

# BALTIC- MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE

Building civil society  
cooperation across the regions

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# I. Introduction



Economic, cultural and political contacts between the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions have existed for centuries in different forms and with varying intensity. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both regions are internally very heterogeneous, though at the same time they face many common challenges and opportunities. The regions have also been brought closer to each other by the increase in travel and the more widespread use of internet and the new tools of communication.

Despite this virtual closeness, however, many prejudices and misconceptions still remain, and there is certainly a strong need to foster dialogue especially between the civil societies in the two regions. This was the background and motivation for initiating cooperation between Baltic and Mediterranean civil society actors in 2009 with the financial support of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures.

The project “Facilitating Political Dialogue in the Baltico-Mediterranean Axis” brought together civil society actors from six countries from the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea regions to enter in dialogue on topics of common interest connected to mobility, culture and environment.

Mobility of people is a common issue for both regions, where migrants from across the sea face similar difficulties rising from intolerance and lack of understanding between cultures. The migration policies of the European Union are also an important common theme and object of interest for civil societies in the two regions.

Intercultural understanding and dialogue between cultures are also elemental in overcoming the challenges set by the growth of xenophobic movements in Europe and in the Mediterranean partner countries. The basis of both migration policies as well as the promotion of intercultural dialogue were set into new light by the uprisings in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean in spring 2011, giving new impetus for the discussions.

And last but not least, both regions also face similar environmental challenges resulting from climate change, oil transportation, agricultural runoff and tourism, among other issues. The aim of the project was to find ways to face these shared challenges through the sharing of knowledge, increased cooperation and political dialogue.

These themes were approached from different perspectives through the various project actions, which are discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters of this publication. The focus is on the results achieved and the possibilities they offer for future cooperation.

The first step of the project was to map the importance of the project themes for the people in the two regions, and to find out about their ideas and prejudices concerning the other region. To achieve this, a survey was conducted in summer 2010, and consequently a study was published based on the survey data. It provided some interesting insights that are discussed further in chapter two. The study also finds a point of comparison in the Anna Lindh Foundation's extensive *Anna Lindh Report on Euromed Intercultural Trends 2010*.

The publication of the study was followed by nine thematic round table discussions, which brought together representatives of civil society, researchers and other experts from the partner countries to discuss specific issues connected to mobility, culture and environment. The aim was to identify the main challenges related to each theme in the two regions, to produce concrete recommendations on how these challenges should be tackled and to encourage the transfer of knowledge and best practices between actors in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions.

The discussions took place in virtual space in the form of video conferences. Thus the programme aimed also to test how new communication technologies can be used in facilitating dialogue between civil society actors and networks. The discussions were facilitated by partner organizations with exper-

tise on the specific themes. In chapter three of the publication, the project partners present their views of the results of the discussions and analyze them in light of the future perspectives of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation.

The project culminated in a final seminar, which took place in Espoo, Finland, on April 4–5, 2011. The seminar aimed both to present the results of the project and to find new synergies by linking actors across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Due to its timing, the seminar naturally gave a prominent place for the analysis of the future perspectives of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation in light of the events shaking the Arab world in spring 2011. The results of the seminar as well as some concluding thoughts are presented in the final chapter of the publication (see Annex 1 for the conclusions of the seminar working groups).

Cooperation projects are, by definition, undertakings that succeed or fail according to the contribution and dynamics of the partners involved. Thus the achievements of this project are to a great extent due to the group of partners forming the project steering group (see Annex 2). The variety of national, regional and thematic points of view of the different actors naturally pose some challenges for dialogue, but at the same time they form the very essence of it, the enriching influence of which was also at the heart of this project. The experience has proved to us that Baltic-Mediterranean dialogue, which is still in many ways taking its first steps, has a lot to offer for both regions.

## **2. Regional identities and perceptions of the other in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions**

What do we mean when we talk about the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions and what do people in the other region understand by it? What are the things people relate their regions with and how do they perceive and misperceive the other? These are important and difficult questions that must be tackled in some way when mapping the potential for inter-regional cooperation.

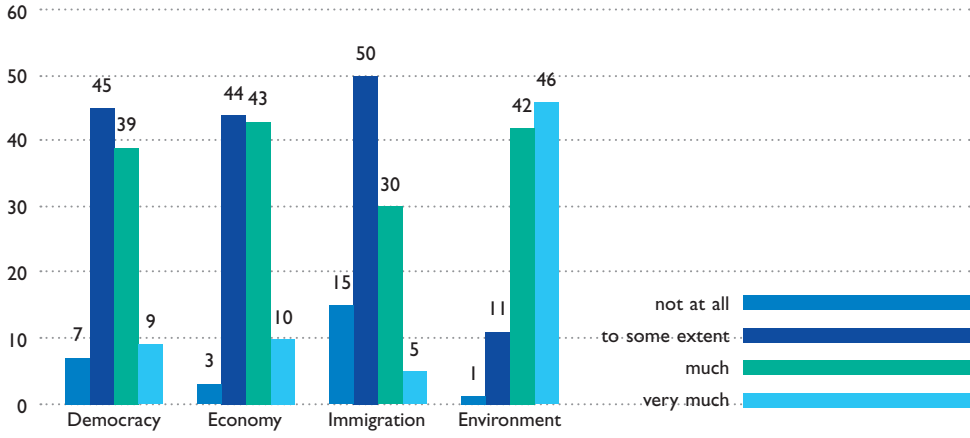
In autumn 2010, the Anna Lindh Foundation published a *Report on EuroMed Intercultural Trends 2010*. It is based on the interviews of 13 000 people in 13 countries, which were analysed by a network of intercultural experts. The report aims to give a broader and more scientific basis for the discussion and policymaking related to intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The results reveal that in some issues there are significant differences in the values and perceptions of people living in the EU-countries on the one hand and those living in Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries, on the other. One of the differences is connected to the role of religion: 64% of Europeans prefer to raise their children based on family solidarity and respect of other cultures, while 59% of people from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean prefer to raise their children based on religious beliefs and obedience. The report emphasizes, however, that this type of differences shouldn't be seen as obstacles for cooperation, but instead as important preconditions to be taken account when developing intercultural dialogue in the region.

