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**Central-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean  
Region: Similarities and Differences**

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## CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION:SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

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BACKGROUND

### *EUROPE*

Europe, the second smallest continent in the world after Australia, represents one fifth of the Eurasian landmass, which is made primarily of Asia. On a north-south axis, Europe extends from Cape Nordkinn, in Norway, to Punta de Tarifa, in southern Spain on the Mediterranean Sea and on a west-east axis, from Cabo da Rossa, in Portugal, to the northeastern slopes of the Urals, in Russia<sup>1</sup>. For modern geographers, the actual boundary between Europe proper and Asia is former by the natural barriers of such mountains as the Urals and the Caucasus, as well as, the waters of the Ural River and part of the Caspian Sea<sup>2</sup>.

Europe is situated in an area of about 10,525,000 sq km (4,065,000 sq km mi) and has a population of 685 million, second largest population of all seven continents of the world, according to the estimates of 1988<sup>3</sup>

Geographically speaking, Europe is commonly divided into the following regions: Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe. Although, maybe, these divisions were initially meant for purely geographic purposes, yet with time, they acquired political, cultural and economic connotations. Indeed, in the aftermath of World War II in 1945, Europe was divided in two ideologically-opposed blocs: Eastern Europe, which fell in the hands of Soviet-sponsored dictators and Western Europe, which was saved from economic ruin by the Marshall Plan, engineering by U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall in order to speed European recovery<sup>4</sup>. But as the recovery materialized, the influence of the United States over Western European democracies grew stronger and this, ultimately, led to the creation of the North Atlantic Organization (NATO) in 1949, which put the destiny of Western Europe in the hands of the Americans. In Eastern Europe, the creation of NATO was matched by the Soviet-imposed military alliance referred to as: The Warsaw pact, in 1955. However, even fellow communists such as Josip Broz Tito, who was not convinced by the Soviet brand of communism, broke

away from the fold in 1948 and chose a distinct Yugoslav way, which led later to the creation of the Non-Alignment Movement sponsored by the Egyptian President Nasser, the Indian Prime Minister Nehru alongside the Yugoslav leader in 1953.

On the death of Staline in 1953, Eastern European virulent nationalism, which was thought to be crushed, for ever, by communist ideology, suddenly resurrected when the East Germans rioted that same year. In 1956, the Hungarians took over and challenged the soviet rule, to no avail. And in 1968, it was the turn of the Czech to challenge Soviet supremacy; it all started when their communist leader Alexander Dubcek embarked on a much-acclaimed liberisation, which became known as the Prague Spring<sup>5</sup>. This attempt towards independence from the mighty Soviet grip was yet again crushed by the Soviet military force, with troops from the Warsaw Pact countries

On the Western European side, though the Americans treated the Europeans as partners in the framework of the Atlantic alliance, yet notorious politicians voiced their concern at America's growing influence in the region. This attitude was expressed, in no doubtful words, by General Charles de Gaulle, who was elected president of France's Fifth Republic in 1958. Faithful to his principles, on his election de Gaulle ceased all military collaboration with NATO, refused to concede military bases to the Americans and embarked on an ambitious programme for the development of France's nuclear deterrent known as: *La Force de Frappe*.

De Gaulle envisioned an independent and powerful Europe extending from the Atlantic to the Urals and was favorable for the creation of a loose federation of independent states: *L'Europe des Patries*. Though many Europeans did not share his vision in its totality, yet they agreed with him on the principle of the European Union. In 1952, as a result, the European Coal and Steel Community (ESCS) was established by France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries with the intention of providing a unified market for the coal and steel products of its members<sup>6</sup>. This was followed by the creation of many specialized bodies<sup>7</sup>. The ESCS gradually evolved into the European Economic Community (EEC)<sup>8</sup> in 1957, its founding treaty provides for the establishment of a customs union and the formation of a common commercial policy over a 12-year period. Member states were required to do away with trade restrictions and tariff barriers, to set up a uniform tariff system for imports, to secure free movement of capital and labor and to standardise wage rates and social security system. Years later, the membership of the EEC doubled with the arrival of Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain and Portugal and, such as, the EEC became known, officially, as the European Union on January 1, 1993. In May, Norway, Finland, Sweden and Austria were endorsed for membership.

As early as the beginning of the 1980s, trade unions and political and social movements started to challenge, quite efficiently, Soviet rule in Eastern Europe. Indeed, in 1980, the Polish labor federation Solidarnosc (Solidarity) called on the government to organize a referendum on communism, the latter, under pressure from the Soviet government, outlawed Solidarnosc and imposed martial law. But, these extreme measures only contributed, in a way, to the downfall of communism in most of Eastern Europe, as economic conditions were deteriorating rapidly and communists were unable to come up with the right economic solutions, to improve people's lives.

With the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev to power, in the USSR, in 1985<sup>9</sup>, he embarked on an unprecedented programme of political and economic reform known as **Perestroika** (reorganisation) in total **Glasnost** (transparency). He negotiated with the Americans the reduction of nuclear arsenals encouraged economic cooperation, respected human rights and indirectly encouraged the nascent nationalist movements in the Soviet Empire. Thus, the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were first to break away from the union and the rest of the republics followed suit, in a domino effect manner. In 1991, the USSR recognized their independence and officially ceased to exist<sup>10</sup>.

Emboldened by this fact, the Central and Eastern European nations got rid of their dictators and communist regimes. In 1989, the Wall of Berlin was torn down and the two Germanies were reunited the following year. Following suit, countries like Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria repudiated communism and organized free elections.

