3rd Standing Committee on Dialogue among Civilizations & Human Rights

Special Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures and Religions

“The Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue in the Western Balkans as a platform to strengthen and consolidate peaceful and good-neighbourly relations among its peoples”

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Report unanimously adopted on 30 October 2010, during the Vth Plenary Session, Rabat

I. Introduction

1. In its first report and resolution approved by the 3rd Standing Committee, subsequently adopted by the 2nd PAM Plenary in Malta in November 2007, the Standing Committee of Cultures and Religions laid down the parameters for its future work. In particular, it stated the centrality of “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue … for the peoples of the Mediterranean States to live peaceably beside one another”, affirming that in recent times, conflict in the Mediterranean had often been exacerbated by “the lack of reciprocal knowledge of the different cultures and religions”.

2. Accordingly, in 2008, the Special Task Force developed a joint action programme to foster “mutual understanding and the promotion of tolerance and respect for the cultural and religious diversity” among the peoples of the Mediterranean, now commonly known as the Fez Programme¹. The Special Task Force also undertook to draw up a questionnaire whereby the Members would contribute to gaining further knowledge and a better understanding of each other by answering a questionnaire about national experiences and policies of PAM Countries in promoting dialogue and understanding among cultural and religious minorities². In its follow-up report to the implementation of the Fez Programme, entitled Building on Dialogue, the Special Task Force drafted a Letter of Commitment that was subsequently signed by PAM Members at the Standing Committees meeting in Lisbon in June 2009 and at the October 2009 Plenary Session in Istanbul. By virtue of this letter, members agreed to, among others, pursue their “work on intercultural and inter-religious

¹ Under the auspices of this Programme, Mediterranean Day has been inaugurated and is now celebrated every March 21st throughout the Mediterranean Region, and the PAM Prize has been instituted for outstanding contributions to reward individual organizations and institutions that have made outstanding contributions to further the Mediterranean ideals expounded by PAM.
² This questionnaire has been answered in detail by all PAM Balkan States: Croatia, FYROM and Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia (Greece and Turkey) with the exception of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
dialogue in [their] respective parliaments – including youth parliaments - and local communities”.

3. In accordance with its 2010 Work Programme, the Special Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures and Religions has committed itself to examining the situation in the Western Balkans. At the outset, it has to be stated that this Special Task Force has set itself a very challenging goal, and it would be premature to undertake a country-by-country analysis of the current situation of the Western Balkan States with respect to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. However, it will attempt to take a snapshot photograph of the recent history of the Western Balkans, since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, and seek to identify common actions which can be taken with a view to buttress peaceful cohabitation and good neighbourly relations between the peoples in the Western Balkans.

II. Balkan cultural spaces

4. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is about people living together in full respect of each other’s diversities. Ethnic origin and religion are the two major components that characterize the Balkan populations. South Slavic languages, Romanian and Greek are the prevailing languages in the Balkans. A part of the population also speaks Albanian, Turkish and Hungarian as well.

5. From a religious point of view, the Orthodox Christian faith is the most widespread, and is practised by some 50 million believers, followed by roughly 10 million Christian Catholic believers and an equal number of believers of Islamic faith. It is extremely interesting to note that there is no direct correlation between the languages spoken and religious faith, and this, in a wider context, should be considered as a positive rather than a negative factor in the process of intra-cultural bridge building. From a more secular perspective (way of life, architecture, cuisine), there are some outstanding ‘cultural areas’ which, according to French geographer A. Blanc, correspond in part to the ancient empires. The Adriatic coast, formerly ruled by the Republic of Venice, is somewhat a reflection of Italy. All the North West part, which was for a long period under Austro-Hungarian dominion, is somewhat similar to Central Europe. The remaining three quarters of the Peninsula is strongly influenced by Ottoman and Byzantine Empires, that of Islam and Orthodoxy, respectively.

6. We are also aware that the human complexity of the Balkans calls for a more subtle approach. Although not exclusive to the populations of this region, the inhabitants of the area usually portray in a very distinct manner, a sentiment of belonging to a well-defined ethnic group. The concept of ethnicity is deeply rooted in the Balkans and this should be borne in mind if we want to understand our neighbours and constructively participate in the process of normalisation of inter-community exchanges especially among civil society.

7. The cliché claim that everything boils down to ‘ancient ethnic and religious hatreds’ should not be overstated. While it is certain that animosity existed and perhaps was in part the consequence of the mixing together of different ethnic and religious communities, economic interests also played an important part in fuelling animosity. Hostilities have varied as economic circumstances have changed and they have also been subject to political manoeuvring. Moreover, the differences between Catholic and Orthodox communities have been subject to changing influences: such as rivalries between ecclesiastical hierarchies, political pressure from neighbouring countries, and so on. History and geo-political issues have filled volumes with reciprocal accusations and justifications. The past cannot be
changed, but it now bears testimony to the process of an ongoing dialogue towards a smooth but constant change. Differences continue to exist, as they do in all corners of the world. Yet such differences cannot divide us, rather they can be seen as a challenge to our spiritual commitment to live in peace with ourselves and our neighbours.

III. Geographic and historical perspective of the Balkans

8. The Balkans (often referred to as the Balkan Peninsula) is a geopolitical and cultural region of South Eastern Europe. The region takes its name from the Balkan Mountain, which runs through the centre of Bulgaria into Eastern Serbia. The region has a combined area of 550,000 km² and a population of about 55 million people. South Eastern Europe includes the States of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Serbia, a part of Slovenia, and Turkey, and a very minute part of Italy (the city of Trieste), Kosovo3 while it is surrounded by the Mediterranean on three sides (Adriatic, Aegean and Ionian seas) and Black Sea to the East. European Union institutions and Member States define the "Western Balkans" as Albania and the constituent republics of the former Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia. However, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development uses "Western Balkans" to refer to the above states, minus Croatia. This report takes the view that no stigma should be attributed to the use of the term Balkans, as it has long been used to refer to the region’s geography, history and culture, and will therefore refer to both “the Balkans” and “South Eastern Europe”.

9. The Balkans has long been a crossroads of cultures and religions, and its modern-day identity is undoubtedly dominated by its geographic position: it was a juncture between the Latin and Byzantine bodies of the Roman Empire, and in the Middles Ages the centre-stage for a series or wars between the Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian Empires; later still, it was the centre of the Ottoman Empire; from a religious perspective, it is an area where Orthodox and Catholic Christianity has continuously converged, as well as a frontier between Islam and Christianity itself. Equally, Jewish settlement in the Balkans is among the oldest in Europe.

10. Leaping forward to the last century, and in doing so paying great disrespect to Balkan history in the interests of brevity and clarity, the region’s early twentieth century history is characterised by the fall of the both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires during the First World War. The Second World War greatly affected the Balkans States as all fell under German occupant or their allied. During the Cold War, most of the Balkans were ruled by Soviet inspired communist regimes, apart from Greece and Turkey, and later Yugoslavia, which asserted its non-alignment under the leadership of Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980). Albania, on the contrary, re-aligned its political ideals towards Communist China adopting what became known as its isolationist position. The non-communist countries, Greece and Turkey entered into NATO, forming the South-eastern wing of the alliance. After the death of Marshal Tito in 1980, the region was, at the end of the XXth century, gravely afflicted by the ensuing civil wars. The violent break-up of Yugoslavia led to the full independence of six Republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia.

3 All reference to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.
IV. Regional and international organisations with South East European specificity and/or importance to developing intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

11. The following regional organisations totally or partly include the Balkan States which are also Members of PAM.

12. Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP): SEECP was launched on Bulgaria’s initiative in 1996. At the Bulgaria-chaired meeting in Sofia, the SEECP countries laid the foundations for regional co-operation for the purposes of creating an atmosphere of trust, good neighbourly relations and stability. SEECP is similar to PAM in that it was formed at the Members’ own initiative and not through another international organisation, and its aims are to fight injustice, and build a region of peace and stability.

13. Regional Cooperation Council (RCC): in 2008, the RCC superseded the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe originally established to foster peace, democracy, human rights and economy in the countries of South Eastern Europe in 1999. The RCC replaced the Stability Pact because it is more "regionally owned" than the Stability Pact, which was driven more by outside partners such as the EU.

14. Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA): CEFTA is a trade agreement between non-EU countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe. As of 1 May 2007, the parties of the CEFTA agreement are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and the UNMIK on behalf of Kosovo. The agreement aims at establishing a free trade zone in the region by 31 December 2010.

15. Central European Initiative (CEI): since it was established in 1989, the mandate of the Central European Initiative (CEI) has been to help transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe in their effort to integrate further with the European Union (EU) and achieve a higher level of socio-economic development. In a post-enlargement context, the CEI has shifted in focus towards those Member States remaining outside the EU. As such, the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, FYROM, Montenegro and Serbia and the three CEI Member States part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) are at present the areas where most of the CEI financial resources and technical expertise converge.

16. Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI): the SECI was formed in 1996 under the guidance of then, Senior Director for Eastern Europe in the United States National Security Council, Richard Schifter, to foster and build on peace initiatives in the area.

17. Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC): on 25 June 1992, the Heads of State and Government of eleven countries signed, in Istanbul, the Summit Declaration and the Bosporus Statement establishing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). It came into existence as a model for multilateral political and economic initiatives aimed at fostering interaction and harmony among the Member States, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity encouraging friendly and good-neighbourly relations in the Black Sea region. In 2009, PAM exchanged Observer Status with the BSEC’s parliamentary assembly PABSEC.

18. UN-led initiatives: United Nations: The Alliance of Civilization (AoC) was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. A High-level Group of experts was formed by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan to explore the roots of polarization between societies and

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4 Cf footnote 3
cultures today, and to recommend a practical programme of action to address this issue. The Report of the High-level Group provided analysis and put forward practical recommendations that form the basis for the implementation plan of the Alliance of Civilizations. On 26 April 2007, former President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, was appointed as the High Representative for the AoC by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to lead the implementation phase of the Alliance.

19. Also, under the leadership of UNGA’s 62nd President, Mr. Srgjan Kerim (FYROM), the General Assembly convened its first-ever high-level dialogue on interreligious and intercultural understanding on 4th October 2007. Mr. Kerim declared that it was time to “begin a global dialogue, using public campaigns and all forms of media, to spread greater awareness of the issues” where “governments can play an additional role by adopting educational curricula that instil values of peace and tolerance.”

20. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): As part of its activities, the UN’s global development network, develop local capacity on strategic areas including Democratic Governance and Crisis Prevention and Recovery. With regard to Democratic Governance Practice, its goal is to strengthen the democratic process in Eastern Europe & CIS countries and help public institutions become efficient and accountable, based on the principles of human rights, gender equality, the rule of law, and therefore contribute to an environment where the people and their institutions can interact in a vibrant, participatory and transparent manner. UNDP has action programmes in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, FYROM, Slovenia and Kosovo.

21. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Founded in 1945, UNESCO is a specialized agency of the UN and works towards creating the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. One of UNESCO’s chief aims is to ensure space for and freedom of expression to all the world’s cultures, by revitalizing them to avoid segregation and cultural entrenchment and prevent conflict. UNESCO has established the Network of Chairs on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, associating in its endeavor the academic community. All Western Balkan States are members of UNESCO.

22. Council of Europe: the Council of Europe organized the European Conference, on the theme “The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue”, (San Marino on 23-24 April 2007) and published a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (May 2008) which was examined in detail in PAM’s last year’s report and has been a source of inspiration for future PAM work. Since then, the Council of Europe has organized a workshop in the framework of the “Speak out against discrimination” campaign (Seville, April 2009) and has conducted the "Intercultural Cities" programme (also in April 2009). It is also worth noting that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted, in June 2007, two resolutions with relevance to the inter-religious dimension of dialogue namely:

· Recommendation 1804 (2007) on “State, religion, secularity and human rights”
· Recommendation 1805 (2007) on “Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion”.

23. The European Union (EU): All the States of South East Europe that are not already Members of the European Union (i.e. Greece and Slovenia) have applied to become members: Croatia, FYROM and Turkey are official candidates, while Albania, Bosnia and

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5 See footnote 3
Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo\(^6\) are considered potential candidates. In order to join the EU bloc, candidate countries have to adhere to a set of strict criteria known as the "Copenhagen criteria" with strong emphasis on, inter alia: democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. All the countries of the Western Balkans are taken part to the Stabilisation and Association process which aims to bring them progressively closer to fulfilling the criteria and to joining the EU.

24. As part of the Barcelona process, the EU has also set up a wide range of measures various instruments promoting the dialogue between cultures and civilisations (MEDA programme) with 12 Mediterranean partner countries. It also set up a High Level Advisory Group on intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean area in 2003. The Group's conclusions supported the proposed setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the dialogue between cultures.