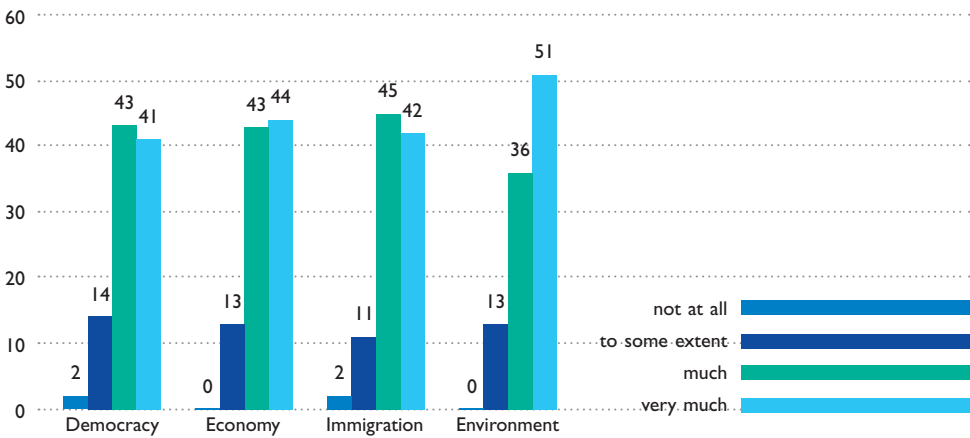
The study on *the Attitudes and prejudices between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions*, which was produced as part of the project, took quite similar approach, while focusing specifically on the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions and the three project themes, environment, culture and mobility. The study is a non-scientific overview based on a survey of 260 people from 18 different countries.

The results reveal that in the Baltic Sea region regional identity is not very strong: 62% of the respondents don't consider themselves as Baltic, whereas in the Mediterranean region the majority identify with Mediterranean identity. In both regions the respondents mainly associate their region with a rich cultural heritage, whereas environment is seen as the major challenge for both the Mediterranean and Baltic Sea regions. In the Mediterranean, somewhat contrary to the Baltic Sea region, important challenges are also seen to exist with issues related to immigration, economy and democracy.

**Baltic Sea:** “Do you think the following parameters are great challenges for the Baltic region?”



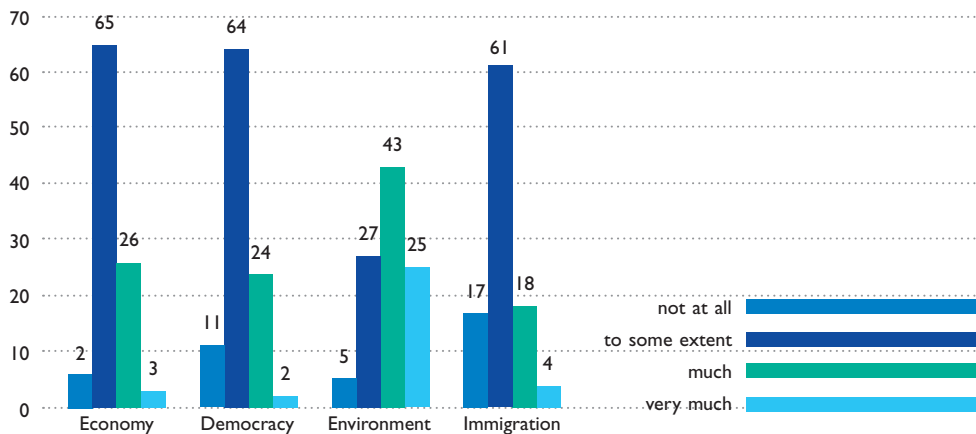
**Mediterranean Sea:** “Do you think the following parameters are great challenges for the Mediterranean region?”



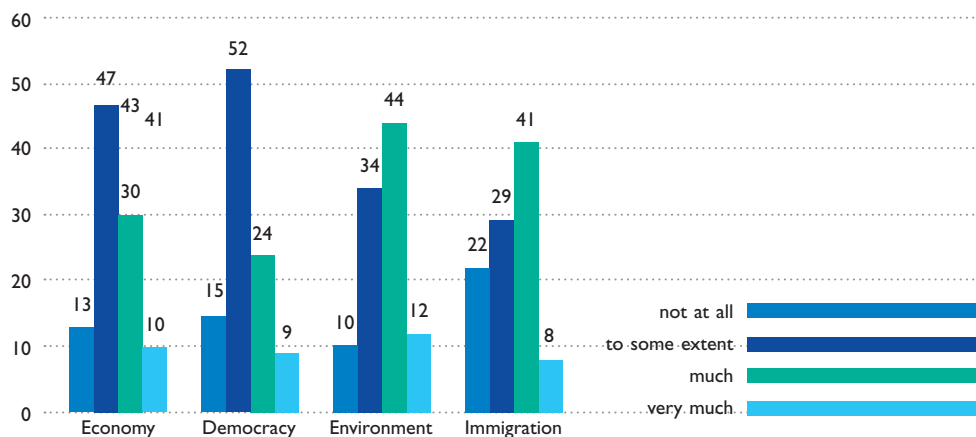
Respondents from both regions also associate the other region mainly with rich cultural heritage. The image of the other region is generally positive, though it is not felt that immigrants from the Baltic Sea or Mediterranean re-

gions have contributed very positively to the receiving societies. Environment is seen as the most important shared challenge, though common ground for cooperation can be found also to some extent with issues related to immigration, economy and democracy.

**Baltic Sea:** “Do you think that the Baltic region share common challenges with the Mediterranean region in the following parameters?”



**Mediterranean Sea:** “Do you think that the Mediterranean region shares common challenges with the Baltic region in the following parameters?”



Concerning the role of the European Union, most respondents don't feel that the EU has significantly improved the political and economic situation in their regions. Neither do they have much trust in the EU bringing the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions closer together.

All in all the study gives a rather positive image concerning the future prospects of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation. Even though the connections between the regions are still weak, there is plenty of potential for cooperation due to the above mentioned common interests and challenges.

### **3. Environment, mobility and culture: thematic focus of the project**

### 3.1. Round table discussions in videoconference form

Lack of resources is often an important motivating factor in developing innovative ways for reaching the set objectives. When the decision was made to realize the project's round table discussions in video conference form, this was not, however, the only reason behind it. As the project covers such a wide geographical area, the use of virtual spaces of meeting and discussion saves natural resources and time, as well as money.

While video conference technology is not as such a very new invention, it has been so far mainly used by large companies, state institutions and universities. The possibilities offered by videoconferencing for civil society actors are still largely neglected. While Skype and other online communication tools are widely used, they have still some major limitations. Video conferencing, on the other hand, offers the possibility for a large number of participants to join discussions by using secure and high quality video connections, thus facilitating participation and creating a stronger feeling of closeness.

One obvious constraint to the use of videoconferencing is the high cost of video conference equipment. Many institutions that possess the facilities, however, are willing to rent them for civil society actors for a relatively low price. This was also the method used during the project: cooperation was initiated with universities, libraries and EU institutions, who provided the partners with the required facilities.

Where this turned out not to be feasible for economic or logistical reasons, other solutions had to be found. Eventually the round table debates were carried out by using a "mixed" technical solution. The University of Helsinki in Finland provided the video conference bridge connections as well as technical assistance, and the participants could join the discussion either by using video conference equipment or their own computers and normal internet connections.

Despite some technical challenges faced during the process, the discussions succeeded in providing a virtual space of debate and in creating a link between the two regions. Video conferencing undisputedly provides an economically and ecologically sustainable means of promoting inter-regional dialogue. However further work is needed to promote it especially among civil society actors, as well as to develop the technology that allows the simultaneous use of different types of connections and technologies.



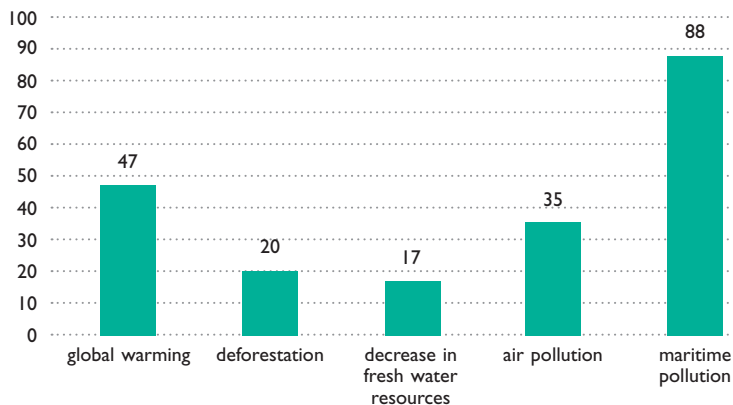
## 3.2. Environment

Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions are both defined by their proximity to the sea, and it is only natural that the importance of the sea environment is an important common factor in both regions. As many of the major environmental problems today are by nature international, inter-regional cooperation is especially important in relation to environment. In good and in bad, environmental problems are very similar in both seas, despite many other differences between the two regions.

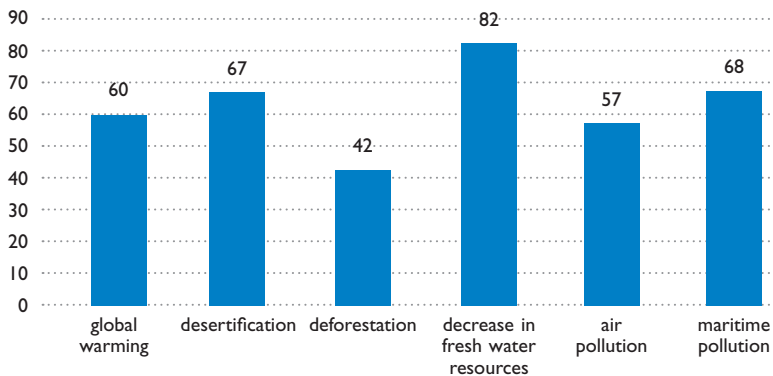
Environmental cooperation between the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions is not a new invention. Regional environmental cooperation has been promoted in both regions by prominent actors like the Helsinki Commission and Blue Plan. It became clear during the project, however, that there is still plenty of unused potential for environmental cooperation especially between civil societies in the two regions.

This message was clearly expressed already in the results of the survey, as respondents from both regions felt that the most important common challenges that the two regions face are connected to environmental issues. However, as can be seen from the figures below, there was more variation concerning the specific environmental challenges felt to be most important for the region in question. For respondents in the Baltic Sea region, maritime pollution was clearly felt to be the major challenge, whereas in the Mediterranean region the decrease in fresh water resources got the highest score, with desertification, maritime pollution and global warming following close behind.

**Baltic Sea:** “What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Baltic region?”



**Mediterranean Sea:** “What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Mediterranean region?”



In the next phase of the project the aim was to follow up on the results of the study by identifying concrete topics and challenges relevant for both regions and by bringing together environmental actors to exchange knowledge and best practices and to formulate recommendations for decision makers. The main means for achieving these goals were the three round table discussions on environment, which took place in videoconference form in autumn 2010 and spring 2011, followed by the working group session on environment at the final seminar of the project.

At the first discussion the participants – environmental experts mainly from the NGO sector and the research community – identified the environmental challenges that they felt to be most relevant for their regions. Marine pollution resulting from sea traffic, especially oil transport, featured prominently on the list, and therefore oil spill prevention and response was chosen as the topic of the second discussion. As environmental awareness raising was seen as a cross-cutting theme relevant especially for many civil society actors, it was chosen as the focus of the third round table discussion.

The participants of the discussion on oil spill prevention and response agreed that even if many countries in the two regions possess, at least in theory, the technical and institutional capacities needed for oil spill prevention and response, efficient action is often prevented by problems in information sharing and coordination between the different institutions in national and regional level. The same goes for legislation, and it was felt to be especially important to improve the enforcement of existing legislation related to for example the safety measures required in oil transport.

Examples were presented of active civil society participation in the Baltic Sea region in strengthening the response capacity to oil spills through trained voluntary troops. It was, however, stated that civil society should focus more on prevention rather than response work, as NGOs can use their lobbying power to oblige states to act on the level of legislation and the control of traffic. This was seen as one potential field for future Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation.

