

Euro-Mediterranean Public Relations.

A possible effect of globalization?

A focus on the idea of developing a strong and complex PR area/region connecting the resources of different countries for economic growth purpose

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Abstract

This paper examines the possibility of identifying and building, through the aid of planned research, a Euro-Mediterranean public relations profession (or Med European pr). Today it is possible to define American public relations quite clearly: its history, its evolution and present development. At the same time it is also possible to define European public relations both in terms of academic studies and development of new theories, as well as in terms of professional growth. The aim of this paper is to understand whether it is possible, and useful, to think in terms of a new area or "region": the Euro-Mediterranean (or Med European) in fact, where public relations could be developed into an organized and strategic form, as a consequence and effect of globalization.

Key questions and arguments:

- Considering that the Mediterranean area is composed of many countries which represent very different cultures and, consequently, different identities, is it possible to think in Euro Mediterranean or Med European pr terms?
- Could it be useful for pr professionals to dialogue with a homogeneous profession or is it also useful to draw attention to specific area-linked pr?
- Could it be misleading to think in terms of Med European pr?
- Or would this new point of view help the growth of the profession as a whole?

- Would this new perspective help universities in Europe (and in general around the world) to collaborate more and better regarding public relations application and techniques?
- And, in finding a Euro-Mediterranean (or Med European) pr approach, would its process be recognized as valid and viable?

I strongly believe that sooner or later this “region” will need an organized professional public relations system, not limited to the single countries belonging to the Med area, as it is today, but thinking in network terms, effectively bridging companies, institutions, universities, professionals, and so on, through the exchange and development of integrated public relations throughout the region.

Article outline

The paper is outlined in two parts: the first one is concentrated on the theoretic approach of the subject proposed; the second part is dedicated to the practical application of the idea presented.

Part one - Theoretical approach

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PART ONE

1. Introduction: Globalization and the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (2010)

Globalization produces different effects which, if foreseen, can be positively managed and strategically organized. “In the Barcelona Declaration (1995), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (15 countries belonging to EU and 12 countries belonging to the Mediterranean basin) agreed on the establishment of an Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) by the target date of 2010. This is to be achieved by means of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements negotiated and concluded between the European Union and the Mediterranean Partners, together with free trade agreements between the partners themselves” (The Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area – http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/free_trade_area.htm).

Thus, in the approaching year of 2010, a new scenario will take form in the era of globalization: an area set to become the world’s biggest marketplace according to the European Commission, which states that “together with EFTA this zone will include some 40 States and 600-800 million consumers, i.e. one of the world’s most important trade entities” (The Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area - http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/free_trade_area.htm).

Conferences and meetings have been organized in many Mediterranean cities to enlighten and discuss the situation focusing on many different and important subjects: economic growth in the industrial sector; cultural exchanges among countries and people in the EMFTA zone; new negotiation opportunities for specific profit companies and commercial fields; widening university opportunities, developments and exchange (other than the ones already existing); involvement of public institutions in the area concerned (partnership agreements); financial opportunities and consequent project development; etc. Questions, inputs, remarks of all kind have been made by the different categories present in the meetings such as politicians, entrepreneurs, professors and academic personnel, journalists and people belonging to the various consultant fields.

During the discussions not much (if anything) has been said about the role of public relations professionals or their associations in the Euro Mediterranean Free Trade Market context. Public relations deals with planned and strategic communication projects, and it should be seriously considered in the EMFTA development strategy. We know that everybody and every organization (private or public, profit or non-profit) communicates. Not always, however, are they able to communicate in a proper way because, as we all know, “everybody and everything communicates, ...the problem is: do they know how?”.

The innovative aspect regarding the European political approach to the Mediterranean area also regards the importance assigned to subjects linked to human aspects such as: development of civil society; cultural dialogue; issues regarding and sustaining the democratic process (Stefania Panebianco, 2006). The reformulation of EU’s Mediterranean policy has moved the centre of attention from commercial and economical cooperation to safety and the human dimension (Stefania Panebianco, 2006). All issues that can be the object of a correct public relations approach.

