The Mediterranean Forum of the Anna Lindh Foundation (MED FORUM), hosted in Valletta, Malta, from 23rd to 26th October 2016, has been widely acknowledged as a “landmark event” in how intercultural dialogue can counteract conflict, extremism, unemployment, and the public discourse on migration and refugee crises.

One month on from the gathering in Valletta, and on the eve of the first Maltese Presidency of the European Council, this Executive Summary provides the preliminary outcomes of the MED FORUM process, an analysis of the delegate and partners' survey, and an action plan to be driven through the Presidency and beyond.

A LANDMARK GATHERING

MED FORUM followed an 18-month strategy and programming process initiated in April 2015 by the Anna Lindh Foundation and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta, in partnership with the main regional institutions working for dialogue in the Mediterranean. The main aim of the strategy was to reaffirm the centrality of intercultural dialogue in the face of unprecedented regional challenges, also following the call of the EU Foreign Affairs chief on the 20th anniversary of the Euro-Med Partnership for “collective action”.

Built on a unique participatory process involving the 4500+ local branches of the Anna Lindh Foundation, representing civil society, cities and local authorities, cultural bodies, artistic and youth organisations, media networks, and an inter-institutional steering group involving for the first time together the Foundation's Secretariat and its partners, the EU Central and External Action services, the League of Arab States headquarters, the UfM-Secretariat, MEDAC, and the Maltese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

The outcomes of this first phase of the MED FORUM process (April 2015 to October 2016):

“Intercultural Dialogue” embedded in the policy discourse. This is evidenced by references to the Anna Lindh Foundation and its intercultural dialogue mandate in the new European Neighbourhood Policy (18.11.2015) and first “International Cultural Relations strategy” of the European Union (8.6.2016). A series of policy statements were also delivered during the MED FORUM by high-ranking officials (including the DG of UNESCO, SG of OSCE), with EU stating that “the Anna Lindh Foundation is a central pillar of the first Global Strategy of the European Union” (published in June 2016). The MED FORUM strategic priorities have also been backed by the 42 Foreign Affairs Ministries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

An unprecedented level of civil society engagement registered. The “appetite for encounter” has been evidenced by the significant increase in participation to the MED FORUM “calls for participation” (launched during 2016), including an increase of more than 15% in requests for self-financed delegates compared to previous Forum editions (1224 CSOs from 42 countries competed to participate in the initial call). The media outreach (MED FORUM LIVE) reached an unprecedented level of people and communities world-wide: #MedForum2016 was a global trending topic during the three main days of the Forum, with 2,805,141 Twitter accounts reached and 12,375,744 unique impressions (potential reads).

“Invest in a generation” receives far-reaching institutional backing. A central theme of MED FORUM and the Anna Lindh Foundation's long-term strategy, “Investment in Youth”, was a catalyst for collaboration among the region’s main institutions and civil society networks. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon acknowledged MED FORUM “for recognising the importance of empowering the world's young people” (UN Day statement of 24th October), and a series of newly established cooperation agreements secured through the Forum process embedded investment in youth as a strategic priority, among them: the World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid, UNESCO, OSCE, Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and the World Bank Group.

Malta EU Presidency is a unique opportunity for the Mediterranean. The narrative built during 18 months, captured through the mainstream media, “Facebook Debates” and policy fora, has reaffirmed Malta’s unique role at this critical moment for the Euro-Med cooperation in the face of unprecedented regional challenges in the Mediterranean. Writing about the Forum, journalists underlined “Malta has a natural understanding of the Arab and the European world and can act as a neutral meeting space”. According to the partner and delegate survey, there is a consensus view that the Maltese EU Presidency is a unique opportunity and “Malta’s six months EU Presidency is vital to show that bridges between the north and south become ‘visible and effective’.”
The key conclusions from MED FORUM 2016:

**Taking a long-term approach and investing in a generation.** Investing in a generation of intercultural actors is the only viable, long-term root to promote mutual understanding and prevent conflict and radicalisation. There is an emerging generation of actors who can play a central role in challenging extremist discourses if they are provided with the tools and institutional framework as agents of change.

**Shifting strategic focus to intercultural cities and reaching communities.** Cities provide landscapes where intercultural encounters give openings to develop new social and commercial networks. The establishment of a “Mediterranean Capital for Dialogue” was recommended as a first operational step to increase visibility and bring together existing city-to-city networks around an intercultural dialogue agenda.

**Reach, impact and growth through operationalising partnerships.** To achieve a joint effort among civil society organisations, MED FORUM called for a diversification of the partnership-base, including striking up sustainable and effective public-private collaborations as well as linking up the initiatives of civil society organisations and local government authorities.

**Media is a crucial sector for the Anna Lindh Foundation.** Preliminary results from the latest Euro-Med survey on intercultural trends and perceptions show a much greater public sense of media negativity from the north and south, and a greater demand for better media training to counteract it. There is scope to invest in more research and analysis, dialogue, exchanges and mentoring of young journalists.

