



European Economic and Social Committee



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Y SOCIAL
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13-14 December, Madrid, Spain

FINAL DECLARATION

The representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean economic and social councils and similar institutions and economic and social actors held their annual meeting on 13 and 14 December in Madrid, Spain. This meeting marked the 22nd anniversary of the Euromed Summits, which were launched on the basis of the mandate conferred by the Barcelona Declaration in 1995.

The Mediterranean region faces major challenges such as war, terrorism, the need for socio-economic development and considerable refugee flows. These challenges show that now more than ever the European Union and the countries forming its southern neighbourhood must cooperate more closely to implement the neighbourhood policy.

The participants discussed a number of these issues, focusing in particular on economic, social and cultural rights in the Mediterranean region, a social protection floor in the Euro Mediterranean area and a new generation of women's rights.

The participants:

On the situation in the Euromed region

1. **condemn all forms of violence and all forms of terrorism**, human rights violations and the infringement of fundamental rights in the Mediterranean region, and call for an urgent political solution to the Syrian crisis which is not only causing unbearable harm to the people living in the affected zones but also has a profound impact on the region;
2. underline that the necessary strengthening of **security**, albeit legitimate, **should never be detrimental to the human values** which are shared by all partner countries, or to the fundamental rights of all citizens. There is indeed a need to support the rule of law and democratic values in all our societies to avoid antidemocratic attitudes on the part of governments, organisations or individuals;
3. urge all the political authorities to ensure that the **human rights of refugees and migrants** in the Mediterranean region are protected;
4. call on the EU institutions to develop **efficient and flexible mechanisms to ensure the safe and legal arrival of refugees and migrants**; and on EU Member States to agree on a common

asylum policy in order to ensure a more balanced distribution of asylum applications between Member States;

5. call on the EU and the international community **to support all countries hosting refugees and to recognise the important role of, and the difficulties faced by, those countries in North Africa and in the Middle East** who are hosting refugees in disproportionate numbers compared to their populations and to provide the necessary support to them;
6. urge the political authorities and the international community to take all necessary steps to speed up the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the relevant United Nations Resolutions and on the principle of an independent Palestinian state, alongside the state of Israel. They express their concern and alarm at the latest development and underline that a way must be found, through negotiations, to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states, so that the aspiration of both parties can be fulfilled;
7. emphasise their serious concern at the recent shrinking **space for civil society organisations** and violence towards their representatives, and call on all governments to ensure that freedom of expression, association, collective bargaining and peaceful demonstration are guaranteed;
8. underline that as early as the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, **economic and social organisations and civil society as a whole were highlighted as playing a key role** in fostering the gradual construction in the Mediterranean of an area of peace and stability, shared prosperity, and dialogue and that today civil society organisations have become, and should be effectively recognised as, fora for inclusion, participation and dialogue with public authorities;
9. welcome the nomination of members of the Lebanese ESC and underline their hope that it will be fully able to fulfil its consultative role;

On economic, social and cultural rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region

10. highlight the fact that the threat of violent extremism must be countered by **addressing its multiple causes, beyond security measures**. The participants urge the European Commission and the Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) to support the networks dedicated to intercultural and interfaith dialogue and to promote these intercultural dialogue activities among the social partners;
11. underline that **economic, labour and social rights are essential for economic development and a democratic society**. These rights include free enterprise, freedom of association and of industrial action, collective bargaining, and social protection;
12. recognise the value of the ongoing SOLiD project in promoting social dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region and recommend that it be renewed and extended to include all interested countries;

13. highlight the fact that in order to achieve an inclusive and productive partnership between the two shores of the Mediterranean, the EU should take into account the asymmetric nature of economic development and provide for transitional measures in their economic exchanges;
14. stress that access to **affordable and quality education and training is a key component for socio-economic development** and, as a result, for potential improvements in quality of life; by contrast, unequal educational opportunities contribute to put the region's stability and security at risk;
15. agree that **non-formal education and training is a vital additional element** given the valuable role it plays in shaping more inclusive and pluralistic societies; synergies between formal and non-formal education should be stepped up and this type of education should be promoted as a tool for developing a culture of peace and lifelong learning;

On a new generation of women's rights

16. welcome the final declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean ministerial meeting on "strengthening the role of women in society" in Cairo and underline **the necessity to translate these words into action**;
17. call on all the countries in the Mediterranean region to **enshrine women's rights and gender equality in their constitutions** at the highest legal level possible and to develop the necessary institutions to protect women, also from gender-based violence;
18. urge the authorities to make it **legally mandatory to take the gender perspective into account** in the conception, elaboration and implementation of public policies at national and regional level; urge them also to recognise the right of women to the ownership of land and livestock in rural areas as a priority;
19. agree that **gender equality must be central to the agenda** of civil and social dialogue in the region;
20. call on the governments of all Union for the Mediterranean countries to **effectively implement gender equality** regarding access to high-responsibility positions and to remuneration;

On the social protection floor in the Euro-Mediterranean area

21. highlight that the improvement of social protection in the Mediterranean area **requires an improvement in the quality and number of jobs and the introduction of specific employment policies** for the most vulnerable population groups in this respect, such as **young people and women**;
22. underline the necessity of **promoting cooperation and the sharing of experiences** and good practices to enhance social protection between the two shores of the Mediterranean;

23. emphasise the importance of improving, within the Union of the Mediterranean, **instruments for information as well as advice and cooperation on the situation of social security guarantees** and how these can be extended in the region; call on the UfM to promote exchanges of information and good practices in this area;
24. call on the Euromed labour ministers to **include the topic of basic levels of social protection on the agenda of their next Ministerial Conference of Employment**, to help align the different approaches on this matter in the region;
25. highlight the necessity to adopt common tools for effective European coordination in order to **guarantee the rights** of non-EU migrants working within the European Union, and those of EU citizens working within the Euro-Mediterranean region;

On future action

The participants commit themselves:

26. to maintain their activities and yearly summits, through continued cooperation between the economic and social councils of the region;
27. to work on the following topics for the coming years:
 - 2018: Social Economy
 - 2019:
