

The Mediterranean Identity: What is It and Who Uses It?

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Introduction

The research presented in this poster is focused on the geographic region known as the Mediterranean.

From this research I hope to present a full picture of the different people and cultures that inhabit the same region.

From this information then I would like to explore the possibility of a "Mediterranean identity," if such a thing is even possible.

The beginning of this research starts with realizing that the Mediterranean encompasses nations and cultures, beyond those in Europe. Once this obvious fact is acknowledged, a wonderful world of varying and yet interconnecting cultures opens up.

Similarities in the Med

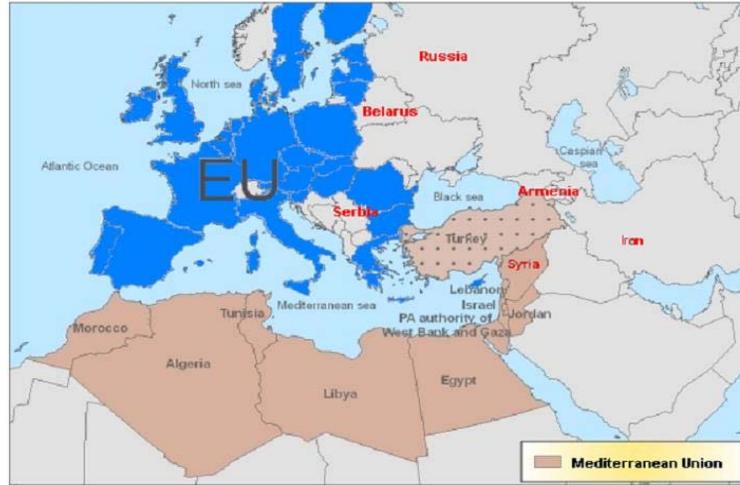
Commonalities that can be found throughout the Mediterranean are not always apparent, when you first study them. One linkage can be found in the diet of the Mediterranean. Most nations in the Mediterranean take part in a low fat, high protein diet, which has garnered attention and popularity around the world.

Another similarity is the aspect of "honour and shame" that is found in many Mediterranean nations. There is a strong ideal throughout the Mediterranean cultures that men act with honour, while women are more inclined to act shamefully without the guidance of a honourable man.

A common connection between the Mediterranean nation is trade and tourism. The Mediterranean is a popular area for travel. If the nations in the Mediterranean made travel throughout the Mediterranean easier and connected, it would help garner a stronger sense of common identity.

The Mediterranean and the People Who Live There

Shown below is a map of the Mediterranean nations today, in reference to their relationship with the European Union (EU). This map also shows which nations belong to the Union for the Mediterranean (UFM), which was formed in 2008.



Map found at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=6879>

There are different meanings and ideas of what the Mediterranean is. What we can say about it is that it is a region that embodies a variety of cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, languages, traditions, norms, and more. These differences make it hard for the countries of the Mediterranean to interact and cooperate. However, there is always a common area amid the differences. This conjures up the idea of a common identity. The Mediterranean is responsible for several of the factors that shape our present day culture. It gave rise to democracy, the nation state, and the world's three largest monotheistic religions. It has served as the center for several of the world's largest empires. Considering these common factors, there should be common links between the nations then, a sense of a mutual Mediterranean identity. This is not the case however. Instead, we find a region that while geographically linked, is almost extreme in its diversity between nations. Indeed, in some areas the only thing that seems to link them is geography. Other nations share a deep past and that carries into today's cultures, but the diversity of these cultures and the political direction of Mediterranean countries do not aid in the formation of a common identity. It is interesting that something that connects each nation, also separates them as well. The Mediterranean Sea, serves as connector and divider. It is the clear point which intersects Europe and Africa, making for easy trade, yet establishes clear boundaries. These boundaries divide the Mediterranean into very distinct regions in terms of culture, religion, politics and economics. However, each nation, even nations that seem to completely separate themselves from any other nation, such as Israel, can lay claim to a Mediterranean identity. Though there are several problems to sort out between the nations of the Mediterranean, such as the constant conflict between the Arab states and Israel, if the Mediterranean nations are willing to work together to solve these problems, then there is a greater likelihood of forming a solid Mediterranean identity. Having a strong connecting Mediterranean identity would serve as a strong starting point for cooperation between the Arab states and Israel, and also involve Europe as well, yet work to unite Israel with the Mediterranean, instead of it forming a more European identity, which it will undoubtedly do if the choices are either Arab or European. One of several proposed projects to help build a Mediterranean identity is a shared connection among Universities in the Mediterranean, in which students would travel from North to South or East to West, to experience and share new cultures.

Challenges to Face

Some people may think that creating a new identity means neglecting the main identity. This is false because idea of a common identity focuses on finding a common area of interaction which makes a stronger identity in the end. It will epitomize all the good things among the various types of Mediterranean diversity.

A mutual identity must be built upon mutual respect. This respect must be achieved between all Mediterranean nations before identity can be built, and therefore conflicts among the Mediterranean nations must be rectified before identity can be built.

Migration has presented another challenge for the Mediterranean identity. North African and Middle Eastern emigrants to Europe have risen in number in recent years. When they leave their native country these lose their national identity, instead becoming European citizens. The Mediterranean identity could serve as a means of keeping a common identity among these migrants.

Conclusions

From the research available and conclusions from other scholars, I believe that while there may not be a strong sense of a Mediterranean identity right now, I believe that if the nations of the Mediterranean work together to form a unified association, then in the future the Mediterranean identity will be stronger and more solidified across the Mediterranean region.