



Qait Bey, Alexandria (EG), one of the Dialogue Night venues.



© 1001 Actions for Dialogue



EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY: CIVIL SOCIETY AND CULTURE

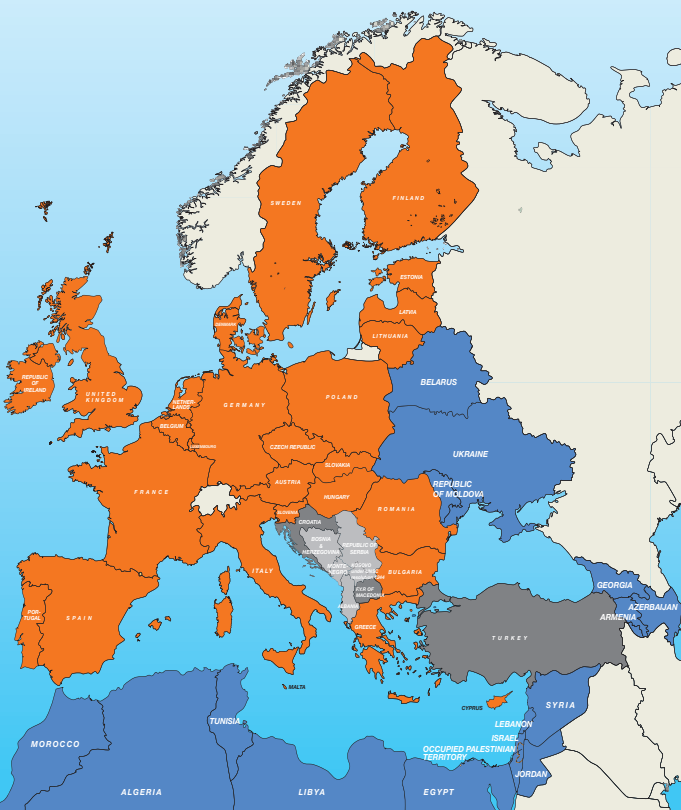
PEOPLE POWER

European Neighbourhood Policy

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- EU Member States
- ENP partner countries
- Candidates for EU membership
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Mediterranean nights

On 22 May 2008, tens of thousands of people across Europe and the Mediterranean came together for a night of entertainment, music, culture and food.

The Dialogue Night sought to promote understanding and coexistence by emphasising the common cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region, the ‘crossroads of civilisations’. Public debates, concerts, food festivals, and much more, took place in Alexandria, Istanbul, Barcelona, Beirut, Venice, Avignon, and other towns and villages in 37 countries.

In Sicily – which has been a melting pot of Mediterranean civilisation, including Greek, Roman, Christian and Islamic – the Dialogue Night in Palermo was a broad cultural conversation. It included a number of international seminars, bringing together people from across the region to discuss cultural coexistence, and dinners where foreign communities were invited to come and mingle with the locals.

A thousand and one cultural encounters

The Night was part of a wider initiative, the 1001 Actions for Dialogue, launched by the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Through this initiative, the Foundation sought to mobilise its network of civil society organisations to fight discrimination, challenge extremism, and help people to rediscover their common roots and heritage.

“This is arguably our most successful action to date,” observes the Foundation’s Paul Walton. “The aim was to mobilise our network. In little over a month, more than a thousand activities took place on the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.”

Equality without reservations

Jordan is committed to the cause of gender equality and has signed up to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but maintains certain reservations.

Jordan’s vibrant women’s movement has been working hard to push for full gender equality. “We have launched a campaign under the slogan of ‘equality without reservations,’” says Leila Hamarneh of the Arab Women’s Organisation (AWO) of Jordan.

Gender on the agenda

This EU-backed NGO has joined forces with other women’s groups to push for progress. In 2007, they presented, at the 39th session of the CEDAW Committee, the first-ever ‘shadow report’ on Jordan.

The coalition has also campaigned against domestic violence and a law was passed which explicitly protects women against such familial abuse.



The majority of European Union citizens, a recent survey found, are in favour of closer co-operation with neighbouring countries. They believe that closer ties could strengthen peace and democracy.

This is precisely what the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is about. Developed in 2003/2004 with the aim of drawing the enlarged EU and our neighbours closer together, the ENP is about taking concrete action to support reforms and to enhance prosperity: to improve the daily lives of people in our neighbourhood.

So how does it work? The EU and each of its neighbours agree on how to build closer relations and support reforms over a three-to-five-year period. The joint commitments are spelled out in so-called Action Plans. Expertise and funding (almost €12 billion from 2007 to 2013) is available under the 'European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument' (ENPI) to assist with modernisation and reform.



