

Participation Now!
Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change

21 – 24 November 2012
Córdoba, Spain

Report

Forum 6
Co-operation projects between Europe and North Africa

by Lucrecia Rubio Grundell
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
Spain

Inputs:

Ahmed Driss, Tunisian School of Politics (Tunisia)
Julian Popov, Bulgarian School of Politics (Bulgaria)
Dalia Dawoud, Tandem/Shaml, Al Mawred al Thaqafy (Egypt)
Philipp Dietachmair, European Cultural Foundation (Germany)
Darius Polok, MitOst e.V. (Germany)
Nelly Corbel, The American University in Cairo (Egypt)

Moderation:

Louisa Slavkova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria

Part I:

Introduction:

Louisa Slavkova, as a foreign policy professional interested in comparative politics of transition in South East European (SEE) and the Middle East and North African countries (MENA), highlighted that the main objective of this parallel forum was to illustrate the theoretical framework regarding cooperation between Europe and North Africa that had already been outlined the previous day with concrete examples of good practice. Examples of good practice in citizen education that were all connected to the concluding questions that were established the previous day, being the most important of all that of whether it was possible to teach citizenship in different contexts, and moreover, whether these different contexts could actually cooperate in doing so.

Part II:

The first project to be presented was that of the Tunisian School of Politics. Julian Popov from the Bulgarian School of Politics explained that the School of Politics is designed as an institution that works with political leaders and political actors of all political parties in Tunisia

that have parliamentary representation, preferably young people. They are then gathered in an isolated environment, away from the influence of both media and voters, so they can interact freely and end up discovering things about each other, similarities even, that they could not have discovered in the exercise of normal politics.

The idea of establishing such an institution in Tunisia was due to the fact that, soon after the revolution, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry organized a conference – The Sofia Platform – in which the leaders of the Bulgarian transition to democracy came together with Tunisian political leaders and concluded that what the latter needed was a School of Politics, that could aid the members of the constituent assembly of Tunisia in their transition to democracy. It was therefore established successfully with the help of the Centre for Mediterranean Studies. For this project then, interaction is the key.

This project stimulated a series of questions on behalf of the audience, especially regarding how it actually works and how it is funded. Both Julian Popov and Ahmed Driss from the Tunisian School of Politics stressed the fact that, for this interaction to take place correctly, it is necessary that the political actors involved are completely isolated from their traditional political environment. In order to promote real interaction, the actors were forced to form groups with politicians that were from different parties and different ideological backgrounds, and they had to work together in the fulfilment of different objectives. This meant that, sometimes, they had to defend their position with which they completely disagreed at a personal level. Occupying the position of their political adversaries in real life politics then, allowed the furthering of their mutual understanding and respect.

With regards to funding, the speakers Julian Popov and Ahmed Driss explained that most of it came from the Bulgarian, Dutch and Finnish governments, from their own fund raising, and from the Council of Europe. They pointed out that the Tunisian government contributes nothing today, however that it would be good if they did so in the future in order to guarantee a tighter local control of the School of Politics. They also added that it is their intention to expand this initiative to other countries like Egypt or Syria, as an intention that is already being developed through the invitation of politicians of the latter to participate in the School of Politics of Tunisia.

Part III:

The second project to be presented was that of the Tandem/Shaml, represented by Dalia Dawoud and Darius Polok, both of which collaborate in a number of NGOs in Egypt and Germany respectively, together with Philipp Dietachmair, who is a program manager with the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam. They collaborate in the implementation and the funding of this Tandem project, whose main objective is the exchange of cultural managers between Europe and North Africa. Dalia Dawoud highlighted that the reason for focusing on cultural managers is threefold. Firstly because the role that culture plays in society was being reconsidered and gaining in importance. Secondly, because culture was regarded as the fourth, and in this context the youngest dimension in the pillar-model for sustainable development in democratic societies. And lastly, because cultural managers are appearing as new actors of citizenship and community engagement.

The aim of the project is to promote local work on culture, citizenship and democracy, through the sharing of experiences between Europe and North Africa, and the co-creation of new strategies, in a way that both can learn from each other. Hence the name of the project: Tandem. It therefore stressed the idea of doing something together, sharing common goals and common challenges, something, which requires new learning and new strategies.

The project focuses particularly on empowering different cultural or artistic groups by providing them with technical and institutional assistance, but more importantly, by providing them with a partner from abroad with whom they may work. This allowed for hands in learning, for the experiencing of new localities and for the opening of new spaces for collaboration, which will hopefully translate into long-term collaborations between different organizations that could, then, contribute immensely to the task of capacity and empathy building, and the deconstruction of mutual stereotypes.

There were questions raised regarding the mechanisms by which the tandems were established and the way their success was measured. Regarding the first question, the speakers Dalia Dawoud and Darius Polok explained that partner forums were held, in which cultural managers from both sides of the Mediterranean would meet and would be able to pick with whom they would like to work. From then on, the collaboration project was left in their hands, and the Tandem/Shaml project would simply help them with the logistics. Regarding the second question, all speakers highlighted that the project does not demand presentable outcomes from their tandems. The important part of their work was the sharing of an experience, not the production of something tangible.

Part IV:

The last project to be presented was that of Nelly Corbel: leading change across the Mediterranean. It is a pilot project, developed between three different think tanks all of which count with leadership academies: the Centre for Applied Policy Research of the University of Munich, with the support of zivik program of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations; the John D. Gerhart Centre for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo and the Arab Institute for Human Rights in Tunisia. It aims at networking and promoting young leaders of Arab transformation countries and Europe, as well as curriculum development and training of community leaders. It focuses on establishing long-term co-operation links between European and Arab cultural organizations on the one hand, and to create a network of creative people working in a transnational cultural environment on the other.

It centres its activities therefore in the teaching of political skills – those, which are not necessarily taught at universities – with a strong rights-based curricular. It focuses on two target groups: The first target group is young people who have shown a desire to evolve and try new things however now need help in bringing their projects into being. They receive training in, for example, the use of certain communication tools, pushing for legal change, or creating sustainable management. The second group targeted by this project is community leaders; people that have a certain status within their communities and that are considered to be the link between individuals and the government. The idea from here on is to create a network of students that can serve as a mentorship for future projects.