The tide of change that swept through the communist world, exacerbated yet again nationalism and brought to attention, once more, the problem of borders. If Czechoslovakia, which was created in 1945, accepted peacefully to divide into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Yugoslavia, on the other hand, plunged headlong into civil war, as the result, of the break up of the federation. Indeed, by April 1992 four of the six members of Federal Yugoslavia declared their independence i.e. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina while the remaining two: Serbia and Montenegro united and called themselves: "The new Yugoslavia", before waging war on the breakaway republics: first Slovenia, then Croatia and later on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serb onslaught on Bosnia and Herzegovina, turned out to be the most dramatic episode of the disintegration of Federal Yugoslavia, for Europe and the rest of the world. The Serbs, far superior in number and weapons proceeded to the systematic annihilation of the Bosnians, who are in their majority Muslims, by such methods as "ethnic cleansing" or by putting their enclaved cities under siege. Unable to find a suitable solution to this dirty war, the European looked towards

the Americans for help. The latter, after bearing tremendous pressure on The New Yugoslavia succeeded in bringing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table in Dayton, USA, and a peace agreement was reached in 1995.

### *The Mediterranean Region*

The Mediterranean Region is the geographical area comprising the Mediterranean Sea proper and the various countries that surround it. The Mediterranean Sea is the largest inland sea in the world and it is surrounded by three major continents mainly: Africa to the south, Asia to the East and Europe to the North. The Mediterranean Sea occupies a total area of about 2,510,000sq km (969,000 sq mi) and its maximum length is 3860 km (2400 mi), whereas its maximum width is 1600 km (1000 mi), as for its greatest depth it is valued at 1500 m (16,896 ft). It is linked to the Atlantic Ocean by the Strait of Gibraltar, to the Red Sea by the Suez Canal and to the Black Sea by the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Strait of Bosphorus<sup>11</sup>.

The Mediterranean region is known to be the birth place of many great civilizations and religions and that is why it is often referred to as “the cradle of civilisation” by historians, but it was, also, a place of contact and clash between various cultures and empires.

Some of the early great civilizations came to life and prospered in the Mediterranean area:

*C'est autour de la Mediterranee que se developperent et s'epanouirent les civilisations de l'antiquite classique grecque et romaine. Platon comparait les civilisations les hommes a "des fourmis ou des grenouilles autour d'un etang". Quand on s'eloignait des rives de la mer interieure, on entrait dans les pays hostile des Barbares. Pourtant, les premieres peuples civilizes qui prospererent pres de ses ravages ne se soucierent pas de la Mediterranee: les Mesopotamiens et les Egyptiens furent les terriens pour qui la mer n'etait qu'une limite a leurs territoires ou a leurs enterprises. Cepentant, des le III e et II e millenaires, les peuples marins de la Phenicie et du monde egeen frayerent la voie. Au premier millenaire avant notre ere, la Mediterranee devint l'axe du monde antique, grace aux Pheniciens et aux Carthaginois, et surtout grace aux Grecs. Rome recueillit ensuite cet heritage et, en groupant sous son autopite toutes les rives de la mere interieure, elle porta a son achievement cette tendance a l'unite mediterrannee que les Grecs avaient developpee. La rupture de cette unite, lors des invasions barbares, fut l'une des composantes essentielles de la fin du monde antique<sup>12</sup>.*

The civilizations that thrived in the area included, the Egyptians in the Nile valley around 3000 BC, the Aegeans in Greece and Crete from

2000 BC, the Hittites in Anatolia from 1900 to 2000 BC. Then, came to prominence the civilizations of maritime trading nations like the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, who roamed the Mediterranean Sea setting up trading posts<sup>13</sup> for the exchange of goods and skills. Between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the whole of the Mediterranean Sea became an integral part of the Roman Empire. They called the Mediterranean Sea: **mare nostrum**, "our sea", in Latin. Vestiges of their civilization are still present, today, in many countries of the area: Morocco(Volubilis, Lixus etc...), Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and many countries of Europe. The Roman civilization left, also, permanent influence on Tamazight (Berber), the local language of North Africa, as illustrated by the following examples<sup>14</sup>:

| Tamazight      |   | Latin  | Gloss          |
|----------------|---|--------|----------------|
| Firas          | < | pirus  | "pears"        |
| Fugus          | < | pullus | "chick"        |
| Asnus          | < | asinus | "small donkey" |
| Otan           | < | hortus | "orchard"      |
| Furu/firu/filu | < | filum  | "thread"       |

*Until the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD, the Mediterranean Sea enjoyed peace and stability and much maritime trade and exchange of goods and ideas took place between the different peoples of the area:*

*L'époque imperiale vit, a coup sur, l'apogée de la vie maritime dans la Méditerranée antique, en ce qui concerne l'intensité du trafic, le nombre des navires et des passagers, le volume des marchandises. L'unification politique du monde méditerranéen sous l'égide de Rome et la paix qui en résultait pour tous les pays riverains donnèrent à la circulation des personnes et des biens une liberté, une facilité, et une sécurité jamais connues auparavant<sup>15</sup>.*

By the 7<sup>th</sup> century, while the Germans and the Slavs invaded from the north, the Arabs carrying the message of Islam, this newly-revealed religion in **felix Arabia**, swept through the southern Mediterranean Region and compelled the Byzantines to evacuate Palestine in 637 and Alexandria in 642. Encouraged by their military success, the Muslim forces took over Cyprus, conquered Carthage in 698 and later on Spain. By 727, the Muslim attacked Sicily, around the 9<sup>th</sup> century entered southern Italy and by 902 they occupied the Balearic Islands and consequently the Tyrrhenian sea became a Muslim sea. The Mediterranean Sea was almost all under the exclusive control of the Muslims:

Aux IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles, la Méditerranée fut donc presque entièrement tenue par les navigateurs islamisés. Sa fonction

majeure fut d'assurer, par un cabotage dont les étapes principales étaient Almeria, Bougie, Tunis, Palmere, Tripoli, Barka, Alexandrie et les Echelles Levantines, les communications et les échanges sur le versant occidental de l'univers arabe. L'Égypte, ouverte sur l'Afrique et l'Extrême-Orient, constitua désormais la charnière de cette aire de relations très actives. Les navires de Byzance sillonnaient la mer Noire, mais se trouvaient pratiquement cantonnés dans les détroits et dans la mer Égée<sup>16</sup>.

