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Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries in the field of social cohesion

Report¹

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Rapporteur: Mr Roland BLUM, France, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

Despite the considerable advances achieved over recent years by the three central Maghreb countries – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – in combating poverty, efforts must be sustained where social cohesion is concerned. The Council of Europe member states have a special responsibility to co-operate with the Maghreb countries because of the manifold economic and social interdependence with them. Given the importance of social cohesion as a factor of democratic stability, every move to promote the fundamental values of the Council of Europe beyond its boundaries should furthermore embody a social component.

The Assembly calls for a reinforcement of the activities of the North-South Centre, which should be at the heart of any co-operation with the Maghreb countries. It invites the member states and the three central Maghreb countries to include activities in favour of social cohesion in their joint work programme, while continuing to further promote democracy and human rights. Finally, the Assembly's Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee should be more closely associated with the work of the North-South Centre in order to ensure fuller consideration of social questions.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11573](#) and Reference 3445 of 29 May 2008.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Despite the considerable advances achieved by the three (central) Maghreb countries – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – in their human development over recent years – including poverty alleviation – social cohesion remains a major challenge for them. The Council of Europe for its part possesses and can share its ‘acquis’ and experience in the promotion of social cohesion, declared to be one of the pillars of democratic stability at the Warsaw Summit (2005), and of social rights as enshrined in the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163).
2. The Parliamentary Assembly confirms its commitment to co-operation with the Maghreb countries, as expressed in [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) and [Recommendation 1825 \(2008\)](#) on strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries. It recalls its latest substantial contributions in this respect, particularly [Resolution 1680 \(2009\)](#) on the establishment of a “partner for democracy” status with the Parliamentary Assembly and [Recommendation 1919 \(2010\)](#) on the Euro-Mediterranean region: call for a Council of Europe strategy.
3. It welcomes the concrete moves made to implement enhanced co-operation with the Maghreb countries, particularly under various partial or enlarged agreements open to non-member states, such as the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the Pompidou Group.
4. In these times of world economic crisis, the Assembly is convinced that the Council of Europe should continue to regard social cohesion as an essential factor of democratic stability and that all endeavours to promote Council of Europe values beyond its boundaries should embody a social component. Special responsibility falls to the Council of Europe because of the manifold economic and social interdependence between the Maghreb countries and the European states, as well its mandate as a promoter of democracy and human rights. The Assembly reiterates its strong determination to develop co-operation with the parliaments of the three Maghreb countries by means of regular debate in the framework of plenary sessions, committee meetings and more informal exchanges.
5. In order to strengthen co-operation with the three central Maghreb countries in the field of social cohesion, the Assembly invites the Council of Europe member states to:
 - 5.1. reinforce co-operation both at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly and by means of the existing intergovernmental co-operation mechanisms such as the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the Pompidou Group;
 - 5.2. take the following measures regarding Council of Europe co-operation machinery and expertise:
 - 5.2.1. support the Maghreb countries in their democratic development to help them fulfil the conditions for obtaining “partner for democracy” status with the Parliamentary Assembly;
 - 5.2.2. continue to support the Maghreb countries in their efforts to accede to other Council of Europe partial or enlarged agreements open to non-member states, and encourage them to have regard to the Council of Europe standards in their national policies, even if accession is not possible, such as the European Social Charter (revised);
 - 5.2.3. reinforce their bilateral co-operation arrangements with the Maghreb countries;
 - 5.3. follow the following goals and principles below with regard to the substantive themes of co-operation with the Maghreb countries:
 - 5.3.1. satisfy themselves that all future co-operation activity between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries addresses the major challenges of better social cohesion, in particular:
 - 5.3.1.1. the problems of ill-treatment and illiteracy affecting children;
 - 5.3.1.2. education, equal opportunities and the problem of discrimination among young people;
 - 5.3.1.3. equal opportunities for women and men at all levels and especially as regards access to skilled employment and equal participation in public life;
 - 5.3.1.4. proper functioning of the labour market, offering career outlets for qualified young people;

2. 2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 24 June 2010.

5.3.1.5. access to health care for all, including the most vulnerable groups (unemployed, elderly, country dwellers, etc.);

5.3.1.6. equal opportunities between different geographical sectors (town centres/outskirts, town/country, etc.);

5.3.2. take account of migration phenomena as a factor of global interdependence by encouraging and helping the Maghreb countries to control irregular immigration by managing the immigration movements from the Maghreb with respect for human rights;

5.3.3. address urgently the social problems of the immigrant populations in their own countries, which are more liable to recur among populations subject to marginal status or discrimination;

5.4. ensure that co-operation with the Maghreb countries in relation to social cohesion proceeds in co-ordination with other European and international institutions (European Union, United Nations Program for Development, etc.), whose actions for the human development of the countries concerned are complementary to those of the Council of Europe.

6. Lastly, the Assembly invites the states of the central Maghreb – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – to follow the same lines of co-operation with the Council of Europe and its member states, and especially to:

6.1. accede, if they have not yet done so, to the Council of Europe instruments open to non-member states, and to take account of other Council of Europe standards, such as the European Social Charter (revised) in framing their national policies;

6.2. urge their competent authorities to establish contacts with the Council of Europe concerning social cohesion, social rights and other specific social questions, as well as concerning the promotion of democracy and human rights;

6.3. address through legal and political measures, shared problems such as illegal immigration;

6.4. promote their parliaments' dialogue and co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly by regularly participating in the plenary sessions of the Assembly, committee meetings and more informal exchanges (conferences, seminars, etc.), according to goals and programmes to be jointly determined.

7. Regarding the machinery of co-operation, the Assembly further considers that its Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee should be more closely associated with the proceedings of the Executive Council of the North-South Centre to ensure fuller consideration of social questions. This could be done informally, through individual activities, and formally, by suggesting that the Committee also be represented on the Executive Council of the Centre. The Assembly asks its member states to support this idea when it comes to the adoption of the new statutory resolution of the North-South Centre by the Committee of Ministers.

