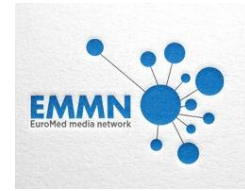


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Leadership gets an apprenticeship

Is there a crisis in leadership in the modern world or is it, as the cynics say, that we end up with the leaders we deserve? Perhaps we might produce the leaders we actually need with more effort of the sort on show in Malta recently.

We expect a lot these days of the world's leaders – in governments, in business or in society – but perhaps we should ask whether simply expecting is enough. Should we be doing something to shape the skills that leadership need? If so, how do we go about it? One option is to take a group of young people who might well feature as the leaders of tomorrow and expose them, today, to working at the highest levels with those already in the job.

This was the model chosen when 20 selected participants from countries south and north of the Mediterranean recently spent a week in the company of politicians, diplomats, academics and media professionals in Malta. The context was the first New Leadership Seminar in the Anna Lindh Foundation's Young Mediterranean Voices programme ⁽¹⁾. Hosted by the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies ⁽²⁾, the seminar offered proof that there is sufficient talent among today's young people to meet the challenges of tomorrow. It also generated calls for the young to feature straight away.

Good leadership

The programme for the week-long event took in a wide range of activities seen as crucial to good performance in a leadership role:

- training in leadership skills
- working together to address key topical challenges
- learning how to work with the media to positive effect
- understanding what it takes to reach policy makers
- practising advocacy with political figures past and present

The 20 young people involved, initially strangers to each other, had to learn to work together in different policy areas and then to work as a team in getting their ideas heard and understood by seasoned practitioners in relevant areas. Face-to-face contact with some of the most influential figures in the region reached its culmination in an address by two members of the team to foreign ministers at the January meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue on the Western Mediterranean ⁽³⁾. And despite the permutations of nationalities, ages and professions assembled for the exercise, there was cohesion in the messages it produced.

Participant Manal Benani from Algeria, addressing the ministerial meeting, made a plea for greater youth involvement in policy-making:

Youth represents about 60% of the population of the region, yet their presence in the process of decision making is almost zero. We want to be involved in designing, implementing and monitoring policies related to our areas of concern.

His words were echoed by Malta's Foreign Minister, Carmelo Abela, and broadcaster Stephen Cole, who both said planning for what young people will do tomorrow is a waste of time when they have so much to offer today. And the evidence from the meetings of participants with distinguished figures such as the Acting President of Malta, Dolores Cristina, European Commission HRVP, Federica Mogherini, and the

ministers of the 5+5 Dialogue, was that the young have ideas, opinions and proposals that should not be ignored.

Shaping narratives

The day participants spent in the company of senior journalists from north and south also proved that they understand the need to shape their ideas and narratives in such a way that sympathetic interests will be keen to work with them in delivering the type of future they want. They heard from the journalists themselves what makes good news stories and how different media aim for different approaches in the way they present news. They spent time working with the journalists on topics they had selected for news coverage, finding ways to shape their stories so that they appealed both to the specific needs of the different media and to their various audiences.

A day reaching out to policy makers followed a similar pattern but started with breakfast meetings and an informal conversation with the former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, examining how youth networks can translate and present their ideas. As the week continued there were further discussions on advocacy and opportunities to interact with current political figures at the Parliament in Malta and at the 5+5 Dialogue

This mix of information, discussion, mentoring and personal involvement was at the heart of the week's exercises. It demanded much of the participants but they delivered in quantity and quality. Those politicians, academics and media professionals who were part of the process were united in their admiration for the skills and application demonstrated during their joint work and keen to see more involvement of the young in tackling key issues in the region.

A week is supposedly a long time in politics but is not really enough to insert a new group into the policy-making framework of a region as complex in its needs as the Mediterranean. It was, though, long enough to show that policy-makers ignore the young at their peril, because quality of the sort demonstrated in Malta will not sit back quietly and wait to be told when it can have a go. And with other events in the ALF/YMV series, with yet more keen and talented young people involved, coming up through the year, this is a message that will be repeated often and loud.

⁽¹⁾ Participants for the Young Mediterranean Voices New Leadership Seminar in Malta underwent a rigorous process of application (CV and motivation video) before a final selection was made by the programme partners (Anna Lindh Foundation, British Council, Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies and Club de Madrid). Criteria for selection included prior interest and participation in advocacy at regional level and capacity to offer outreach to communities following the exercise.

For more information on the event and participants go to the Anna Lindh Foundation at www.annalindhfoundation.org/young-mediterranean-voices-0 or the Facebook page at

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/YoungMediterraneanVoices/>

⁽²⁾ <https://www.um.edu.mt/medac>

⁽³⁾ <http://westmediterraneanforum.org/about-the-55-dialogue/>

SEMINAR EXTRACTS

Learning leadership – it's a team thing!

Day 1 of the New Leadership Seminar showed that being a leader is no solitary job. It stressed the need for skills in building trust and developing relationships, a theme that was to recur throughout the week. Participants were shown how to focus on self-awareness in their discussions with others as part of the

process of understanding how alternative perceptions and ideas come to be. With guidance from the experts of Common Purpose ⁽¹⁾, they investigated the different aspects of cultural intelligence and ways of building dialogue when dealing with those with different views.

They then visited different organisations for discussions with diverse stakeholders, where cultural intelligence was necessary to ensuring positive discussions. Back at the seminar base they shared these experiences and reported on their findings. The key message from this teamwork in leadership training was that a leader operating in isolation from others is not an effective leader. Having the ability to understand and adapt to cross-cultural differences, and to use this in building strategy, demands far more than simple social skills and respect for other cultures. It is, though, a skill that can – and should - be taught, and it is one that needs practice.