By the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Christian conquest of Spain and Sicily had begun. In the case of Spain, it will take 4 centuries, for it was only completed in 1492 with the fall of the last reigning Muslim dynasty of Banu al-Ahmar of Grenada and the mass expulsion of Muslims toward North Africa. During the same period, powerful city-states such as: Venice, Genoa and Barcelona emerged and played an important political and economic role in the Mediterranean Region and they are even thought to have been instrumental in the advent of the European Renaissance.

With the discovery of a water passage around Africa, the Mediterranean Sea lost in its strategic importance. At the same time, the influence of the Ottomans began to be increasingly felt in the Mediterranean Region. After the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans took control of the eastern Mediterranean Region. Having controlled the straits, they chased the Genoans from the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea and the Venetians from Cyprus, then, they took over Cairo in 1517 and Arabia. Suleiman the Magnificent took hold of Rhodes in 1522 and entered the Balkans and Europe of the Danube: Belgrade fell in 1521, Buda in 1526 and Vienna was subjected to a siege in 1529. The Christian navigation, pushed to the western part of the Mediterranean Sea, came under incessant attacks from the Turkish navy and the Maghrebi pirates such as Khayr ad-Dine known as *Barberousse*, that Suleiman cleverly used to extend his influence and, subsequently, control much of North Africa, with the notable exception of Morocco that preserved its independence from the Ottomans. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman empire began to crack at the seams and its influence to wane gradually, while Austria and Russia, waiting on the sidelines, gained in power and importance:

Rien d'étonnant, dès lors, que, parallèlement aux grands conflits qui embrasent l'Europe occidentale, l'avance de l'Autriche et de la Russie se poursuive contre les Ottomans. Longtemps ennemie de l'Autriche, la France s'emploie avec succès à sauver l'empire du sultan (et y gagne en 1740 le renouvellement des Capitulations, si utile à son commerce). Son alliance avec l'Autriche (1755) affecte

en consequence ses relations avec la Porte, dont l'Angleterre alors se fait la protectrice. Mais la Grande Bretagne ne peut contrecarrer les desseins orientaux de Catherine II de Russie, qui acheve la conquete de la Crimée s'insinue en convoite ouvertement Constantinople. Au cours du conflit de 1770, la tsarina expédie une armada russe qui detruit la flotte turque à Tschesme (Asie Mineure), evenement d'immense portee puisqu'il force le sultan a ouvrir les Detroits aux bateaux de commerce russes. Des lors, les Russes, comme les Anglais, croisent en Mediterranee, agitent les peuples balkaniques au nom de la religion orthodoxe, decretent leur suzerainete sur Raguse, favorisent les orthodoxies des Lieux saints et, pendant la crise ouverte par la Revolution francaise tentent de confisquer l'ordre de Malte et ses iles<sup>17</sup>.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>, France and Britain dominated effectively the Mediterranean Region. The English expressed their influence by occupying Gibraltar in 1704, Malta in 1800, the Ionian Islands in 1809, Cyprus in 1878 and finally Suez in 1882 and, thus, they managed to control all the access routes to the Mediterranean Sea with the exception of the Turkish straits, which the Russians were trying to acquire. While Britain was busy in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Middle East, taking control of some of the territories of the moribund Ottoman Empire, the French were getting a foothold in the Western Mediterranean by chasing the Ottomans from Algeria and occupying it in 1830 and by imposing a protectorate on Tunisia in 1881-1883<sup>18</sup>. However, this territorial bulimia was put on hold by the emergence of a new regional power: Italy. Aware of the danger regional conflicts may have on their interests, especially that the Mediterranean Region's strategic importance has been further enhanced with the opening of the Suez Canal to maritime traffic in 1869, European powers signed various agreements defining the zone of influence of each of them:

- The agreement of 1887 between Great Britain, Italy, Austria and Spain
- The agreement of 1902 between France and Italy and
- The agreement of 1904 between France and Great Britain.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France and Great Britain emerged as the main colonial powers in control of the Mediterranean Region and this was further confirmed by the decision of the League of Nations to entrust them with the administration of some territorial mandates in the Middle East after World War I:

A l'issue de la Premiere Guerre mondiale, la preeminence de ces deux...puissances en Mediterranee se trouve renforcee par les



traites de paix qui leur confient, en accord avec la Société des Nations, d'importants mandats au Proche-Orient à l'heure même où la mise en exploitation des gisements de pétrole de cette région du monde fait de la Méditerranée l'artère vitale de l'Europe en matière de ravitaillement énergétique<sup>19</sup>.

Because of its vital strategic importance for Nazi Germany during World War II, Hitler sought to control parts of the Mediterranean Region by sending the infamous Africa Korps under the command of General Rommel, known as "desert fox", in the North African desert, where he achieved initially some military success before being defeated by the Allies in 1942. Following this war, the Mediterranean Region was to become one of the most important stages of the Cold War between the US and the USSR.

