

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



The Anna Lindh Foundation  
**VIRTUAL MARATHON**  
FOR DIALOGUE IN THE EUROMED

## VIRTUAL MARATHON FOR DIALOGUE

*Promoting Cultural and Social Cooperation in the EuroMed Region  
May-June 2021*

# Digital Threats and Opportunities for Intercultural Dialogue

*MAY 26TH, 2021*

### DISCUSSION TOPIC

*The Impact of Digital Tools  
in Promoting or Threatening  
Intercultural Exchange*



## SEVEN HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS AND PARTICIPANTS

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AISSAM BENAÏSSA	<i>Intercultural Debates Expert</i>
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VESNA LONCARIC	<i>Member of the Cabinet of Ms. Dubravka Suica, EU Vice President, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography</i>
SID EL-MORHI	<i>Digital Communication Consultant   Algeria</i>
NADIA HENNI-MOULAÏ	<i>Journalist, founder of Melting Book   France</i>
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# Digital Threats and Opportunities for Intercultural Dialogue

## THREE PILLARS

①

### OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS OF ONLINE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The impact of the digital sphere on inclusivity along with its limitations

②

### EDUCATION IN MEDIA LITERACY

Youth empowerment, preventative measures against hate speech, & socioeconomic equality

③

### ONLINE INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE VS. FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS

Encouraging in person discussions & providing a safe online third space

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Main Recommendations Emerging from the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue on Digital Threats and Opportunities for Intercultural Dialogue tackling the threats, solutions, and future of intercultural dialogue and media literacy.

①

**TO FIND A POINT OF EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN REGULATION AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

in order to simultaneously preserve freedom of expression of the digital media user while minimising the threats of hate speech.

②

**TO EDUCATE THE YOUTH IN MEDIA LITERACY AND EMPOWER THEM**,

raising their awareness about algorithms, echo chambers and critical thinking methods in order to focus on prevention rather than intervention.

③

**TO EQUIP ALL COMMUNITIES REGARDLESS OF THEIR SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT WITH**

**DIGITAL LITERACY** by providing access to digital media and helping them understand the digital world.

④

**TO USE CREATIVE TOOLS LIKE STORYTELLING AND MOVIE MAKING**

in order to combat discrimination and hate speech effectively while reaching a wider audience.

⑤

**TO FACILITATE FACE TO FACE DISCUSSIONS**

in order to experience the nuances of real-life communication.

⑥

**TO WORK ON DEVELOPING INITIATIVES THAT COULD PROVIDE INCLUSIVE THIRD**

**SPACES** where intercultural exchange could take place safely.

## CONTEXT

In the framework of the Celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process and the “Renewed Partnerships with the Southern Neighbourhood: a new agenda for the Mediterranean”, the Anna Lindh Foundation and its EuroMed civil society Network organized the Anna Lindh Foundation Virtual Marathon for Dialogue in the EuroMed region (VM).

The Virtual Marathon gathered activities of ALF civil society Network and partner organizations were set to take place during 42 days from the 19th of May to the 29th of June.

## MAIN AIMS OF THE VIRTUAL MARATHON FOR DIALOGUE

The first aim of the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue is to **highlight the importance of the Intercultural Dialogue to build sustainable societies in the EuroMed Region**, taking into consideration the challenges and opportunities brought about by the Covid19 pandemic.

The second aim of the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue is to **develop and promote new ideas and policies towards better cultural and social cooperation in the EuroMed region.**

*The Public Virtual Dialogues will involve participants and panelists who play a major role in the economic, ecological, social, and cultural development of the region. Those include high-level policymakers, journalists, decision makers, young people, business & private sector, gender pioneers, academics, CSO representatives. The challenge is to create synergies with the civil society, especially the Youth and the Women, to create the conditions for positive social change.*

## ABOUT DIALOGUE 2

Highlighting the importance of digital media and the shift to online communication in facilitating or threatening intercultural dialogue, the impact of digital tools is discussed in light of three main pillars.

Dialogue 2 focuses on the need for regulation while guaranteeing freedom of speech online. It also points out the power of algorithms, the importance of education and media literacy, and the use of digital tools like storytelling as tools for inclusion.

The results from the latest ALF-IPSOS Intercultural Trends Survey 2020 show that people in the Euro-Med have grown increasingly interested in knowing about the cultural, political, and economic life on the other side of the Mediterranean. 68% of the SEM population look to social media and online media as the most trusted sources of information as well as cross-cultural interaction. Around 90% of EuroMed people believe that digital tools can aid in the promotion of intercultural dialogues, and 77% consider that the cultural barriers are less present online in contrast to face-to-face encounters.



*Eleonora Insalaco*  
**Head of Operations &  
Intercultural Research at ALF**

The EU's new agenda for the Mediterranean this year calls for more democracy and intercultural integration. Human development will be a main goal behind the cooperation with Mediterranean countries along with promoting diversity. The role of social media is central since it could aid in this mission, strengthening links among people across the world and creating an environment for learning and understanding.