The round table discussion on environmental awareness raising showed that in both regions there are many examples of active work on environmental awareness raising done by schools and the official education system as well as by civil society organizations. More emphasis and resources should, however, be given to cooperation projects that aim to decrease pollution and improve the quality of water in the two seas. It was agreed that NGOs can have an important lobbying and awareness-raising role, but to make full use of it civil society needs more resources for implementing projects and actions in the field of environmental education and advocacy.

The public-private cooperation on environmental awareness raising done in the Baltic Sea region was presented as a good practice, and the need to enhance cooperation between environmental NGOs from Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions was clearly expressed. One concrete step towards this aim could be the creation of a webpage that would work as a virtual platform for discussion and information exchange on environmental awareness-raising between actors from the two regions

The working group on environment that convened at the final seminar of the project based its discussions on the results of the round table debates, taking them further and formulating a set of recommendations that were presented at the end of the seminar (see Annex 1). The message of the working group was that the regions share many common environmental challenges and therefore Baltic-Mediterranean environmental cooperation has a clear added value. It is well known that pollution crosses national and regional borders, and that the common voice of civil societies is better heard than that of individual actors, which also justify the need for more cooperation.

Potential for cooperation was seen especially in activities related to joint research, lobbying campaigns and awareness raising. The focus should be on inter-sectoral cooperation, and awareness raising should connect to the everyday concerns of people, aiming to promote the idea of a “common sea” among the inhabitants of the two regions.

The same message also came up in the results of the survey sent to the seminar participants, as 75% of respondents chose environment as the most important thematic field for Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation. The uprisings in spring 2011 and the resulting new political context in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean also add to the potential for more active environmental cooperation in the Baltic-Mediterranean axis.

### 3.3. Mobility

Mobility in the Baltic-Mediterranean context is a broad concept, ranging from Nordic tourists flying south for their holidays to Libyan refugees escaping war across the Mediterranean, not to mention exchange students, migrant workers, businessmen and many other groups on the move.

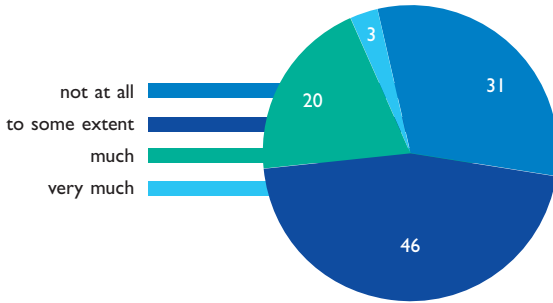
Even as the movement of people between the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions has increased during the last decades, many significant problems and obstacles still remain, touching people from different groups and different parts of the regions in a variety of ways. Some of the biggest chal-



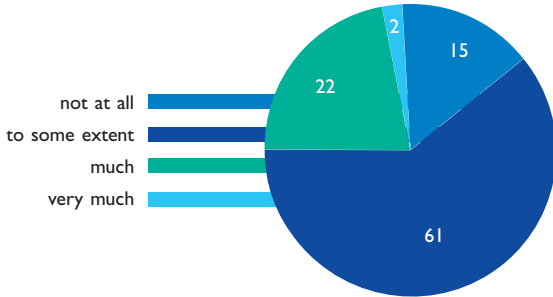
lenges are connected to migration, which was also at the focus of the project's discussions. As can be seen in the figures presented in chapter two, migration was felt to be a common challenge for the two regions much more by the respondents from the Mediterranean region than by those from the Baltic Sea countries.

This certainly reflects the fact that many phenomena connected to migration are much more urgently felt in the Mediterranean, where legal and illegal migration from South to North has been touching societies on both sides of the sea for a long time. With the growth of South-South migration, however, the traditional view is changing as many societies in Southern Mediterranean are now also receiving increasing amounts of migrants. It is therefore important to discuss as well the perception and position of immigrants in the receiving countries. The survey suggests that the general impression of the other region is more positive than the attitude towards immigrants coming from there (see the figures below). This reflects the anti-immigration, xenophobic trend that is gaining strength in many EU countries.

**Mediterranean Sea:** “Do immigrants from the Baltic region have a positive influence on your society?”



**Baltic Sea:** “Do immigrants from the Mediterranean region have a positive influence on your society?”



Several acute themes connected to migration in the two regions were debated in three round table discussions that took place in videoconference form in autumn 2010 and spring 2011, followed by the working group session on mobility at the final seminar of the project.

The first discussion mapped the situation and topics of common interest related to migration in the two project regions. It was acknowledged that immigration is still quite a new issue in Finland and Estonia, and the number of immigrants is still relatively low. For Mediterranean countries like Greece, Is-

rael and Morocco, for example, immigration (and emigration) is a very acute theme that poses pressing contemporary challenges. The participants of the first discussion selected labour migration policies, EU's role and the position of immigrants in receiving countries as the themes to be discussed at the following round tables.

The second discussion focused on labour migration and EU policies, presenting the situation and policies in the participating countries and formulating some common recommendations based on the discussion. The debate highlighted the different situations in northern and southern Europe. Whereas northern European countries apply strict and selective labour migration policies even when their population is aging and the need for labour force growing, in the South countries like Greece are receiving huge migrant flows and facing majority of the problems resulting from EU's Dublin convention.

It was agreed that generally in EU countries the current migration policies are based on inviting highly skilled workers to fill positions that Europeans can't, while on the other hand there are a lot of people who leave their countries because they have to, without always filling the EU criteria. This leads to a two-tier system, where people are discriminated on the basis of their expertise. Contrary to this approach, the participants agreed that migrants should have all the rights that the citizens of the receiving countries have. It was emphasized that civil society can change the direction and perspective of the migration debate and help to create a culture that respects human rights. NGOs need to put pressure on decision makers and work together for the same goals: one concrete aim would be to urge the states to sign the *United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*.