8. The Assembly is convinced that even after the current reforms, social cohesion and migration should remain priority themes of the future action of the Council of Europe, owing to their close links with the fundamental values of the Organisation.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Blum, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly have for several years been involved in extensive discussions and practical projects concerned with fostering co-operation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean shore, and, in particular, the central Maghreb states: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

2. In its [Resolution 1506 \(2006\)](#) on external relations of the Council of Europe and [Recommendation 1724 \(2005\)](#) on the Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union, the Parliamentary Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights beyond its member countries' borders, and particularly in the southern Mediterranean region. In its [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) and [Recommendation 1825 \(2008\)](#) on strengthening co-operation and exchanges with the Maghreb countries, it confirmed its commitment to "strengthening co-operation and exchanges with the Maghreb countries, which it regards as one of the pillars of stability in the Euro-Mediterranean region and as key partners".

3. The current framework for co-operation with the Maghreb countries is moreover defined by [Resolution 1680 \(2009\)](#) on the establishment of a "partner for democracy" status with the Parliamentary Assembly, [Recommendation 1893 \(2009\)](#) on the future of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and [Resolution 1731 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1919 \(2010\)](#) on the Euro-Mediterranean region: call for a Council of Europe strategy. In [Resolution 1731 \(2010\)](#), the Assembly reaffirms its belief that peace and stability in the Mediterranean region can only be secured in the long term on the basis of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and notes that several Mediterranean countries have shown interest in taking advantage of the Council of Europe's expertise in this field.

4. The rapporteur welcomes this broad-ranging and open approach to exchanges with the countries of the Maghreb. Nevertheless, he considers that particular emphasis should be placed on co-operation regarding social cohesion. In their action plan, adopted at the 3rd Summit in Warsaw (16-17 May 2005), the heads of state and government identified social cohesion as one of the "essential enabling factors for effective implementation of Council of Europe core values in our societies". Similarly, the ministers of Council of Europe member states responsible for social cohesion, meeting in Moscow on 26 and 27 February 2009, called on the Committee of Ministers "to recognise that social cohesion supports the core objectives of the Council of Europe on human rights, democracy and the rule of law". The rapporteur supports these declarations and considers that any efforts to promote the Council of Europe's fundamental values beyond its frontiers must be backed up by a policy on co-operation with regard to social cohesion.

5. As a member of the French National Assembly representing Bouches-du-Rhône and first deputy Mayor of Marseilles, the rapporteur comes from a region and a city where the interdependence of Europe and the southern Mediterranean shore are particularly evident. This interdependence concerns all the countries of Europe and means that, over and above their commitment to promoting shared values beyond our frontiers, they have a particular responsibility to contribute to the development of their neighbours in a number of areas, including social cohesion, as this report will set out to illustrate.

6. The initial aim was to look at possible areas of co-operation for combating social exclusion. However, the preparatory work on this report showed that the notion of social exclusion was not perceived or defined in the same way in Europe and the Maghreb, and that European concepts cannot automatically be applied directly to other countries. The rapporteur therefore decided to broaden the perspective – and thus the title of the report – to highlight the context in which co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries could and should be conducted with regard to social cohesion, including efforts to combat all forms of exclusion.

2. Problems of social cohesion in the Maghreb countries and general responses

7. Since the independence of the central Maghreb countries (Algeria 1962, Morocco 1956, Tunisia 1956), social progress and economic development have been parallel objectives of these independent states and their regimes. Although their political paths have differed, these countries have finally converged towards a process of globalisation and economic liberalism.³ However, their economic and social development has differed significantly from that of the Council of Europe member states. In their commitment to supporting

3. Groupe d'analyse du social et de la sociabilité (GRASS)/Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS): Social protection in the Maghreb countries, Ministry of Research 06/07, Paris.

social cohesion in the Maghreb, member states must not try to apply European concepts to the letter, but must take account of the specific political, economic, and social contexts of each of these countries. These are very complex and will only be touched on briefly in this report, so as to identify the main areas for co-operation with the Council of Europe with regard to social cohesion.

2.1. Algeria

8. Algeria is the largest of the three Maghreb countries, with more than 35 million inhabitants. The country has been independent since the Evian agreements with France of 5 July 1962. It is governed by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was re-elected for a third term on 9 April 2009. Despite progress concerning democratisation, certain restrictions with regard to exercising political freedoms have still been noted in recent years, for example when it comes to registering political parties or the persecution of militants of the opposition. Economically, it is richly endowed with oil, gas (5th largest producer in the world), iron ore, gold, zinc and uranium deposits. It is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of GNP (US\$60 billion) and its healthy economic growth rate (4.8%, not including oil, and nearly US\$110 billion of exchange reserves) has permitted the early repayment of its debt, so that its foreign debt now only represents 1% of GNP.

9. Despite major work programmes across the country, the unemployment rate is still relatively high, though it has fallen since 2008, to 10.2% in late 2009. Women and young persons are the worst affected. Nearly three out of four unemployed (73.4%) are aged under 30, and 86.7% are under 35. Algeria has a very young population, with 65% aged under 30. About 30% of the population is illiterate, with much higher rates in certain categories, such as rural women, where the figure is 55%. Algeria is a transit country to Europe for men and women from sub-Saharan Africa who are victims of sexual trafficking and other involuntary services, yet another in the list of social problems to be dealt with.⁴

10. The state dominates the Algerian economy and development of the private sector remains limited, although the gradual liberalisation since the 1990s has opened up the market to national and international private investment. However, the government's efforts to diversify the economy through domestic and foreign investment outside the energy sector have done little to reduce the high unemployment rate or improve living standards. Despite its strong performance on macroeconomic indicators, Algeria continues to suffer from structural weaknesses, the most important of which is its heavy dependence on oil revenues, which account for 50% of GDP, 75% of tax income and 98% of its exports. In response, a supplementary finance act came into force in July 2009. This restricts the import of certain products as a means of strengthening the local economy.⁵

11. Algeria has set itself the priority of improving the welfare of the entire population through an equal sharing of the fruits of growth. In recent decades, much progress has been made towards reducing poverty and social exclusion. Between 1988 and 2000, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty (1 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollar per day and per person) fell from 1.9% to 0.8%, a reduction of 58%. The incidence of general poverty (2 PPP dollars), estimated at 12.1% in 2000, had fallen to 6.8% in 2004. The country's human development index has improved rapidly in recent years and extreme poverty has been practically eliminated.⁶

12. However, national data can sometimes conceal disparities between urban and rural environments and between regions. The main pockets of poverty are still to be found in rural areas and on the edges of large cities. And even if Algeria has largely succeeded in eliminating financial poverty, it continues to face new human development challenges, such as mortality rates among the under fives, maternal mortality, quality of education, female illiteracy, HIV/Aids, the environment and problems of governance, as well as challenges regarding certain particularly vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed.⁷

2.2. Morocco

13. Morocco has more than 33 million inhabitants, 55% of whom live in large cities such as Casablanca (3.4 million inhabitants) and Rabat (1.7 million). It was a French protectorate from 1912 to 1956, when it became independent. The reigning monarch since July 1999 has been Mohammed VI. During the last few years, the monarch has launched reform programmes in the fields of democracy and human rights. The

4. Algerian National Statistics Office: www.ons.dz.

5. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: presentation of Algeria.

6. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): www.dz.undp.org.

7. United Nations in Algeria, Common Country Assessment, September 2005.

country has moreover set up a body for the protection of and reflection on human rights: the Advisory Council of Human Rights (Conseil consultatif des droits de l'homme). The country's economy is based on tourism, new information and communication technologies and telecommunications. Its GNP is US\$39 billion.

14. Morocco's social and economic situation reveals a number of contrasts. It is strongly committed to reducing poverty and has made considerable progress (in 2010, only 13.7% of the population were still under the poverty level).⁸ It has also made great efforts in recent years to promote employment, education, housing and equality between women and men, via the family code and reform of the state. These policies have enabled Morocco to achieve unemployment rates of 9.6% in 2008⁹ and an estimated 9.2% in 2009,¹⁰ the lowest among the three Maghreb countries. Nevertheless, the country still faces such challenges as illiteracy (alphabetisation rate of 52% of the population in 2007), relatively low rates of school attendance and very high unemployment, particularly among young people in towns, where the figure is as high as 30%.

15. The economic policies in operation since 2003, particularly the national human development initiative in 2005, have led to a certain macroeconomic stability. However, the economic crisis in Europe – Morocco's main export market – has also had an impact on the country, demonstrating just how interdependent the economies of Europe and the southern Mediterranean are. Nevertheless, and particularly thanks to the trade in phosphates, the principal mining resource, the country's economy is relatively dynamic, with respectable growth rates (6.2% in 2008).

16. Since independence and in response to this contrasting situation, government policy has gone through a number of phases. Starting in the 1980s, Morocco went through a period of rapid economic reform with an emphasis on market principles and private enterprise, but in the last ten years Morocco has been "a scene of raising awareness of a 'social' issue, which can be qualified as a 'social re-invention'".¹¹ This has led to greater emphasis on policies qualified as "social", growing "concern about the capacity to maintain social cohesion" and the establishment of a certain measure of social dialogue, following the recent enactment of social laws. Nevertheless, the world of work in Morocco is characterised by low levels of protection for employees and rural and informal sectors for which discussions about social policies have little relevance.¹²

2.3. Tunisia

17. Tunisia is the smallest of the three Maghreb countries, with about 10 million inhabitants. Like Morocco, it has been independent since 1956 and since 1987 has been led by President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Despite a law guaranteeing the political representation of the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies, the greater part of legislative and executive powers remains concentrated within the hands of the president of the republic. Economically, it is fairly similar to its European counterparts, with a diversified market economy (GNP of US\$22 billion) based particularly on agriculture, mining, tourism and manufacturing. However, unemployment (14.7% in 2009) and inflation (5% in 2008)¹³ are still very high. The state continues to exercise some control over the economy but this has been diminishing over the last few years and there has been growing privatisation. Real economic growth, which remained constantly around 5%, has declined significantly since 2008 because of the economic crisis in Europe, Tunisia's main export market.

18. Economic growth, fuelled largely by household consumption and exports, has led to a significant rise in incomes and the emergence of a genuine middle class that now represents more than 70% of the population and is the binding force of the country's economy. Tunisia has the highest quality of life of all the central Maghreb, characterised by social security coverage that extends to 89% of the population. The largest part of the country's budget goes on education. Some 99% of the country's 6-year-olds attend school and French and English are taught from a very young age. However, the large number of students – nearly 300 000 – raises the problem of their massive influx onto the labour market.¹⁴

19. Tunisian society is one of the most progressive in the Arab world, reflected among other things by the status of women, which is one of the most advanced in Arab society. For example, women represent more than 50% of students and 29% of judges. In terms of female representation in parliament, Tunisia even

8. PNUD: www.pnud.org.ma.

9. Moroccan Ministry of the Economy and Finance: www.finances.gov.ma.

10. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: presentation of Morocco.

11. Myriam Catusse: "Les réinventions du social dans le Maroc 'ajusté' Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée (REMM), pp. 105-106.

12. Ibid. pp. 221-246.

13. Tunisian National Statistics Institute – www.ins.nat.tn.

14. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: presentation of Tunisia by the General Directorate of the Treasury and Economic Policy (DGTPE), 2008 figures.

exceeds certain European countries: the rate of female representation within the parliament rose from 23% to 27.5% between the elections of 2004 and 2009, whilst women are represented at 18% in France, 22% in Great Britain and 21% in Italy (figures of respective last elections). Legislation passed in 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2004 gives women the same rights as men with regard to divorce and the management of household accounts, criminalises so-called honour killings, which are treated as intentional homicide, and makes sexual harassment an offence. Bearing in mind the Council of Europe's fundamental values, with equality between women and men considered as being a major factor for social cohesion and progress, these developments are to be warmly welcomed.

20. Tunisian policies to combat poverty and exclusion are based on national solidarity and a number of corresponding institutions, such as a national solidarity fund, the Tunisian solidarity bank and the national employment fund 21-21. The aim is to draw the least well off and disadvantaged regions into the productive system by offering them appropriate material and technical resources. Turning to social policies in general, Tunisia is trying to respond to a number of social problems by extending and improving social coverage, the introduction in 2007 of a new health insurance system and assistance to vulnerable groups of the population through employment, training and job-finding measures. More specific measures concern adult literacy, protection of the disabled and assistance to elderly persons.