**Young Med Voices can be a catalyst for a real north-south partnership.** Building on its precursor “Young Arab Voices”, it is the first time such a pan-Arab programme extends to Europe, reshaping the traditional Euro-Med dynamics. The EU High-Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini underlined: “This is not only a geographical expansion, but opening up new channels for youth-led agency.”

**Mobility remains the central challenge, right and opportunity.** MED FORUM highlighted that opportunities for mobility are limited and not equitable in their distribution or availability. This was a key conclusion taken forward in the 5+5 Ministerial on 28th October in Marseille, on how more diverse young people are given the opportunities to communicate, exchange and collaborate across all kinds of borders – physical or cultural.

**Dialogue requires competences and a capabilities approach.** There are competencies required to ensure dialogue is effective. A capabilities approach offers a valuable analytical lens for exploring the challenge and complexity of intercultural dialogue in contemporary settings. Capabilities recognises that development is a process whereby people’s freedoms are expanded.
DIALOGUE INTO ACTION

MED FORUM was conceived from the outset as a far-reaching process to accelerate and scale-up intercultural action to counteract forces of polarisation and cultural divide within and across the societies of Europe and the Mediterranean region. The Anna Lindh Foundation and partners are now well-positioned to transform the secured policy ad institutional commitments into a programme of action to be driven through the Maltese Presidency of the European Council and beyond.

The Maltese Presidency (first semester 2017) provides a framework to advance policy and programming actions recommended through MED FORUM:

(1) Shifting the policy and media narrative “beyond extremism”

1a. Policy Outreach. MED FORUM provides a blueprint for challenging extremist narratives, evidenced also by the high-level policy statements, mainstream media coverage, and social media impact. As confirmed in Valletta, the Anna Lindh Foundation will now partner with the United Nations on the inter-agency steering group for the Progress Study on UN Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security) which will provide a global platform for public policy outreach.

1b. Trends Report. MED FORUM in Valletta was the platform to present the preliminary findings of the Ipsos-MORI survey on cross-cultural trends commissioned by the Anna Lindh Foundation and carried out in October 2016 across 13 Euro-Med countries. The analysis of the trends report will be the basis for launching through the Maltese Presidency a series of major debates with next-generation influencers as well as policy-makers, thinkers and decision-makers in the current ‘authority’ generation.

1c. Youth-led Campaigns. The trends data presented in Valletta provides evidence that investment in youth-led initiative is the most effective way to challenge extremist narratives. The strategic partnership with Facebook launched at MED FORUM, along with newly established media partnerships, will be the basis for launching a region-wide programme of “innovation labs” aimed at empowering youth sector leaders with the tools to run large-scale communications campaigns.

(2) Reaffirming youth voice and education initiatives

2a. Youth Platform. The launch of “Young Mediterranean Voices” at MED FORUM 2016 represented a major milestone. The programme has now received financial backing by the European Commission, the World Bank Group and Member States such as the Finnish Government. It will provide a unique platform for enhanced youth debate and dialogue action across the Mediterranean region.

2b. Promoting mobility. Youth mobility will be a key strand of policy advocacy work to be promoted through the Maltese Presidency. The 5+5 Ministerial was a first step on 28th October in Marseille, and the recommendations to combine enhanced face-to-face exchange with virtual education exchange to deepen and widen access.

2c. Intercultural learning. During the next semester, the Anna Lindh Foundation will commence rolling-out its “Handbook on Intercultural Citizenship Learning”. More than five years in the making with educators from the north and south of the Mediterranean, the handbook will be embedded through formal and non-formal education bodies.
(3) Working through media and culture

3a. MED FORUM reaffirmed media as a central domain for intercultural dialogue. The landmark 10th edition of the Anna Lindh Journalist Award, to be launched during the first semester 2017 on the theme of migration and cities, will also provide a framework to advance media programming in the domain of cross-cultural reporting.

3b. Translation was a feature of MED FORUM 2016 through the international award ceremony for translation on the opening day of the Forum. The recommendation for the creation of a fund to facilitate the mobility of actors in the domain of translation will be promoted as part of the advocacy plan for the Maltese EU Presidency.

3c. Creative enterprise provides an opportunity to open up space for intercultural action. The MED FORUM process was a catalyst to draw together existing research and good practice from across the Euro-Med region which will contribute to programming underway with the Anna Lindh Foundation and partners.

(4) Ensuring the Mediterranean legacy

4a. Dialogue instrument. A central conclusion of the MED FORUM process has been the reaffirming of the Anna Lindh Foundation as the institutional dialogue instrument for bringing together civil society and youth institutions across the Mediterranean. Embedding for the long-term the Foundation as a central institution and reference point will be central for the Maltese EU Presidency.

4b. City recognition. One of the large-scale initiatives proposed through MED FORUM has been the establishment of a first Dialogue Award for Cities through the new collaboration with Valletta 2018 Foundation with the aim of raising visibility and embedding best practices on intercultural dialogue. The criteria for this award scheme will be developed as a basis for a regional programme.

4c. Estonian Presidency. Discussions are being initiated with the Estonian authorities and Anna Lindh Foundation’s civil society network regarding the preparation of the Presidency of the European Council to follow Malta in the second semester of 2017 to ensure the “Mediterranean legacy”.

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