The third round table debate continued the discussion on migrant workers, focusing on their position and role in the receiving countries. The participants noted that generally the European governments are investing in security measures instead of improving the functioning of their integration policies. Migrants coming to EU are often faced with systemic illegality, which creates a fertile breeding ground for xenophobia. Negative attitudes towards migrants are dominant in many countries, and for example in Finland migrants are often seen as passive receivers of social services instead of active participants in the society.

The group agreed that NGOs and other actors should counter this negative and distorted discourse, and receiving countries should include in their education system teaching on respect for other religions, ethnicities and nationalities, putting emphasis on the promotion of intercultural dialogue. It was al-

so proposed that the sending and receiving countries should prepare coherent policies for training and educating the migrants and allocate also adequate resources for this work.

The working group on migration that convened at the final seminar of the project elaborated further the topics of the round table discussions, putting emphasis on labour migration policies and the human rights perspective to migration. The group advocated coherent migration policies guided by the human rights of the migrants instead of security interests and profit seeking of the receiving countries.

The migrants' rights to health services and education were highlighted, as well as the need to counter insecurity rising from low salaries and short-term contracts. The group agreed that selective migration policies should be limited, as they have negative consequences both in the sending and in the receiving societies ("brain drain" and "brain waste"). It was also stated that in order to guarantee the rights and wellbeing of migrant women, migration and integration policies need to be constantly gender mainstreamed.

The working group noted that the states are increasingly transferring their responsibilities related to the integration of migrants to civil society actors, while on the other hand the efforts of the civil society actors are not facilitated enough. The group supported the creation of more targeted courses and trainings taking account of the needs and qualifications of migrants as one possible concrete solution to the challenges discussed at the seminar. It also proposed the establishment of centres specializing on language teaching and integration courses, which, however, shouldn't contradict the need to guarantee the migrants' possibilities for learning their native languages. (see Annex 1 below)

Thus many shared views and recommendations related to migration were formulated during the project, which proves the ability of the Baltic-Mediterranean framework for creating fruitful dialogue on topics related to mobility. Common voice of the civil societies in the North and the South is especially important in combating both the selective EU migration policies, which are guided too often by narrow security interests, as well as the prejudices and xenophobic attitudes in many of the receiving countries. After the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, starting in spring 2011, and the resulting growing migration flows to EU, this dialogue would be more urgently needed than ever before.

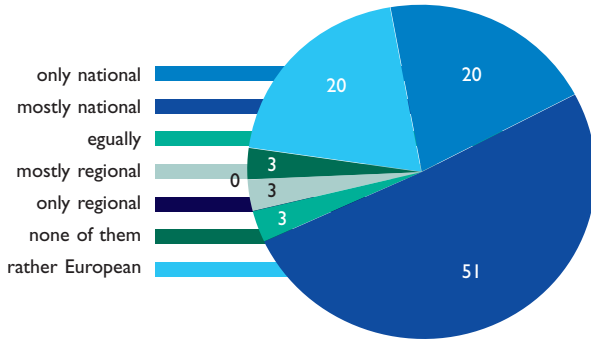


### 3.4. Culture

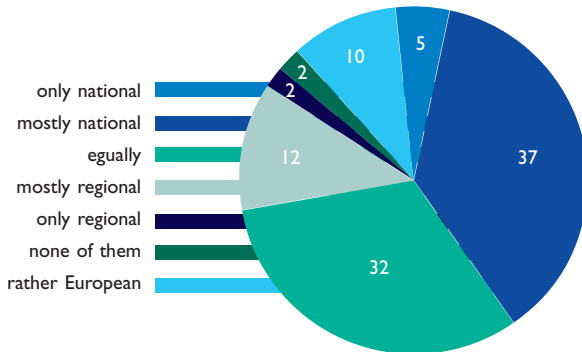
When defined broadly, culture can cover a wide and complex set of issues ranging from art, cultural heritage and religion to food and peoples' everyday behavior. The starting point of the project when approaching this complex topic was a regional one: the aim was to identify and discuss about the shared values and cultural characteristics as well as the prejudices, barriers and challenges to intercultural communication inside and between the two very diverse project regions.

First task in pursuing this goal was to get a better idea of how and to what extent people living in the two regions experience this diversity, and whether the terms "Baltic Sea region" and "Mediterranean region" have some meaning for them beyond being mere geographical definitions. Based on the results of the survey, it is obvious that in both regions national identity still dominates over regional or European identifications (see figures below). In the Mediterranean, where the regional perception has longer historical roots, identification with the region is somewhat stronger than in the Baltic Sea countries.

