

Identity and Mutual Perceptions

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It is crucial, in my opinion, that everyone should accept the different components of one's own identity. What seems apparent, however, is that the evolution in the last years has not been going in that direction.

In a world of neighbouring cultures, the major issue is how to manage the coexistence of cultural diversity. The management of neighbouring cultures requires relentless attention, deep reflections and creative solutions. It might be too premature to talk of a Mediterranean identity, with people continuing to define themselves in terms of their nationality, religion, language and social belonging. Indeed, the Mediterranean identity rests for now; a political vision and an intellectual construction that has so far inadequately been translated at the level of real perception of individuals and groups. In looking towards the future of the Mediterranean area, managing immigration remains a priority area of action. The issue is negatively affecting the intellectual and political atmosphere of riparian countries. Although a healthy management of coexistence is a major benefit, it is through encouraging migrants to accept their 'double belonging' and unique capacity to play the role of link between originating and host countries.

When we look to the reality of mutual perceptions, the problem of trust between people of the North and South of the Mediterranean has been developing and increasing over the last decades. It is connected to the real issues which need to be resolved and to a negative perception of the 'other'. For a significant improvement to take place over the coming years and decades, we must focus action on resolving the problems through a balanced and sustainable solution for the Middle-East crisis, and work tirelessly to change perceptions and mentalities.

This is the responsibility of a range of stakeholders including political leaders, the intelligentsia, teachers, and the media. In terms of the latter, we must continue to work through initiatives such as the 'Anna Lindh Mediterranean Journalist Award' to ensure not only the professional quality of reporting but also the 'ethical' quality. The criterion by which we judge such a prize does not seek political correctness in the realm of our daily confrontations, but calls on the use of proper words, images and approaches that may resolve incomprehension, misunderstandings and hatred.

Concerning the construction and validity of the Union for the Mediterranean, it may, in my perspective, be too early to judge. Nevertheless, a healthy approach is to wage and build on the deep aspirations of people for dignity, well-being, freedom and democracy. One must constantly thrive for essential values, which is the price for trust in solid and sustainable foundations.