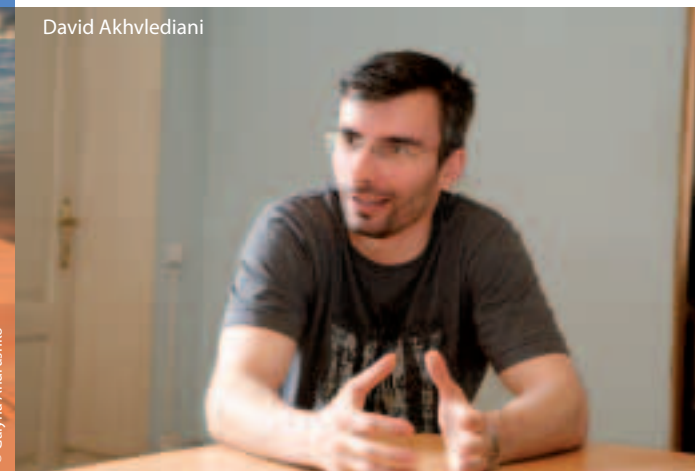
Young Ukrainians urge voters to go to the polls.



Imane Masbahi



© Galyna Andrushko



David Akhvediani

Helping the grass roots grow greener

A society thrives when its grass roots are healthy and well-tended. NGOs, charities, activist groups, cultural and political associations, artists' groups, think-tanks, and other civil society organisations all play a vital role in promoting dialogue in the community, and in resolving conflicts.

One area the ENP focuses on in particular is promoting people-to-people dialogue. This encompasses everything from the arts to civil liberties; from music festivals to academic debates. Meetings and exchanges, even when conflictual, help enrich us all, build understanding and dissipate tensions.

At a screen near you

Imane Masbahi is the only female film distributor in Morocco. Having studied screenwriting and film direction in Egypt, the 'Hollywood' of the Arab world, she developed a passion for Egyptian cinema. Almost a decade ago, she started up a small company to develop a niche for Egyptian-produced films in Morocco.

Although Egyptian cinema is very popular in Morocco, it is usually only the most commercial productions that arrive in the country, and people tend to watch Egyptian films at home, rather than at the cinema. At the box office, besides Moroccan films, it is Hollywood and Bollywood that rule.

"Competition from the US and India has hurt the distribution of Arab films," Masbahi explains. "And with lots of pirate films around, this makes it harder drawing audiences to the cinema, especially for serious films."

Box office hit

A small fish in a big pond, Masbahi had also lacked the resources to promote her films in the way distributors of American and Indian films can, not to mention all the publicity they get through massive media coverage. This has made the challenge of promoting hard-hitting political dramas, for instance, that much harder.

With the help of the EU-funded Euromed Audiovisual programme, Masbahi has succeeded in raising the profile of Egyptian cinema in Morocco. She has been able to afford proper promotional campaigns covering outdoor billboards, the print media and even television.

And it has paid off. Her latest offering, an Egyptian political satire about corruption, had the unusual distinction of topping the box office charts of Morocco's largest cinema chain for an entire quarter.

Join the celluloid caravan

Caravans have carried people, goods, ideas and culture around the Mediterranean for millennia. Bringing this ancient tradition into the 21st century, the Caravan of Euro-Arab Cinema has been taking films back and forth between the two regions since 2006, with support from the Euromed Audiovisual programme.

It holds regular cinematic events in different cities in the Mediterranean region and the Arab world in an attempt to promote cultural dialogue through the art of film-making. In 2008, the caravan parked in Paris and showcased female directors from the Arab world.

Common ground in a divided region

"People living in different regions of the Caucasus know surprisingly little about each other," explains Salla Nazarenko of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). "So, enabling journalists to travel and to report on issues first-hand is important."

This need to promote greater awareness and balance led the IWPR and the EU to launch the Cross Caucasus Journalism Network (CCJN). "There are many more issues which unite journalists than divide them. With the help of the CCJN, not only do the journalists develop professionally, but they are engaged in grass-root confidence building via dialogue and balanced reporting."

Fresh perspectives

David Akhvediani, a young journalist with *Resonanzi*, an independent Georgian daily, feels that his involvement with CCJN has enabled him to see the broader picture. "I am always learning something new," he says, such as the fact that there are minorities in Armenia, contrary to popular Georgian belief.

"My reporting has changed for the better. I check the facts more thoroughly and use more sources to gain multiple perspective," says Akhvediani.