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Euro-Mediterranean region: call for a Council of Europe strategy

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs

Rapporteur: Ms Elsa PAPANIMITRIOU, Greece, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs congratulates the Political Affairs Committee on bringing the subject before the Assembly. It agrees with the analysis of the rapporteur that democracy, the rule of law and the human rights dimension, which represent the core mandate of the Council of Europe, need to be reinforced in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (Union for the Mediterranean) and that the Council of Europe ought to play a much stronger role. The committee draws attention to the multiple levels of possible co-operation, including co-operation with regional parliamentary assemblies and co-operation at the level of local and regional authorities.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendments to the draft resolution

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 7, add the following:

“The Assembly also stresses the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in the Mediterranean Basin and welcomes in that regard the positive co-operation it has fostered with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) since its inception in 2006 on a wide range of Mediterranean issues where the two assemblies share a common interest, such as environmental protection and disaster management, migration flows, the role of local and regional authorities, and the Israeli-Palestinian question.”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 11.5, add the following:

“as well as, at the regional level, with the existing parliamentary platforms such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM);”

1. See [Doc. 12108](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee.



Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 11.7, after the words “for questions of justice”, insert “sustainable development”.

Amendments to the draft recommendation

Amendment D (to the draft recommendation)

In paragraph 3, replace the wording “prosperity and human, social and cultural understanding” with the following:

“sustainable development and prosperity based on human, social and cultural understanding”.

Amendment E (to the draft recommendation)

After paragraph 3, insert a new paragraph 4 as follows :

“It also notes that 15 members of the Assembly are also members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) which was established in 2006 in Amman (Jordan) following some 15 years of co-operation amongst the states of the Mediterranean region under the IPU-led process known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). With a total of 25 member states from the Mediterranean Basin, the PAM aims, by means of parliamentary diplomacy, to find common solutions to current challenges, setting a path towards a peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean for all.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mrs Papadimitriou, rapporteur

1. Mr Denis Badre’s report on “Euro-Mediterranean region: call for a Council of Europe strategy” indicates and opens a door for the Council of Europe to examine and monitor the ongoing process within the Euro-Mediterranean region towards peace and stability. There are useful references to the Council of Europe’s previous resolutions, to other international fora and embedded co-operation with established partnerships (Barcelona Process, European Neighbourhood Policy, European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, EUR-OPA, Med Net and others) and a call for interaction with the already existing Mediterranean parliamentary assemblies – the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM).
2. It is, however, important to note the difference between the two regional assemblies: EMPA’s member parliaments derive from all European Union countries (27), plus some beyond it, while the eastern and southern states (16) are granted one third of the votes. In the PAM, which includes the littoral states of the Mediterranean (north and south), the north-south balance is equal. Needless to say, this balance has already proven an added value to PAM, the effectiveness of which is already acknowledged among the member states and by the United Nations.²
3. The Council of Europe has to lend its expertise in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law to the Mediterranean region. A geopolitical region that is our planet’s most challenging field for the very application of the Council of Europe’s principles and values. The fact that the region encompasses countries beyond the Council of Europe is a pseudo-argument as the impact of the trans-temporal drama of “mare nostrum” spreads to all European states.
4. Beside the pressing need to resolve the long-standing political tensions and conflicts and bring peace and stability to the region, we are faced with the urgent need to stop the environmental degradation of the Mediterranean Sea and to preserve its biodiversity.
5. The region’s rapid growth in recent decades, while delivering significant positive impacts for the living conditions of the population, has, however, largely occurred at the expense of the environmental balance, which is essential for human well-being, and has often contributed to an increase in social and economic disparity, which are characteristic of the Mediterranean basin today. Moreover, difficult access to scarce resources, such as water and arable land, is becoming an additional factor for political tension and instability.

2. PAM was granted observer status at the UN by UNGA Resolution A/RES/64/124 of 16 December 2009.

6. The issue of sustainable development of the Mediterranean is the subject of a separate report, currently under preparation in the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs (rapporteur: Mr Joseph Falzon, Malta, EPP/CD), which will be presented to the Assembly in the course of 2010.

7. In global terms, the year 2010 will be the International Year of Biodiversity and an important year to set the basis for a low carbon future by reaching consensus amongst the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), especially in the aftermath of a rather meagre outcome from the high-level negotiations in Copenhagen (COP15) in December 2009.

8. We know how crucial it will be to achieve firm political and economic commitments in order to contain climate change within the projected 2°C increase and to remedy the effects of environmental degradation across our planet. The growing threats to fragile ecosystems – such as those in the Mediterranean region – are stark examples that ought to fuel our political action.