21. Overall, Tunisia's development strategy is based on the interdependence of the economic and social domains and the conviction that the best way to combat social exclusion is to create employment and maintain a satisfactory working environment.¹⁵ This approach is reflected in a number of special multilateral programmes such as the Youth, Employment and Migration programme, supported by the Spanish Government, which sets out to strengthen local initiatives and promote regional skills in job creation in three pilot areas, particularly affected by youth under-employment and emigration.¹⁶

2.4. Problems affecting all three Maghreb countries

22. Despite the differences in their economic and social circumstances, the three Maghreb countries have certain social characteristics in common: the youth of their populations, their demographic growth (Tunisia 1.15%, Algeria 1.21%, Morocco 1.52%) and their fertility rates (Algeria 1.9%, Tunisia 2.03%, Morocco 2.62%). The latter reflects the common challenge of reducing population growth. They also show similar progress with respect to human development, as shown by their respective human development indices (Algeria: 104th, Morocco: 130th, Tunisia: 98th), which places them all in the "medium" group.¹⁷

23. Various forms of poverty in the Maghreb countries continue to encourage social exclusion and stigmatise some sections of the population. Notably in Algeria and Morocco, the exclusion of certain social classes is closely linked to the unemployment rate – particularly among young people, who make up the major part of the population, to an uneven distribution of national wealth and to inequalities between men and women, particularly strong in rural areas and amongst the poor. The three countries are keen to see the emergence of a middle class that is open to the world and which consumes and communicates, even in the context of a difficult labour market that is saturated with qualified young people, but they do not always seem to make sufficient effort to help the most disadvantaged.

24. Social segregation in the Maghreb takes various forms, including growing educational disparities, particularly between urban and rural populations. Among the signs of this is failure at school, illiteracy and lack of access to schools. According to the World Bank, rural poverty is one of the major impediments to universal access to education, for both girls and boys. Poor rural children, and girls in particular, make up a very large share of those who do not attend school. One of the biggest challenges is delivering services to remote rural areas, added to which traditional activities and values that limit families' demand for education tend to be stronger in rural areas. Infrastructure, schools with proper facilities, and qualified educators can go a long way in increasing rural education, especially for girls.¹⁸

25. Rising poverty also deprives the poorest members of the community of access to basic health care, medicines and different forms of treatment such as surgery and radiology. Medical prevention and screening are either lacking or too costly, because of the resulting need for vaccines, specialist appointments and the diagnosis of serious conditions. This leads to a decline in the life expectancy of groups of the population who do not have access to such care. There is a danger that this problem will increase along with general

15. Ibid.

16. Written communication to the rapporteur, Roland Blum, from Mr Jameleddine Khemakhem, Tunisian senator, in May 2010.

17. UNDP: www.tn.undp.org.

18. UNDP: "Human Development Report 2009" – <http://hdr.undp.org>.

tendencies towards an ageing population, which is also happening in the Maghreb. This has considerable consequences in terms of the need to adapt care and treatment to cardiovascular and degenerative conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. There is also the problem of local medical and hospital facilities for the most socially deprived.

26. Equality between women and men is another victim of this social exclusion, and it also sadly encourages domestic violence against women and children. Exclusion in Morocco is much more closely linked to poverty than it is in France. Within this exclusion-poverty relationship, women are the victims of structural factors such as the economic crisis, debt, structural adjustment policies and the increased dependency of Third World countries that increase the “feminisation” of poverty.¹⁹

27. Social exclusion resulting from economic and educational poverty may also be accompanied by cultural or religious segregation. Religious identity takes on major importance because of the style of life associated with it and the cultural heritage and identity that emigrant populations take with them to their new homes. This climate can lead to a retreat into their own identity, which is reflected in an avoidance of social mixing, even though this is a necessary ingredient of society, and even, in extreme cases, to terrorism. The resurgence of terrorism in the Maghreb, as shown by recent attacks, and the strengthening of the terrorist networks of al-Qaeda Maghreb according to American intelligence sources,²⁰ is rooted, at least partly, in social and cultural segregation.

28. In societies characterised by lack of prospects, certain young persons may turn to groups based on religious communities, particularly ones that offer them a future and an existence in which faith alone is an aspect of social distinctiveness. They then become more receptive to the sort of extremist discourse that can lead to terrorism. This refuge in a form of confrontational and violent religious identity in countries where Islam is the religion of state reflects a crisis of confidence in the state and its institutions. For these young people, the state has become incapable of ensuring equality between all citizens, whereas radical Islam delivers egalitarian messages in which there are no longer rich and poor but only believers united in their commitment to reclamation and struggle.

29. However, the social frustration of these groups also leads to social confrontation and public disorder, in the form of strikes, demonstrations and so on, in protest against social injustice that is blamed on corruption and the unequal distribution of wealth. Thus, there were violent disturbances in Oran in Algeria in May 2008, in the port of Sidi Ifni in Morocco and in Gafsa in southern Tunisia in June 2008. In Gafsa, a mining town where unemployment is over 30%, there were riots after unemployed persons gained the impression that nepotism had led to their being pushed to one side. Finally, the social exclusion of certain groups may also lead to very specific social problems such as various forms of crime from petty delinquency to organised crime, the level of which has risen steadily in recent years, particularly in connection with trafficking in persons and drugs.

2.5. Interdependence with the member states of the Council of Europe

30. Emigration is the result of a difficult social situation, which it then further exacerbates. In the absence of prospects, certain unoccupied young Maghrebis turn towards Europe, which retains an idyllic image that is reinforced by the television channels that many households watch. The phenomenon of *harragas* (burners), the name given to young people who travel illegally to the coasts of Europe, often risking their lives, is the ultimate gesture of desperate young people who must leave their lives, families and culture behind. At the same time, the Maghreb countries are becoming increasingly countries of immigration for a sub-Saharan population from Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, driven away by absolute poverty. This immigration is aggravating the lack of social cohesion in the Maghreb by creating new categories of excluded groups. The arrival of large numbers of African immigrants fosters feelings of xenophobia and racism towards these incomers among people who themselves face poverty and who consider that this immigration can only make their own economic and social situation worse.