After World War II, the countries of the region gained independence from the colonial powers, but many border and territorial conflicts erupted as the result of bad colonial administration. Notably among these, is the Arab-Israeli conflict, which started in 1948 with the creation of the State of Israel at the expenses of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights. As a result of this injustice, the region was subjected to four wars before the rights of the Palestinians were universally recognized.

## LEVELS OF COMPARISON

### *The areas in question*

The Central-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Region are two big areas that are similar in certain aspects and yet different in many ways, these areas are in turn made up of several sub-regions that have each its own specificity and characteristics

Central-Eastern Europe comprises two sub-regions:

- **Central Europe** which is made of such countries as: Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Yugoslavia.
- **Eastern Europe** which consists of countries like: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, European Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

The Mediterranean Region in turn divides in three distinct sub-regions:

- Northern Mediterranean grouping the following

- **Southern Mediterranean** made up of countries like: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.
- **Eastern Mediterranean** comprising the countries that follow: Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Malta and Cyprus.

Right from the outset, the following observations have to be made about the regions to be compared i. e. Central-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Region:

- Central-Eastern Europe is made up mostly of ex-communist countries and some of the richest and most powerful countries of Europe;
- The predominant faith in the Central-Eastern Europe is the Christian Orthodox religion followed by the Protestant religion.
- The Mediterranean region consists of two distinct sub-regions : a rich north and a poor south and east separated by the sea;
- The Mediterranean Region has face to face two of the most important religions of the book i. e. Christianity and Islam;
- The Northern Mediterranean colonized the Southern Mediterranean, in some cases over a century and used it for a long period as a reservoir for cheap and as a market for its manufactured goods.

It must be brought to attention, that each of the two regions to be compared are undeniably far from being homogeneous, for the simple reason that years after the fall of the Wall of Berlin there continues to be an imaginary iron curtain that separates Western Europe from Eastern Europe, while Islamic culture is set for a clash with European materialism, but not in the Huntington way<sup>20</sup>, for reasons to do primarily with the lack of understanding and the unwillingness to engage in a positive dialogue. Europe has always looked down on the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and has never attempted to treat them as equals. It has always politically preached a north-south dialogue<sup>21</sup>, but never put it into effect for the simple reason that it has no substantial gains in it. It is even suspected that the Euro-Mediterranean Conference that was held in Barcelona on the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1995, was the result of the potential threat that the Islamists posed, in both Algeria and Egypt, to European stability, otherwise how can be explained the inclusion of Morocco, a Southern Mediterranean country, in the Trevi group, an exclusively European security structure.

## WHAT TO COMPARE ?

An important observation to make, is that it is easy to compare the Northern Mediterranean to Central-Eastern Europe, because geographically they belong to the same continent and they share more or less similar values and religious beliefs to a certain extent, however, on the other hand, it is not an easy attempt a comparison between Muslim Mediterranean countries and Central and Eastern countries,, bearing in mind that the Bosnian problem is a living example of the lack of understanding of Islam by this part of Europe.

With this in mind, we will attempt to compare Central-Eastern Europe with the Mediterranean Region in the following areas:

- Culture and traditions;
- Interest in religion;
- Importance of family.

## CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

In spite of their differences, the countries of the Mediterranean Region have over 5000 years of common known history and of togetherness, especially bearing in mind that they have always been sea-faring peoples. Indeed, the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians and the Romans roamed the Mediterranean Sea exchanging goods with the indigenous population and sharing their lives and experiences. The passage of these peoples left permanent traces on the locals's culture and language

(Cf. the **BACKGROUND** section above for specific examples) .

The Mediterranean Sea, far from being a natural obstacle, impeding exchange between the nations of the area, has greatly facilitated their interaction. So, in many ways the Mediterraneans have a specific culture of their centered around the following concepts:

### *Hospitality*

It is a sacred concept for all Mediterraneans and especially in the southern and eastern parts among Arabs, who have elevated it to a religious duty. Indeed, in the Arab folklore there is the much-narrated story of this Arab horseman, Hatim Ta'i, well-known for his sense of generosity, who on receiving one day unexpected guests and because he had no available provisions, fed them his horse. Since then, the Arabic language has the expression: *karam Hatim Ata'i* "Hatim Ata'i's generosity", referring to someone's proverbial generosity and hospitality.

In a country like Morocco, hospitality has a religious significance and any guest is known as **dayf Allah** "God's guest". Foreign travelers, on uttering these two words are immediately given shelter and food, even if their hosts are the poor of the poorest, because it is widely believed that feeding one's guest is **roujoula** that is to say an act of extreme chivalry and bravery.

As for the Berbers of North Africa, hospitality is almost a religion and houses are designed to receive guests and accommodate them as comfortably as possible<sup>22</sup>. The first thing that Berbers offer their guests is sweet mint tea prepared ceremoniously "to sweeten" the nascent relationship and make it grow and last long. In Berber folklore, it is believed that. In the past, there was a peasant, who often lighted a huge fire outside his dwelling with hope to direct travelers to his house for food and shelter. This earned him among his people the nickname of **bou-inawjiwan** "the guest's man"<sup>23</sup>. Hospitality is, also, an attribute of the Northern Mediterraneans and is undeniably part of their tradition and education.

Unlike Mediterraneans, Central and Eastern Europeans are most reserved and less inclined to receive guests in their homes. For them, home is off limits and they often prefer to meet guests and friends alike in bars, restaurants and other public places. Home is considered to be an exclusive space reserved for the family and a retreat from the outside world. That is the reason why bars are a cultural thing among the Germans, Austrians, the Bulgarians, etc. and Eastern Europeans and beer drinking an important social activity. Germans have even beer festivals like the October Fest that is organized annually in the city of Munich.

