

FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RELATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:

Pathways for a Future Euro-Med Agenda on Cultural Cooperation

Carina Soriano, Head of ALF Spain Network
Gemma Aubarell, ALF Spain Network
Coordinator

Inspiring **Knowledge** Driving **Action** Uniting **Cultures**

Executive Summary



Building on the outcomes of the Tangier Declaration (March 2024), the ALF Networks of Belgium, France, Ireland, Tunisia, Morocco, and Spain are organising a joint cross-network initiative aimed at transforming cultural relations into a driving force for Euro-Mediterranean intercultural cooperation.



A Cross Network Initiative in the frame of the ALFORUM 2025

Making culture an effective tool for dialogue in the current Euro-Mediterranean context

Based on the Tanger Declaration (March 2024), this cross-network initiative builds upon the results of the actions carried out through the 5 Cross-Network sessions organised by Belgium, France, Ireland, Tunisia, Spain and Morocco during the Forum under the umbrella of international cultural relations, ensuring a comprehensive and impactful approach to cultural diplomacy.

We would like to reflect on how the current context urges us to move beyond understanding cultural diplomacy as a mere tool of soft power and to imbue it with a more **creative and inclusive approach**, centered around a renovated spirit of dialogue, mutual understanding and learning, joint capacity development, and Mediterranean solidarity.

This cross-network initiative aims to foster meaningful dialogue, collaborative learning, and actionable outcomes that contribute to a **sustainable and inclusive approach to cultural diplomacy as a key instrument for intercultural relations** in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Transforming cultural relations into a driving force for fostering open and fluid identities in the Mediterranean. We support the art and the culture of exchange and openness with others as part of our own evolving identification, not as a renunciation of our beliefs. We advocate for a utilitarian view of culture, nonessentialist, with a purpose of positive, transcultural, and transgenerational values. Culture allows us to reconstruct “vivre ensemble” (the recognition of plural identities as an opportunity, not as a threat): we need to work on trust and ensure intercommunity coexistence.

Empowering Civil Society and Cultural Actors for Inclusive Societies. In a moment marked by profound social fragmentation, global crises, and rising polarisation, the Euro-Mediterranean region stands at a pivotal crossroads. While it remains a space of rich cultural diversity and centuries-old exchange, it is also confronted with mounting challenges—from youth disenfranchisement and identity-based tensions to the unequal representation of cultural voices. Against this complex backdrop, the **Forum on Culture, Dialogue, and Resilience seeks to bring together civil society institutions, cultural practitioners, and experts** to reclaim culture as a vector for peace, inclusion, and transformation.

This Cross-Network initiative aims to offer a platform where cultural actors, educators, researchers, artists, and local leaders collaborate to shape more inclusive, equitable, and democratic societies. Structured around **five dynamic sessions**, each led by grassroots organisations and field experts, the forum explores strategic pathways to empower communities, especially youth, in fostering intercultural understanding and cohesion across both shores of the Mediterranean.

Proposals addressed to the Euro-Mediterranean agenda



As ALF networks we believe it is imperative to establish a **comprehensive action plan within the Euro-Mediterranean agenda** that provides concrete instruments, resources, and methodologies to address the cultural challenges impacting Euro-Mediterranean relations.

This Session aims to **position culture at the core** of these relations by offering strategic recommendations and practical frameworks for implementation.

According to us, this is the starting point for sustainable work at the Foundation mainly by 4 main axes:

- **The concluding document** from this session to serve as a key advocacy tool for institutional and governmental negotiations. It is proposed that these efforts be channelled through the Anna Lindh Foundation's networks, leveraging both the Advisory Council and the Board of Governors to strengthen cultural diplomacy initiatives. This will be particularly relevant within one of the ALF's key policy dialogue axes, actively engaging network members.
- We would like to contribute to shaping relevant instruments such as the **new Pact for the Mediterranean**. The main recommendations can be included in the frame of the Barcelona +30 on Culture for Dialogue, highlighting the transformative power of culture from multiple perspectives, emphasising the need to position culture at the core of Euro-Mediterranean relations.
- We encourage the Secretariat of the Anna Lindh Foundation to integrate these conclusions into the **Foundation's Action Plan**, ensuring ministerial-level engagement and coordination. This includes fostering collaboration with Ministries of Culture and enhancing cross-sectoral coordination across Youth, Social, Educational, and Cultural affairs. Strengthening partnerships with external entities will further amplify the impact and long-term sustainability of cultural initiatives.
- Finally, this cross-network initiative and these conclusions aim to create **a multiplier effect, inspiring other national networks** within the Foundation to place culture at the centre of their initiatives and reinforcing its role as a fundamental tool for intercultural dialogue.