⁽¹⁾ For more on this from Common Purpose see <https://commonpurpose.org/>

Working with media – where’s the trust, where’s the support?

In the time of fake news and increasing reliance on social media, no training with media professionals can escape a degree of self-justification. Veteran broadcaster Stephen Cole (ex BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English) began Day 2 of the seminar with his view of why quality mainstream media, with their insistence on independence and impartiality, still have a valuable role to play in holding the powerful to account and ensuring democratic functioning through rigorous reporting. This was a theme echoed by a panel of seasoned journalists from across the media and across the region as they explained to participants how they sourced stories and what makes good news input, editorial background and visual programming.

It was then the turn of the participants to become journalists, taking selected topics and shaping stories in a way that they felt would attract the interest – and possible support – of the professionals in the room. At the end of the day the journalists in the exercise set the participants the challenge of supporting quality, independent journalism as they developed their professional lives, pointing out that anyone who thinks professional media have a role to play in tomorrow’s world needs to help make sure they are still around to do it.

For more on this and detail of journalists with interest in the EuroMed region see the EuroMed Media Network (<https://www.euromed.media/>), an organisation supported by the Global Thinkers Forum (<http://www.globalthinkersforum.org/>).

Policy making and advocacy – who talks, who listens?

The view of politicians as those who do the talking while everyone else listens was turned on its head on Day 3 of the New Leadership Seminar. Maltese and international political figures made themselves available for discussions on issues selected by the participants, including youth participation in democratic life, migration, media responsibility for truth and accuracy, the easy movement of people in the Mediterranean, and environmental protection.

The focus was on advocacy, with the policy-makers explaining how best to get ideas and proposals to them in appropriate ways. Through the day, key political contributors to policy-making in the region, plus experts in specific policy areas, listened to what participants had to tell them and offered guidance on how to be more effective in doing so.

The process continued the following day with a visit to the Maltese Parliament, where participants met the Speaker of the House of Representatives. More close conversations with policy-makers on selected participant proposals then led to presentation of two of the proposals to ministers at the 5+5 Dialogue on the Western Mediterranean. This was practising advocacy at the highest level, meeting the challenge of demonstrating the value of including young people in such discussions and generally impressing the politicians with the mix of passion and reasoning underpinning the propositions. If one message from these exercises was that policy-makers are willing to listen, another was that the young are definitely worth being heard.

For a view of the events from the perspective of the Malta Ministry of Foreign Affairs see

<https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2019/January/19/pr190097.aspx>

Support in high places

The depth and strength of the support for this exercise in leadership training can readily be judged by those who took part. Among the high profile speakers, panel members and others who met and talked with participants were:

- Acting President of Malta Dolores Cristina
- European Commission HRVP Federica Mogherini
- Foreign Minister of Malta Carmelo Abela
- Minister of Education of Malta Evarist Bartolo
- Speaker of the House of Representatives Anglu Farrugia
- Former Prime Minister of Greece George Papandreou
- Former Foreign Minister of Malta George Vella
- Head of the European Commission Representation in Malta Elena Grech
- Anna Lindh President, Elizabeth Guigou, and Executive Director, Nabil Al-Sharif
- Representatives of the states in the 5+5 Dialogue (Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia)
- MEDAC director Stephen Calleya
- Prominent international journalists Stephen Cole, Naomi Watts, Paul Gillespie, Shahira Amin and Saad Hattar
- Representatives of the UNHCR, Council of Europe, the World Bank Group

In their own words

As well as non-stop conversations between the New Leadership Seminar participants and major political and cultural figures, the week in Malta produced many comments on the value of such exercises and what they offer for the future. Here is a selection.

“The young people involved in the Young Med Voices are a source of inspiration. We are already transforming their ideas into practice ... We are determined to continue to work together to make their aspirations and their proposals reality.”

European Commission HRVP Federica Mogherini

“Youth is half the present and all the future. We should invest in youth leaders, not for tomorrow, but today.”

Foreign Minister of Malta Carmelo Abela

“It is essential that we listen to young people. We need to transform the Mediterranean into a sea of prosperity and sharing, and youth must be at the centre of this”.

Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, co-chair of the 5+5 Dialogue Ministerial

“You are setting an important precedent today: Young women and men from both shores of the Mediterranean - acting, leading, speaking truth to power, and bringing concrete actions to help shape a more peaceful and secure common future”.

Anna Lindh President, Elizabeth Guigou, addressing the 5+5 dialogue meeting

“Youth represents about 60% of the population of the region, yet their presence in the process of decision making is almost zero. We want to be involved in designing, implementing and monitoring policies related to our areas of concern.”

New Leadership Seminar participant Manal Benani, Algeria, speaking at the 5+5 dialogue meeting

“We need to work together to support young people’s meaningful economic inclusion and advance the development of youth-centred employment programmes. This also means creating safe community spaces for youth-led dialogues that can engage young people in an assessment of their economic needs at the local level, and help design and monitor those employment programmes”.

New Leadership Seminar participant Carmen Cuenca del Olmo, Spain, speaking at the 5+5 dialogue meeting

“The key message I took away is hope! Hope for the future if these leaders of tomorrow make it to the top of their chosen professions.”

Stephen Cole, broadcaster, New Leadership Seminar participants

“The delegates expressed themselves powerfully when they spoke personally about their own experiences. I was delighted by their commitment to education and the environment and impressed by their focus, stamina and passion.”

Naomi Goldsmith, journalist and media trainer, on working with the New Leadership Seminar participants

“Inspiring!”

Shahira Amin, Egyptian journalist, on working with the New Leadership Seminar participants

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