25. European Commission (EC): The EC itself, and it Directorate General for Culture, has been promoting intercultural dialogue for several years —within its member States or in third countries. The Culture 2000 programme contributed to several cultural cooperation projects involving organisations from several European countries. The Interculture Dialogue Conference in 2006, led to 2008 to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Several conferences have been to encourage tolerance, better knowledge and mutual understanding (Jean Monnet project, March 2002, “Dialogue between Peoples and Cultures, focusing on specific questions of concern to civil society”, May 2004 and "Dialogue between Peoples and Cultures: The Artists and the Cultural Actors" in February 2005).

26. Also, through its Youth programmes, the EU facilitates youth mobility and exchanges between young persons from 31 European countries.

27. OSCE: The OSCE is also actively supporting its members in combating all forms of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and discrimination\(^7\). It has established an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), based in Warsaw, Poland. The Chairman in office also appoints personal representatives to combat discrimination\(^8\). The OSCE also established back in 1992, the post of High Commissioner on National Minorities to identify and seek early resolution of ethnic tensions that might endanger peace, stability or friendly relations between OSCE participating States\(^9\).

IV General considerations concerning “Dialogue”

28. The Council of Europe’s White Paper on Intercultural dialogue\(^10\) referred to above and PAM’s 2009 report “Building on Dialogue” are promoting dialogue through an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and

\(^6\) Cf footnote 3

\(^7\) 15 PAM countries are currently members of the OSCE (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, FYROM; Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey)

\(^8\) Currently: Rabbi Andrew Baker, Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism, Ambassador Adil Akhmetov, Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims and Mario Mauro Personal Representative on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions.

\(^9\) Currently held by Ambassador Knut Vollebaek from Norway.

\(^10\) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, Living together as Equals in Dignity, Committee of Ministers, 7 May 2008, Council of Europe, CM(2008)30 final 2 May 2008. As stated in its previous report, the STF, endorsed by the PAM Plenary, supports the departure from traditional multicultural models of co-existence of majorities with minorities based on mutual rights and obligations.
respect. Engaging in dialogue serves as a barrier to developing stereotyped perceptions and mutual suspicion of others, where minorities are susceptible to be used as scapegoats for intolerance and discrimination.

29. In considering the policies to be adopted in support of intercultural or interreligious dialogue in the Western Balkans, PAM cannot ignore the tragic loss of human lives, whether due to conflict or ethnic cleansing policies that took place during the final decade of the twentieth century. An estimated quarter of a million lives were lost in the bloodshed that swept through the Western Balkans, and a further three million people were displaced, whether temporarily or permanently, or became refugees. Today the question of the return of internally displaced people and refugees is neither complete nor entirely politically resolved. Overall, the situation in the Western Balkans is not considered to have been definitively stabilized. One main reason is that the States in the Balkans are at different stages of economic and political development.

30. PAM has been outspoken in its denunciation of the exploitation of religion to achieve nationalist and/or political goals that exclude, discriminate against and divide peoples and will work with the parliaments of the region and all actors involved at local, regional and international level to continue its policy of engagement.

31. PAM would like to highlight the findings of a report prepared by the Hellenic Republic Ministry of Interior Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the leadership of Professor Prokopis Pavlopoulos entitled “Local Government and Interculturalism”. The report states that intercultural dialogue begins with local authorities, with balanced management of cultural diversity and social cohesion since local democracy is closest to the citizens. As such, local authorities and municipalities can plan and implement all aspects of economic, cultural and social life of the local community.

32. Mention should also be made of the Gallup Balkan Monitor survey, covering Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo and exploring key issues including ethnic & cultural identities and perceptions of other ethnic groups, religion & spirituality, good governance, corruption, crime and safety, well-being and life satisfaction, migration, future outlook and aspirations. Such tools are useful for politicians to feel the pulse of the populations of this region and shape future policy in particular on inter-cultural and minorities issues.

33. Thus, in the context of the Western Balkans and on the premise that cultural diversity is an economical, social and political asset, local authorities have a duty to establish contact with all the cultural and religious groups in their geographical area and every sector of public life. More simply stated, local communities have to become mutually more supportive, creating a feeling of belonging and togetherness. Based on the findings of this report, PAM believes that parliaments should involve as much as possible local communities and civil society in general in projects promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

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13 Greek Minister of Interior
14 Cf Footnote 3
V. Interreligious dialogue

34. The considerations drawn in relation to intercultural dialogue are generally valid for questions relating to inter-religious dialogue. In the Balkans, religious differences never were merely a reason or pretext for conflict, but also served to create a basis for instability in terms of national and cultural identity. Hence, given the strong nexus between religion and ethnicity in the Western Balkan States under consideration, it may be more appropriate to evaluate - and certainly worthwhile investigating - to what extent the use of religious cooperation fosters dialogue and develop a genuine sense of togetherness of people. Inter-religious dialogue is an essential tool for the development of mutual trust and understanding.

