

## Rising to the Euro-Mediterranean Digital Challenge

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MEDFORIST is a project of the EUMEDIS initiative of the European Union. It has lasted for 36 months, starting from August 2002, and gathered 16 partners: four from the EU 15 countries (France, UK, Finland and Greece - AUEB, Management Science Laboratory), composing the project management team, and 12 from Mediterranean countries - from Morocco in the West to Syria in the East and including Cyprus and Malta. Within the MEDFORIST project, a Euro-Mediterranean network for sharing pedagogic resources in e-business has been implemented through three main project phases:

- o Year 1 was dedicated to the establishment of the network and the analysis of needs for e-learning support and content in the countries,
- o Year 2 was dedicated to the development of pedagogic material adapted to the local context of the partners and to the implementation of technological support - platforms,
- o Year 3 was dedicated to the dissemination of the training material and the know-how developed.

### Human Resources - The Establishment of a Regional Network

The MEDFORIST project has mobilized a significant number of players and enabled the development of strong ties between leading academic institutions in the region. Besides the project management team, the network of people consists of:

- o The **trainers** (23 men and 25 women, four trainers per country), who after having followed cutting-edge seminars in the areas of E-commerce, Customer Relationship Management, Enterprise Resource Planning and Supply Chain Management, have been responsible for developing local training material and case studies.
- o The **instructors** from Grenoble Ecole de Management, who have tutored the group of trainers in the subject areas and in the principles, operation and functioning of e-learning.
- o The 12 **country managers**, who have been responsible for managing the program in their country, for guaranteeing the execution of the dissemination and ensuring the sustainability of the actions undertaken in the course of the project.
- o A number of **contributors**, who have been associated with the actions conducted within the project, including executives having enabled the development of case studies, and who were instrumental in improving seminars and training courses, government officials who have supported the project in different ways, e.g., organization of conferences, dissemination of results and provision of policy recommendations, and people from academia who have supported the seminars, conferences, and engaged in research activities related to the scope and topic of the project.

Of particular significance to the development of the network are the two conferences organised within the project. The **First International Conference in E-Business and E-learning EBEL 2005** was held in May 23-24th 2005 in Amman, Jordan and the **First International E-business Conference IEBC05** was held in June 23-25th 2005 in Hammamet, Tunisia. Both conferences have gathered over 500 participants. 153 authors of whom 31 were MEDFORIST trainers or instructors have presented 76 articles in the two conferences. The conferences played an important role in bringing together high-level representatives from governments, leading academics, and executives and managers from both business and public organizations. The conferences attracted the interest of major players in the ICT sector of the region including Microsoft, IBM, France Telecom and Jordan Telecom. Proceedings from the two conferences have been published.

### Learning Material and Other Deliverables

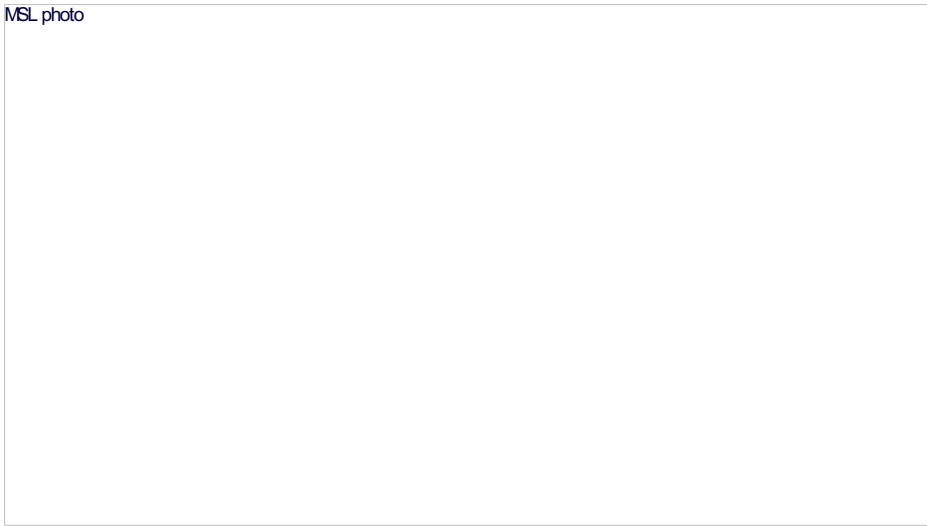
The members of the network have produced a significant volume of learning material, case studies, country reports, market overviews and research papers and reports. All content has been gathered in the **MEDFORIST Knowledge Base** accessible through the [project website](#). Syllabi and programs for teaching e-business have been produced by the trainers and country managers. For each country and for each type of public (undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate) syllabi have been build for each of the four modules that were the focus of the project (E-commerce, Customer Relationship Management, Enterprise Resource Planning, Supply Chain Management). These syllabi have been introduced either in existing programs of the institutions or have been the basis for the design of new programs. **Course materials** are available corresponding to the syllabi mentioned above. They are mainly, slide shows, readings, quiz and exercises. They are basic materials to be used by the trainers for their courses to the different audiences. **Case studies** are the other main contribution to learning materials from the trainers. Each trainer has written one case study with a leading company from his/her country, describing how the company has managed the introduction of e-business applications. Based on the case studies developed, a casebook has been published in July 2005 under the title: "Rising to the Digital Challenge: Lessons from Mediterranean Enterprises".

