



**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**



**FOURTH PLENARY SESSION
ATHENS, 28 MARCH 2008**

**FINAL DECLARATION
OF THE PRESIDENCY**

The fourth session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) convening in a plenary session in Athens, on 27-28 March 2008, upon the invitation of the Hellenic Parliament and under the presidency of Mr. Dimitrios Sioufas, President of the Hellenic Parliament and in the presence of guests of honour:

- the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, H.E. Mr. Kostas Karamanlis
- the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Barroso
- the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Lluís Maria de Puig
- the European Union Commissioner on Environment, Mr. Stavros Dimas
- the State Secretary for Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Dušan Lesjak
- the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Yannis Valinakis

The members of the EMPA (herewith the list of participants), declare their strong commitment to strengthening the parliamentary dimension of the Barcelona Process and pursuing its objectives and emphasise their commitment to enhance the role of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly as the parliamentary institution of the Barcelona Process that will contribute to the establishment of operational ties between the EMPA and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership;

Acknowledge the fact, that the Mediterranean was and remains a meeting point between East and West, North and South, a melting pot of world traditions and cultures, a space of challenge and invitation for economic and political cooperation, a bridge for Europe's business and trade activities with the Middle East, Asia and North Africa;

The Members of the EMPA underline that during the first four years of its operation parliaments discussed important issues with a view to pursuing initiatives aiming at the development and consolidation of peace and prosperity in the region.

The EMPA notes the statement made by the European Council on "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" and expresses its support towards developing initiatives to further promote the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and calls on the European Commission to enhance EMPA's role, including a reinforced legal basis, as the legitimised parliamentary dimension of the revised process.

The EMPA underlines the following in the light of the discussions and the Recommendations of the Committees:

POLITICAL ISSUES

Firmly supports the process of consolidation of the Euro-Mediterranean area based on democratic principles and the respect for the Rule of Law. The well-cemented establishment of such principles must also lead to a strong partnership in the areas of foreign and security policy, in tackling terrorism, and in solving the conflict in the Middle East;

Reiterates its condemnation against terrorism, which can never be justified in any of its manifestations and under any circumstances;

Considers combating terrorism a common objective, which ought to be firmly pursued in conformity with international agreements on human rights, fundamental freedoms and international humanitarian law, as well as in accordance with the democratic principles governing the organisation of public authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership countries;

Considers the implementation of the Code of Conduct will be facilitated by the adoption of a definition of “terrorism”; thus, deeply hopes the Euro-Mediterranean partnership countries will be able to find a common position;

Considers that the role of media is important to protect from terrorist acts through the propagation of the values of democracy, tolerance and the work to employ the different forms of modern communication means;

Underlines the role of the EMPA (the only parliamentary assembly uniting all parties involved in the Middle East peace process), in particular:

- its capability to quickly adopt strong political stances against aggression by one member against the other and in support of human rights and fundamental freedoms and rule of law, should be improved,
- fact-finding missions of EMPA delegations, such as the one that was deemed appropriate to be sent to the Gaza Strip, should be actively encouraged in order to support the Assembly's political stances and the Middle East peace process, and the lasting solution to which is strongly desired,
- the organisation of a special plenary session debate on assessing the implementation of the peace process from the 'Annapolis Conference' onwards should be considered;

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Affirms the importance of socio-economic convergence – both within the Southern countries and between the two shores of the Mediterranean – and regional integration, to any successful investment plan and in order to get full value from the economic, industrial and institutional cooperation to which the two shores of the Mediterranean have committed themselves; Acknowledges the need to associate more EU countries and organisations in MEDA issues, especially in northern and central Europe, and to promote more consistently the big investment potential of the Mediterranean region within the European Union;

Invites the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region to strengthen the conditions for free-trade in terms of goods and services as well as people so as to achieve a better balance in employment opportunities between the two shores of the Mediterranean and to create new jobs and new training opportunities especially for young people;

Renews the request concerning the follow-up of the transformation of the Euro-Mediterranean facility for investment and partnership (FEMIP) to a Euro-Mediterranean Bank of development, and calls for accelerating the achievement of technical studies in collaboration with the European Investment Bank to transform this facility into a bank;

EDUCATION

Acknowledges that education and research are crucial to society's political and socio-economic development, and reaffirms the goal of achieving fair and unconditional access to quality education;