### ***Openness / warmth***

Generally speaking, Mediterraneans are known for their openness and friendliness. They are easily accessible and are inclined to speak to anyone who would want to speak to them. Among the Mediterraneans Arabs, *ssalim-u 'alaykum* "peace be upon you" is more like an invitation to engage in a conversation, and the specific use of the word "peace" is very symbolic, for it is only in time of peace that people are accessible to each other and are likely to show warmth and friendship.

For the Berber unknown poet, openness is an important quality of being human for the dead do not talk and do not communicate:

***Siwar akithi ayuma wa-ytjji wahthi  
Amu ghanim gi-tsaffan wahthass ja ijthi***

***Siwar sajjahth ayuma, awar thmizith  
Isfaja x-wur tharuh, yazmasen abrith<sup>24</sup>***

*Speak to me brother, do not leave me alone  
Like a reed left whistling for the pebbles*

*Speak loud my brother, words are sweet  
They please heart and soul and widen their horizon*

This quality of openness among the Mediterraneans is reflected on the architecture of their habitations. In fact, they build their houses wit inside gardens and large patios, and this is something that can be found in Morocco, Spain, Italy, Greece, etc... Here again, we find our unknown Berber poet making reference to open sky architectural structures in his rhymed verse:

*Wshas ayuma rmar, wshayid nesh rehna  
Bnas reqsa, bnayid thaddath s-ujenna <sup>25</sup>  
Athxemmagh gha bbi atesrahegh thimenna*

Give him, brother, wealth, give me peace of mind  
Build him a castle, build me a house with an open sky  
I will contemplate the greatness of God and forgo hateful words

Openness is an important prerequisite for hospitality and generosity. Generosity is also synonymous with the acceptance of the other and Mediterraneans have always accepted the other, provided he comes with peaceful intentions, for their history is one of movement, migrations and exchange and the Mediterranean Sea, rather than being an obstacle, has always facilitated contact with the different people, from the early times of Ulysses. Indeed, the Mediterranean Region has produced some of the greatest travelers like Marco Polo (1254?-1324?), a Venetian traveler who accompanied his father and uncle on an expedition to the Far East and managed to become Kublai Khan's favorite and agent, and Ibn Batuta (1304?- 1378?), a native of Tangier, who is more widely traveled than any other medieval man and who has written valuable accounts on the Near and Far East.

Apparently, Shakespeare wrote his play *Othello* in honor of a valiant Moorish military commander he made friends with during his travels and whom he admired greatly for his bravery, generosity and openness to the extent that he would say what follows, through his character Desdemona:

*That I love the Moor to live with him,  
My downright violence, and storm of fortunes,  
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued  
Even to the very quality of my lord.  
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,*

*And to his honors and his valiant parts  
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.  
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,  
A month of peace, and he go to the war,  
The rites for why I love him are bereft me,  
and I a heavy interim shall support  
by this dear absence. Let me go with him<sup>26</sup>.*

Contrary to the Mediterraneans, the Central and Eastern Europeans are by nature more reserved and less likely to make friends with foreigners. In Germany, after the reunification, the so-called socialists of ex-East Germany who, as a result of the change and the readaptation to market economy, found themselves jobless, viciously started blaming this state of affairs on the foreign workers, who have, in their majority, lived and worked in the country for over a quarter of the century. This attitude was responsible for a hate campaign that swept through the whole of Germany and was responsible for many terrorist acts directed at foreigners and all their symbols. After all, in Germany, foreign workers are referred to by the euphemism *foreign guest-workers*, which for many non-Germans means *unwanted but useful foreign workers*.

A similar campaign was initiated in Russia against Foreign students at the famous ex-Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, that was in the heyday of communism the breeding ground for world revolutionaries and freedom fighters, and they were assaulted, abused and terrorized. After all, this is not surprising, for the post-communist Russia produced also ultra-nationalists like Jirovinsky, who just about insulted every possible nationality other than his. His movement was not a marginal phenomenon, for in the first free elections of Russia his rhetoric attracted a substantial vote.

In ex-Yugoslavia this reservedness-cum0hatred for the other was directed by the Serbs towards their own countrymen i. e. Croats and Muslim Bosnians, because they dared defy them, the leading ethnic group in the federation. This *lese majeste*, the Serbs punished by declaring on them the most barbaric war ever waged on any nation, during which they made use, among other things, of "ethnic cleansing" and sheer massacre of civilians, like the massacre of 60 civilians in a market place of Sarajevo by a deliberate shelling of a crowded area.

### ***Body language***

Body language, is an important aspect of the communication process in the Mediterranean Region, for in addition to the verbal language, people often resort to it, as a form of expression on its own, or as an auxiliary to emphasize an idea, present an argument in a forceful manner, express a thought, show a feeling, share an information, talk

about taboo subjects, etc...For Mediterraneans, many thoughts and ideas would not be expressed properly if they are not supplemented by body language.

Greetings are known to be an important social exercise for people around the world, but, whereas they are verbal in many societies yet in the Mediterranean area they are verbal and most importantly non-verbal. Indeed, in this region when people say "good morning" or "good afternoon" this is often followed by a handshake with a pat on the shoulder and/or some other body expression, because body contact is in itself a form of friendship and understanding.

In France, when two people meet and exchange greetings and, then, shake hands only, they are thought to be but acquaintances, for friends would normally hug and embrace and while embracing in France is two kisses on each cheek. In Morocco it is only one, unless the two persons have not seen each other for a long period of time. It is common sight in the Southern Mediterranean countries, to have to men holding hands while walking and talking, in this culture this means they are very good friends, elsewhere it has other connotations.