31. Emigration to Europe is certainly one of the main consequences of the lack of economic and social prospects faced by certain groups. It concerns both poor people who are desperately seeking a better life in Europe through illegal immigration, and well-educated persons for whom the domestic labour market offers no long-term prospects and whose departure leads to new social imbalances. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in 2008 there were about 2 600 000 North African migrants in Europe and

19. Gender and Development in the Maghreb, World Bank, 24-25 May 2005.

20. Combating the social exclusion of women in Morocco and France, Colloquy on Labour Market and Gender in the Maghreb Countries, Rabat, 11-12 April 2003.

this immigration is generally a conscious choice of moderately comfortable individuals and households looking for a better life rather than a desperate response to deprivation.²¹ France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy are the main host countries of these immigrants. France has the largest Maghrebi community, with nearly 1.5 million persons, not counting all the European citizens, including children and grandchildren, of Maghrebi origin.

32. To reduce the flow of immigration, certain European countries sometimes adopt very protectionist anti-immigration strategies that may even border on violations of human rights. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly considers that "international migration is a key element of globalisation and offers valuable potential for growth and development in both host countries and countries of origin".²² The rapporteur considers that all future co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries should seek to strike a balance between a more "positive" approach to immigration by the European countries and a strengthening of legal provisions in the Maghreb countries to penalise illegal emigration to Europe. The latter have existed in Morocco since 2003 and Algeria since 2008.

33. Social exclusion does not stop at the frontier but is often perpetuated in the European countries of origin. Of course, social exclusion also affects the nationals of those countries but persons of Maghrebi origin are often particularly threatened by economic and social exclusion. In France there is a high rate of poverty among immigrants and their descendants, above all those from the Maghreb (27.3% risk of poverty in France in 2007 among households of Maghrebi origin).²³

34. Poor employment prospects are the main cause of poverty. In France in 2004, 67% of persons over 18 living in poverty did not have a job.²⁴ "Migrants are also harder hit by joblessness. In 1999, migrants accounted for 15% of all unemployed, but only 8.6% of the workforce. Moreover, education and degrees afford migrants little protection, with unemployment of 16% amongst those with higher level qualifications."²⁵ Access to employment is the key element of social integration. On average, income from work represents nearly 70% of a household's income. But employment is not just a source of income; it also integrates those concerned into a social network.²⁶ These differences in immigrants' and non-immigrants' access to employment are certainly no greater in France than in other countries. They are thus a shared European problem.

35. All these elements of social exclusion and their consequences, which are evident in the Maghreb countries and also in certain Council of Europe member states as a result of immigration, lead to a crisis of confidence in the state and its institutions, such as the police and the courts, and this includes Europe. Evidence of this is supplied by the riots in certain French and Dutch poorer urban outskirts in which young Maghrebis or persons of Maghrebi origin have taken an active part. The rapporteur has already produced a report on the riots in European cities, in which he noted that "riots are often the end-result of a long process that has its roots in poverty, social exclusion and the diverse forms of discrimination".²⁷

36. The economic and social interdependence of the Council of Europe's member countries and its neighbouring regions takes numerous forms. To take a couple of highly visible examples that have received considerable media coverage, one can refer to the mass and sometimes illegal emigration of young Moroccans who cross the Straits of Gibraltar, at risk to their lives, or to certain decisions taken by the European Union that have an effect beyond Europe's borders, such as the distribution of fish quotas in the Mediterranean. Overall, the economies of the three Maghreb countries have also suffered from the crisis in Europe's economy, to which they are closely linked. It therefore seems clear that the Council of Europe's member states should share their ideas about how to remedy the economic and social situation with countries outside Europe that are affected by the same developments.

37. Apart from their commitment to promoting their shared values beyond the frontiers of Europe, the aforementioned economic and social interdependence gives the Council of Europe member states a particular responsibility for supporting social cohesion in the Maghreb countries. In their common search for strategies to strengthen social cohesion, the Maghreb countries and the Council of Europe need to take account of the

21. New York Times, 1 July 2008.

22. International Organization for Migration (IOM): "Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union", Migration Research Series No. 32, 2008.

23. "Final declaration of the Chair", Tunis, 16-17 March 2007.

24. OECD, Economic Department: "Combating poverty and social exclusion in France" (Stéphanie Jamet), Paris, 2007.

25. Ibid.

26. Mohamed Saïb Musette, "Summary report on migration and development in Central Maghreb", International Labour Organization, 2006.

27. Stéphanie Jamet, op. cit.

aspects of international migration that link them together. Countries of origin should be helped to avoid the need for young and well-trained persons to emigrate to Europe because of their lack of prospects. More also needs to be done to increase understanding of migration, to improve migrants' level of integration in European society. Together with social cohesion, with which it is closely bound up, migration remains a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe, as the Assembly notes in its [Recommendation 1917 \(2010\)](#) on migrants and refugees: a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe.

3. Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries in the field of social cohesion

38. Although relations between the Maghreb countries and the Council of Europe member states are sometimes characterised by less desirable features such as irregular immigration, it is important to avoid a security-based discourse aimed at protecting European countries from social problems "imported" from third countries. The Council of Europe should promote its fundamental values as part of an open process of exchange directed towards finding common solutions to shared problems. The countries of Europe and North Africa have shared many glorious and not-so-glorious moments of history. For many centuries, Europe was essentially defined by the shores of the Mediterranean, which the Romans called *Mare Nostrum*.

39. All the countries of the world seek economic and social progress in the interests of their citizens' progress and well-being, of which their social rights and maximum possible social cohesion are also essential ingredients. And to these major challenges can now be added that of establishing effective systems of social security. In the course of its parliamentary and intergovernmental activities, the Council of Europe has produced a number of texts that serve as reference standards in the field of social rights, together with certain bodies that are an excellent basis for all future co-operation regarding social cohesion. As the Parliamentary Assembly notes in its [Resolution 1731 \(2010\)](#), the Mediterranean region occupies a strategic position in Europe's neighbourhood. It has historical, cultural, economic and human links with Europe. Peace and stability in this region take on a crucial importance for Europe.

