



MESSAGE FROM MR JACQUES CHIRAC PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC
FOR THE OPENING OF THE MEDITERRANEAN MEETING IN MARSEILLES

17 May 2004

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the opening of your symposium, it is my special pleasure to wish you a very warm and friendly welcome.

I would have liked to be there with you, to tell you in person the importance I attach to your meeting. I suggested it at the Johannesburg Summit in September 2002, because it seemed beneficial for the future of the Mediterranean to have representatives of civil society from all the countries bordering its shores meet and discuss their aspirations freely, with a view to fostering the emergence of a common vision.

I would like to thank each of you - who are all eminent, dedicated figures in your respective fields - for coming to contribute to this forum.

What better place than Marseilles for this meeting? With its history dating back to high antiquity, and its highly dynamic present, it is a symbol of Mediterranean identity. It is fitting that, imbued with the cosmopolitan spirit of this exceptional city, you will be discussing the future of the region there. I hope that your work will inspire the next Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy, for which the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Blue Plan have paved the way.

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Your meeting comes at a critical time for the Mediterranean.

Violence is raging, particularly between Israel and the Palestinians, whereas a few years ago, peace seemed within reach. This violence is not only a daily tragedy for its victims; not only a denial of rights for those that it prevents from living in safety in a recognised State with borders guaranteed by international law. It fuels frustration and hatred. It is used as a pretext for terrorism. And every day it widens the gulf between peoples.

Everyone knows that peace necessitates a return to negotiation and simple gestures of courage, confidence and generosity from both sides. Europe must use all its influence to speak to the protagonists in a language of firmness and openness, so that they end a conflict that we can no longer allow to jeopardise



our future.

I am aware that each and every one of you is obsessed by this tragedy that today seems insoluble. I am convinced that, as the men and women of good will that you are, you will try to overcome the temptation of pessimism, anger or resentment, and address together the common challenges of the Mediterranean area.

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Because there are other concerns, perhaps less obvious, but no less worrying.

Who can resign themselves to a Mediterranean in which the North enjoys a high standard of living, innovation and growth and the South is characterised by a certain lethargy?

Who can remain indifferent to the millions of young people whose fundamental needs - such as education, training and employment - are denied?

Who can accept that the ecological heritage of this magnificent sea is depleted and threatened by exponential urban growth, unregulated tourism, aggressive fishing and uncontrolled pollution?

Who can subscribe to the caricature of our relations through the bogey of the clash of civilisations, which simplistically views Islam and the Christian world as antagonists, when in fact the history of our region is as much about our exchanges, our mutual borrowings and our dialogue as about our ancient conflicts?

The import of your discussions is immense. The Mediterranean Basin, a world at once open and closed, united and divided, is so loaded with history, civilisation and culture that it seems to form a kaleidoscope of human experience. It is our responsibility to imagine a common future for the region, a civilisation project for the 21st century. It is our responsibility to nurture genuine dialogue between cultures and forge new relations between North and South. That was the ambition of the Barcelona Process, which we must urgently revive.

With enlargement to Malta, Cyprus and Slovenia, the European Union has confirmed its Mediterranean calling. While Turkey's determination to respect the founding principles of the Union, and the Union's response to that effort, will in the next few years be one of the surest indicators of the progress we achieve.

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In these times when difficult issues have become acute, Europe must confirm its commitment to supporting the reforms that the Mediterranean countries wish to carry out.



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Reform is vital to free up potential that is all too often stifled. It must be underpinned by an ambition to modernise, by the qualities that are the driving force of any society: a taste for innovation and an individual and collective aspiration to progress, happiness, respect and freedom. It must take a chance on openness and confidence in human nature, because identities wither when they retreat into intolerance, fanaticism and rejection of others.

But reform cannot be imposed from the outside, even less by force. It cannot be the turnkey import of a foreign model. It must be impelled by the energy of each people and country, and receive the determined support of others, as partners and friends. That is how France and the European Union see the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

It is an economic partnership, enabling each country to benefit from the openness that will be generated by the creation of a free-trade area, and through which a common zone of initiative and dynamism will offer each person a chance of greater prosperity.

It is a partnership for the environment, through which we can pool our responses to the dilemmas of sustainable development, so critical in our region of fragile and endangered ecological balances.

It is a partnership for people, which will seek to provide every person with education, healthcare, decent housing and access to culture. And to achieve in every place the universal aspiration to freedom, respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

With globalisation, which is shrinking distances and increasing exchanges, our horizons are broadening and our identities becoming multiple. Let us choose the dream of a new identity, a new Mediterranean citizenship. Let us succeed in building bridges between our peoples to link our cities, our countries and our businesses from one side of the Mediterranean to the other.

We share this sea with its intense light and stunning shores.

We share the origin of civilisation, that intuition that appeared in Egypt and spread, diversified and flourished over the centuries in so many peoples of high culture and inestimable heritage.

We have received the great humanistic legacy of the religions of the Book and share the conviction that dialogue between equals, exchange of ideas and respect for others must inspire our relations and translate into acts.

We are among the first inventors of Democracy, civic life and an art of living based on harmony between man and the environment as well as on a will to



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overcome sometimes-hostile nature.

That may be the substance of your proceedings. If you succeed in developing an understanding, a lasting bond, a political will to assert an identity to the world and a project for our time, that will demonstrate that the Mediterranean remains the cradle of civilisation and humanism; and that, in the 21st century, it can be one of the poles of human progress around which globalisation can be organised.

Thank you. |