The role of communication, therefore, is of primary importance for every kind of project or activity intended to be carried out, especially if we consider the delicacy of differences present in the EMFTA region. For this reason I consider public relations fundamental to the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area establishment which needs to achieve its commercial and economical objectives in a strong, lasting, profitable and competitive way.

If public relations can and must be considered an important part of any start up activity, through planning its communication consequences and feed-back, it follows that public relations, if inserted correctly in the communication process as a profession (including obviously its members and professionals), will inevitably be the basic component of any communication programme involving all the different activities and negotiation plans to be carried out and reinforced.

The question is: why has nothing (so far as I know) been organized on this basis? Why have public relations professional bodies or public relations European companies not been involved (in a thorough way) in the EMFTA strategic

programme? Isn't this to be considered an opportunity for us pr professionals and academics? I think it is. I also believe, however, that although this situation is on the one hand a great opportunity for the development of the profession (and its members), on the other it is also a long and difficult process to initiate and to achieve. Why not try anyway?

2. Defining the Euro-Mediterranean region

Before carrying out any research on this study, it is necessary to understand what we mean by "Europe", what we mean by "Mediterranean", what we mean by Mediterranean countries and their Sea.

We are looking at three very different areas: two of them are connected by geographic borders and the third by the sea.

1. Europe is a continent consisting of different countries. Each country possesses its own identity, and social, cultural and economic peculiarities. Because of the many differences, it is not possible to consider a cultural and social identity for Europe. It is only possible to speak in political and economical identity terms. In fact, Europe is enlarging its political and economical strength through the increase of the number of countries taking part in the EC. Furthermore, we often hear mentioned the definition of a Northern European region (or countries) and a Southern European region. In both cases they can be considered as sub-regions of the continent. Even though there isn't a clear definition regarding the Southern Europe region (it can vary according to geographical, cultural, linguistic and historical factors), usually Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and, in general, all the Mediterranean countries of the European continent, belong to the South of Europe (www.Wikipedia.it – Southern Europe). All South European countries (apart from Portugal) are touched by the Mediterranean Sea.
2. The Mediterranean zone is not a continent. It is an Area consisting of many countries not belonging to the same continent. It is possible to define an identity for each country, but the immense variety of cultural, social, religious differences in this area makes it even more difficult (if not impossible) to

determine a cultural and social Mediterranean identity. Furthermore, it is also impossible to determine a common political and economical Mediterranean aspect, such as the European one, because we are talking of two different entities: continent and area. That is why it would be a complex operation trying to find a single definition of the Mediterranean area (Stefania Panebianco, 2006): it can be analysed underlining its common destiny and its unity, or its political conflict. In this area we find both conflicting and unifying elements, but only by an evaluation of its parts (Islam and Western countries) will it be possible to argue with regard to a socio-cultural identity

3. The Mediterranean countries are those touched by the Mediterranean Sea. They form a specific area in which its territory includes parts of Europe, Africa and Asia. Let us just think of the differences existing between Algeria, Libya, Syria, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, and so on. What these countries have in common is the Mediterranean Sea, practically nothing else. Many people would say that Mediterranean countries consist of not only the ones touched by the sea, but also others that politically or historically are to be considered part of this group. At present I would prefer to focus only on the countries that are actually touched by Mare Nostrum, in order to avoid complicating the mental process of the idea of an Euro Mediterranean public relations concept. Once this is accomplished, if ever, then it would be possible to enlarge the new pr region to other countries, if considered useful.
4. Finally, the fourth element, the Mediterranean Sea. Its waters extend to the Red Sea, the Black Sea and flow into the Atlantic Ocean. These last sea areas will not be considered in the present study for the same reasons indicated above. Our focus regards only the area or region occupied by the countries touched by the Mediterranean Sea, also known as *Mare Nostrum* (Our Sea) as defined by the ancient Romans.