**Vesna LONCARIC**  
*EU Vice President*  
*Commissioner for Democracy and*  
*Demography*

## Pillar ①: OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS OF ONLINE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

How has the digital sphere been useful in fostering inclusivity? How has it been limiting?

### Policy change in Tunisia due to a youth led YouTube channel



Michael Bush  
Society and Education  
British Council  
UK

The digital sphere can have some positive impact. From the angle of digital media representation, *the media gives the chance for otherwise unheard voices to find an outlet through digital tools*. Panelist Michael Bush referred to work that was done with civil society organisations in Tunisia to develop their YouTube channel, which grew to have 220,000 subscribers. The channel is for youth voices and representation, and it was created as a response to Tunisian media which misrepresented the youth and portrayed them in stereotypical ways. *It led to policy change in the country.*

### Algorithms as a threat to intercultural exchange



Sid El-Morhi  
Digital Communication Consultant  
Algeria

*The digital sphere has been helpful in allowing marginalised communities to share their thoughts and concerns and connect with the world, but this does not remain unaccompanied by threats. Algorithms are controlling what users of social media say and limits how far they can go, ultimately compromising the quality of intercultural dialogue.* Panelist Sid El-Morhi pointed to the fact that some content creators were

being censored or banned from certain platforms for speaking out. He expressed his concern and worry about **private businesses having the authority to censor people and dictate what hate speech was**. However, this 'new' language and these algorithms do play a role in *bridging gaps where more individuals have more access to more perspectives from across the region and internationally.*

### The media as a tool for representation and the need for regulation



Nadia Henni- Moulai  
Journalist  
France

*Social networks have been beneficial in allowing marginalised people to air their grievances. The digital world has brought some equilibrium with the participation and representation of diverse groups and people, showing that not just one type of people exists.* Ms. Nadia Henni- Moulai demonstrated that In France, for instance, only 16% of people who were visible on

the screen were not white, and only 0.7% of screen actors were persons with reduced mobility. *This was partly remedied by social media.* She recommended finding this point of equilibrium where social media can have a beneficial impact for the representation of cultural diversity as long as certain regulations were set.

Panelist Lurdes Vidal Bertran **also added that during** the pandemic the problem **was too much information** rather than too little, and that **hate speech was directly related to fake news, which meant the problem would be exacerbated.**



Lurdes Vidal Bertran  
IEMed  
Spain

To find an equilibrium point between regulation and freedom of speech in order to simultaneously preserve freedom of expression of the digital media user while minimising the threats of hate speech.

## Pillar ②: EDUCATION IN MEDIA LITERACY

How can we empower youth with media literacy and counter hate speech through preventative measures? Can all communities have equal access to digital media?

Media literacy as an effective way to counter fake news



Viktória Mihalkó  
Anthropolis Association  
Hungary

The speed of communication and the shortening of the message due to digitalisation is a problem in itself. Although digital media is swift and efficient, it does not actually provide a space for traditional cultural dialogue; a great chunk of the information is missing which allows for misinterpretation and fake news. Speed also makes intervention harder, as once the message is out, it cannot be taken back. Ms. Viktória Mihalkó instead suggested *prevention through education rather than intervention*.

Media literacy: how the medium shapes the message, algorithms, and echo chambers

Media literacy involves critical thinking and the study of texts and their sources. It also involves the understanding of how algorithms work and not studying media literacy in an academic sense. For Panelist Michael Bush, the latter is likely to be ineffective, as it distances the user from the text itself, while in reality, *users are actively involved in the media and need to be able to think critically from their position as active users*.



Michael Bush  
Society and Education  
British Council  
UK

Marshall McLuhan's notion of "medium is the message," is important to understand, as **the medium shapes the content**. *It must be a priority to teach users how to use a platform in a more constructive and efficient way.*



Sid El-Morhi  
Digital Communication Consultant  
Algeria

There appears to be a normalisation of certain hate narratives due to algorithms and echo chambers. This is worrying, as users are shown what they like to hear rather than being privy to different perspectives. Panelist Lurdes Vidal suggested **teaching children about algorithms and telling them exactly how these work to keep them connected rather than informed**.



Lurdes Vidal Bertran  
IEMed  
Spain



## RECOMMENDATION 2

**To educate the youth in media literacy and empower them**, raising their awareness about algorithms, echo chambers and critical thinking methods in order to focus on prevention rather than intervention.

### Digital literacy across socioeconomic divides

**Not everyone has equal access to digital technologies.** In light of socioeconomic equality, panelist Nadia Henni- Moulai called to action by proposing *the launching of a working group which would investigate means for advancing the digital world in terms of opportunities and social equality.*



*Nadia Henni- Moulai*  
Journalist  
France

It is doubtful that digital technology democracy is achievable since it is creating more gaps between communities who can connect to social media and those who cannot, as well as between those who can filter information and others who cannot.



