



*Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale*

DIREZIONE GENERALE AFFARI POLITICI E SICUREZZA

*Il Coordinatore delle Attività Multilaterali Euro-
Mediterranee-Golfo*

Prot./ 37581

Rome, February 27, 2017

Dear Ambassador Atallah,

In response to your letter of February 5, 2017, I would like to draw you attention to the following thoughts on a renewed definition of collective identity. They can be described as a fresh Italian contribution to the ALF forward-looking strategy.

The ALF forward-looking strategy, adopted 18 months ago by the Board of Governors aimed at relaunching our common institution, has stimulated the Italian Network debate.

As you were able to witness during your last visit to Rome, there is a sense of renewed commitment to further strengthening the core values of openness, tolerance and mutual understanding shared by our diverse Euro-Mediterranean societies.

You may recall that this was the essence of the speech given by Dr. Enrico Molinaro, Executive Director of the Italian Network for the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue (RIDE), in front of a vast and selected audience, including the ALF Advisory Council members, on the occasion of the Rome Seminar held in cooperation with IAI-NEWMED, last September 8, 2016.

In his talk - to be published soon on the RIDE website: ride.mediper.eu – Dr. Molinaro conveyed a number of ideas that, if applied to the whole ALF network of networks, could further increase visibility and wider recognition to the Anna Lindh Foundation, strengthening its role as a primary, credible and sought-after partner for intercultural programs and actions across our region.

The Italian Network's new ideas - mentioned by the same speaker also on the occasion of the ALF civil society Med Forum in Malta, and positively quoted by the Italian MP Khalid Chaouki - may contribute to advance and address those aspects of our strategy that are key to long-term sustainability: an organizational capacity needed to represent the back-bone of its operational

framework, with its good governance mechanisms, funding model and structure, including the role of its stakeholders and networks.

The ALF has a very clear plan of action according to the triennial program agreed upon with the European Commission but, especially following the decisions adopted on November 18-19, 2015, in Brussels at the Heads of networks' meeting, the ALF recognized the autonomous role of the national networks, which are encouraged to provide fresh contributions within the ALF established program.

In this perspective, I believe that there are a few proposals from the Italian Network that could offer an innovative contribution to our renewed political commitment and long-term perspective of the Foundation's mission.

At the Italian national level, our current experience is that of working for an operational framework and organizational capacity that would help the Foundation to grow and sustain its terms of quality, impact and reach.

This is consistent with with the key-messages the Italian Network received on September 8, 2016, from the ALF Advisory Council which was to deliver positive messages, and to explore which role Italy can have in this respect and to understand the relationship between dialogue and identity.

The Italian Network idea at the heart of Dr. Molinaro's remarks intends to connect activities for the dialogue on the one hand, and evaluation and respect for collective identity, on the other hand. Despite the fact that identity has been the focus of all our activities, it seems that this term has been long absent from ALF documents, speeches and topics, except maybe for the somewhat generic expression "Mediterranean identity."

To my knowledge, the 2016 Forum in Malta invited the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) to open up a "new phase of action", a "pioneering research". This means innovation in methodology of research and, also, in issues.

To strengthen my point, I hereby quote Dr Molinaro's core message: "Actually, the issue of identity is not a new one; probably it is the oldest issue in our knowledge, related to the essential concept of integration inside a collective identity, to the symmetric and complementary relationships between different groups, and to the concepts of reciprocal and mutual respect. Accordingly, Identity is not, nor can become, a side, minor, issue. According to all the most prestigious experts in anthropology, identity is, in terms of groups and collective identity, the basis of life: there is no life without group identity. Human beings cannot live by themselves, they simply die".

We are clearly referring to this concept in its plural form because, as there are various Mediterranean identities, so there may be different Mediterranean perspectives. In this pluralistic context, I believe that the Italian Network can offer its peculiar point of view, in a political moment of the Euro-Mediterranean history when Italy feels it must express a special responsibility.

Nowadays in Italy there is a significant debate on identity, also reflected by the newspapers' headlines. Italian Undersecretary of State of Foreign Affairs Vincenzo Amendola, concluding our September 8 meeting, witnessed our "new phase of action". Italy is going in this direction, proposing new actions at the European level, particularly at the Euro-Mediterranean and global levels; for

example, Italy successfully suggested at the G20 and European Union meetings the idea of dealing with the immigration issue not anymore as a specific problem of a single state, but as a global problem.

As a result mainly of this Italian stance, we see today in the media that the idea of security is not anymore predominant in the domain of Defense and Intelligence alone (“l’approche sécuritaire”), but also in the hands of people who create culture. This idea goes together with the importance of identity because “intercultural dialogue” means dialogue between groups and collective identities.

In particular, Dr Molinaro reminds us that this is an anthropological concept, developed in the book “Steps to an Ecology of Mind” by Gregory Bateson. This text explains why we, as human beings, give so much importance to the relationships’ formal dimension. It also explains why, for us, it is often more important the way we communicate rather than the contents of our communication.