The following map illustrates the new and very competitive area presently known as the Euro-Mediterranean region (www.sailinissues.com).

Fig.1 – Map of the Mediterranean Sea and its countries



3. Defining culture and identity

Usually land is considered as the natural link or passage between countries, borders and cultures. It is mentally easy for us to conceive American or European or because of the homogeneity and continuity of its lands. I would like to consider the sea (and not the land in this case) also as a natural bridge.

The concept of identity

Assuming that culture is the combination of different elements such as ideas, values, norms, symbols, etc, identity is basically the form that culture takes from the moment in which, following an enculturation and socialization process, it becomes part of the cultural system to which a person or people refer. Culture and identity evolve being a dynamic concept. Furthermore, identity changes and remodels itself through a learning process favoured by interaction with the external world (S. Panebianco, 2006).

Dialogue among Euro-Mediterranean countries aimed at their mutual understanding can only be channelled effectively through the application and experience of public relations in this area, and what must emerge is some criteria of identity in common.

Research for an identity

The question is, would it be possible to consider the sea as the link, the bridge, in order to build a common condition, to conceive a new identity? What I would be looking for are the elements that can characterize *the* Mediterranean identity, and by using this term I'm not thinking of destroying the existing identities belonging to each country and its people. Obviously each Euro-Mediterranean nation (in Europe, in Africa or elsewhere) must maintain its core values which belong to its culture, its history, its religion, its social, economical and political context. In fact these must be considered the values which will enrich (and be part of) the global Med identity. What I think could be achieved is the search of those common elements on which to build a simple but genuine Med identity, its strengths and its weaknesses.

The concept of culture

At the same time it is necessary to understand the meaning of culture (from its sociological point of view). It is possible to consider two meanings of the concept of culture. In the first one it matches with the idea of interior refinement and mental concentration, usually the qualities of a well educated person, bound to his or her individual education and training; the second concept takes into consideration behaviour, values, the specific life style of particular groups of people within the same society. So the concept of culture belongs to a sort of tool box used by social scientists to try to understand the behaviour of individuals (or groups) in a specific society (Loredana Sciolla, 2002).

The sociology of culture deals with the relations existing between culture and specific historical and social contexts. The values and the concepts, instruments by which we classify people and things, operate in social life forms and environments, and must be considered according to the use that we want to make of them and also taking into consideration the wider context and system they

belong to. Culture influences social relations giving them stability and favouring the development and diffusion of certain behaviour. Culture influences and modifies society, and in doing so it does not always modify it in the direction of majority consent.

The relation between society and culture is bidirectional, and takes into consideration (Sciolla, 2002):

- the dependence of the cultural forms on social structures. Here, culture is a dependent variable of other elements and factors, and to understand it we must first understand and explain these factors. So it is necessary to study how historic, social and cultural contexts influence culture itself.
- the role carried out by cultural forms in determining social action and development. Thus, culture is also an independent variable in the sense that it is culture that explains other social aspects and behaviour, which brings us to the effects of the cultural forms.
- the social processes by which culture is passed on by one generation to another. This means analysing the mechanisms by which culture becomes part of the subjective universe of each person /people.

4. The two sides of Globalization: local and global communication

What is globalization?

Globalization is the process by which relatively separated zones come to intersect in the same “imaginary” space (Doreen Massey-Pat Jess, 2001). In this process the idea of culture as a series of autonomous and closed systems of meaning and practices starts to appear anachronistic. While gathering information about this subject (Doreen Massey-Pat Jess, 2001), I came across two models of culture in relation to the concept of “place”, both in a physical and imaginary way: 1) culture as a series of relatively firm meanings, which stabilize cultural identities and guarantee that the life style of the group remains homogeneous (connecting the idea of culture to the concept of place); 2) in the second model the meanings are not fixed, but are constantly treated, contested and transformed; where the

cultural practices and forms are not pure but combine themselves with elements of other cultures, and where identities are not stable and invariable according to their place of origin, but, on the contrary, constantly re-produce themselves in new forms, in new places, from a combination of elements and meanings.