**Baltic Sea:** “Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Baltic region?”

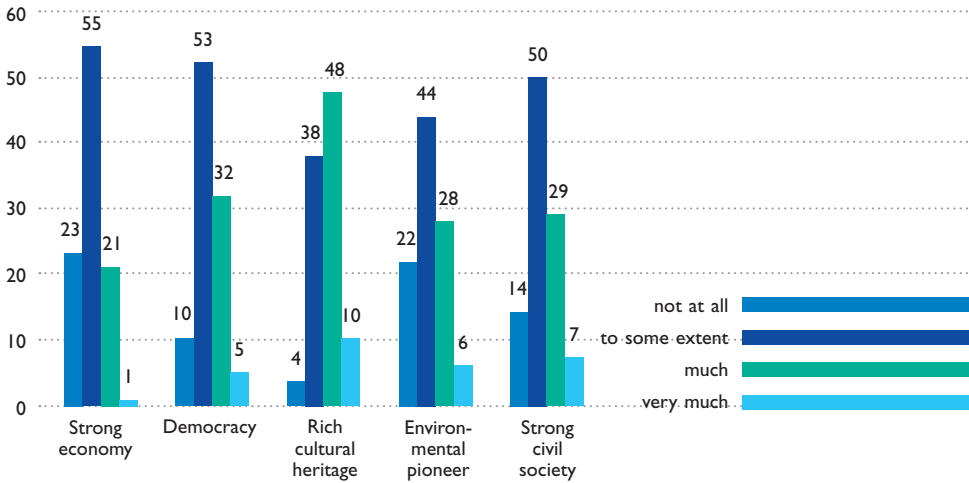


**Mediterranean Sea:** “Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Mediterranean region?”

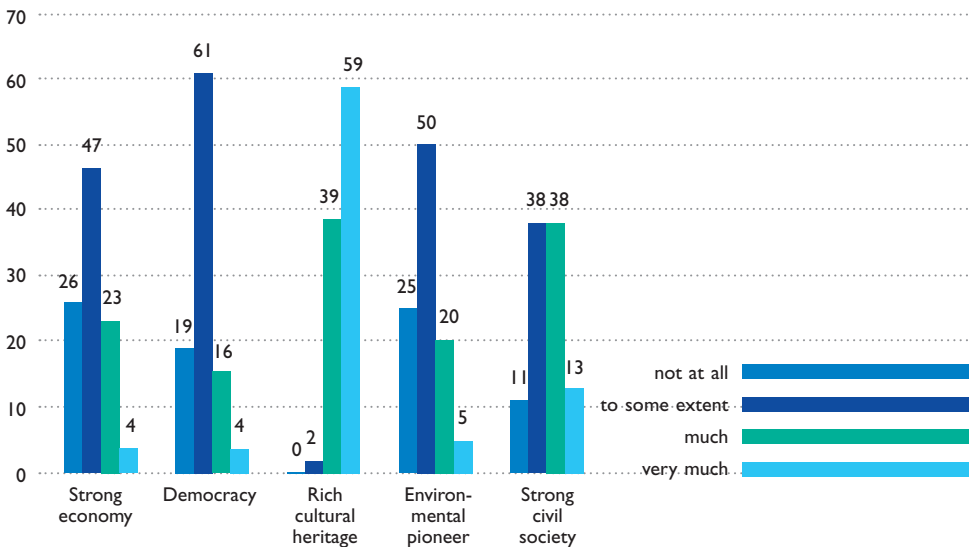


However the respondents from both regions still felt close to their neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture. When asked what characteristics they associate with their own and the other region, rich cultural heritage got the highest number of answers (see figures below). Thus one conclusion of the study is that culture plays a crucial part in the identity of both regions, and that the citizens are proud of their own cultural heritage and also appreciate the culture of the other region.

**Baltic Sea:** “To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Baltic region?”



**Mediterranean Sea:** “To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Mediterranean region?”



But this, in itself a positive indication, is obviously only one part of the bigger picture. The Anna Lindh Foundation's report on EuroMed Intercultural Trends shows that, despite increased contacts between people, many misperceptions and gaps in knowledge still remain between people living in societies in Europe and in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region. One of the main differences in values was connected to differing perceptions on religion, which was valued much higher by the respondents from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

Even if the Baltic Sea region may appear culturally more homogenous than the Mediterranean "mosaic", it also contains various historical, linguistic, religious and other divisions. Discussion on intercultural dialogue is high on the agenda especially in connection with the debate focusing on immigration. Who should adapt, to what extent and to which culture, are questions that are actively debated. This makes intercultural dialogue an issue of common interest between the two regions inside the wider Euro-Mediterranean community, and provided a starting point for the round table discussions of the project.

The first discussion mapped the main challenges connected to cultural diversity in the two project regions. Through many examples it became clear that immigration and the growing migrant communities had during the recent years fuelled the debate on cultural diversity and multicultural society in both Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea regions. Big part of the discussion has focused on language issues and language politics, but naturally also religion and other aspects of identity and culture have been brought to the agenda. When looking for solutions and ways to fight prejudices and misperceptions, it was agreed that education in its different forms has a crucial role.

The second round table discussion consequently focused on education as a tool for intercultural communication in the Mediterranean and Baltic Sea regions. The participants put emphasis on both the differences as well as the many similar challenges faced across the regions. In Finland, multicultural education has been included in the school curriculum in some form since the 1960s, but many problems still remain: education remains quite assimilative and to a large extent dominated by the majority culture, and teachers get very little help on how to integrate multicultural issues that are stated in the curriculum into their everyday work. In Greece, on the other hand, interest in multicultural education is very limited, and no real intercultural teaching is taking place at schools. Therefore the integration of migrants into the society is mostly in the hands of the NGOs.

The imbalance between dominant and minority cultures in education, the lack of resources of the different actors involved and the rising xenophobic

attitudes were felt to be important shared problems. As a conclusion, it was agreed that global education is needed in all levels: children, students, teachers, educators, and also politicians – and maybe especially them – should be targeted. Multicultural topics should not only be included in the curricula but also put into practice. It would as well be crucial to involve the minorities more actively in this sort of discussions as well as in policy implementation.

The rise of the civil society in the Middle East and North Africa in spring 2011 to defend freedom and basic human rights is a process that obviously has important implications for the future cooperation related to intercultural dialogue. It was against this changing background that the third round table discussion raised the issue of citizenship and its relation to the dialogue between cultures. It was agreed that any society that is struggling to define its identity is facing the problem of citizenship. The challenge of defining a common shared citizenship is especially difficult in places and contexts where there are strong oppositions or even open conflicts between different groups. Challenges are also faced, however, when the concept is applied to large and culturally and historically varied regions and groups of people.

As an example of the latter case, it was noted that the differences inside the Mediterranean region are visible in the development, and non-development, of regional civil society cooperation. As communication is usually easier between actors representing the same sectors, cooperation across the Mediterranean has started sectorally, with environment taking the lead. In a more general perspective, citizenship consists of a number of different elements and rights, some of which are shared to a greater extent than the others. The lesson for Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation would then be to first examine which elements of citizenship are most widespread and advanced, and then consider the next steps for cooperation.

The discussions concerning the shared Euro-Mediterranean value base and the need to re-examine old perceptions of Middle East and North Africa gained a lot of impetus during the events of the Arab spring, and it became also one of the main topics of the final seminar of the project. The working group on culture set as its task the evaluation of the basis on which cooperation on the promotion of intercultural dialogue is and will be built. It also continued the discussion on the role and potential of education as a tool for intercultural learning, taking account the context and implications of the Arab spring.

The group agreed on the need of sending a strong message to the civil society of the South, not only in words but also through actions. The emphasis should be put on the youth and their ideas of the future, and intercultural di-

dialogue should not be discussed and promoted without taking account the socio-economic and political contexts which condition peoples' lives. The dialogue should involve all actors and be directed by the principles of mutual exchange and learning.