Cultural Cooperation and International Relations



During the process of defining the various sessions of this initiative, several meetings and exchanges took place among the different actors involved, including the experts and stakeholders who would later take part in the Forum. Building upon the reflections of the Tangier Declaration, and because of the collaborative effort to design the programme, as well as the discussions held within the coordination group, we highlight below some key insights:

1. Cultural Cooperation vs. Culture in International Relations

It is important to distinguish between cultural cooperation and the instrumentalisation of culture in international relations. While cultural diplomacy can serve strategic or political aims, it must not be reduced to a tool of influence. Genuine cooperation places culture at the heart of mutual understanding and shared values, beyond state-driven agendas.

2. Convergence of Challenges and Opportunities

There is a growing convergence of frameworks and declarations that highlight the centrality of cultural rights in today's global agenda—such as the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights, the recognition of culture as a driver of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and the recent Tangier Declaration. These initiatives collectively reaffirm the role of culture in building inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based societies.

3. The Critical Role of Civil Society and Socially Engaged Art

In the face of growing social fragmentation, a civil society approach is more necessary than ever. Socially engaged art is a powerful medium for civic participation, fostering dialogue, inclusion, and community empowerment. Cultural diplomacy should recognise and support the transformative potential of these grassroots practices.

4. Governance as a Source of Legitimacy at the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)

The complexity of the ALF's governance model is, in fact, one of its greatest strengths. Its legitimacy and influence stem from the diverse and representative nature of its civil society networks. This bottom-up structure provides both credibility and resilience, enabling the Foundation to act as a true convener of intercultural dialogue.

5. The Need for Inclusive and Cooperative Cultural Governance

Spaces of dialogue must be safeguarded and expanded—not merely as substitutes for EU limitations, but as complementary arenas where diverse actors can collaborate. The cultural ecosystem must be integrated and balanced, encompassing large institutions, mid-sized organisations, and small initiatives alike. What we need is not only financial support or new structures, but a genuine model of cooperative governance that facilitates participation, co-creation, and long-term engagement.

Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Relations & Social Engagement Art

There is a need that has been repeatedly voiced at this forum and in many other meetings of Anna Lindh Foundation partners: the need to **enable and support grassroots organisations, small structures, and locally rooted projects** in developing small-scale initiatives that reflect local realities. Another crucial point is the **importance of cultural mediation**. It encourages citizens to engage with their civic environment and holds the power to initiate real change. For instance, theatre can facilitate dialogue and generate solutions, creating a new shared reality that fosters social cohesion and a sense of belonging to our common humanity.

In this shared humanity, **everyone has a place and everyone matters**. Building on this idea, we have seen that, to be truly effective, **cultural mediation must be embedded in the work of diverse stakeholders**, including artists and social actors, to foster cross-sectoral perspectives. We are convinced that **lasting change will be driven by local communities and small-scale initiatives**. To this end, we must build a **resilient cultural ecosystem** that enables social engagement through art and culture. This is why **cultural mediation should be recognised as a key instrument for strengthening intercultural dynamics**.

Priority must be given to **fostering human relationships, encouraging active participation, and supporting the diversity of cultural expressions**, thereby promoting individual self-esteem and collective well-being.

It is essential to encourage the **European Union to reinforce its commitment to culture** and to increase its involvement in the cultural sector by providing **long-term support for small-scale projects**. At present, the *Creative Europe* programme primarily benefits large organisations, institutions, and projects with significant budgets. It is therefore crucial to establish **micro-subsidies specifically dedicated to local, civic, and cultural initiatives of smaller scale**.

From this perspective, it is important to **embed equity within every project**, ensuring meaningful dialogue between countries with differing levels of opportunity and working conditions. It is also vital to develop **supportive models** that allow smaller organisations to navigate complex application processes more easily.