What is happening is that globalization is pushing more towards the second model, and this trend is due to the speed with which the globalization phenomenon is evolving and reproducing itself. The consequent reduction or compression of time and space, because of globalization, produces a sort of relocation of cultures belonging to a constantly larger number of places.

Because globalization, as suggested by Ian Clark (in Zolo, 2005), influences alterations linked to spatial and international relations dimensions, it includes concepts of integration, interdependence, multilateralism, openness, spatial compression and homogeneity.

Globalization and cultural diversity.

The process of globalization is linked to a wider and more varied concept of culture. It is possible to date the origin of globalization far back in history (just look at what the Romans managed to achieve without the aid of internet!), but certainly it is in these last decades that its effects have been “spinning” every day in a more surprising and evident manner. Space and time are condensed on a global scale in a way that was unthinkable until some years ago (Doreen Massey-Pat Jess, 2001). Globalization belongs to modern times, to our time, and it refers to the compression of the world and, at the same time, to the intensification of knowledge and understanding of the world as a whole (Robertson in Cesareo, 2000).

Globalization has affected Europe which, as a unified country today, tries to present itself to the world with a European culture and identity. The same thought can be carried over to the Mediterranean and Euro Mediterranean area (even though not belonging to a single continent).

Under these circumstances it would be possible to create a dynamic and productive Euro-Mediterranean pr aspect of our profession. This would lead to a complex process of exchange and understanding between the many differences present in the area focused upon. Certainly a difficult task to carry out, but one

which would at the same time provide for the urge to apply concepts of globalization as well as glocalization. This is part of the delicate process taking place in our century and which needs to focus on concepts such as integration and communication, and I believe that the Euro-Mediterranean region will be a very important and a strategic part of the world in the near future where these concepts will be absolutely linked to one another in any activity or project to be carried out.

Global and local communication.

The problem is not communication in itself, but that it relies on the fact that in the Euro Mediterranean region (as in Europe) we are all different from one another. And the differences are more evident than the ones existing in the European area. So, if the process of defining an European pr has been long and articulated, it follows that it will be even more complex and tough defining a Mediterranean or, better still, a Euro Mediterranean public relations view. The differences regard the codes with which humans communicate: linguistic, semantic, verbal, cultural, para-verbal, and so on. The same concept of democracy is different from one zone to another, which puts our communication and communicating codes into an even more difficult position, modifying the perceptive system of individuals and groups, who represent the many publics (and stakeholders) to whom public relations messages are directed.

Supposing that a company needs to focus on its local or national publics or stakeholders: the kind of communication produced will follow easily defined and managed criteria. But the case would be different if the corporate context, and its consequent market, is wider and more complex to define from the communication programming point of view, such as the Mediterranean or the Euro Mediterranean one, if we decide to consider the enlarged region.

At this point the use of a **local and global public relations** system is fundamental.

- Local public relations takes into account the communicative and perceptive peculiarity existing in single areas (local)

- Global public relations has the ability to extract those common aspects (global) which could define, local and global together, the new Euro Mediterranean pr.

Thanks to the study and research carried out by public relations practitioners and professors belonging to European universities, the results obtained demonstrate how public relations in Europe follows specific and typical territorial needs. It is as if we can define many “local pr flavours” (definition by Dejan Vercic during an interview in BledCom 2006), which represent the different facets of public relations and communication in European countries. It all depends on how pr is used or what it is mainly focused upon, how the basic pr needs are satisfied according to the social, cultural, political needs, (and so on) existing in each country. It is a very important study which helps us to understand the different facets of our profession in such a diverse and ample context. Can we talk of global European pr, then?

Following a similar process in the Euro Mediterranean region, it would be extremely interesting to uncover a global Euro Mediterranean region in which to build and practise a global Euro Mediterranean pr profession.