The role of education, according to the working group, is crucial in advancing development and intercultural dialogue. Education should promote critical thinking and focus on affirming diversity instead of advocating mere tolerance. New tools and possibilities offered by internet and the different social medias should be made an integral part of the cooperation, and their potential should be fully utilized in cooperation that is crossing national and regional boundaries.

## **4. Baltic-Mediterranean Axis: A New Framework for Cooperation?**

The project culminated in final seminar that brought together more than 60 representatives of civil society, research community, state institutions and private sector in Espoo, Finland, to discuss the challenges and possibilities of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation both on political level as well as from a more practical perspective.

The goal of the seminar was to present the results of the project to a wider target group, to draft further the ideas and recommendations produced during the project and to assess the potential of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation in the different thematic fields. However the historical events that began to shake North Africa and the Middle East in early spring 2011 brought additional importance and urgency to the seminar discussions. The uprisings are affecting the whole framework of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, and the analysis of their impact featured prominently also in the seminar discussions.

Information on the discussions was also updated in real time on the blog page of the seminar, which opened the topics for a wider debate, and continues to provide a platform for discussion on Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation.



### **Arab spring 2011: Re-evaluating the context of Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation**

The plenary sessions of the seminar focused on the role of regional actors and civil society networks in promoting Baltic-Mediterranean cooperation as well as on the perspectives of future cooperation in the light of the changing context in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

The speakers and participants agreed that the uprisings of spring 2011 mark a significant change in the whole region. As Mr. Andreu Claret, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation, stated, it is a moment where history is defined. Especially the role of the youth and the direction taken by socio-economic development were seen as crucial elements for the future of the region.

Despite the many questions that remain open, the big differences among the countries in the region and the huge challenges still faced by many of them, it is clear that the events in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean offer many opportunities for more active cooperation in the future. Especially the strengthening role of the civil societies was perceived as fundamental in advancing democracy in the region, and it also calls for reassessment of the past cooperation policies and methods. The changes are relevant especially for the EU in the context of its Neighbourhood policy reform. The EU's role in its Southern neighbourhood raised eager discussion in the seminar, and the conclusion was that it must continue to be active in the region, while at the same time adopting a non-patronizing, more humble approach.

It was also stated that the moment is crucial for the civil society in the North to show its support to civil societies in the South as well as to initiate concrete actions and provide support in the grassroots level.

## The future of the Baltic-Mediterranean Axis

Based on the experiences of the project and the discussions at the seminar, what can then be said to be the relevance of the Baltic-Mediterranean framework for future cooperation?

It is clear that the Baltic-Mediterranean axis doesn't provide the same additional value for cooperation in all sectors. In different ways and with varying intensity all of the project themes, however, affect people living in both regions.

The survey study, the round table discussions and debates at the seminar all indicate that environmental cooperation between the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions has a lot of unused potential, reflecting the many shared and unsolved environmental challenges connected mainly to sea environment.

With respect to intercultural dialogue, it is clear that many walls of misunderstanding and prejudice still remain in the Euro-Mediterranean region. As was emphasized in the seminar, however, the Arab spring offers a real possibility for change in cooperation related to intercultural dialogue between Europe and the Arab world. The opportunity will be missed, however, if this

“window of opportunity” will not be used to challenge established stereotypes regarding our vision of the Middle East and North Africa.

The shared perspective that emerged from the discussions on mobility that took place during the project put strong emphasis on the human rights of the migrants, which are often contradicted by the selective, security-based policies practiced by many states as well as the European Union. The political tendencies gaining strength in many European countries show that the voice of the civil society needs to make itself better heard, and cooperation in the Baltic-Mediterranean framework can provide one means of voicing the common concerns of the civil societies in the North and in the South.

The results of a survey sent to the participants of the seminar shows also positive indications concerning the relevance of the Baltic-Mediterranean framework. Majority of the respondents think that the Baltic-Mediterranean axis has a lot of potential for future civil society cooperation, with environment and intercultural dialogue seen as the most relevant fields of cooperation, followed by education and social issues.

Widening the geographical perspective is also one option when planning the cooperation in the future. In the seminar discussions the possibility of connecting the Black Sea region to the Baltic-Mediterranean axis gained support: this could enable a more extensive exchange of knowledge and best practices, and would highlight the many topics of common interest for civil societies in all three regions.

The final seminar of the project made it clear that the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East have made it an urgent task for all actors to re-evaluate old cooperation models, and that civil society should have a central role when planning future cooperation. The message of the seminar was that Baltic-Mediterranean axis has potential to become one of the frameworks for this cooperation: if we want it, now is the time to act. It is also clear that the project “Facilitating Political Dialogue in the Baltico-Mediterranean Axis” marks just the first phase of cooperation that should be both expanded and deepened in the future.

## ANNEX I:

# Recommendations of the project

## I. Environment

### **Sea environment in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions: common challenges, common solutions?**

- **Environmental risks connected to maritime traffic**

**ADDED VALUE OF BALTIC-MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION:**

- › Collecting and exchanging information and expertise
- › Linking environment to inter-cultural dialogue
- › Environment is a way to promote peace, it unites people and countries: pollution crosses borders
- › Power is in numbers, “look big and act big”

**ACTIVITIES, RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- › Increasing political will for implementing existing legislation
- › Promoting inter-sectoral cooperation
- › Education and awareness raising are important especially with the youth, they help to engage people and to promote the “our sea” perception
- › Finding ways for common funding for projects that address the environmental concerns
- › Environment should be considered in the cost benefit analysis
- › Supporting joint research, lobbying, campaigns, awareness raising
- › Using on-line tools and virtual communities
- › Encouraging corporate social and environmental responsibility
- › Raising awareness about the sustainable use of the seas

**MESSAGES:**

Awareness raising..

