



The site of Mediterranean Cultures

## **Babelmed.net** **The magazine of Mediterranean cultures**

### **1) WHO ARE WE?**

Babelmed is a non profit organisation established in Rome in April 2001. Its main objective is to promote cultural exchanges in the Mediterranean and to spread information and ideas regarding this shared sea, particularly important today when prejudices and amalgamations are creating new barriers, both in the North and South.

In 2002, the association launched Babelmed.net. The site aims to be a link between actors, events and cultural production in the Mediterranean and to provide independent information on a wide range of issues. It is run by a central editorial team in Rome and a network of 17 correspondents around the Mediterranean Basin.

### **2) OUR FIELD OF ACTIVITY**

Today, Information in the Euro Mediterranean region mainly suffers from a difficult circulation of information between all countries of the region and in particular concerning the North-South axis, worsen by a difficult circulation of people between all countries of the region. All this leads to a lack of true cultural dialogue. While a series of representations and stereotypes distort reality at North, censorship of different natures (especially at South) prevent whole generation of journalists to express themselves freely.

These factors are the result of political tensions and incomprehension that come from both sides of the Mediterranean. As for Cultural journalism in the Mediterranean, it mainly suffers from lack of funding and a lack of mobility. Cultural events and their different developments are not lacking but are little covered. A point of reference for innovative, original, contemporary and free cultural reporting is always more needed.

At regional level, occasions for a true dialogue and exchanges are always more rare. At a Political and social level, the need to produce an independent information and create opportunities for a genuine dialogue is, more than ever, vital for both banks of the Mediterranean. In a very tensed international context, the North has very little understanding and knowledge of Southern realities and the South is undergoing a very critical moment of its history, torn apart by wars, internal conflicts and lack of civil liberties.

As Medias are concerned, the South Mediterranean is facing, according to International NGO “Reporters Without Borders”, “noticeable problems” in Egypt, a “difficult situation” in all Maghreb countries, and a “very serious situation” in the other Middle-eastern countries. The lack of independent medias goes along with a strong self censorship from journalists. In this context, declustering Information and offering a free space to express themselves is essential. The use of different types of medias, and in particular the use of Internet helps going beyond these various constraints.

## 2) WHAT DO WE DO?

### ***Babelmed Philosophy***

The name “babelmed” refers to the Mediterranean “med” and its cultural diversity “babel”. “Bab”, the word for door in Arabic, also gives the impression of an open door. Babel is a mosaic of the languages found in the site that is mainly in French, English and partly in Arabic. The articles in the different country sections are presented in their original language (Italian, Spanish, etc...).

Public at large, and the media in particular, most often ignore that Western European countries are close to Muslim Mediterranean countries through history, cultural roots, mutual fertilisation of music, literature or films. Yet, the cultural dimension of these broad subjects constitutes a key factor towards improving mutual understanding and healing tensions.

Moreover, numerous cultural projects are implemented in the Mediterranean region but receive little coverage from national media.

Today, introducing the Mediterranean countries’ culture to the general public is both a challenge and a crucial issue.

### ***Cultural Journalism***

Reporting in Babelmed considers Culture in its broader sense. The content of the site is divided into several sections: Cultural Agenda, Press review, Features, Creations and Archives. Each of the sections is then divided into sub-sections such as: Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Literature, etc..The site also contains on-line and interactive exhibitions for example “Syria, in the eyes of Europe, or “The sense of commerce”. Society issues as well as political questions are dealt with from a cultural point of view. It is always tried to give national or local phenomenon a larger and cross-cultural understanding.

Permanent sections deal with specific themes: Films, Books and CDs, Impressions, Travels, Cooking Chronicles, Poetry, Geoart. The content of the site is also available by country, while a research engine helps to find specific articles in the site from their source. The site also produces Features on the most central issues of Mediterranean cultures, sorted by main themes (women, migration, war, cuisine, for example) or by geographical locations (cities: Alexandria, Beirut, Istanbul, Marseilles, Palermo, Tangiers, etc; countries: Turkey). A blog section is now available for Babelmed journalists.

### ***Cultural exchanges (information and ideas)***

The site offers more than 300 links with the main Cultural actors in the Mediterranean: Publishing houses, media, cultural institutions, museums, festivals, Independent places of creation and performance, etc.. Other intelligent links have been created with sites such as Medi1, Confluences Méditerranée, Actes Sud, Radio Orient , Qantara.de. It wants to be a platform of information and cultural exchanges with the main cultural places and medias of the region.