Another aspect of body language in the Mediterranean countries, is the excessive use of gestures in discussion. The gestures, play the role of a visual aid used to illustrate whatever is being expressed in verbal language. Among the Berbers of North Africa, "speaking with hands" is quite a common practice, for the unknown Berber poet, it is undoubtedly a form of expression as any other:

*Inid s-ummm, thasiwred hetta s-ithawthan  
Thamimund tasabhand thassath'aq qa' iwthan<sup>27</sup>*

Speak with your mouth and speak with your fingers  
Mimouna is a beautiful woman and the whole world is in love with her

Among the Central and Eastern Europeans, body language is certainly not a n important form of expression, it is used but not as extensively as in the Mediterranean area. In Germany, for example, greetings are not automatically followed by a handshake, let alone hugs and kissing on the cheeks, on the contrary, people try to keep their distance from each other because getting closer and touching the other, in any part of his body, could be interpreted as being gay. Indeed, two men or two women holding hands are thought to be gay and people avoid actively such a behavior. Also, people use gestures less in their speech, in many ways, one can say that gestures are used to express some negative attitude, in most cases.

## INTEREST IN RELIGION

Religion has always been an internal part of the people of the Mediterranean Region and Eastern Europe. Indeed in these two areas, even when religion seems to be taking the back seat, it is not, it is just rethinking itself in order to adapt to social and political changes. The truth is that religion is a central issue in these two parts of the world.

In Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church<sup>28</sup> has always had a major influence on the population even at the height of communism. In the ex-USSR, the Communist Party tried to reduce its influence, but never really succeeded, for even if the activities of the church decreased in number they decreased in intensity and the latter continued to stand by the people. In Poland of the 1980s, the trade union Solidarnosc led the fight against the communist regime side by side with the church. The fact is that, in spite of many decades of communist rule in these countries, faith in religion remained very strong and did constitute the main danger that led to the fall of communism.

It is true that, communism was, somewhat, successful in meeting some of the needs of the human being, but it failed miserably in the realm of spirituality. It provided accommodation, work, health care, etc... but was unable to find an alternative to the spiritual requirements of the individual. As a result, the communists were able to meet to a certain extent the challenges of everyday life, but were unable to provide a satisfactory explanation to the meaning of existence and to life and death. And even the convinced communists often conceded this important flaw in their ideology. So, in Eastern Europe, though many people lip service to communism, yet they continued to practice religion in secrecy and it was very much the fall of the Wall of Berlin that brought them out of the closet.

During the communist reign in Eastern Europe, the population continued to practice religion and celebrate its rituals, some in the open and some in secret. Though the number of functioning churches was reduced drastically, people continued to celebrate mass in the open and Christmas and other religious feasts in the privacy of their homes. The communist authorities were well aware of this, but they never attempted to stamp it out by the use of force or even by gentle persuasion. They just ignored it, with the belief that it will die out and that was a major error of appreciation, for religious belief did not only die out, but on the demise of communism it came back to life stronger than ever. Another interesting observation to make is that on the fall of communist ideology, in Eastern Europe, there was a rush on the part of communists, to convert or reconvert and/or find solace in religion and the churches were unable to meet the demand, because they never thought that, in many cases, belief in this ideology was only skin deep.



In the Mediterranean Region belief in religion is an important. In the Northern Mediterranean, in spite of the institutionalization of the secular state, the population remains deeply religious, especially in such countries as Spain, Italy and Greece. In these countries, religion is a way of life: rituals are numerous and celebrations re uncountable. What is important is that secularism and religion rub shoulders but do not collide, they respect each other's area of activity and influence. Secularism for the state and its institutions and religion for people and their spiritual needs. In these countries, belief in saints and their blessedness is very common among all sections of society irrespective of their wealth and education. It is altogether a way of life that modernity has not been able to affect and the proof is that the issue of abortion is not as acute a problem as in other European countries.

In the southern and eastern part of the Mediterranean, predominantly Islamic, religion is a faith and a way of life: **din wa dunya**, because Islam does not acknowledge the Western concept of the separation of church (i. e. mosque) and state, instead the church (mosque) and the state do intermingle and religion is omnipresent in every aspect of everyday life. Since the beginning of this century, under the influence of European colonial powers, Islamic countries of the Mediterranean area adopted European secular institutions and, as a result, they disregarded the Islamic law shari'a and many religious institutions. A good example of this is the gradual secularization of the Ottoman culture:

The major steps toward secularization of the Turkish culture were taken by the Republican regime. After abolishing the Sultanate in 1922, the Turkish Grand National Assembly abolished the Caliphate two years later. The religious establishment of the empire was completely dismantled. All religious offices of the **ancient regime** were annulled. The activities of the theological institutions of Islamic sects and orders were outlawed. The educational system of the Republic did away with the Ottoman cultural dualism. All educational institutions were put under a unified system, and the Ministry of National Education was authorized to control and run the new system. Furthermore, a Directorate of Religious Affairs was established under the auspices of the state, which fully determined its activities. All religious personnel have thus been converted into state employees. Finally, in 1928, the 1924 Constitution of the country was amended and the phrase "The religion of the Turkish state is Islam" was deleted and replaced by the declaration that the Turkish Republic is a secular state<sup>29</sup>.