I would like to point out that the terms local and global must not be interpreted as two separate aspects of a situation or of a context. On the contrary they are absolutely and inevitably interconnected. Local is something or somewhere not necessarily small in itself, but only smaller in scale than what is intended in a global comparison. So local can be a town if global is the nation, or local is a continent if global is the world. At the same time, inversely, the concept of global is a wider context compared to its local. Local and global must not be interpreted as two opposites, but must be considered as interdependent on one another. Local and global are part of each other. The basic aspect of both terms is the relations that exist and take place in each sphere and in relation with each other. The lack of proper communication practice, in local and global contexts, may generate confusion, conflict, resistance, etc. It is the role of public relations to avoid similar errors and to obtain credibility in managing local-global communication.

5. Intercultural communication as the link to the achievement of Euro-Mediterranean public relations.

Taking my starting point from the definition of public relations, where it is stated that "... public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics" (part of CIPR's UK definition of pr), I would add, for the purpose of the Med area, the concepts of *integration and inter-culture*, adapting the definition to " integration, intercultural and mutual understanding ...". This would help us to think in a more defined and focused public relations and communication perspective. If the aim is to conceive and work in a new environmental identity and culture (the Euro Med one) it is also fundamental to realise that the only way to operate correctly and with the minimum error is to be prepared to face and manage the real intercultural process of the projects organized and carried out. The words integration and intercultural are frequently used nowadays due to the enormous number of people moving from one country to another, looking for better places to live in or for work reasons. The same terms, though, exist in every context, but we often fail to understand their effects. Strangely enough, even when a person moves from his town of origin to the next town, a distance of perhaps only 100 miles, it is still possible to think of an integrating process for that person, and, from some specific aspects, a process of intercultural relation. If we expand the example to a wider zone, like the Euro Med region, the only way, in my opinion, to avoid any kind of cultural conflict or misunderstanding occurring is by using professional intercultural communication. During my research I came across many projects being carried out in the Euro Mediterranean region, from the development of courses for diplomats which will be needed in this area; to professional journalistic associations which are organized by an agreement in the Med area (I'm referring to AnsaMed, the new international press agency which focuses on the Mediterranean); to north African universities which are asking American universities to be their guide in certain academic projects, and so on. What I fail to find (unless my research hasn't been thorough enough) is the role of European public relations in the Euro Mediterranean region. Probably single pr practitioners or professors are being called on a personal basis, but I really think that even so this is certainly not

enough for the opportunities that could be exploited. Moreover, referring to the EMFTA region and the deadline of 2010, I believe that intercultural communication can be the clue to a new pr development in our field.

6. Visible differences and hidden similarities as the advantage of the process

Looking at people belonging to different cultures we usually tend to identify them by certain typical visible aspects, not only physical but also cultural. These aspects determine codes of behaviour and of communication on both sides. We start to interpret these codes according to the meaning that we ascribe, usually not knowing or considering what the original meaning represents. And vice versa. At the same time, all people present common peculiarities which are not visible, but which are part of human nature. I believe that people belonging to different countries and cultures are made of both *invisible similarities* and *visible differences*.

Usually conflict and misunderstanding depend on the second group rather than on the first one, because of lack of knowledge in each relating country or group. An important role of communication and public relations programmes could be to point out how the invisible similarities must be the link which permits acceptance of the visible differences among people belonging to the Mediterranean area, in order to share certain basic values and/or accept the value of the differences outlined.

The main problem that I think exists in the Euro Mediterranean region depends on the many and totally different cultures and identities which flourish in this area. The aim of public relations programmes is to permit acceptance of the different cultures, focusing on the fact that *this* is the great advantage of the Med region. Different cultures can become an added value, and diversity can and must be considered as an added value.

Public relations is always looking for added values in all its programmes and plans: why not try with the Mediterranean area?