- › Should be based on common concerns and human values, and aim at building communities (across borders) which will share the “our sea” conception
- › Needs to connect to the everyday concerns of people
- › Should relate with specific values of the traditions and cultures of the given region
- › Should suggest ways to act for the wider public
- › Should also relate to other topics, such as labour market, trade, agriculture and economics in a wider perspective
- › Activities:
  - › Supporting research and development for new innovations
  - › Determining the agents of change (public leaders, celebrities etc.) and using them as a link to the common public
  - › Simultaneously implementing public awareness raising and lobbying
  - › Information exchange between Baltic Sea and Mediterranean NGOs on best practices, case studies, approaches to awareness raising (including agents of change, use of new and old medias..) and lobbying
- › Cooperation between different sectors (private, public, CSO, academic)

## 2. Mobility

### **Mobility and its obstacles: perspectives from North and South**

- **Call for coherent migration policies based on human rights**
  - › Instead of the prevailing security approach to migration, a human rights based approach should be promoted: the rights and needs of the human being must be at the centre of migration policies
  - › Policy coherence is crucial in order to ensure that different policies do not produce contradictory outcomes
  - › Selective migration policies need to be limited: from the Southern perspective, they contribute to 'brain drain' thus hindering development, and in the North, there is the problem of 'brain waste' by which education and skills-base of migrants are not used due to structural racism in the European labour market
  - › Migration and integration policies need to be constantly gender mainstreamed in order to ensure the protection of the rights and the wellbeing of migrant women
  
- **Migrants' equal rights need to be guaranteed and their voice must be heard in decision-making**
  - › Right to health: the migrants, notwithstanding their document status, have to be guaranteed access to health services
  - › Right to education: all children, despite their document status, must be guaranteed access to public education
  - › Migrant workers need to be guaranteed, by the law as well as in practice, equal salaries with the non-migrants
  - › Migrants should not be victims of the economic cycles and the resulting labour market policies
  - › Extra effort by the European Union is needed to listen to the concerns of the migrants
  - › The European Union needs to guarantee free visas and facilitated application processes for civil society actors coming from non-EU countries

- **Proposals and recommendations**

- › Concrete project proposal: specific trainings taking account of the needs and qualifications of migrants as well as labour market needs should be organized more (e.g. Russian women were recruited for a course qualifying as a sales assistant for jobs where fluent Russian is an essential skill)
- › Example of a best practice: a project by the Finnish Interior Ministry to find work for highly-educated migrants already settled in the country. One of the interim results has been that even for the Ministry it was difficult to find employers for the highly-educated migrants. Thus this remains an issue where the participation of all stakeholders (the state, employers, trade unions, migrants themselves and NGOs) should be enhanced.
- › Educational centres specialising on integration courses are needed, as well as more language courses on all levels
- › The migrants' possibilities for learning their native language need to be enhanced, in order to promote better integration while safeguarding the migrants' right to culture
- › The states are transferring their responsibilities related to integration to civil society actors, yet the efforts of the civil society actors are not facilitated enough.

## 3. Culture

### Intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

- **Now is the time to react positively by sending a strong message to the civil society of the South**
  - › Solidarity and support need to be shown in the whole EuroMed area: civil society must make statements and act in order to support the developments in North Africa
  - › Socio-economic and political conditions are the basis from which to build a positive perception of the future
  - › This is especially important concerning the youth and their vision of the sustainable future (education, housing, employment, founding families)
  - › Involvement of all actors (EU, states, civil society, private sector) is crucial
  - › EU must take an active role, utilising the already existing institutions and bodies
  - › Transparency, coherence, good governance, awareness raising are to be emphasized
  - › Without gender equality there can be no real democracy
  - › Exchanging and learning from experiences, discussing the shared values, learning both ways, changing perspectives and perceptions: these are the basic elements of intercultural dialogue
  
- **Education is the main tool for development**
  - › Family education is a starting point
  - › Learning and teaching about the other and also learning together by using online platforms, network tools, e.g. eTwinning
  - › Critical thinking and questioning the “truths”
  - › Instead of tolerance we need to emphasize affirming diversity, importance of the attitudes: changing the behaviour towards the other
  - › The role of the languages in intercultural understanding and in integration is crucial
  - › Critical media education should be emphasized

## ANNEX 2:

# Programme Partners

- **The Lead Agency:**

- **The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU, Kehys ry (Finland)**

Kehys offers services to Finnish NGOs on EU development policy issues and EU funding. It also engages actively in the debate on EU development policy and supports networking and information-sharing between NGOs in Finland, in the EU and globally. The main thematic focus area of Kehys is policy coherence for development.

- **International Centre for Black Sea Studies – ICBSS (Greece)**

ICBSS is both an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region, as well as a related body and acknowledged think-tank of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Its principal aim is to foster multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.

- **EKO LIBURNIA, Association for Development of Ecotourism, Organic Agriculture and Environmental Protection (Croatia)**

Eko Liburnia promotes sustainable use of natural resources, development of eco-tourism and ecological agriculture. It also provides expert services related to environmental standards and regulations and environmental impacts of economic activities.

- **Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information – IPCRI (Israel/Palestine)**

IPCRI is a joint institution of Israelis and Palestinians dedicated to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of “two states for two peoples” solution. It is the only Israeli-Palestinian joint public policy think-tank and “do-tank” in the region.

- **Groupement d’Etudes et de Recherches sur la Méditerranée – G.E.R.M (Morocco)**

GERM is a scientific non-profit association operation based on the work of a team of committed researchers. Its main objectives are to promote open discussion and dialogue on issues related to the Mediterranean and to organize meetings, seminars and roundtables that address topics related to the major political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of the Mediterranean.

G.E.R.M. is the head of the Moroccan network of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

- **Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud – AKÜ, Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (Estonia)**

(Estonia) Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation (AKÜ) is an independent not-for-profit coalition of 14 non-governmental organisations that work in the field of development cooperation or have expressed interest towards that topic. AKÜ’s main areas of work are Estonian and European development policy, global education and financing for development.

- **Tampere Peace Research Institute – TAPRI, University of Tampere (Finland)**

Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI) is a multidisciplinary and international research centre in the framework of the Institute for Social Research, University of Tampere. Its mission is to conduct high quality research on the causes of war, on the non-violent resolution of conflicts and on the conditions for peace.

One of TAPRI’s research areas is the Mediterranean region. TAPRI Mediterranean Studies Project focuses on international relations in the Mediterranean area, particularly on the Euro Mediterranean relations and the Barcelona Process. TAPRI is the head of the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

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