Furthermore, **multimedia courses** have been produced by the trainers with the help of the instructors on e-learning from Grenoble Ecole de Management. These multimedia courses are available on CD-ROM format and some examples may be found on the Knowledge Base. Materials are available in French, English and Arabic languages. These courses follow a standard template using Microsoft PRODUCER including videos displaying the trainers and software for synchronising slides to the trainer's presentation (see illustration image below). The multimedia courses also include all additional materials requested for the course administration such as syllabus, readings, case study, quiz, etc. During the project all trainers have experienced individually and collectively the making of multimedia courses.



Among the special documents and reports have been produced a **self-assessment tool** address the needs of executives - particularly in SMEs. A report entitled **Best Practices in Knowledge Management** compiles the experience of operating, over three years, a network of people in many different countries on a remote basis from a Knowledge Management perspective, and reports on **best practices on e-learning, intellectual property and cultural differences** have also been produced.

The infrastructure for e-learning and collaboration that has been developed and implemented during the project is illustrated below. These different software solutions provided the necessary support for executing all project tasks and for building a strong community. Their joint development as such was an important experimental learning exercise in the project.



## Added Value from the Project

The added value is two-fold. On the one hand, there is added value brought to the Mediterranean countries, and on the other there is also added value for the European Union from the project. This added value appears at four levels; Trainers, Institutions, Nations, and Regions.

The trainers involved had little knowledge of the four e-business topic areas at the start of the project. At the end, the amount of experience acquired is considerable. The trainers have developed their own course materials, investigated the e-business situation in Mediterranean companies, written cases as a result of their investigation, and conducted courses, seminars and research projects. In addition, the trainers have been certified to share their course materials with others trainers and some have started training other trainers.

At the level of the partner institutions, the MEDFORIST project has succeeded in transcending barriers that might have existed because of the differences between the institutions - focus on different fields such as computer sciences, business administration, economics or engineering, and having different educational focus ranging from undergraduate schools to graduate and vocational training institutions. At the end of the project all partner institutions have introduced new courses on e-business in their programs at all levels. Moreover, e-learning was not well known to many partner institutions (with the exception of Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, and Egypt). The introduction of e-learning requires again a transformation of the organisation, which is difficult to achieve in institutions like universities. To take an example of the change required in delivering courses, traditional teaching in most of the Mediterranean institutions is done on the model of the teacher transferring knowledge to the students through lectures. In the e-learning teaching model a "learner-centred" approach is required. All materials are available to the students (lecture on video, readings, assignments) and the role of the teacher is more the one of a coach teaching the student "how to learn" than teaching what has to be learnt. This radical change is also illustrated in the project by the introduction of the case study methodology where students, either on a face-to-face or on a distance basis, discuss business situations between themselves. Thus, adopting the technology is not only to set up the required infrastructure, to build electronic contents and to train trainers. It is also changing the process of delivering courses. At the end of the project, most partners have introduced the infrastructures, the contents and the trained trainers in their programs and have started changing the learning process of their students in introducing the e-learning solutions proposed by the project.

At the national level, many Mediterranean countries tend to lag behind EU countries as far as ICT are concerned. Equivalent levels of ICT adoption is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for exchanging goods and services. The development of an educational offer in e-business, widely accessible on a distance basis and aiming a wide range of populations is indeed one of the key success factors to narrow this gap. An action that will consist in transferring courses to trainers would be very insufficient if it was not included in a larger process of meeting an emerging demand. In the former paragraphs we point out the actions that have been conducted to train trainers and make them able to master the content and the process. We also point out the importance of adapting the products and learnings of the project. These core mechanisms for building a sustainable and relevant offer need to be completed by equivalent mechanisms at the demand level. Therefore, preliminary studies have been conducted in each country to better understand the needs. First the study of infrastructures sets the limit of what is feasible. No infrastructure means no e-learning and many partners are in a situation where the pilot project will remain a pilot until a sufficient infrastructure emerges. Results show nevertheless a rapid development of telecommunications infrastructure in many countries to be followed by the development of the internet and PC at professional and domestic level in the next ten years. The next important point is the understanding of the needs for competences and training in companies. A survey has been conducted all over the Mediterranean showing results from 925 companies. Results are available on the knowledge management base of the project. The benefits of the survey are several: First to understand the needs, second to raise awareness and third to stimulate an emerging demand for the new courses. Following the surveys, which give a quantitative evaluation of the needs in term of competences and associated training, case studies conducted within the companies gives an additional in-depth knowledge to the needs of the companies.