With the advent of the Iranian Revolution in 1978, Muslim fundamentalist groups mushroomed up in all Islamic countries and even among the Muslim migrants in Europe, with the intention of reislamising the society and undertaking the task of the

reestablishment of the Caliphate. Their declared enemy is secularism and secularists, as well as, all those that call for the adoption of the Western way of life, as in the case of Turkey. With time and the failure of the secular movements, because of their inability to define the role of religion within the society, as Munoz argues quite rightly:

*...l'incapacite des gouvernants a definir le role de la religion et du sacre dans la societe aura echoue dans leur objectif de secularization. Bien au contraire, leur ambiguite engendrera de graves contradictions qui vont s'accroitre progressivement et qui, jusqu'au aujourd'hui, vont se caracteriser par l'affrontement entre deux legitimites: celle du pouvoir seculier et celle du religieux<sup>30</sup>.*

And, also, because of the inability to make a difference to the lives of Muslim populations and to meet the expectations of the younger generations, fundamentalist movement gained in strength and set out to implement their programme of reislamisation. Frightened by their popularity, existing governments resorted to their traditional methods of repression and this led to violence as in the case of Algeria with FIS and GIA and in Egypt with Jama's Islamiyya, etc...In other countries, like Sudan, the fundamentalists took over power and began the implementation of their programme. In other Muslim Mediterranean countries, fundamentalist groups do not spare any opportunity to make their presence felt, as in the case in Morocco with Al-'adl Wal Ihsane, whose charismatic leader Abdessalam Yassin, though under house arrest, still indirectly plays a major spiritual role in the political arena and in Tunisia with Nahda, though it is technically speaking outlawed.

*A feature of the 1980s and the 1990s is not only growth in the number of politically active groups with a variety of approaches to religion and to the strategies for achieving their goals, but also the observable Islamisation of Muslim societies. Those labeled as Islamists believe and press for the introduction of an Islamic order as an achievable aim<sup>31</sup>.*

Aware of the importance of the movement of Islamic revival, many governments, that were hitherto of secular obedience, began to change their attitude with the intention to please the fundamentalists and, thus, new mosques were built, prayer call and Friday prayers were broadcasted on national radio and TV, religious holidays were celebrated and religious curriculum introduced, in schools, in countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Jordan, Syria, etc...all in all, Islam is an important element in the lives of the people of the area, be they religious or not and in the name of the preservation of the tradition they aspire to see it continue as such

## IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

With few notable exceptions, the family is an important social unit both in the Central-Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean Region and this is due, in many ways, to the fact that both religion and culture in these areas have made out of the family a sacred institution and the groundwork of society. However, with industrialization and the subsequent rural exodus, the notion of family lost in its importance, as it shrunk in size for pure economic reasons.

In Eastern Europe, the family played a major role in the emancipation of the individual, for the simple reason that the central state, interventionist in nature, regulated every aspect of the life of the individual without paying any attention to his needs and expectations and without taking into consideration any form of his feedback, if allowed at all. Unable to express himself freely on social, economic and political issues, within the society or the state institutions, for fear to be taxed of revisionism, the individual resorted to the family unit for this. This explains why communists punished whole families for anti-regime activities of one of its members and the examples are numerous in this case, especially under the reign of Stalin. Indeed, to stamp out any form of opposition to his policies, Stalin punished political opponents by deporting them with their families to inhospitable parts of Siberia or to Soviet Central Asia, then.

In Poland, in the 1980s, Solidarnosc (Solidarity), in its confrontation with the communist government based its political strategy on such elements as family and religion and the leader of the movement Lech Walesa, who was to become the first freely-elected President of Poland after the demise of communism in Eastern Europe, was a devout believer in both family and God since he is the head of a large family and is a very religious person.

Hitler, aware of the importance of the notion of family within the German culture, based much of his Nazi propaganda on this important factor and by so doing attracted tremendous support for his policies, ambitions and designs across Germany. He advocated the superiority of the Aryan race and the German family over other races and families, whose enslavement or annihilation, he authorized, especially those of Semitic stock. Aware of the importance of the family for the success of his political aspiration in Europe, prior to the beginning of the war, he undertook several actions in favor of the family, which led to the increase of his popularity among the Germans. One such action is the production of the car of the family: **Volkswagen**, which was marketed at a low price in order to allow every family to own one. In today's Germany, the family is still as important, given the relatively good social welfare services the government has put at its disposal and which is considered to be one of the best in Europe.

Likewise in the Mediterranean Region, the family is as important if not more. In the countries of the Northern Mediterranean, where religion is very strong like Spain, Italy, Greece, etc..., family is unquestionably sacred and central to people's interest. In Sicily, the family is so important within the society that it is almost a religion, whose pillars are: solidarity, honor, mutual interest, respect, faithfulness, etc... Because the family is such a strong element in this part of the world, the local Mafia adopted its structure in its organizational chart, and even exported to the US and to other countries where it is present. As a result of this, gangs in America worked on the basis of family structures in most cases, since the beginning of this century. In this case, "families" are bound by honor, solidarity and mutual interest and any breach of these requirements is automatically punished by death, as dramatized in the film "godfather" and the subsequent sequel.

Some of the family traditions, still very strong in Sicily, are also found in some areas of Southern Mediterranean like in the Rif region of Northern Morocco<sup>32</sup> and in Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, in this part of the Southern Mediterranean and likewise in Eastern Mediterranean, the concept of family is very important for the individual and for the society. As these areas are modernizing very quickly the notion of the tribe is gradually losing ground in favor of the family that is becoming the depository of the traditions of the latter. But what is making the family even more important, is the fact that Islam has given it a prominent role within religion<sup>33</sup>. This is shown quite convincingly in the following verses of the Koran:

*Worship none but Allah;  
Treat with kindness  
Your parents and kindred, II:83*

*Serve Allah, and join not  
Any parents with him;  
And do good-to parents, kinsfolk, III:36*

*Thy Lord hath decreed  
That ye worship none but Him,  
And that ye be kind  
To parents. Whether one  
Or both of them attain  
Old age in thy life,  
Say not to them a word  
Of contempt, not repel them, but address them  
In terms of honor, XVII:23<sup>34</sup>*

Because Islam has made out of the family the central unit of the society and as such the core element of the **Ummah** (the community

of the faithful), it has become a sacred institution and, even if it has evolved, with time, from being the basic unit of the tribe<sup>35</sup> to being the basic unit of the society, its importance did not at all diminish, on the contrary it has increased, as has taken some of the duties of the disappearing tribe.