Therefore, according to the Italian Network’s proposal, identity should be the focus of the work of whoever wants to help the dialogue between the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, and between all of us. A practical example illustrating this proposal is the structure of the Italian Network of the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue (RIDE) within the ALF, as one of its 42 active national networks. As you know, we apparently are just one of the many networks organized in a similar way. With the constitution of RIDE however, there is an essential difference, discussed on the occasion of the two parallel meetings held on September 11, 2015, (ALF Advisory Council and Italian Network’s General Assembly): the idea to create a best practice, an administrative organization model that could be also useful as an example, and possibly as an inspiring experience for other networks.

Also based on the suggestions coming from your predecessor, Director Claret, in 2013, we have put together, in addition to the ALF Italian Network – a parallel network based on Italian law, registered at the notary. In this historic peculiar context, the RIDE network drafted programs, especially after the new Executive Committee was elected on September 11, 2015, with the mandate of developing activities through the RIDE working groups, not necessarily limited to the Anna Lindh Foundation Programs.

As an example, the RIDE Network supported a research organized by one of our members (the Italian research institute EURISPES) on the BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which today are penetrating the Mediterranean. Accordingly, the RIDE organized an unprecedented Round Table at the Indian Embassy – currently holding the rotating presidency of the BRICS countries - and the BRICS representatives, in front of a wide and qualified audience (including myself), asked the help of the Italian ALF network, as a communication bridge vis à vis the Euro-Mediterranean region and people.

Since the BRICS represent half of the world population, this is example shows us the potential achievements produced by the parallel work of the international networks focused on dialogue on the one hand, and the organization of the national network of the local communities on the other hand.

In this way, the latter are contributing to the development and the evaluation of the collective identities acting at the national level, outside the limited and well defined margins given by the ALF Programs. RIDE started to develop working groups that opened debates and active cooperation on immigration's policies with the representative of all the diaspora communities in Italy. It is worth noting that this representative is a member of a Consultative National Council set up according to the new Italian law on Development Cooperation, in connection with the relevant Ministry's Directorate General.

It can be said that this model stems from two Italian virtues: flexibility and creativity, with the aim of providing all members of the ALF networks with the possibility to work and discuss about very practical issues.

Another example of creativity involving identity issues is the one carried by a prominent member of our network in the area of organic and balanced identity food, now reaching out to Tunisia and Palestine. In this context, RIDE is sponsoring an innovative health research about the roots of our food and nutrition, knowing that cuisine is also an important part of culture and identity.

In fact, it is RIDE's ambition to connect this track of activities to the general follow-up programs generated by Milano Expo 2015 as well as to the soon to be launched PRIMA Research Program.

A major point of discussion within RIDE is the following: "is it convenient to put together all the ALF important actions for the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue with the elements of discovering, protecting, revaluating and respecting collective identities at the national networks' level? Religious, national, cultural, linguistic and ethnical identities could represent one of the innovative elements we are asking for".

According to my RIDE contacts, the Italian Network's proposal could also offer some innovative ways and pragmatic solutions for the ALF financial capacity from 1st January 2018.

In this respect, let me quote Dr. Molinaro again: " The suggested national associated networks (NANs), to be set up in the other 42 members states on the model of the RIDE, could work side by side with the respective current ALF Networks, and may also contribute to the fundraising process of the ALF activities in two parallel ways.

On the one hand the proposed NANs, working on the identity concept, should look for the contributions from their respective civil society bodies (including the business community and public institutions, both at central and local levels) in terms of material and personal help on a voluntary basis. In principle, this should reduce the need for the national heads of network to fund the respective networks activities.

On the other hand the involvement of so many business, financial, educational establishments might compensate in the long term the declining trend of reduction of funds from member states to the ALF, beside the contribution from the European Commission."

Additionally, upon the suggestion of its current Director, RIDE is launching a new program of "participated workshops" on europroject management, which intends to involve the best of our national network in large-scale European projects, with maximum active involvement and

participation from the grass-root network membership. This is expected to lead to ambitious fundraising goals at European level, in cooperation with other ALF national networks sharing the same goals.

Last but not least, the high quality work of the renewed NANs may earn for themselves challenging and influencing policy-oriented roles vis à vis their own respective Foreign Ministries and national Governments. This is what the RIDE is trying to do in the area of development cooperation and migration acting as a “think tanks’ think tank” for the Mediterranean, African and Middle East areas.

Finally, as soon as the new bylaws (“statuto”) will be approved (March 31st, 2017), the RIDE Executive Committee is expected to act as the National Focal Point for UNAoC. This and other related tasks have been designed also to shape some legitimate expectations for a successful fundraising campaign.

I hope to have an opportunity to further discuss this topic during our next meeting in Malta.

Yours Sincerely,



(Enrico Granara)