### ***Journalists’ network***

Babelmed's editorial line is to decluster national Mediterranean culture by offering content produced by journalists who are immersed in the cultural, political and social space of their own country, allowing a better understanding of all its particulars. Furthermore, the dialogue within the network allows a comparative view of inter-crossing themes common to the whole Mediterranean area. The following list present the current contributors, other free lancers also contribute to the magazine.

### ***The Editorial Team:***

Nathalie Galesne (France)

French journalist, former Chief editor of the revue "Rive", author of a book on Syria «Syrie, éclats d'un mythe». She is Babelmed Chief Editor

Catherine Cornet (France)

French journalist, she's a specialist of Middle-eastern politics and Babelmed Network Co-ordinator

Aquilino Mancini (Italy)

Italian architect, photographer is the Web master of the site.

### ***The Journalists' Network:***

Saleh Bashir (Tunisia)

Tunisian Journalist and "Cosmopolitan" Arab writer, he's collaborated to As safir, An Nahar in Beirut and works since 10 years for the Arabic Daily Al Hayat as an Editorialist.

Mehemet Basutçu (Turkey)

Turkish journalist, he collaborates to the Turkish daily "Hürriyet" and he's a specialist of Turkish politics and Mediterranean cinema.

Youssef Bazzi (Lebanon)

Lebanese journalist and poet, he collaborates with the Lebanese daily Al Mustaqbal and the Cultural supplement Nawafez.

Hassan Daoud (Lebanon)

Lebanese journalist and novelist, he is Chief editor of Nawafez, Lebanese cultural supplement. He also has published numerous novels in Arabic translated into French and English.

Daikha Dridi (Algeria)

Algerian journalist, she's been collaborating with several Algerian dailies and covered especially the Algerian civil war. Together with Djamel Benramdane she's funded the very independent Algerian news site "Algerian Interface".

Issandr Elamrani (Egypt)

Moroccan journalist, he's been Deputy Chief editor of English language magazine "Cairo Times" and works as free lance journalist for several dailies and Egyptian magazines. He is now managing Editor of English Language Egyptian magazine "Cairo Magazine".

Jalel El Gharbi (Tunisia)

Tunisian journalist and Academics, he's a specialist of Maghrebian Literature. He cures the Poetry section of Babelmed together with a group of other Mediterranean poets.

Adrian Grima (Malta)

Maltese journalist and Academics, he's a researcher in Maltese Literature and a specialist of Maltese cultures.

Hanan Kessab Hassan (Syria)

Syrian journalist and Academics, she is, among others, the Arabic translator of Jean Genet works. She's a theatre specialist and also teach drama in Syria and Lebanon.

Nadia Khoury (France/Lebanon)

Reporter specialist in Middle-eastern issues. She has a passion for Mediterranean music and cures the "Muzzika" section of Babelmed.

Leonidas Liambey (Greece)

Greek journalist and Artist, graduated from Athens Arts school is a specialist of Modern and Contemporary Arts.

Fadi Miyadi (Morocco)

Moroccan journalist, she lives between Casablanca and Paris where she contributes as a free lance journalist to several newsmagazines.

Antonia Naim (France)

Italian journalist, she collaborates with several Cultural magazines in France, and is a specialist of Mediterranean cinema.

Hicham Raji (Morocco)

Moroccan journalist and Academics, he is a specialist of Moroccan politics and press.

Eloy Santos (Spain)

Spanish journalist and poet, he is a specialist of Mediterranean poetry.

Camille Soler (France)

French journalist and actress, she is specialist of young migrant cultures in France and innovative Performing Arts.

Adania Shibli (Palestine)

Palestinian journalist and novelist, she published several books in Arabic translated into French and English and is specialist of Palestinian Cultural world

### ***Decluster national Mediterranean culture***

The site generates its own content thanks to its Roman Editorial Team and its network of journalists in the Mediterranean, chosen for their independence and knowledge of cultural issues. When entering the network, journalist are briefed in order to write for a Mediterranean and international public. This effort helps declustering national cultures and have them discuss with each other in a positive and constructive way.