Calls for the commitments made in the field of scientific and university cooperation to be put into practice, so as to facilitate mobility for students and scientists from the South with regard to European establishments, by stepping up the Community TEMPUS and ERASMUS MUNDUS programmes with the partner countries;

Calls for an increased effort to promote scientific cooperation between the countries of the two shores of the Mediterranean by renewing and promoting higher education programmes particularly those which seek to establish a profitable cooperation between education and training institutions;

Recognizing the Slovenian initiative to create a Euro-Mediterranean University as an important step forward through a cooperation network of existing universities, invites Governments and Parliaments to define a number of criteria with a view to create an effective Euro-Mediterranean space for higher education ensuring the active engagement of both shores of the Mediterranean and promoting the exchange of students;

Calls on the European Council and the Mediterranean Countries to undertake actions to create a budget line enabling the further development of the Euro-Mediterranean University;

Invites Governments and Parliaments to make young people central to Euro-Mediterranean policies, by strengthening community and multi-lateral instruments envisaged for the young generations and to encourage exchanges between students and between professional experiences;

Welcomes Morocco's intention to host the second edition of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament, following the first meeting held in Berlin from the 26th of May to the 3rd of June 2007, which permitted young people from both sides of the Mediterranean to discuss their views about the region and the prospects for future cooperation;

CULTURAL ISSUES

Emphasises that the growing availability of new media represents a fruitful opportunity for dialogue, knowledge and education of young generations, which should be grasped in compliance with basic ethical principles and in the service of a world characterised by greater fairness and solidarity. It, however, notes that there is still a significant "digital gap" which Governments and Parliaments are called upon to bridge;

Expresses the hope that media may fully be able to exercise their function as mediators, basing themselves on the values of transparency, impartiality, freedom of information and expression, the respect of civilisations and specificities, in the awareness of the growing role they have to play in modern society;

Emphasises that media bear the responsibility to avoid provocative broadcasts containing insulting elements on grounds of freedom of expression which might encourage discriminative and racist tendencies in the society;

Underlines that freedom of expression should be exercised with responsibility and respect for human rights, religious symbols and beliefs, consistent to the international covenants and the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as to the fundamental principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership;

Condemns the widespread confusion between terrorism and Islam, and expresses its sorrow for the offences and the unjustifiable defamation campaigns against Muslims, especially with reference to the production of a film in the Netherlands, the content of which has been deemed offensive to the Muslim world;

In view of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Culture (Athens, May 2008) the EMPA underlines that the spread and sharing of culture has a central role in the mutual understanding of individuals and peoples and for social cohesion in the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region;

Stresses the importance of a meaningful intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region, inclusive of all movements upholding their ideals by peaceful means, in order to promote mutual understanding, common values and a shared vision of our future;

In order to raise the profile of links between EMPA and the Anna Lindh Foundation, calls for the possibility to be considered of organising meetings between lead networks of the Anna Lindh foundation and the EMPA Culture Committee;

Welcomes the decision to designate 2008 as the year of intercultural dialogue, which is to be used to raise awareness of discrimination (violations of fundamental rights) against women and girls and provide society with a wider range of information on the position and role of women immigrants, their culture and their aspirations in the host countries; notes that there should be a two-way process of promoting information and the participation of women immigrants in European social events;

MIGRATION

Welcomes the results of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Migration of 19th November 2007 in Albufeira and underlines the value of the regional cooperation framework, while stressing the need to strengthen the joint management of migratory flows to achieve the goal of optimising the social and economic benefits of migration for countries of origin, *transit* and destination, also through Union agencies, in order to combat illegal migration;

Recalls the loss of life among irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the Mediterranean during their perilous journeys to their destinations emphasising the need for the protection of the lives of these people;

Emphasises the close relationship existing between labour migration and the development, and the importance of partnerships between governments, local and

regional authorities, civil society and migrants' associations to shape effective development policies;

Calls particularly on governments and parliaments to intensify cooperation between member states, within the spirit of the Barcelona Declaration, with the aim of raising adequate resources to promote effective social policies and broad information campaigns, in order to avoid all discrimination based on the geographical provenance of immigrants and by adopting measures to achieve a simpler system for the management of legal immigration and to ensure full portability of pension rights, also in countries of origin;

