

EUROMED SUMMIT

OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS

Nicosia, 26-27 November 2014

FINAL DECLARATION

The representatives of the economic and social actors and councils from the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries, meeting in accordance with the mandate conferred by the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 and extended under the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), held their 2014 meeting in Nicosia on 26 and 27 November.

The participants warmly thank the Cyprus Workers Confederation for its hospitality and contribution to the success of the Summit.

The participants have issued the following recommendations:

On the political context:

The participants:

1. condemn all forms of violence taking place in the Euro-Mediterranean region;
2. condemn the infringement of basic rights in a growing number of countries in the region and insist that all human rights violations in the region must stop, and urge governments to implement full democratic transitions and to acknowledge the inalienability and indivisibility of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948;
3. urge the political authorities and the international community to step up political, financial and material support for both Jordan and Lebanon, which are hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, representing more than 20-30% of their original populations and definitely exceeding their economic and social capacity to cope with such a crisis;
4. urge the political authorities and the international community to take all necessary actions to reach a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the relevant

United Nations Resolutions and on the principle of two states for two peoples, urge them also to strengthen the role of civil society in this process.

On developing dialogue with political authorities:

The participants:

5. underline the important role that economic and social organisations and councils, and organised civil society in general, should play in the political decision-making processes;
6. request that these organisations and councils be regularly consulted and that their proposals and recommendations be incorporated into policy decision-making processes through dialogue with their relevant political authorities;
7. consider that support, including financial support, to civil society structures for dialogue at national and regional level is a key responsibility of European and Mediterranean political authorities;
8. call therefore on the new European leadership to enhance relations between the European Union (EU) and its southern neighbourhood and to involve civil society organisations as an indispensable interlocutor in addressing the regional challenges ahead;
9. call upon the governments of the region to safeguard and recognise civil society associations, respect their freedom of speech, association and demonstration, provide them with a legal environment for access to information and prevent restrictions and repression against them, wherever present;
10. welcome the development of new civil society actors, and specially the setting up of an Arab trade union confederation;
11. encourage existing Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) and civil society networks, where necessary, to ensure inclusive representation of civil society in their countries and to help these new actors to develop their capacity for dialogue;
12. call upon the EESC, the national ESCs and other relevant partners in the EU to step up their cooperation initiatives, for instance by hosting study visits by organised civil society stakeholders, in order to familiarise them with civil dialogue processes and with the way the consultative bodies work; believe that dialogue, training and information initiatives aimed at this end should also be developed with the support of existing ESCs;
13. insist on the importance of capacity-building for civil society organisations and believe that European cooperation programmes must foster a culture of participation among Euro-

Mediterranean civil society organisations, and help to strengthen consultative bodies on the basis of their needs;

14. encourage the development of ESCs based on the *Charter for Euromed Economic and Social Councils* adopted in Amman at the 2012 Euromed Summit with the support and recognition of the national political authorities;
15. strongly urge that civil society organisations on both shores be kept informed on the negotiations for free trade agreement between the EU and the partner countries in the Mediterranean area and play a role in monitoring both their negotiation and implementation, in order to ensure that balance between economic, labour, social and environmental aspects of the agreements is preserved;
16. urge the EU to renew the TRESMED project, applying a developed and more inclusive approach in which partner ESCs are more closely involved in designing and developing the project;
17. undertake to propose specific projects for cooperation among the civil society actors and councils in order to contribute to a Euro-Mediterranean area for cooperation, peace and progress; they will do so in the most flexible manner, so that all stakeholders are involved on the basis of their needs, circumstances and demands, and also in a coordinated manner with the UfM and the EEAS;
18. the ESCs will work in order to identify sectors for cooperation, such as employment and investment, SMEs, energy, migration, etc.; in this way they will progressively define a platform for the promotion and support of projects involving the Euro-Mediterranean networks and strengthen the institutional framework for their cooperation, on the basis of the decision, taken in Rome in 2010, to set up a Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of Economic and Social Councils.

On the fight against poverty and social exclusion:

The participants:

19. underline that on both sides of the Mediterranean the risk of poverty and social exclusion is particularly concentrated among children, youth, women (especially those with dependent families) and the elderly;
20. consider that it is key to invest in improving vocational training and access to employment, the latter being a crucial tool in social inclusion processes;
21. call on governments, with support from the ILO and other international organisations, to develop an effective social protection floor, as this is an investment contributing to wealth creation and a key element in addressing the risk of poverty and promoting social inclusion,

thus strengthening the potential for economic growth and social cohesion in the countries of the Mediterranean;

22. insist that civil society organisations play a part in social protection programmes and strategies;
23. welcome the fact that in recent decades the Southern Mediterranean countries have made great strides in education, significantly increasing the average number of years devoted to primary education, and encourage their governments to continue their efforts to eradicate illiteracy and early school leaving;
24. fully support the efforts to establish an ambitious post-2015 framework for universal Sustainable Development Goals that will aim at eradicating global poverty and achieving a sustainable development model that integrates social justice with economic stability and the protection and restoration of the planet's natural resources and ecosystems;
25. underline that the implementation of a universal framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must allow for differentiation, taking into account the specificities of each region and country.