*Lurdes Vidal Bertran*  
IEMed  
Spain

There is a need to ensure access to digital equipment and build the environment needed to cultivate digital literacy, since even if communities do not have direct access to the digital media, the digital world is still around them. Teaching users how work with texts more than digital equipment is also essential. Panelist Ms. Viktória Mihalkó pointed out that the gap in learning ability between young people and older people is much larger than that between marginalised groups and majorities, so education across the youth of all socioeconomic context is possible.



*Viktória Mihalkó*  
Anthropolis Association  
Hungary

## RECOMMENDATION 3

**To equip all communities regardless of their socioeconomic context with digital literacy** by providing access to digital media and helping them understand the digital world.

### Storytelling and moviemaking as preventative measures against hate speech

*At Anthropolis in Hungary*, the global citizenship education method is being utilised to empower the youth to develop relationships with the larger world and other cultures. Their digital storytelling campaign, in which they gather personal experiences from all around the world and uses digital storytelling to construct a message about human rights and appropriateness has been a beneficial approach. The short videos are shared with the public in the digital sphere, facilitating the creation of a safe environment, while still sharing information and personal ideas on controversial issues



*Viktória Mihalkó*  
Anthropolis Association  
Hungary

A project was developed during the pandemic by the British Council under their education and society programmes. Through a collaboration between a UK organisation and a Tunisian organisation, thirty-eight film makers worked together virtually for twelve weeks to produce a movie. The movie tackled the story of one man from Tunisia and a young woman from London who connect through art and creativity. The audience is invited to see that despite cultural and socioeconomic differences, everyone had the same struggles, emotions, and values.



### Reaching a wider audience

Two points need to be taken into account: first, the possibility that young people mostly use the media for entertainment. Ms. Lurdes Vidal pointed out that interculturality should be linked to entertainment and the content should be curated in a way that fits youth interests.

Second, repeating oneself should be avoided, as we may be preaching about interculturality to people who are already convinced of it. Therefore, the use of technology and creative formats should target and attract users who might not be compelled by the ideas of interculturality otherwise.



#### RECOMMENDATION 4

**To use creative tools and means like storytelling and moviemaking** in order to combat discrimination and hate speech effectively while reaching a wider audience.

## Pillar ③: ONLINE INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE VS. FACE TO FACE INTERACTION

Can the digital sphere be a replacement for in person discussions?  
How can the quality of intercultural dialogue be maintained?

### Preserving mobility and the importance of in-person discussions

The European Commission has worked on the codes of conduct, which they had some companies sign, emphasising the importance of working together. But that might not be all that there is to be done. Ms. Lurdes Vidal went further in pressing the need to encourage mobility and allow people to meet face to face, as online intercultural exchange cannot be a replacement for real life interaction.



Cultural exchange cannot only happen within the digital world. Rather, people need to speak face to face rather than from behind the screen. That is the only way to capture nuances and see what is really happening in the real world. Similarly, politicians cannot hold discussions on twitter. Ms. Nadia Henni- Moulai highlighted that digital media needs to complement rather than replace face-to-face dialogues.



*Nadia Henni- Moulai*  
**Journalist**  
France

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

**To facilitate face-to-face discussions** in order to experience the nuances of real-life communication.

#### The quality of the space suitable for intercultural dialogue



*Michael Bush*  
**Society and Education**  
British Council  
UK

Intercultural exchange cannot include the same fast pace that characterises the most common digital platforms; therefore, it requires some form of third space where intercultural dialogue could take place safely. Using media literacy for raising awareness and addressing concerns may result in an echo chamber effect, so practitioners of intercultural exchange must think about the quality of the space they are creating. Mr. Michael Bush expressed his interest in taking

forward the questions of how to bridge cultural divides between fragmented or polarised communities; how the online space influences offline space; how to develop content, programming, and initiatives which would provide inclusive third spaces where the intercultural exchange could take place. He suggested mapping the impact of intercultural exchange with machine learning tools that could be applied on publicly available online data to develop a theory of change.

*The Anna Lindh Foundation* subscribes to the proposals that have been made. A clearer picture has been formed of the direction forward, establishing the need for education with the focus on youth and media literacy. Alternative spaces for intercultural dialogue must be created outside the digital sphere, and with the application of creative methodologies and non-formal learning approaches, hate speech can be combated by creating positive content, putting it out there and multiplying the voices, the opinions and the formats rather than limiting them.



*Eleonora Insalaco*  
**Head of Operations &**  
**Intercultural Research at ALF**

Dialogue is key, and misinformation affects everyone. Racism, online and offline, will not solve any crisis; humanity and solidarity will.



*Vesna LONCARIC*  
**EU Vice President**  
**Commissioner for Democracy and**  
**Demography**

#### RECOMMENDATION 6

**To work on developing initiatives to provide inclusive third spaces where intercultural exchange could take place.**