35. The FBO (Faith Based Organizations Forum) on Multi-religious Cooperation for Humanitarian Relief, Development and Peace, an initiative developed under the auspices of Religions for Peace, met in Frankfurt November 2008 to explore the opportunities for FBOs to cooperate across multiple religions to add to the quality of humanitarian and development responses following protocols that are acceptable to all faith communities. The Forum identified distinct potential benefits from multi-religious cooperation for humanitarian aid, development and peace when working in and around conflict, namely:

a. The vast majority of individuals and communities in areas of potential and actual violent conflict identify with and/or belong to a religion;
b. Religious structures reach down and can give humanitarian access to grassroots communities and out, beyond conflict lines, with local, national, and transcontinental structures;
c. Religious leaders are enabled to educate their communities to understand that the root cause of many conflicts is political or economic, rather than religious;
d. Religious leaders can sensitize and influence their communities against the use of violent conflict, and persuade their communities in conflict to enter a peace process;
e. Religious leaders of different faiths, acting together, can provide a powerfully symbolic demonstration of solidarity, confidence and trust;
f. Religious leaders of different faiths, acting together, with integrity and trust, can monitor and provide early warning of potentially serious conflict;
g. Faith inspired humanitarian aid and peace organizations working together with the religious leaders of different religion can:
   - assess, through action research, the real needs of people and communities on all sides in an area of conflict;
   - reach out to all communities, including women and youth, with task-oriented dialogue, education and conflict transformation training;
   - help support the political election monitoring process;
   - access political leaders of all persuasions and the media with clear identity, solidarity, and representative advocacy.

36. The FBOs recommended drafting a Code of Practice to manage such issues, which might include trust and awareness building; common principles; code of practice; principles of dialogue; the deep values that bring us together.

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15 Founded in 1970, Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace. See www.religionsforpeace.org.
16 The Forum is an informally organized network engaged in an ongoing dialogue dedicated to building trust, creating a learning forum, facilitating joint advocacy at all levels, and promoting joint research into multi-religious cooperation.
VI. Actions that PAM can promote within the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue for the Western Balkans

Awareness raising/exchange of best practices
- Build on the answers to the questionnaire collected in 2009 to highlight best practices regarding status and rights of national ethnic and religious communities in order to share best practices in the region.
- A follow-up questionnaire could be drawn up by the PAM Secretariat for the Balkans – as well as all other PAM countries - with the aim to finding out what activities civil societies have engaged in at local level to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
- Follow-up on the PAM Letter of Commitment engaging all parliaments to conduct activities within their own parliaments on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and including youth especially engaged in national NGO’s.

Cooperation at regional and international level/Advocacy
- As part of its activities under the Fez programme, PAM should seek to increase its collaboration with all other actors on inter-cultural/inter-religious dialogue in the region (see list p 3-5 above) and hold joint events on the subject of dialogue.

Legislative Action
- PAM Members belonging to the Balkan region could lobby their respective national, regional and local parliaments to draw up and implement municipal and local authority codes, which include policies to ensure balanced management of cultural diversity and strengthen social cohesion at local level.

Development of Exchange programmes
- PAM Members belonging to the Balkan region could lobby at national, regional and local level for further development of cultural exchange programmes, to be developed at all levels, including national parliaments, down to local communities, and especially targeting youth culture, for example by organising multicultural musical events, sporting competitions etc. Exchanges can be organised both through secular and religious associations.

Education
- Support specific training programmes within public administrations to sensitise members of local authorities about multiculturalism and non-discrimination. Multiculturalism needs to be taught as a priority in schools.

Visibility
- The Mediterranean Day (21st March) established by PAM should be used as an important platform to promote peace, reconciliation and inter-cultural/inter-religious dialogue throughout the region including the Balkans.
- A special portal could be set up, for example on the PAM Facebook site, where inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue initiatives/best practices can be posted, by people of the South Eastern Europe, which will help develop knowledge, awareness-building, and understanding.
A dedicated PAM prize should also be used as a tool to award individuals, groups or organisations that contribute exceptionally to intercultural and interreligious dialogue throughout the Balkans.

Journalism and Media
- PAM should continue to work closely with the media to publicize all its activities on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and highlight “success stories”.