On the role of the social economy and social entrepreneurship as a vehicle for growth:

The participants:

26. recognise the role that the social economy can play in fostering economic growth, eradicating poverty, building up sustainable local development, and improving labour market access and decent working conditions especially for women and young people, as well as for various categories of disadvantaged workers;
27. recognise the potential of the social economy in contributing to the formalisation of economic activities taking place in the informal economy;
28. encourage the participation of every country in regional social economy networks, such as ESMED, to share experiences, promote best practice and work across both sides of the Mediterranean;
29. call on the governments to recognise social economy potential and to accordingly develop the necessary institutional and legal frameworks along with the financial instruments to foster it;
30. underline the necessity of assisting social economy enterprises in building their business capacity, professionalism and networking skills, and request that European funds be mobilised to this effect;

31. underline the active role that the social partners can play in strengthening the importance of the social economy in relation to growth, job creation and the fight against poverty and social exclusion;
32. urge European countries to establish links with their Southern Mediterranean counterparts in order to support the development of broader statistical data-based knowledge on the social economy.

On the economic and social situation of youth in the Euromed region

The participants:

33. acknowledge that young people are developing new participation platforms and mechanisms, which will need to be supported and integrated into civil dialogue together with existing economic and social actors;
34. are aware of the fact that the global financial crisis, the lack of job opportunities and unfinished social and political processes in some countries are leading to growing frustration among young people;
35. call for steps to be taken to ensure that young people are able to play an effective part in the decision-making process and generate a new climate of confidence and cooperation that supports the political and economic transition in the Mediterranean countries;
36. stress that closer cooperation and stronger solidarity are crucial for improving the socio-economic situation of young people in the Mediterranean region; in this regard, the specific instruments deployed respectively by the EU and the Union for the Mediterranean should be simplified, better coordinated and better disseminated among youth organisations in the southern Mediterranean countries;
37. express deep concern about the rising unemployment levels in the Mediterranean region, and underline that high unemployment rates and poor employment prospects have to be addressed through closer regional cooperation and a long-term strategy to harness the potential of young people;
38. insist that policies regarding young people in the Mediterranean must not overlook gender issues, and that legislative changes to promote the role of young women should consolidate and ensure the human, economic and social rights of women;
39. emphasise that new employment opportunities in rural areas for young people both in traditional sectors (agri-food) and in emerging sectors such as tourism, renewable energy and the environment, need to be developed;

40. call for the Euro-Mediterranean network of economic and social stakeholders and institutions to become closely involved in fleshing out the new mobility partnerships proposed by the EU in the Mediterranean area, and to ensure that they do not remain mere political declarations; consider that coordination between national structures and the European Training Foundation is also crucial in this context.

On the economic empowerment of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region

The participants:

41. draw attention to the need to promote and encourage the involvement of women in economic life in the Euro-Mediterranean region; recognise that the persistently high unemployment rates among women in the Mediterranean region are a major challenge for socio-economic development, and call for women not only to be provided with access to more jobs but better, decent ones;
42. underline that women's economic empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region is a major factor in achieving equality between women and men;
43. call for women, especially in the Southern partner countries, to be facilitated access to new information and communication technologies (ICT), as an effective way to access information related to job vacancies, new trends in the labour market, marketing of products etc.; note that wider access to the new ICT would also improve women's employment opportunities by providing them with new skills and knowledge and also with a greater chance of reconciling work and family needs;
44. point out that the region's development, growth and competitiveness depend on making full use of its human capital at all levels and in all sectors of economic activity, and in this regard urge that women participate in mechanisms of good governance and decision-making, and in economic and local affairs;
45. express their utmost concern regarding the situation of women in conflict zones and refugee women and deplore the deterioration of women's rights in some of the Euromed countries; in this regard, they fully support the decisions taken at the 57th session of the United Nations' ECOSOC Commission on the Status of Women, which focused this year on combating all forms of violence against women, and the recommendations of the UfM Parliamentary Committee on Women's Rights (Amman, Jordan, February 2014);
46. demand that all countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region ratify and effectively implement international conventions regarding the rights of women, including the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and the ILO Convention number 189 on migrant domestic workers;

47. call on the EU and other international actors to promote and support women's rights and women's economic empowerment in their relations with all countries;
 48. call for the participation of women as full members in the ESCs of the UfM Member States to be strengthened.
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