Workforce diversity

Nowadays companies are beginning to consider the necessity of organizing themselves in diversity and cultural diversity terms. “Modern societies and organisations are composed by people who differ widely in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, education, social class, level of (dis)ability” (Maureen Guirdham 2005), and so on. This is one of the many public relations areas that will develop in the Euro Mediterranean region. People will start moving around from one Med region to another, and most probably companies in this area too will need to consider their organization also in terms of (for example) internal communication programmes.

“There is evidence of a narrowing or even increasing elimination of cultural differences in business. *Grint* sees both positive and negative consequences of aspects of globalisation. While noting that: <<at last we are approaching an era when what is common between people transcends that which is different, where we can choose our identity rather than have it thrust upon us by accident of birth>>, the same author goes on to suggest that: <<we are heading for global convergence where national, ethnic and local cultures and identities are swamped by the McDonaldization ... and/or Microsoftization of the world>>” (Laurie J. Mullins, p.51). In the USA as in Europe “there is an undoubted narrowing of cultural differences in work organizations; and it may be the case that such narrowing may apply to individual and group behaviour at work” (Laurie J. Mullins). The same will apply to the Mediterranean context, but the ground must be prepared being this area socially and culturally much more delicate than the ones above mentioned.

One of the objectives at the basis of the 2010 deadline is the achievement of the largest competitive market in the world. This is impossible to attain without skilled and well trained people to count on. Organizational behaviour, diversity training and management, internal and external public relations (just to put it simply) cannot be set aside.

PART TWO

7. The necessity of a research project

To ascertain whether it is possible to achieve Euro Mediterranean public relations, and prior to that Mediterranean pr, it is necessary to proceed through a series of steps, based upon research and analysis of the data obtained.

Just as Europe is composed of different countries which represent different cultures, religions, social values, mentalities, traditions, etc., so is the Mediterranean area. The aim is to carry out a survey to help us understand the different Mediterranean public relations “flavours” and to define:

- what the situation in this particular area regarding public relations is at present;
- how public relations are carried out by professionals;
- how public relations are applied by companies (private and public);
- how public relations are perceived by academic studies.

Research start-up

At present I am working on a personal research project “Public Relations in the Mediterranean area” and the following steps have already been taken:

- Presentation and overview of the aim of the project
- Preparation of a semi-structured questionnaire diversified for each category identified
- Translation of the questionnaires in English, Italian and French
- Definition of the target audience to whom the questionnaires will be sent
- List of the countries touched by the Mediterranean Sea
- Definition of the name of the centre of research which will focus on studies regarding public relations in the Mediterranean area (CE.R.RP.MED - Centro di Ricerca delle Relazioni Pubbliche nel Mediterraneo)
- Selection of a simple logo for CE.R.RP.MED
- Identifying the human resources necessary to carry out the work in the team group
- Research budget and approximate time schedule

The following steps are in course of preparation:

- Organization of a website
- Conversion of the questionnaires in web format in order to send and receive the data requested using a simple and quick instrument
- Preparation of the data loading programme
- Completion of the list of contacts for each category identified

The categories chosen for the research, and belonging to the countries touched by the Mediterranean Sea, are the following:

- Professional pr bodies
- Universities and pr professors
- Industrial and corporate associations
- Institutions and the public sector

Objectives of the research (as will be shown on the website)

1. One of the aims of the research project “Public Relations in the Mediterranean area” is to portray the state of the art of professional public relations in the vast territory of the Mediterranean.

More precisely to identify:

- The way in which the communication function is perceived, utilised and inserted into the logic of corporate strategy process carried out by firms present in the territory of each Mediterranean country
- The activation of degree courses in Public Relations, as well as single subjects present in educational courses offered by the universities in the Mediterranean countries
- The presence of public relations teachers and professors, structured or otherwise, in the academic world
- The opinion of the professionals in Public Relations and Corporate Communication in order to find out the real state of application of the profession in the territory

- The level of utilisation or the presence of the Public Relations function in the entrepreneurial or private context

Advantage: to know the strengths and weaknesses of the Public Relations profession in the Mediterranean area.

