

SECOND SESSION

"Speaking Mediterranean": new languages, new visions.

Moderator:

Fadila **ANOUAR**, Chief Editor of 2M (Morocco)

Speakers:

Sima **BAHOUS**, President of the Higher Media Council (Jordan)

Boris **BERGANT**, Director of the Int'l Relations of RTVSLO (Slovenia), Vice President of EBU

Erik **BETTERMAN**, Director General of Deutsche Welle (Germany)

Nacer **MEHAL**, Director General of APS, Vice President of the Alliance of the Mediterranean Press Agencies (Algeria)

Isona **PASSOLA**, President of APIMED (Spain)

Aidan **WHITE**, Secretary General of IFJ – International Federation of Journalists (Belgium)

The session has been enriched by some video insertions by RTVSLO and Deutsche Welle that represent examples of TV multi-languages programmes (mainly news) addressed, respectively, to the Balkan and Arabic-speaking audiences.

Referring to the topic of the session, Mr. **Betterman**, Director General of Deutsche Welle, has stressed the fact that it's thousand years that the Mediterranean has been giving "fresh cultural impulses to Northern Europe and absorbing ideas from there" and that, in this era of globalisation, "there should be all the more cooperation over borders of language and culture". It is in this framework that even a Middle European TV, like Deutsche Welle, can take up the challenge to play "as a bridge of information and cultural exchange" following its motto "From the heart of Europe". To this aim, different initiatives such as the *DW Point* – multi-media and multi-languages information terminals opened in Syria and Amman – the Arabic Service of *DW TV*, that now broadcasts for 8 hours a day and is received in over 20 countries from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, the *DW Radio*, key medium in this region, and, finally, activities in the field of training addressed to media personnel. Such a multi-level strategy "is always of advantage of both sides, far beyond merely professional considerations" and is aimed at finding out "new ways of approaching the people with whom we would like to enter into dialogue" and at "strengthening elements that connect". Referring to the Arabic programme of DW, Mr. Betterman stressed that "the main outcome of the programme is the multicultural process that is happening in the TV station", a human and professional benefit fed by implying more than 1/3 collaborators coming from 16 different countries.

Following a quotation by Goethe – "Whoever knows others as well as himself must also recognize that East and West are now inseparable", from the poems collection "East-West Divan" – Mr. Betterman has concluded that "we at Deutsche Welle may not be *Mediterranean*, but we do speak the same language when it comes down to the vision of living together peacefully in diversity and freedom".

In the same view, Mr. **Bergant** has shown a promotional video presenting a multilingual miscellaneous of the different magazines (from Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Slovenia) composing the *Alpen-Donava-Adria* TV programme, "the oldest European multilateral trans-border project still in operation" that celebrates its 25th year of broadcasting. When this project was launched, during the Cold War, "it brought together very different cultures and social systems. It was very pioneering. But it slowly developed, becoming a self initiative". This example tells us – he concluded – that "whatever circumstances occurring, the professionals can compare and share practices and backgrounds by working together". Nowadays, by exploiting the new communication technologies, it is possible to improve interactivity and dialogue with our "neighbours" widening the perspective usually focused only on the national dimension.

Moving the discussion from these concrete TV experiences to an institutional point of view, the moderator has given the floor to Mrs. **Bahous**, President of the Jordanian Higher Media Council: "the Mediterranean mosaic of cultures risks to be blown away due to the standardised media solutions that are promoting today. The risk of being pulled into cultural trenches is today high". And these risks will have a negative impact on cultural diversity. "We need different, alternative models. We should not have fear of fighting cultural globalisation, not by withdrawing into ourselves but by asserting our identity through learning more and living together". "The concept of culture is not static" - she continued - but, on the contrary, it is continuously evolving and involving; it is not "an alienation force, but an embracing one, harmonious, welcoming, and enlightening".

Following a quotation by Bernard Shaw - "Peace is not only better than war, but it is infinitely more arduous" - Mrs. Bahous has underlined the role that media have to play to give their contribution to reach this target: indeed, the media are asked to teach democracy, non-violence, tolerance, solidarity and justice, and to build a "Culture of Peace". "We, in the media, have to think about how to move from an *information society*, that has prevailed so far, to a *knowledge society*". To do that, "we have to look into our modes of production, our modes of promoting news exchanging, our modes of promoting new media contents and formats that are specifically Euro-Mediterranean, specifically multi-cultural and multi-languages". "Jordan - she stressed - is on the way to promote this new approach, as catalyst of stability and peace in the region", working for the inter-dependence, the inter-faiths dialogue, the North-South and South-South exchange.

In this view, she pointed out the recent initiatives carried out in Jordan: opening of the private sector to media investments; empowering of the information technologies sector; recent approval of the new "Press and Publication law" which states the removal of journalists imprisonment and bans their arrest; the next adoption of the "Freedom of information law"; and, finally, the decision of creating institutions that work on quality education and training in the media sector through the Higher Council and many private and public universities.

