The power of the media to influence opinion is also manifest in the way in which perceptions of a particular situation can rapidly change. For instance, the public perception of Iran was transformed between the time of the elections and recent moves to impose sanctions on the country.

Participants also underlined the challenge of reconciling freedom of expression and mutual understanding. Some suggested that self-limitations on freedom of speech are needed. However, the emphasis should not be on censorship, but on journalism ethics and on upholding principles of fairness and transparency.

Finally, others questioned the idea that the role of the media should be to promote social harmony. There are occasions, for example, when the media should not shy away from offering criticism of minorities, when that is justified. One should avoid focusing journalism on 'public relations' goals. Indeed, the role of the journalist is also to be critical, to challenge the status quo, in order to generate change on the ground.

Thematic Session 4: Living Together in Urban Societies

(Organized by the Council of Europe and United Cities and Local Governments)

PANELISTS

H.E. Mr. Marcio Fortes, Minister for Cities, Brazil

Mr. Alfredo Sánchez Monteseirín, Mayor of Seville, Spain

Ms. Irena Guidikova, Head of Division of Cultural Policy, Diversity and Dialogue, Council of Europe

Mr. António Costa, Mayor of Lisbon, Portugal

Mr. Vincenzo Scotti, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Italy

Mr. Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul , Co-President of United Cities and Local Governments, Turkey

Mr. Sérgio Besserman Vianna, President of the Chamber for Sustainable Development of the City of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Ms. Cecilia Martinez, Director of UN-HABITAT regional Office for Latin America and Caribbean

Mr. Phil Wood, urban therapist, researcher and analyst, United Kingdom, Moderator

Mr. Eduardo Miralles I Ventimilla, UCLG, Rapporteur

This session highlighted the central role that cities play in managing diversity in their societies. Goals for the session were to discuss methods to deal with conflict and disputes in the urban context; to explore how new practices can be extended to other contexts; and to draw lessons from several practical examples such as the 'Intercultural City' project, the use of city diplomacy for conflict prevention and resolution, and the multicultural experience of Rio de Janeiro.

Intercultural cities, throughout history, have been places where ethnic, cultural, social and religious barriers have been overcome for the benefit of social actors. It was highlighted that cultural diversity is an integral element of numerous cities, such as Istanbul, Seville, Bristol, Rio de Janeiro, Cordoba, Reggio Emilia and Lisbon. One of the central issues discussed in the session was introduced by Ms. Irena Guidikova from the Council of Europe. She spoke about the necessity to move away from the traditional patterns of 'assimilation' and even 'multiculturalism' to build the new paradigm of "intercultural cities." The intercultural city is characterized by new urban spaces that are not only environmentally sustainable but also culturally and socially sustainable. In addition, Intercultural Cities embrace diversity as a factor contributing to development, growth and competitiveness. Speakers nevertheless stressed the fact that cities face the challenge to effectively make the best of diversity to fight against poverty and social inequalities, ensuring that all citizens are equal.