

# Rebuilding Bridges, Restoring Trust

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The Euro-Mediterranean region has been blessed by nature in many ways. Its climate, geography, natural and human resources have rendered it the birthplace of great civilizations; and its basin, which witnessed the birth of the three monotheistic religions, has had an extraordinary impact on the history and cultural development of mankind.

However, this cultural diversity, which should be viewed as a source of enrichment and progress, has often, through the centuries, been fraught with political strife, conflicts and confrontations. Yet some wise men have taken it upon themselves to encourage the peoples of the Region to build bridges and overcome religious, ethnic and cultural differences by focusing on what brings them together rather than what separates them. Such bridges can only be built through intercultural dialogue; a dialogue that promotes a better understanding of 'the other'; an acceptance of those who are different, and a belief that diversity can ensure mutual enrichment and create the necessary conditions that will allow societies to benefit from it and evolve, develop, and prosper in a climate of peace and stability.

Indeed, it is the absence of intercultural dialogue that is the origin of misunderstandings and mistrust; people often fear what they do not know and often have misconceptions about the 'other', an attitude that creates tensions, confrontations and, sometimes, even wars. With this in mind, and in an attempt to overcome the faulty concept that civilizations will clash, a series of initiatives have been launched to ensure an alliance, rather than a clash of civilizations. Hence, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Anna Lindh Foundation are actively promoting this intercultural dialogue across the two shores of the Mediterranean.

I am totally convinced that the only way to face the challenges of our Region is to promote and deepen this dialogue in order to take advantage of all these initiatives, and to create a sense of partnership between all men and women in our area, regardless of colour, creed or gender, to help change the philosophy of politics, and to ensure that in our world we can cooperate with one another, even if the past has been confrontational, in order to promote justice, inclusion and participation, and thus to build a better future for ourselves and our children.

Therefore, I believe we must all be committed to this aim not only because it corresponds to the principles and ideals we believe in, but also because it is in the best interest of the peoples of the area. We must, through cultural dialogue, help create the atmosphere that allows just peace to end the conflicts in the area, and promote economic, social, and cultural development in the entire region. We need to take concrete initiatives in a strategic and structural framework and give priority to outlining, within the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Alliance of Civilizations, the Union for the Mediterranean, and UNESCO an agenda for an intercultural dialogue with a new vision and new impetus.