM countries), how interested are you in knowing about their [TOPICS A-E]?
Base: All respondents (%), by region (©Anna Lindh/Ipsos 2020).

Most trusted media sources for cross-cultural reporting

Intercultural dialogue in the context of the EuroMed region is influenced by a range of factors, including media content in both traditional and new media formats.

Online and social media are widely used platforms for the consumption of information in the EuroMed region, particularly in SEM countries, and occupy an advanced position in relation to most trusted sources of information on cross-cultural reporting. Online media (including news websites and online magazines) are reported as being the most trusted media source for information about European/SEM countries for 35% and 32% of European and SEM respondents, respectively, whilst social media is the most trusted media source for 36% of SEM respondents (Chart 8.1). Conversely, social media is the most trusted media source for just 15% of respondents in European countries. Nevertheless, despite the increasing number of online and social media users around the globe, the Survey data indicate that TV remains the most trusted source of information for respondents in European and SEM countries (for 52% and 59% of respondents, respectively).

Intercultural dialogue in the context of the EuroMed region is influenced by a range of factors, including media content in both traditional and new media formats.

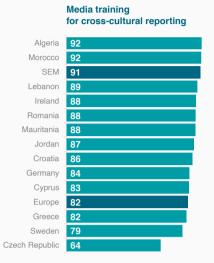As TV content, which includes news programmes and live performances among other outputs, is so heavily relied upon, it is essential that policymakers and organisations working in the field of intercultural dialogue – such as the Anna Lindh Foundation – invest time and effort in utilising TV screens to reach their audiences and advance their missions.

Collaborative production of media content, involving people from different countries across the EuroMed, that is targeted towards a general audience – especially younger generations – is one approach that could be utilised to encourage intercultural dialogue on a large scale. Such production, which could emerge in the form of documentaries, talk shows, or intercultural news programmes produced in collaboration between local, regional and international TV networks and other forms of streaming media, may contribute to better understanding among people within the EuroMed region.
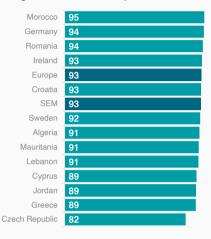
Similar efforts should be made to target the consumers of print, online and social media, as the Survey data suggest that people on both shores of the Mediterranean also rely on these mediums for the consumption of news and information about the other. Again, cross-border collaborations that bring different social and cultural perspectives could be a useful approach in promoting intercultural dialogue through these mediums.

As such, building on the experience of the Anna Lindh Foundation in advancing collaborative initiatives among the people of the two regions, further initiatives that encourage collaborative media-culture production for TV screens, print media and online media platforms may have a positive impact on mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue.

Chart 8.3: Media training for cross-cultural reporting - by country

**Media training
for cross-cultural reporting**

Algeria	92
Morocco	92
SEM	91
Lebanon	89
Ireland	88
Romania	88
Mauritania	88
Jordan	87
Croatia	86
Germany	84
Cyprus	83
Europe	82
Greece	82
Sweden	79
Czech Republic	64

**Diversity management and radicalisation prevention
training for non-/Government professionals**

Morocco	95
Germany	94
Romania	94
Ireland	93
Europe	93
Croatia	93
SEM	93
Sweden	92
Algeria	91
Mauritania	91
Lebanon	91
Cyprus	89
Jordan	89
Greece	89
Czech Republic	82

? **Survey question:** Many countries in Europe and in the countries on the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, are facing challenges such as hate speech and opposing cultural views. How effective do you think that each of the following will be in preventing and dealing with these challenges? **Base:** All respondents (% effective –sum of "very effective" and "somewhat effective" responses"), by country (©Anna Lindh/Ipsos 2020).

Topics of interest in news and information consumption

Results from the Survey indicate that the topic of the natural environment and the impact of climate change occupies the top spot in the list of interests in other countries among people in both European and SEM countries, with 43% and 45% of respondents reporting that they are 'very interested' in hearing about the environment and climate change in the other, respectively (Chart 8.2). This result confirms the notion that – as universal matters affecting humanity's shared future – climate change and the environment can unify people around the globe, including people on both shores of the Mediterranean.

We can interpret this result as a further opportunity for encouraging cross-border production of media content. Such production should acknowledge the important role that media can play in educating younger audiences on topics of interest such as climate change. With this in mind, organisations aiming to promote intercultural dialogue through media platforms should also incorporate media literacy programmes into their strategies.

Media literacy refers to the ability to use, critically understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts (Ofcom, 2012) and has been described as the core of intercultural dialogue (Manuel Pérez Tornero, 2012). Media literacy programmes can be a vital tool for educating young people and adults on key social challenges such as climate change, conflict and radicalisation by improving audiences' abilities to critically evaluate and properly understand media content and key messages delivered through media platforms.