9. As the rapporteur, Mr Denis Badré, rightly mentioned in his explanatory memorandum, amongst the six priority projects identified by the Union for the Mediterranean, there are three projects that are directly related to sustainable development, namely the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, civil protection initiatives to combat natural and man-made disasters, and a Mediterranean solar energy plan.

10. While I would fully agree with Mr Badré's analysis that the current activities identified as priority by the Union for the Mediterranean lack focus on the core issues of democracy, human rights and the rule of law – which are fundamental to achieve security, political stability and peace in the Mediterranean region – I would nevertheless argue that those values cannot be “imposed” on governments, but instead could be more easily generated – at all levels of society – through closer co-operation on concrete projects of common interest.

11. Within the Council of Europe, there are several existing mechanisms in the field of sustainable development that could open up to co-operation with the Mediterranean countries, namely:

- the Bern Convention (Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, 1979) ratified by both Morocco (2001) and Tunisia (1996). It aims to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats and to promote European co-operation in that field;
- the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) which was set up in 1995 following the Rio Earth Summit and the adoption of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. Endorsed by 54 countries in Europe, eastern Europe and Central Asia, it supplements the work undertaken in the framework of the Bern Convention. The principal aim of the strategy is to find a consistent response to the decline of biological and landscape diversity in Europe and to integrate biodiversity conservation and sustainability into the activities of other sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, industry, transport and tourism. The activities could be further expanded to include co-operation with the countries of the Mediterranean basin;
- the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), created in 1987 as a platform for co-operation between European and Southern Mediterranean countries in the field of major natural and technological disasters. EUR-OPA activities cover the knowledge of hazards, risk prevention, risk management, post-crisis analysis and rehabilitation. The agreement is “partial”, as not all member states of the Council of Europe participate, but it is “open” to non-member countries and today includes Algeria, Lebanon and Morocco as full members;

12. At the level of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs has initiated parliamentary co-operation with:

- the World Water Council and the Turkish Parliament in order to strengthen the parliamentary input “Parliaments for Water” to the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul (March 2009). The committee organised in November 2008, the preparatory meeting which focused on implementation of the right to water and sanitation in national legislation and concrete application for those populations in need; planned management of transboundary water basins and aquifers and promoting co-operation; and decentralisation policies for the implementation of local water and sanitation services. The issue of “right to water” was a particularly difficult one to negotiate with the ministers who only agreed to a “need for water”, but failed to qualify it as a “right”. The Assembly therefore proposed to host an intermediary meeting in Strasbourg in 2011 in order to advance these issues ahead of the 6th World Water Forum, which will be held in Marseilles in 2012;

- the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), since its inception in 2006, and on a wide range of Mediterranean issues where the two assemblies share a common interest such as environmental protection and disaster management, migration flows, the role of local and regional authorities, and the Israel-Palestine question.

13. In conclusion, environmental problems instead of being a source of conflict could even be a means of solving the old political conflicts of the region, if only they could be considered as instruments for peace and co-operation. We need solidarity between the countries of the region and a minimal level of human decency: access to clean water, sanitation and energy sources. These are fundamental human rights for every woman and every man living in the Mediterranean region.

- Who can safeguard this axiom?
- Who can persuade both Israelis and Palestinians that the underground water of the blessed land of the three monotheistic religions can follow no man-made dividing walls? And that human rights, like water, are to be enjoyed by both nations.
- Who else, but the Council of Europe can monitor the honest balance between the northern partners who provide technologies and the lucky southern owners of the abundant renewable energy sources?
- Who could be a better agent than the Council of Europe for introducing the concept of the environmental migrant within the existing UN protection system for political or humanitarian refugees?
- Who can finally upgrade environmental protection to the level of democracy, of peace, of human rights protection?

14. We should stress that “the environment” is not only our physical milieu. Especially when dealing with the Mediterranean region, we necessarily have to look at all the dimensions of our frame of existence: social, economic and cultural. Without them, how could one speak of a “Mediterranean environment”?

15. Denis Badré’s report should be applauded for giving us a great idea. The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs is suggesting to continue this debate with its report, which will put emphasis on the strategic control of the environmental crisis in the Mediterranean region – in its multidimensional sense. By undertaking a critical journey through an amazingly interesting and dramatic area, during a critical time, and giving the Council of Europe a crucial and universal role, while opening a challenging perspective for the future work of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Reporting Committee: Political Affairs Committee

Committees seized for opinion: Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs and Committee on Economic Affairs and Development

Reference to committee: [Doc. 11507](#), Reference 3420 of 14 April 2008

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Secretariat of the committee: Mrs Agnès Nollinger, Mr Bogdan Torcătoriu and Mrs Dana Karanjac