3.1. The Council of Europe's *acquis* in the field of social cohesion

40. The revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), which protects individuals' fundamental economic and social rights in their daily lives, is a central reference standard in the field of social development. When it came into force, it contained a number of new provisions concerning the right to protection against poverty, the right to housing, the right to protection in case of termination of employment and the rights of employee representatives. The Social Charter reflects a number of shared values that have roots in a large number of countries, even though not all states have ratified it yet. By April 2010, 30 had ratified it and 15 had signed but not ratified. Some 16 member states remain bound by the 1961 Charter (ETS No. 35), and seven of these have also accepted the 1988 Additional Protocol (ETS No. 128), which extends its material scope.

41. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee is currently preparing a report on the monitoring of commitments as regards social rights, thereby continuing to promote the Charter across Europe. Given the challenges of a globalised economy, and even though it is not at present open for signature by non-Council of Europe member states, the Social Charter could still serve as a reference for the Maghreb countries when they seek to raise their social rights to the highest standards.

42. The Council of Europe's legal instruments include binding ones and ones that are concerned with co-ordination. The European Code of Social Security (ETS No. 48) and its Protocol (ETS No. 48A), as well as the revised European Code of Social Security (ETS No. 139), set standards in the social security field on the basis of minimum harmonisation of the level of social security, and set out the underlying principles of what is referred to as the European social security model. Co-ordination of social security is concerned with migrants, namely people who move to another country in order to live or work. Co-ordination provisions ensure that migrants are treated fairly as regards social security. They also aim to reduce some of the disadvantages of migration, particularly in respect of long-term benefits such as old-age pensions. Co-ordination provisions do not oblige states to directly alter the substance of their social security laws.

43. Turning to social cohesion in general, the revised Social Cohesion Strategy approved in 2004 is still the reference standard, pending the possible adoption in 2010 by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers of a new Social Cohesion Strategy, accompanied by an equivalent Council of Europe Action Plan.

3.2. Co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Maghreb countries

44. The Assembly recently introduced a new basis for co-operation in the form of its “partner for democracy” status, to enable non-member states in neighbouring regions to benefit from the Assembly’s experience in strengthening democracy and participate in the political debate on common issues that go beyond Europe’s borders. In its [Resolution 1680 \(2009\)](#) establishing this status, the Assembly reaffirms its strong commitment to developing co-operation with neighbouring regions as a means of consolidating democratic transformations and promoting stability, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

45. At the recent Seminar on the Prospects of Co-operation between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Council of Europe, in Rabat on 22 and 23 February 2010, the Moroccan authorities made an official request for “partner for democracy” status. In their common conclusions of the seminar, Morocco and the Council of Europe identify their priorities for future co-operation, which will encompass:

- human development through investment in the country’s living forces, in particular young people and women;
- co-operation in the field of social cohesion;
- protection of children and the establishment of an environment that helps their development, *inter alia*, through the gradual accession of Morocco to Council of Europe conventions;
- promoting the equal participation of women and men in public and political life, and equal rights in private spheres, while bearing in mind the cultural values of the Kingdom of Morocco.²⁸

46. The rapporteur welcomes the conclusions of the Rabat seminar and hopes that closer co-operation between the Council of Europe and Morocco will act as a stimulus and serve as an example to other countries interested in securing the new status, particularly the countries of the southern Mediterranean. He underlines on this occasion that, from the point of view of the Council of Europe, equality between women and men is a fundamental value which should be pursued independently of any cultural approach, and that this is the line to be followed rigorously in the co-operation with the Maghreb countries and in any message addressed to them. He recalls moreover, that, even outside of the perspective of this formal status, there have been numerous more informal exchanges with the Council of Europe in recent years, which he firmly believes should be continued and strengthened. Most recently, in January 2010, a high-level Moroccan delegation attended the Assembly’s first part session in Strasbourg and a high-level Tunisian delegation took part in the second part of the session in April 2010.

3.3. Main Council of Europe bodies concerned with co-operation

47. The Maghreb countries have already taken part in co-operation with the Council of Europe and its Assembly in a number of areas under existing arrangements. Bodies concerned with social cohesion or areas related to it include the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre), the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Pompidou Group, which is concerned with combating drug abuse and trafficking.

North-South Centre

48. Following a recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly, the North-South Centre was established by the Committee of Ministers in 1989 with the dual task of raising public awareness of global interdependence issues and of promoting policies of solidarity in accordance with the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. The centre was established in Lisbon in 1990. Its innovative and visionary character was based on the idea that the fate of Europe is intimately linked with that of the South and that the nations and peoples of the world depend on each other in a complex web of economic, social, cultural and ecological relations, demanding wide-ranging international co-operation and mutual understanding. Morocco acceded to the North-South Centre in July 2009. Algeria and Tunisia have also expressed interest on a number of occasions but have not so far taken the final step.

28. Report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee on “Riots in European cities: lessons and Council of Europe response” ([Doc. 11685](#)), rapporteur: Mr Roland Blum, 2008.

49. The centre's three main focuses of activity are (1) education and youth, (2) intercultural dialogue and (3) human rights and democracy, which place it at the heart of any future co-operation in the social field. According to proposals for a revised statute of the North-South Centre presented by the Assembly in 2009 in its Recommendation 1893 on the future of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre), the centre should, *inter alia*:

- improve education and information on the fundamental issues of global interdependence and solidarity;
- provide a framework for dialogue and co-operation between the Council of Europe and non-European countries or regions, in particular through education, youth co-operation and intercultural dialogue, and encourage and promote contacts of this type at parliamentary level;
- serve as an interface and act as a think tank on interdependence issues between Europe and the South.

50. In 2010/11, the centre plans to organise seminars to raise awareness of the Council of Europe in Algeria and Tunisia and a conference on women as participants in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, which will look at topics linked to social cohesion. The same topics are covered in the centre's youth programmes and co-operation activities between young Africans and Europeans.²⁹ The centre has done a great deal of work on the issue of migration, particularly the concept of migration and co-development (as recognised by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population in Recommendation 1917 (2010) on migrants and refugees: a continuing challenge for the Council of Europe). This issue is also being considered currently from the standpoint of young Africans living in Europe.

51. The Rabat seminar has enabled the centre to strengthen its role as the interface between the Maghreb countries and the Council of Europe. This role is considered to be a priority for the future and needs to be fully recognised in the discussions leading up to the Committee of Ministers' new statutory resolution, whose adoption is expected shortly. This interface role extends well beyond the centre's own activities to encompass all of the Council of Europe's areas of activity, thus including social cohesion.