2. The next aim is to outline a Mediterranean identity of common characteristics, while still preserving the typical diversities and peculiarities, on which to base a “Mediterranean pr flavour” marked by “Mediterranean local pr flavours”.

Specifically:

- To identify those professional elements in Public Relations common to all the different countries in the Mediterranean
- To identify those professional variations typically linked to the territory

Advantage: In this way there would be on one hand a profession connecting to the specific territorial context (with all the cultural effort entailed) and on the other (which is even more important) Public Relations specialist areas connected to the cultural characteristics rather than the territorial or other.

3. In a second phase of the above, the aim is to confront as realistically as possible an extremely delicate analysis in order to understand and allow to emerge those public relations characteristics peculiar to each region of the Mediterranean, as well as to identify those similarities also linked to origin and the historical-evolutionary context:

- to define the true Mediterranean identity with the aim of strengthening ties, building partnerships between the Med countries themselves, and
- creating that sense of acceptance and respect among nations based on pride in knowing themselves and each other in order to live in a manner of productive synergy.

Advantage: to conceive the profession of public relations as tied to the development and growth of the Mediterranean area as a future economic power. Where diversity among people, cultures, origins, religion, political schemes, values and principles in life are so rich that it must be considered the absolute first point of strength and advantage.

Through the questionnaire it will be possible to learn if the idea of building a Mediterranean pr is considered useful to the profession (or if it is just a waste of time and resources) and if there will be any suggestions forthcoming to obtain this goal. Practitioners and professional bodies should be actively involved in the search project and, once launched, it will be exciting to observe the degree of interest shown by the categories mentioned and if there is a difference in the level of interest coming from one country or another.

Above all, it would be a new experience in which to work together, exchanging doubts, thoughts, ideas and eventually developing projects together.

By analysing each aspect indicated above it will be possible to obtain a general overview of the situation. In a sense it could be compared with the first step that we take when planning a pr campaign: analysing the situation or the scenario. If I want to know whether it is worth initiating a Euro-Mediterranean pr development I must, first of all, understand what can influence, positively or negatively, its future development. The deeper the study carried out on each aspect the better and more profound the results obtained will be. These will lead to giving us a clear picture at the end of the total research, revealing and illustrating the real strengths and weaknesses of the situation.

I realise that during the process of receiving the data requested I will come across aspects that I hadn't thought of, or that I may have overestimated or underestimated. I am prepared to learn from the mistakes which I may have committed during the preparation of the research and, even if it would mean slowing the quest, I still believe that it will be a necessary phase to confront.

8. How to build Euro-Mediterranean pr: a tentative approach

A characteristic of the Euro Mediterranean context is that it is living a very dynamic process of growth which will, inevitably, impact into social and organizational everyday life if not supported by proper communication strategies. This process is reinforced by the deadline foreseen in 2010. This date is one of the reasons why it is important to focus on strengthening public relations from both the professional and academic points of view, aware that this is a changing and

dynamic area which needs the knowledge of professionals and the support of academic research.

Common basis and specialised pr areas

The results obtained from the research would establish whether there are common areas in the region that use public relations in a specific field or with a specific and strategic view, which means creating, for example, defined pr specialized areas.

Leading on from this hypothesis, it would be possible to obtain two situations regarding public relations practice:

- recognition of a general Euro Mediterranean pr practice, homogeneous for the whole region, and built on the common public relations principles and techniques known worldwide
- identification of specialized Euro Mediterranean areas on specific public relations subjects

I consider this last possibility as an advantage for the pr sector which would live a new and vibrant professional opportunity. I imagine that it would be stressful and energy consuming for each Med country to attempt to cover in a highly professional way all the pr fields. It would also take time before all the area would gain equal professional standards. Certain countries, especially those belonging to the European part, are already equipped to offer specialization in many if not all pr competences, but what about the rest of the Euro-Med countries? If this situation emerges from the research most probably, then, certain areas will lack the ability to cover all public relations expertise. The solution can be found in guaranteeing the coverage of all pr competence in the Euro-Med area.