### ***Counteract prejudices and amalgamations that are creating new barriers, both in the North and South.***

Too many violent events are here in the daily news to remind us that prejudices are taking the lead in the North and South banks of the Mediterranean. The region has become a pole of conflicts and the stage of some of the most violent confrontations. The whole world actually looks at it as a place of conflicts, misunderstandings and inconsistency. Our common culture and history is cancelled and forgotten by short-sighted news reporting creating always higher barriers between the peoples of the region. By providing in depth information about Mediterranean cultures, their contemporary dynamism and the efforts by cultural actors to bridge the gaps, Babelmed wants to contribute to counteract the various prejudices.

### ***Be a link between cultural actors, events and cultural production in the Mediterranean***

Babelmed pays particular attention to cultural exchanges and artistic co-operation and opportunities. It plays a role in linking cultural actors or cultural places from the Mediterranean, announcing their major events and initiatives, providing constant updates about funding opportunities or calls for applications. Artists and Cultural actors have become a large part of Babelmed readership.

### ***Participating in a shared culture of peace***

The culture of peace goes prevailingly through dialogue and culture. Without entering into void terms and declaration, Babelmed works in its daily work towards a culture of common understanding and exchanges which is the best path towards a long lasting of peace in the region.

### ***Independent reporting and Freedom of expression***

Babelmed's main goal is to provide information on cultural issues in the Mediterranean in a free and politically independent fashion. To this day, it has no equivalent on the Internet. Babelmed is a totally independent electronic media. It belongs to no media group and has no link with any political, professional or religious body. It operates with subsidies from foundations interested in cultural dialogue and freedom of expression around the Mediterranean.

## **3) THE SITE TODAY**

With 5 years of presence on the Internet, the [www.babelmed.net](http://www.babelmed.net) website has become a reference for all those who concern themselves with cultural issues in the Mediterranean area. With some 50,000 users per month, Babelmed's present notoriety has no match in its own sphere of activity. Instruments specialising in measuring Internet sites' traffic rank have located it as the 94,680th website worldwide for the number of visitors, by reference to 45 million active websites<sup>1</sup>. Babelmed reached the 30,000th world rank on several occasions in 2006.

## **4) NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES**

Journalism in general and cultural journalism in particular finds always more difficult to fund itself. Babelmed is a free magazine and e-marketing dividends are not at all sufficient to carry on the quality work Babelmed intends to pursue.

It is therefore very important to get some sustainable funds in order to increase our visibility, carrying on with fundraising activity as well as keep the high cultural profile of the magazine.

## **5) RESULTS AND GOALS BABELMED IS WORKING TO ACHIEVE**

Babelmed intends increasing its visibility on the internet contributing, by extension, in promoting Mediterranean cultures. The magazine wants to become always more a reference for cultural issues in the Mediterranean area and create debates between different cultures and societies.

The magazine also wants to increase its impact on young cultural journalists from the region that do not always find a space for expressing themselves in a professional manner.

For the sustainability of Babelmed, it is, therefore crucial to ensure a long term viability to the magazine, by creating best practices for cultural fundraising and creating trustful and lasting partnerships with both public and private organizations.

## **6) INDICATORS OF SUCCESS**

---

<sup>1</sup> World ranking established by [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) on 27 December 2005. By comparison, the cultural and information websites most relevant for the Mediterranean region are ranked as follows: "RFI" (France) 15,341<sup>st</sup> rank; "TV5" (France) 18,778<sup>th</sup> rank; "Courrier International" (France) 34,336<sup>th</sup> rank; "Radio Sawa" (USA) 35,288<sup>th</sup> rank; "Medi 1" (Morocco) 3,451<sup>st</sup> rank; "RMC-Moyen Orient" (France) 51,403<sup>rd</sup> rank; "Radio Orient" (France) 1,131,357<sup>th</sup> rank; "Ansamed" (Italy) 2,360,339<sup>th</sup> rank; "Cinemamed" (France) 3,159,146<sup>th</sup> rank; "Euromed Café" (Italy) 4,128,285<sup>th</sup> rank.

As an Internet instrument, Babelmed measures its visibility and success through Instruments specialised in measuring Internet sites' traffic rank and calculating number of visitors and numbers of pages seen.

Babelmed will also assess its progress with the number of persons subscribing to its newsletter. It will also prove its success by the multiplication of Babelmed institutional partners and its capacity in gathering private and public partners around this common project.

With the multiplication of Babelmed media partners and the diversification of the language contents of Babelmed (especially in Arabic and Turkish), the site will show its "anchorage" within the cultural milieus of the region.

**More info:** <http://www.babelmed.net/index.php?l=en>