52. The European Union is an active participant in the North-South Centre through its statutory bodies. The European Commission and the European Parliament are represented on the Executive Council and the Commission is also represented on the Bureau. This involvement highlights the centre's growing role in the external policy of the Council of Europe, for whom the partnership with the European Union is of great importance. The centre receives considerable support for its activities from the European Commission under the terms of the joint management agreement 2009-11 between the centre and the European Commission. This covers the centre's education (Education for Global Citizenship/Development in the New European Union Member Countries) and youth (Africa-Europe Youth Co-operation) programmes. The centre also participates in the European Commission-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

53. As part of the current discussions on the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of a new statutory resolution for the centre, following Assembly Recommendation 1893 (2009), there are proposals to strengthen still further this involvement, in particular by the inclusion of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union on the Executive Council, on the same basis as the Commission and European Parliament, and by relaunching the idea of the accession of the European Union itself to the North-South Centre. This was intended from its inception, but has not so far happened. The Assembly has also raised the question of such closer involvement in its [Resolution 1731 \(2010\)](#) on the Euro-Mediterranean region: call for a Council of Europe strategy. In its [Recommendation 1893 \(2009\)](#), the Assembly also argued that the centre should develop working relations with the United Nations system, the European Union pending its accession and other regional and international institutions and organisations active in relation to global interdependence.

54. The rapporteur considers that, in view of its activities and its successful efforts to organise co-operation with the Maghreb countries, the centre's role as an interface between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb should be strengthened, and that Algeria and Tunisia in particular should be encouraged to accede to the centre as soon as possible. Moreover, given the importance of social cohesion at this time of economic crisis, the centre should take more account of this topic in its future activities, including aspects of it in its current or future special programmes.

55. The Assembly has been closely involved in the centre's activities since its foundation. It is currently represented on the Executive Council by two members and two substitutes appointed by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, in accordance

29. "Conclusions of the Seminar on the Prospects of Co-operation between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Council of Europe, Rabat, 22 and 23 February 2010".

with their respective terms of reference. To ensure that in future the centre's activities take full account of social issues and problems relating to social cohesion, the rapporteur strongly recommends that a representative of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee also be appointed, with a view to formally extending co-operation in this area.

Venice Commission

56. The European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the “Venice Commission”, named after the city where it meets, is a Council of Europe advisory body on constitutional questions. Set up in 1990, the commission has performed an essential role in the adoption of constitutions meeting the standards of the European constitutional heritage. Initially conceived as an instrument of emergency constitutional engineering in a context of democratic transition, it has gradually evolved into an independent, internationally acknowledged forum of reflection. The commission assists in propagating the European constitutional heritage, founded on the continent's axiomatic norms, while continuing to provide states with “constitutional troubleshooting”. In addition, the Venice Commission plays a unique part in conflict management and prevention by means of its standard setting and counselling in constitutional matters.

57. Having been formed in May 1990 as a partial agreement by 18 Council of Europe member states, the commission became an enlarged agreement in February 2002, enabling non-European states to join it. The Venice Commission is composed of “independent experts who have achieved eminence through their experience in democratic institutions or by their contribution to the enhancement of law and political science” (Article 2 of the Revised Statute). All Council of Europe member states are members of the Venice Commission; Morocco and Algeria joined in 2007, and Tunisia in 2008.

Pompidou Group

58. The Pompidou Group's principal task is to help frame in its member states drug prevention policies that are multidisciplinary, innovative, effective and founded on validated knowledge. Prominent among the Pompidou Group's current activities is the “Mediterranean network for co-operation on drugs and addictions” (MedNET) whose ongoing projects concern the three Maghreb countries.³⁰ MedNET aims to foster co-operation, exchange and two-way knowledge transfer between the countries of the Mediterranean Basin and the European countries that are members of the Pompidou Group and donors. Given that the problems linked with drug taking and illicit trafficking are part of the social challenges of the three Maghreb countries, and that cross-linkages with Europe exist in this field too, the rapporteur welcomes the Pompidou Group's very substantial action through the MedNET project. He moreover considers this to be a most pragmatic approach, yielding tangible results on the ground, from which the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries could take inspiration in other future co-operation projects.

59. Overview of established relations concerning social cohesion between the Maghreb countries and the Council of Europe:³¹

Agency	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia
North-South Centre	Interest repeatedly shown	Member since 1 July 2009	Interest repeatedly shown
Pompidou Group	Beneficiary of the MedNET project (2007-10)	Beneficiary of the MedNET project (2007-10)	Beneficiary of the MedNET project; priorities being set by means of field visits
Venice Commission	Member since 2007	Member since 2007	Member since 2008
Others	Participation in numerous training sessions, conferences, study visits, national publications, etc.		

3.4. Other avenues of co-operation

60. Where intergovernmental co-operation within the Council of Europe is concerned, the Maghreb countries also participate in various other Council of Europe partial or enlarged agreements. Algeria and Morocco acceded in 1991 and 1995 respectively to the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards

30. Amongst the past events, it also seems useful to mention the Lisbon forum of 2009, organised by the North-South Centre on: “Creating a culture of human rights through education”.

31. P-PG/MedNET(2009)36: “MedNET work programme for 2010 adopted”.

Agreement (EUR-OPA), are observers to the European Pharmacopoeia Commission of the Council of Europe, and have also ratified certain Council of Europe conventions such as the Convention on Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No.104) (Tunisia in 1996, Morocco in 2001) and the Anti-Doping Convention (ETS No. 135) (Tunisia in 2004).³² Recently, and also in the framework of the Rabat seminar in February 2010, Morocco officially acceded to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport.³³

61. Other paths of co-operation with the Council of Europe are envisaged by the Maghreb states today, for instance gradual accession to other conventions which are becoming international standards recognised far beyond the boundaries of the European continent. The aim of this report, however, is not to itemise the existing or envisaged co-operation schemes, but rather to illustrate the breadth of the possibilities for exchange. They may, but need not always, unfold according to very ambitious programmes. Thus, the three Maghreb countries participate very regularly in activities organised by or with the Council of Europe. These include training seminars (for example, on intercultural dialogue, drug addiction and conflict resolution), joint publications (on drug addiction), and study visits on more general themes. The rapporteur considers that the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries should also benefit from more random opportunities to co-operate, because each single action furthers the grand design of building closer relations between Europe and the Maghreb countries. The Assembly should therefore encourage the respective bodies of the Council of Europe and the Maghreb countries to strengthen their co-operation under various arrangements, formal co-operation structures and more informal exchanges included.