Mr. **Mehal**, while affirming the role of media as vectors of any message and dialogue, has stressed that their "primordial mission is to consecrate the inter-culturality". Nevertheless, within the Euro-Mediterranean basin the gap between the North and the South has become wide and unbalanced, due, in particular, to the "whole of satellites pouring from the Northern shore any kind of contents". The Southern viewers have indeed become "direct consumers of western cultural models and information products that are vectors of a way of life and of being" that affect in particular the young audience. We can talk about - has stated Mr. Mehal - "TV-addiction", generated by the pressing presence of satellite dishes in Southern Mediterranean houses, that has introduced a "mirror" on the daily Western life. Starting from this consideration, this "speaking Mediterranean" is only a one-way speaking? How to re-balance this situation? It is urgent to "re-found the North-South relation": on one hand - he has stated - it is necessary to point out the failed promises made by the international bodies, in this sense, but, on the other hand, it is important to underline the existing "wills" of making this "speaking Mediterranean" something concrete. In fact, there are many good quality Southern audiovisual products, TV programmes and debates able to push ahead the North-South interaction and exchange.

Mr. **White**, while pointing out the role of journalists in helping to create and to stimulate dialogue, has underlined the difficult circumstances and the big ethical questions they face today. "Often I feel uncomfortable looking at some images", "of course we have to report the news because it is absolutely vital and we can't ignore it, but it is important to understand the consequences of what we do": "I'm worried about the fact that sometimes we in media are not truly aware of the power we have today: it is a power that have to be understood and treated effectively and professionally". The image of Alan Johnson, the Bbc journalist held hostage, shown by Mr. White opened another fundamental question: "the kidnappings and murders of our colleagues - that have reached record proportion - should be a signal that even if we, in the media, don't understand the power we have, then, believe me, the people who want to control and influence media have understood that very well". And, about this risks in the journalist profession, he has proposed some points: first, "the need for security and protection of our work and the people who

carry it out"; second, "the promotion of a higher level, a higher quality of information"; finally, the important role that media and communication can play for the development.

As far as the existing concerned legislation, he has affirmed: "I regret that our political leaders are consumed by a paralysis in terms of their response to the critical questions of media. We see them committed to a security agenda that is based sadly upon chipping away civil liberties and fundamental rights". And he has made reference to two recent law initiatives examples "to confirm my view that, even in a democratic world, I don't think freedom of expression is safe today": first, the introduction, by U.N. Human Rights Council, of a new restriction on article 19 of the freedom of expression; secondly, the E.U. decision of introducing a European wide approach on the question of genocide denial. "These issues – he has concluded – are moving towards more censorship and less openness and I think this governmental approach is wrong. In this region there is still many countries that have criminalised journalists, or where journalists can be sent to jail for the work they do".

Mr. White has concluded his speech by identifying some areas of international and multi-lateral initiatives and debates in which to involve COPEAM: security and protection of journalists; media for development; editorial quality and standards, ethics of journalists, editorial independence.

Mrs. **Passola** opened her speech by stating that "we, in the Mediterranean, propose an alternative system, a system of different cultures, different religions, different languages, different ways of doing; of course it is a more complex system but a fairer one". So, the question is how to manage this complexity? According to Mrs. Passola "this is not a complexity that we have to approach as a problem, but, on the contrary, with a certain joy. Because when someone is obliged to think about the Other, so this person becomes definitely cleverer, more friendly, more generous. And if we apply this to our Sea, this part of the world can become more aware, vital, varied". "Letting aside all the problems it brings, the globalisation it is primarily in favour of this concept of diversity. So if we manage well this globalisation, this idea of Mediterranean could be a small mirror where to look at other countries and cultures".

In which practical way? APIMED, constituted by 400 members, "has chosen to concretely practice this diversity, to stop talking about dialogue but to actually make it by co-producing". This concrete approach implies, for example, to organise focused markets – like the Sitges one – where different TV broadcasters select projects and achieved programmes presented by many producers and purchase them.

"Co-producing is dialogue", and the co-productions are "first of all an exchange of life". In the fields of fiction and documentaries, there are already many projects focused on subjects of interests. If we take the most from the fact that many Arab people live in European countries, "this contact gives us a lot of opportunities in terms of ideas and subjects to make quality products to be broadcast". In this framework, she asks COPEAM to support more producers in spreading out their works. On the other hand, producers have to keep asking for supports to their activity. "The audiovisual is culture. So we have to keep asking for protection of this sector, in order to remain free and out from the mere market logics [...]. With this protection and our sensibility and professionalism a good work could be done".

Giving the floor to the audience, a further debate on the reasons for the difficulty of exchanging products from South to North has been opened. Mr. **Mehal** stressed the fact that the flux of programmes is still absolutely unidirectional, from the North to the South. We have to promote – he suggested – the "nearness" existing between the Mediterranean cultures, and organise, around it, a productive system – made of TV and radio broadcasters, producers, script writers – able to "give a new image of the South, to make the North-Mediterranean and European peoples to accept to receive images from the South", breaking out this "one-way dialogue" and "re-balance the flux". "We produce music, films, theatre, and we need the others know better our cultural and social reality and change some racist and xenophobic image of us". To do this, it is necessary "a shared will of working together".

Referring to the topic, Mrs. **Bahous** underlined that the need of a long term strategy has also to take into consideration the lack of political support or will. First of all, it is necessary to improve, inside each country, adequate education, as well as university and training systems and structures. Only this way it is possible to be competitive and autonomous in the media and communication market.

In addition to this, it is necessary to work on *media literacy*, and media education: " our children watch any channels, any news, any newspaper without understanding the bias, the questions of ownership, and all the dynamics happening within the media" . "Communication is no longer a talent, or just an ability in talking or writing, but it is a discipline, an art, a science and we have to be aware of that and work through our education system". And, she concluded "the most part of people running our TV stations were educated in the West, in western media, in western channels, contents and products. [...] Now, we are beginning producing our own media content and formats, and setting up our institutions and structures that are rooted into our culture. This is our task."