

The Mediterranean, a "land" of Media

According to what Fernand Braudel wrote, the Mediterranean is not "a landscape, but several landscapes. Not even a sea, but a succession of seas. Not even a civilization, but several overlapped civilizations". Today, with almost 460 million inhabitants, 150 million Internet users and more than 600 TV channels, it is on the waves, on the screens and on the network that the Mediterranean will write the new page of this history.

At the time the European and the Mediterranean Heads of State are going to give a new impulse to the secular relationship between the Northern countries and the Southern Mediterranean ones, the challenges are multiple: security, sustainable development, education, energetic and food matters. This great enterprise will have to be based on the exchange tradition the Mediterranean space has been built on.

During his official visit to Algeria, in December 2007, the (French *ndr*) President of the Republic declared: "It is only when the Mediterranean makes peoples and ideas meet that it will place itself in the vanguard of the global civilization". Carrying out today such an ambition is unthinkable without inscribing the Information Society – Media, audiovisual, digital technologies – in the heart of the reflection and of the action that will be dealt tomorrow.

Since 1995, the Barcelona conference highlighted the need of a "reinforcement of the role of Media in the development of the intercultural dialogue". Radio, television and Internet are the relays of the values of which the Mediterranean has been the melting pot for three thousands years. How not to be convinced about the role that the Media play in fighting against any obscurantism or extremism and in the promotion of religion, information and expression freedoms?

Images are our common language. It is urgent to inscribe them in a common policy aimed at encouraging their production, their transmission and their circulation in this region. Yesterday still crossed by deep disparities, the Mediterranean audiovisual landscapes are facing today similar and convergent challenges: the advent of Internet and of the terrestrial digital television, the sensational explosion of the telecommunications, the end of the public monopolies, the concurrence between the public and the private sectors but also between the national and the international televisions, the more and more avowed need of regulation of the sector.

Young, fragmented and complex the Mediterranean audiovisual sector is a market of the future that is provided with important productive resources serving a large and captive audience.

The deep difference between actors (institutional, public and, specially, private ones), between networks (Hertzian, satellite, digital), between challenges (political, economic, cultural, financial ones) impose to start up a process that only the Mediterranean Union will be able to federate and to embody. Is it not time that the Mediterranean genius materializes in projects which will be tomorrow the Seven Wonders of the audiovisual and digital world?

Let try a listing. First of all, the infrastructures, by developing the optical fibre and the access to the broadband, in order to more and more share information and creations. Then, the memory, by putting on line a big archive-based site that would offer on the WEB the whole digitized Mediterranean audiovisual patrimony. Training, by the opening of a Mediterranean University of sound and image. Creation, with the establishment of common rules guaranteeing a statute to artists, the safeguard of their works from piracy, the respect of their copyrights and of their freedom of expression. Broadcast, with the setting up of a database of programmes' exchange aimed at the wide circulation of talents and works and, why not?, the founding of an "ARTE of the Mediterranean". Finally, production, with the generalization of the agreements of production, specially hoping to see the birth, one day, of a great popular series daily watched by million women and men on both shores.

In addition to the variety of landscapes, of seas, of civilizations so beloved by Braudel, we have today the diversity of the works, of the creations and of the talents that appear on our screens. They will contribute, tomorrow, to make the Mediterranean a land of Media, open to the present time and to the future. Isn't there, as well, that the project of the forthcoming Mediterranean Union finds out all its sense?

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