62. All three Maghreb countries endeavour in many ways to draw generally closer to Europe through various institutions, including the European Union and the Council of Europe. Furthermore, several European countries maintain close external relations with the Maghreb, particularly Spain, Portugal and Italy, whether in their bilateral relations or in settings of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue (dialogue 5+5,³⁴ Mediterranean Forum, etc.). Lastly, Algeria should play a more prominent part in the Union for the Mediterranean, successfully launched on 13 July 2008.³⁵ Tunisia also lays claim to its Mediterranean dimension through its energetic participation in the Mediterranean Forum, its commitment to the 5+5 dialogue, and its active role in the Euro-Mediterranean process.

63. Through their various activities, the Maghreb countries also seek to increase their foothold in the European Union, their chief trading partner. Accordingly, Tunisia is the first country in the Mediterranean Basin to have signed, on 17 July 1995, an association agreement with the EU, amplified and supplemented by the Tunisia-EU Action Plan adopted in July 2005 under the European Neighbourhood Policy.³⁶ Concerning Morocco and its relations with the European Union, the country was granted “advanced status” at the 7th EU-Morocco Association Council on 13 October 2008.³⁷ Algeria also participates in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Algeria and the European Union moreover have an association agreement that is a legally binding instrument.³⁸

64. In the perspective of this general outreach to Europe by the Maghreb countries, and given that their development strategies are firmly underpinned by interdependence between the economic and social dimensions, any future move for co-operation should be made in close collaboration with the European Union and other European and international agencies whose action is complementary to that of the Council of Europe. A fine example is the European Union’s involvement in the work of the North-South Centre. The time seems right, moreover, to increase the European Union stake in exchanges on the alleviation of poverty and exclusion taking place at the level of the Council of Europe: the European Commission has made these concerns priority themes in 2010 by declaring it “European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion”.³⁹

32. Information provided by the North-South Centre; annual report on Council of Europe external relations in 2009 (SG/Inf(2010)6).

33. Contribution by Ms Maria de Belém Roseira at the Rabat seminar, 22 February 2010.

34. “Conclusions of the Seminar on the Prospects of Co-operation between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Council of Europe, Rabat, 22-23 February 2010”.

35. The 5+5 dialogue is a forum of informal political dialogue comprising 10 countries bordering the western Mediterranean Basin: the five countries of the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia) and five European Union countries (Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal), www.diplomatie.gouv.fr.

36. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: Algeria’s presentation.

37. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: Tunisia’s presentation.

38. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr: Morocco’s presentation.

39. www.eeas.europa.eu/algeria/index_en.htm.40. www.2010againstopoverty.eu.

4. Conclusions

65. The three central Maghreb countries – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – continue to pursue their transitions to more democratic, liberal and cohesive systems. Nonetheless, major challenges persist where social development and cohesion are concerned, including prevention of poverty and social exclusion. In times of world economic recession like these, many social problems do not only affect the Maghreb countries but are shared with other countries in the world and in Europe. Various social problems (poverty, exclusion, discrimination, etc.) are, moreover, characterised by points of interdependence between Europe and the Maghreb, particularly by way of migration to Europe.

66. In the context of its co-operation with these countries, the Council of Europe should strengthen the social component for a variety of reasons. It is a matter of dealing with the common problems of social cohesion and giving the Maghreb countries the benefit of European expertise, but also of better apprehending the underlying social problems of the population emigrating to Europe, so that these people may be received with all due respect for human rights. Any future co-operative action should furthermore proceed in liaison with other European and international institutions having a strong presence in the Maghreb countries as regards human and social development, notably the European Union, which already participates actively in the work of the North-South Centre.

67. To enhance co-operation with the three Maghreb countries, the Assembly should take action at the following levels:

- according to the measures taken by the three Maghreb countries and the validity of their respective applications, grant them new status, for example “partner for democracy”;
- develop parliamentary exchanges;
- actively further Council of Europe intergovernmental co-operation.

68. In the context of parliamentary co-operation, delegations from the three Maghreb countries should be regularly invited to the Parliamentary Assembly’s plenary sessions, and be encouraged to attend committee meetings. As regards social cohesion, they should attend the meetings of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee especially. Besides the statutory meetings, the respective delegations could take part in debates and more informal exchanges in the form of lectures, courses and other events.

69. In the context of intergovernmental co-operation, the Council of Europe should carry on highly pragmatic action to implement projects on the ground, such as the programmes run in connection with the MedNET project of the Pompidou Group. This project was and continues to be very favourably received in the Maghreb countries and has had great success and a most definite impact on the problems of drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

70. The North-South Centre in particular should be a hub for all future intergovernmental co-operation with the Maghreb countries. In the course of its recent activities, it has been able to further reinforce its role as an interface between the Council of Europe and the Maghreb, and arouses more and more interest among the countries concerned. In this way, Morocco officially joined the centre in 2009 while Algeria and Tunisia have signified their interest on several occasions; they should be strongly encouraged to go through with this approach. The Assembly is currently represented on the Executive Council of the centre by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education. In order to take account of the importance of social cohesion in the general promotion of Council of Europe values, the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee might also be invited to be represented on the Executive Council of the centre.

71. Among the future co-operation activities conducive to greater social cohesion may be mentioned:

- childhood (ill-treatment, illiteracy);
- youth (education, equal opportunities, discrimination);
- labour (access to lasting employment, discrimination, equality and effectiveness of re-employment aid);
- health (access to care);
- the social sphere (equal opportunities, spatial/geographical segregation).

72. Lastly, the Maghreb countries – which have already made various moves to draw closer to the Council of Europe, including accession to partial or enlarged agreements open to non-member states – should also persevere in their efforts towards greater future co-operation. Having regard to the social challenges facing them, they should be encouraged to place special emphasis on social concerns in all exchanges with the Council of Europe and its bodies.