As not every pr company needs to be a “Jack of all Trades” and can specialise in the area in which it feels to be strongest and most innovative, so can each Med country decide to focus on one or more specific pr issues (taking for granted that they do maintain a common pr basis). So instead of all public relations professionals doing everything but not particularly deeply, and not always efficiently (as in Europe and America) the Med could concentrate on obtaining the very best in every pr field through country-linked specialisation. For example, Morocco may

have a particular need and a penchant for crisis management with more specialists on the subjects in their pr companies than anywhere else in the Med. Why not use Moroccan pr in that sphere, then, and leave everyone else to save time and specialize in another sphere.

This is a new concept which Euro-Med pr could begin to establish being still in its babyhood.

Gradually a unique and heretofore untried system could emerge in Med pr whereby each country will boast a pr profession specializing in a particular sphere and which can be called on throughout the Med area.

Training and pr education

In order to achieve the above solution, it would also be necessary to train practitioners adequately in order to face the new challenge in the best and most professionally competent way. This could be the effect of globalization on the pr field and from this point of view I think that European pr has a very important role to play in transferring knowledge and skills to those countries belonging to regions which may still not fully apply communication as a strategic resource or measure in social and organizational projects.

Opening pr courses and schools of professional training are the first steps towards the creation of competent public relations professionals in this region. The main effort would be in organizing a net-work through the Med countries able to train homogeneously the new pr generation and also take care of the specialist areas. The result would be a new professional figure: the Euro-Med public relations specialized professional.

Building a network

Partnership should be cultivated with the diplomatic system of embassies and consulates who know the logistics and dynamics of cultural and social relations in the different countries. They can be important allies and instruments of reciprocal communication and knowledge.

It is also important to increase the diverse publics' knowledge of the Med pr profession which can be achieved by approaching the principal organizations and

entities belonging to the various sectors and professions in order to create synergic relations throughout the Med area.

Finally, it would be necessary to set up a permanent observatory on the evolution of Med public relations progress, which means carrying out continuous research in this area. The globalization process will certainly oblige monitoring its evolution in the region in order to study any variation in the profession according to specific needs.

9. Advantages achieved through building Euro-Mediterranean pr

The advantages foreseen as a result of the process of building a Euro-Mediterranean pr profession can be briefly indicated as follows:

- Strengthening the Euro Med area. Doing nothing at all about the above aspects, could leave the Med area further and further behind in terms of professional pr knowledge, widening the gap with those countries, leave alone continents, that are attentive to the evolution of pr.
- Positively exploiting the Med phenomenon. The effect of globalization can be devastating if not confronted with passion and enthusiasm. We have the good luck to be working in a profession that is applicable to every sector, in every country. This is our strength, this is our competitive advantage. But to consider it less than useful to apply ourselves on this front could, on the one hand, avoid consuming energy, but on the other hand leave us aware of creating a professional gap which will in time be impossible to bridge excepting by enormous sacrifice.

10. Conclusions

The world is becoming ever smaller, and the necessity for improving exchanges (human and commercial) ever more pressing. Globalization is a phenomenon that can't be stopped and that in any case has to be considered and perceived in a positive manner. Public relations can be a lever of coherence in a project that is so

much bigger than we are, but in which we undoubtedly find ourselves. This means that we shall learn to use public relations not just in our own small context, or country, but on a global level, in the world. This idea applies everywhere. It is obvious that since I live in the centre of the Mediterranean Area I feel the need to draw attention to this specific region. But these remarks are also applicable to other contexts.

Conclusive advantage: A Mediterranean profession of Public Relations would be created from which the Mediterranean itself could gain benefit without having to depend so much on North European or American expertise.

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