The MEDFORIST project succeeded in building a national network for the dissemination and promotion of e-learning and awareness in the e-business field. Through Chambers of Commerce, professional associations and other relays, it amplifies the dissemination to a wider public of companies and executives. In each country such a national network has been established whose actions are reported before. In addition, many actions have been undertaken which aimed at raising awareness of national authorities on the challenge of the Information Society and at getting support for the continuation of the actions. Several partners have received support for the actions from their local government. Such is the case in Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria and indeed Egypt as the partner is directly linked to the Cabinet of the Prime Minister. At last, awareness actions have targeted a large audience and countries other than the one from the MEDA group. This is particularly the case of the International Conferences run in Tunisia and Jordan. This type of event has empowered the partners' institutions giving them a visibility, which overpasses their usual boundaries.

Finally, the added value brought to the EU from the MEDFORIST project is multiple. It has been a very rich experience for each of the European participants to be faced with the reality, view points and needs of their colleagues from all over the Med Basin. The project has enabled teaching experience on a remote basis in an intercultural context, in-depth understanding of various educational systems, development of knowledge about training needs and training processes both at micro (trainers - institutions) and macro levels (industry sectors, nations), and, finally, the project was a complex but indeed successful exercise in large-scale project management.

For the future enhancement of the relations built and the knowledge developed, the European institutions for Higher Education have to build strategies to face a growing international competition associated with a rapidly growing demand and to increase their "market share". This is obtained by the establishment of links with universities and vocational training institutions abroad, exchanging students and faculty, setting up similar programs, harmonising the organisation of studies, delivering joint diploma and certificates. Joint networks of people and shared training and research resources in innovative fields like e-business and e-learning are of high value to build a "competitive advantage" for Europe, particularly at a moment when private universities flourish in most of the Med countries. Actually, if the position of the European universities is still strong for historical reasons within traditional state-controlled universities, the emergence of new private universities open the door to new partnerships often with American private institutions. In addition to the change in competition, the demand for higher education is growing very fast. One may recall here the speech of the Ministry of Telecommunication of Jordan during the Eumedis Dead-Sea meeting of April 2005. 75% of the population of Jordan is less than 25 years old and 50% is still at school. Getting a higher education for children is clearly seen by the population as the main asset for its future and people are ready to pay high fees for this. This is particularly the case in business administration with the emergence of an international competition at MBA level. European institutions need to be active in these countries at a moment when the market is growing so rapidly that the positions which are lost today will never be recovered.

The MEDFORIST project has been such an opportunity. Bilateral agreements have been established covering all or parts of the above links. New cooperations have emerged which should last for many years to come. As such the MEDFORIST project has contributed to the achievements of the expected objectives and results of the EUMEDIS programme:

*To contribute to the expansion and qualitative improvement of the Euro-Mediterranean Information Society in the pursuit of the overall economic development, quality of life and mutual comprehension, and understanding the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.*

At last, the extent to which a project such as MEDFORIST will contribute or not to the overall improvement of the quality of life as a direct consequence of the large-scale deployment of regional Information Society initiatives in various fields of activity in the MED countries remains to be seen. This long-term objective requires continuous effort. The partners of the project are committed to achieve it. Resources need to be identified and deployed. Each partner is committed to strive for this end in his or her respective country. We are all convinced that the European Commission recognizes the added value brought by the MEDFORIST project and that it will help securing the future of this initiative.

## List of Partners

- [EU15](#)
  - Grenoble Ecole de Management, Centre TIME (contracting partner)
  - Athens University of Economics and Business, Management Science Laboratory
  - Helsinki University of Technology
  - University of Sheffield
- [Mediterranean Institutions](#)
  - Institut Supérieure de Gestion et de Planification, Algeria,
  - University of Cyprus,
  - The Cabinet of Information and Decision Support, Egypt,
  - Princess Sumaya University, Jordan,
  - Université Saint Joseph, Lebanon,
  - EAN, Malta,
  - Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Informatique et d'Analyse de Systèmes, Morocco,
  - Birzeit University, Palestine,
  - Higher Institute of Applied Sciences and Technologies, Syria,
  - Institut Supérieure de Gestion, Tunisia,
  - Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey,
  - ISIK University, Istanbul, Turkey.