We recommend that the **Anna Lindh Foundation strengthen its work on socially engaged art**, particularly through **cross-sectoral collaboration between civil society organisations and cultural actors**. This entails sustained support for **socially engaged artistic practices and partnerships** at both the **local and Euro-Mediterranean levels**.

Ten Proposals for a Culture-Driven Euro-Mediterranean Transformation

We elaborated the final concrete proposals and recommendations to be integrate at strategic level (to inform EuroMed policies) and Operational (to be included in the ALF Agenda)



Intercultural Inclusive Cities Label (Anna Lindh Foundation / Union for the Mediterranean)

Promote inclusive and progressive local policies through innovative tools that valorise urban heritage as a shared space for intercultural meaning-making. Initiatives such as *Scope Apps* or the activation of intangible cultural heritage can serve to deconstruct stereotypes and foster civic belonging. The development and visibility of this agenda may be reinforced through the *labelled Mediterranean Cultural Cities* scheme, recognising cities that champion diversity in public spaces.



Culture4All – Local Euro–Mediterranean Charters (European Union)

Institutionalised cultural diversity at the local level by establishing *municipal cultural charters* in major Euro–Mediterranean cities. These should include the creation of permanent *Intercultural Councils*, formally embedded in municipal governance. Comprising elected representatives of cultural communities, youth delegates, researchers, mediation experts, and cultural practitioners, these bodies will ensure inclusive representation in urban cultural policy-making.



MedCreative Europe: For Cultural Rights and Local Initiatives (European Union)

Recalibrate the *Creative Europe* programme to support grassroots and citizen-led cultural initiatives. While the current structure predominantly benefits large-scale institutions, a dedicated line of *micro-grants* should be created to empower smaller local actors. This would bring the European project closer to neighbourhoods and communities, aligning with participatory cultural governance. Additionally, EU cultural programmes should reinforce transversal collaborations between civil society organisations (CSOs) and cultural actors through socially engaged art practices, fostering inclusion, dialogue, and democratic values.



Cultural Mediation as a Strategic Lever (Anna Lindh Foundation)

Cultural mediation must be recognised as a key mechanism for strengthening intercultural dynamics. Emphasis should be placed on fostering human relationships, encouraging participatory exchanges, and supporting the plurality of cultural expressions. This involves sustained support for socio-cultural initiatives and a rethinking of intercultural dialogue frameworks, both locally and across the Euro–Mediterranean region.



Youth Connect Heritage Learning Hub (Anna Lindh Foundation)

Establish a regional *Youth Heritage Hub* to empower young people (18– 30) through direct, community-led engagement with cultural heritage. Using museums, libraries, and heritage sites as educational platforms, this initiative would develop civic participation, intercultural skills, and leadership capacities, highlighting the vital role of youth in heritage preservation and innovation.

Mobilise shared Mediterranean heritage as a platform for *peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, and resilience*. By restoring heritage, encouraging shared narratives, and creating inclusive spaces for collaboration, this initiative will contribute to reconciliation and sustainable peace. The project should prioritise *third spaces*—such as museums, heritage centres, and libraries—as key venues for intercultural exchange and healing.



Adaptation of Existing Programmes for Social Art Engagement (European Union)

Redirect and adapt existing European programmes—such as *Interreg NEXT-MED* and *CERV*—to explicitly support cultural action. This could include opening cultural lines within Interreg or using CERV’s third component (on civic participation) to support cultural twinning and socially engaged artistic practices at local levels.



Solidarity Mechanism for Cultural Rights in Crisis Situations (Anna Lindh Foundation)

Create a *Euro-Mediterranean Solidarity Fund* to support cultural actors, communities, and spaces during times of crisis (e.g., conflict, displacement, or repression). This fund would provide emergency financial and logistical aid, ensuring the protection of cultural rights and continuity of intercultural actions during critical moments.



Euro-Mediterranean “Stories for Peace” Label (Anna Lindh Foundation)

Launch a cultural label to support and disseminate *narratives for peace*, co-produced by artists, educators, and activists. The initiative would combat hate speech by promoting collaborative cultural outputs that embody empathy, memory, and pluralism. It could be anchored within existing initiatives such as the *Sea of Words* contest to reach broader youth audiences.



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PO. Box 732 El Mansheya, 21111,
Alexandria, Egypt

<https://alf.website/en/>

info@alfsecretariat.org



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