In a country like Morocco, that is modernising very quickly, the tribe is progressively losing its importance in favor of the family. Indeed, the individual does not identify himself, as often as in the past, in tribal terms but only in family name and unlike, in the Western world, the individual does not exist as such yet, he is only part of a family and the family name is his only valid social identification. People often ask for one's family name and not for one's name.

The importance of the family in the culture of a country like Morocco, as well as, in other Muslim countries of the Mediterranean Region, is reflected in the way people fulfill the following obligations required of them:

- honor;
- respect of seniority;
- solidarity;
- mutual help;
- love and affection;
- faithfulness;
- defence of identity.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that Central-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Region share yet another characteristic and that is the prominence of the notion of family in both cultural heritage and way of life.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Microsoft Encarta. Copyright © 1994

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Cf. **The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopaedia**. 1996. New York: Dell. Pp. 583-585.

<sup>7</sup> The European specialised bodies are

### **a-European Atomic Energy Community**

supranational agency established in 1957 to spur atomic energy development within the European Economic community. Euratom, as it is popularly known, seeks to create a common market for nuclear raw materials and equipment, stimulate joint research, and establish a reservoir of nuclear technicians.

### **b-European Parliamentary Assembly**

A legislative body formed in 1958 to govern European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community and European Atomic Community. In 1962 it became the European Parliament.

### **c-European Free Trade Association ( EFTA )**

It is a customs union and trading bloc ratified in 1960 by Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal. Finland became associate member in 1961. Agreement provided for gradual reduction of tariffs and quota restrictions between members.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Monnet (1888-1979), a French politician and Robert Schuman are considered to be the founding fathers of the European Economic Community

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Histoire du Monde*. 1994. Paris: Nathan. Pp. 728-729.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 738-739.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. "Mediterranean Sea", Microsoft Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnalls Corporation.

<sup>12</sup> Vol. 10 1980. Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis France p. 727

<sup>13</sup> Lixus is a maritime trading built by the Phoenicians on the Atlantic in the north eastern part of Morocco near today's city of Larache. This very same trading post was used much later by the Romans as a settlement, a trading post and a seaport.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Chtatou, M. 1982. "Aspects of the Phonology of a Berber Dialect of the Rif ". Unpublished doctoral dissertation, SOAS, University of London, London. P. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. Vol. 10. 1980. Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis France. p. 729.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 730

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 733

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *La Grande Encyclopedie*. 1975. Paris: Larousse. P. 7827.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Reference her is obviously made to the scenario put forward by Samuel P.

Huntington, " The Clash of Civilisations? " *Foreign Affairs* 72, no 3 ( summer 1993 ) .

<sup>21</sup> Reference here is made to the French President Mitterrand who made of the north-south dialogue one of the objectives of his presidency but never put it into effect. On the contrary, he was accused of adopting a colonial and paternalistic attitude at the Franco-African Summit, at La Baule, in France, on the issue of democracy.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Pierre H. Savignac. 1978. *Contres Berberes de Kabylie*. Montreal: PUQ.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Chtatou, M. " The Folk Tradition of the Gzennaya Riffis " . Unpublished ms.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid , these rhymed couplets known as *izran* are popular literary genre among Berbers.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Shakespeare, W. **The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice**. Edited by Alvin Kerman. 1963. New York: Signet Classic.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Chtatou, M. "The Folk Tradition of the Gzennaya Riffis ". Unpublished ms.

<sup>28</sup> The Orthodox Eastern Church is the community of Christian churches, independent but mutually recognised ; originating in the eastern Europe and South Western Asia through a split with the western Church. They agree in accepting the decrees of their seven ecumenical councils and in rejecting the authority of the bishop of Rome ( the Pope ). Orthodox and Roman Catholics view each other as schismatic, but consider the Nestorian, Coptic, Jacobite and Armenian churches as heretical. These were differences within the whole church in early days, but the split between East and West began only in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and became definite only with the challenge to papal authority by Photius ( 9<sup>th</sup> century ) and the condemnation of the PATRIARCH OF Constantinople by Pope Leo IX ( 1054 ). The Crusades embittered feelings, and many attempts at reunion since that time have been unsuccessful. There is considerably variation of practice between the two. Thus, in the Eastern Church the liturgy is always sung and is not usually celebrated daily as in the West, and communion is given with spoon. Parish priests are usually married; monks and bishops are not.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kalaycioglu, E. " Turkish Culture and the European Union: A Political and Historical Assesement " **University of reading Discussion Papers in European International Social Science Research, No: 58** , December 1995 . p. 4

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Martin Munoz, G. 1996 : Le Role de la societe civile au Maghreb et le defi Euro-Mediterraneen " in **L' Annuaire de la Mediterranee**. Rabat: GERM/PUBLISUD. pp. 149-163.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. B. A. Roberson, " Islam and Europe: An Enigma or a Myth " **The Middle East Journal 48, no. 2** (Spring 2 ) p. 298.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Chtatou, M. ( forthcoming ) " La Notion d'appartenance tribale chez le Rifain ". **Awal**.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Chtatou, M. (forthcoming). " The Notion of Family in Islam ". **Islam Aujour'hui**.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. **The Holy Qur'an**. Translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali. 1989. Brentwood, MA, USA: Amana Corp

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Coon, C.S. 1931. **The Tribes of the Rif**. Cambridge, Mass, USA: Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Pp. 90-95.