Notes that women immigrants, as a general rule, encounter significant problems in integrating, primarily in terms of poverty, social exclusion, 'ghettoisation', limited access to public and social services, health services and of difficulty in accessing the labour market, low employment rates and high rates of unemployment, employment in temporary or low-paid jobs often without social and economic protection or in sectors of the 'grey' economy and undeclared employment, limited linguistic skills, a low rate of participation in basic and, above all, tertiary education, limited participation in social, political, trade union and cultural life of the host country, ignorance of the language, legislation and the culture of the host country;

Underlines the importance of providing information on their rights to the migrant women, so that they could fully enjoy those rights and be actively involved in their host society;

Calls on the Member States of the EU and the partner countries to ensure, through bilateral labour agreements relating to the entry of third-country nationals or via other methods, that women immigrants enjoy secure legal and labour status in the host countries and that they do not suffer discrimination on the basis of either gender or origin, in accordance with the "Community acquis";

WOMEN RIGHTS

Urges the Member States of the EU and the partner countries which have not done so to ensure that effective and deterrent penalties apply under their criminal codes to all forms of violence against women and children, particularly forced marriage, polygamy, crimes of honour and to increase the awareness of police and judicial authorities on those issues;

Calls on EU Member States and partner countries to eliminate the gap between the number of male and female scientists and promote gender equality in academic environment;

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Based on the discussions held during the meetings of the committees and on the debate held during the 4th Plenary Session on the subject of "Energy and Environment: perspective for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation", the EMPA:

Expresses its concern regarding the very high existing levels of contamination of the sea, air, soil and subsoil, and the excessive contamination of natural resources and concerned by unplanned coastal development, the excessive expansion of aquaculture,

the introduction of invasive foreign species, increased maritime traffic, landscape degradation, the loss of biological diversity, desertification and coastal erosion, urges EU Member States to use their bilateral assistance programmes to support the Horizon 2020 initiative and believes that any initiative must be in keeping with the Barcelona Process and calls for EUROMED cooperation the end of the degradation of the Mediterranean Sea to be prioritised;

Intends to continue the examination of these problems by changing its report on 'Horizon 2020 for the Mediterranean Sea' to a broader and deeper report on climate change in the Mediterranean, focussing on threats to, and opportunities for, the Mediterranean;

Emphasises the strong relationship between desertification and forced migratory flows, as is demonstrated by the growing number of the so-called "environmental refugees", which requires a common effort to promote effective cooperation programmes in combating desertification and providing support for locally-based rural activities and measures aimed at the sustainable management of water supplies to urban centres;

Invites the major international fora to affirm solemnly that access to water in adequate amounts to ensure life and health is an essential and inalienable human right by promoting the adoption of mechanisms and obligations to allow the full enjoyment of the right to water and recalls the fundamental value of water, as recognised by the cultures of the Mediterranean region and the need to combine development with the conservation of cultural heritage, in order to ensure the effectiveness of water management projects and their compatibility with the needs of populations;

Reaffirms its commitment to sustainable development and its support for the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change and for the Kyoto protocol;

Welcomes the conclusions of the United Nations climate change conference held in Bali (3-14 December 2007), including the agreement in principle on a 2050 target to reducing the emissions, the agreement to negotiate a binding deal in 2009 and the agreement to provide assistance to developing countries both for mitigation and adaptation;

Recognising the importance of strengthening cooperation in the field of energy between Euro-Mediterranean partners and the need for developing a regional energy market, the EMPA supports the Hellenic proposal for the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean energy community, following the example of the energy community in the countries of South East European Union.

The Euro-Mediterranean Energy Community will contribute decisively to:

- The security of energy supply of the countries involved, through the diversification of their energy sources.
- The attraction of large scale energy investments in the wider area of the Mediterranean.
- Enhancing competitiveness in the energy sector.
- The protection of the environment, by securing the use of renewable sources

and the establishment of measures for energy saving, taking into account the ever growing energy needs of the region.

The Assembly, aware that an effective response must be based on shared understanding of a common objective and an agreement on the framework for action, urges all member-countries to work together in solidarity, sharing their technologies and know-how and developing cooperation;

The Assembly, aware that enjoying a decent standard of living is a universal Human Right, while the access to energy still remains most unequally offered in our region, as well as in many regions of the world;

Recommends to the Euro-Mediterranean governments to support the EMPA's initiative towards proclaiming each Human being's Access to sustainable Energy as a Human Right;

The Assembly instructed its President to forward this Declaration to the Presidents of Parliaments and the governments of the members participating in the Barcelona Process and to all participating institutions.