Measures to prevent and deal with conflict and radicalisation

It remains important to point out, however, that media platforms can be a double-edged sword in their ability to negatively frame and represent the other, consequently contributing to misinformation and negative portrayals, on the one hand; and for their capability to advance constructive intercultural dialogue in all sectors of society, on the other hand.

Interestingly, the vast majority of Survey participants (82% in European and 91% in SEM countries) agree that media training for cross-cultural reporting can be either a 'somewhat effective' or 'very effective' measure in tackling societal issues such as hate speech and polarisation (Chart 8.3).

Building on the Survey results, national and regional policymakers must also consider investing in media training to enhance media professionals' capabilities in cross-cultural reporting of qualitative and quantitative news and information, including journalists and content producers. Such an effort can be viewed as a direct response to the pressing need to empower media professionals, including young content producers on both shores, to tackle social challenges such as hate speech, conflict and radicalisation.

Role of women in the media sector

The vast majority of poll participants in both geographical settings (93% in Europe and 82% in SEM countries) agree that women should play either 'the same role' or 'a greater role' in the media, including TV and cinema. This could be an important indicator for policymakers to consider developing policies and programmes that

encourage women's participation in media production, including in the field of cross-cultural dialogue, where women could play a major role in media-oriented efforts.

Conclusion

Media is becoming part of the fabric of everyday life, including with regards to intercultural communication. Medium, message and content themes are aspects of the communication process that contribute to shaping intercultural relations and dialogue in the EuroMed context.

In light of the Survey results, this paper argued that by taking the lead in adopting initiatives that promote cross-cultural content for TV, online media and other communication mediums, as well as incorporating media literacy programmes and media training for cross-cultural reporting into intercultural dialogue strategies, policymakers and organisations working in the area of intercultural dialogue could take an essential step forward in advancing strategic cross-cultural dialogue efforts. Such a step would not only contribute to advancing intercultural dialogue in the long run, but would also confront misperceptions, negative stereotypes and disinformation in the EuroMed context.

As the Survey shows, media – as a contemporary driver of change – could have a noticeable influence on intercultural dialogue. The more opportunities there are for media and culture creatives across the EuroMed to get involved in collaborative production, the more chances exist for the media to make a positive impact on the promotion of intercultural relations and dialogue in the long-term. Training for cross-cultural media reporting and media literacy programmes are necessary elements of such a collaboration and are essential for achieving this goal.

Finally, if the COVID-19 crisis has taught us a lesson, it is that humans have many common interests that unite them, and that solidarity and collaboration is a major way to move forward. In light of this lesson, intercultural dialogue across the Mediterranean could achieve its strategic goals when close collaboration takes place among civil society organisations, universities, artists, media personalities and culture activists through the door of media co-production. Media co-production offers opportunities for advancing cultural exchanges, strengthening mutual understanding and addressing society's most pressing challenges. ■

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Dialogue in action | Austria

SAG's MULTI — multilingual rhetoric contest

With the aim of promoting multilingualism and internationality of young people and encouraging them to take a personal stand and move an audience with a speech, 'SAG's MULTI!' has held multilingual rhetoric contests since its beginnings.

These contests are divided into three categories according to contestant age. Each participant gives a speech in which he/she switches between his/her first language, or a foreign language and German.

Every year, SAG's MULTI! provides a leitmotif with numerous sub-topics for the contests in question. The participants choose a topic of their choice (either a leitmotif or one of the subtopics) and give a speech during which they demonstrate their rhetorical skills and language skills.

Examples of leitmotifs from last year's competitions: 'Who am I when I don't have to be anyone?', 'This is worth living for that!', 'Think out loud'. The participants have to convince the jury of their language skills. At least one member of the jury will be a native speaker of the foreign language. The contest is divided into three stages: pre-selection, main competition and finals.

EDUCULT and 'Wirtschaft für Integration'

Almost 30% of the students in Austria have a family language other than German. With up to 600 young people participating in the SAG's MULTI! event every year, the contest reaches many multilingual pupils in all of Austria. Last year, 52 languages (in combination with German) were spoken during the contest. The contest language statistics from last year were led by English with 156 speakers (127 times as a foreign language learned), ahead of Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian with 75, and Turkish with 58 participants. The range of the languages spoken during the contest is extremely broad, including Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Pashto, Sorani to Urdu or Vlach language. Hence, SAG's MULTI! provides visibility to the language talents of young people in Austria, especially the ones coming from a migrant background. Regardless of their place of birth, nationality, religious and cultural background, these young people compete and come together to discuss and take positions on a relevant societal issue.

In 2020 the project reached a new dimension, with the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation broadcasting the contest virtually and via TV, reaching many new audiences in Austria.