



**EUROMEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT
OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS
AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS**

Rabat, 14 – 16 October 2008

FINAL DECLARATION

1. The representatives of the Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) and similar institutions, together with the representatives of civil society organisations in the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries which do not have an ESC or similar institution, meeting in accordance with the mandate conferred by the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, warmly thank His Majesty King Mohamed VI of Morocco for the high patronage he has kindly granted to the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions. They wish to take this opportunity to thank His Majesty for the royal message delivered to the participants at the Summit, highlighting Morocco's interest in the role played by the Economic and Social Councils, who play a major part in strengthening a network of exchange and cooperation between actors in our respective civil societies, working in the fields of economic, social, cultural, ecological and human development.
2. During the summit, delegations from all the partner countries, the European Economic and Social Committee, and most EU Member States discussed issues relating to the participation of civil society in the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, to freedom of association and strengthening of participatory structures in the partner countries, to the social dimension of relations between the European Union and the partner countries, to access by women to economic and social life, and to the creation of a free trade area in the Euromed region.

The participants adopted the following recommendations:

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On civil society participation in the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean"

3. take note of the launch of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean of 13 July 2008, with a view to giving new impetus to Euro-Mediterranean relations. They urge EU Member States and Euromed partners to ensure that this new initiative will be founded on the achievements of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, giving it more practical content, especially by implementing projects;

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4. support the determination to give greater visibility to relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean partner countries and to promote reforms intended to boost governance and participatory democracy;
5. recall that the 1995 Barcelona Declaration invited the European Economic and Social Committee to take the initiative in establishing links with its counterparts and equivalent bodies in the Mediterranean partner countries, which prompted it to set up a network for cooperation of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions. This network meets for a Summit each year;
6. regret that the Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions were not involved in the consultation process on the establishment of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, especially since the success of this initiative will depend on the active participation of civil society and in particular of the private sector;
7. declare that the network for cooperation of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions is ready to work closely with the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean bodies and play an active part in proposing, promoting and following up projects at both national and regional level;
8. propose that the network for cooperation of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions, with the European Economic and Social Committee, should be effectively represented on the bodies of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, enabling civil society organisations to be kept informed and participate in the decisions that concern them;

On freedom of association, promotion of human rights and strengthening of participatory structures in the partner countries

9. welcome the inclusion among the objectives of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean of the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but stress the urgent need to ensure that these principles are put into effective practice in all the countries concerned by means of measures that ensure economical and social rights;
10. emphasise the need for human rights and the rule of law to be respected in all countries. They also call for legality and the fundamental personal and public freedoms to be upheld;
11. recall that the existence of freely established social groups in the various sectors of civil society is crucial to the democratisation of the countries of the Euromed partnership. They also request programmes for capacity building of civil society organisations in the partner countries to be developed so that they can play an active role in the Euromed partnership;
12. urge those partner countries that do not have a consultative civil society structure at national level to, by means of the appropriate support, facilitate the establishment of autonomous structures that are representative of a large majority of civil society. These structures must be able to speak out

independently and count on the resources they need in order to operate. The participants also call on the European Union to support such developments. They also request the official endorsement of newly created Economic and Social Councils, especially the Palestinian Economic and Social Council;

13. welcome the creation of an Economic and Social Council in Jordan, and encourage those involved to put it on an operational footing as soon as possible. They also support the efforts made in Egypt with a view to setting up an Economic and Social Council;
14. welcome the decision of His Majesty Mohamed VI, announced at the opening of the parliamentary session of 10 October 2008, to establish an Economic and Social Council, a constitutional institution the objective of which is to give practical content to the major choices made by Morocco concerning development. This decision will strengthen the system of Moroccan consultative bodies in a number of different fields;
15. draw the attention of the EU institutions to the importance of supporting those Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions that already exist in the partner countries. These councils must be autonomous in their important function to ensure dialogue and cooperation at national level between different social groups (representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions, farmers, consumers, NGOs, women NGOs and social economy networks etc.). They also urge their governments to take into account their initiative on the economic and social reforms;
16. reaffirm that the Economic and Social Councils in the partner countries can play an active part in monitoring the implementation of European Neighbourhood Policy and association agreement action plans. They propose to provide regular monitoring, at national level, of these policies and to present the results of their work to the annual Summits of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions;
17. support the necessity to give continuity to the cooperation and to activities, such as the proposal of the Palestinian and Israeli Economic and Social Councils to set up joint actions in the field of Palestinian workers' rights, and in promoting changes of experiences between young people, in particular from Palestinian and Israelis, to develop mutual comprehension;

On the social dimension of relations between the European Union and the partner countries

18. consider that all the initiatives, programmes and projects carried out under the Euromed partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean should reflect the social dimension, a key element for the sustainable development of the partner countries;
19. consider it necessary to promote active employment policies and to strengthen public employment services. These policies must help to create high-quality employment, reduce the underground economy and, in this way, improve the situation of the least advantaged groups. The

also consider it necessary to pay close attention to issues concerning migration and the free movement of persons;

20. favour defining and developing an integrated employment strategy, to comprise specific objectives for both the region as a whole and for individual countries. They consider that, if such a strategy is to be introduced and followed by practical steps, a greater financial effort is required of the European Union;
21. are convinced that the active involvement of civil society, and in particular of the economic and social partners, in defining and implementing policies, programmes and projects relating to the social dimension would maximise the effectiveness of such initiatives;
22. believe that collective bargaining and a social dialogue between strong, independent economic and social partners should be encouraged. In this regard, the participants support BusinessMed and the Euromed Trade Union Forum in their efforts to conduct a dialogue at Euro-Mediterranean level. Such a dialogue is ever more necessary given the probable consequences of globalisation, increasing competition and economic reforms;
23. propose that a network be set up to monitor the implementation of the social dimension of relations between the EU and the partner countries, in which the civil society organisations of the Euromed partner countries would be represented;
24. welcome the Ministerial Conference on employment to be held on 9 and 10 November 2008, and consider the involvement of the economic and social partners of the Euromed region in the follow-up to the conclusions of the conference to be crucial. They urge the Ministers for Social Affairs and Employment to present a concrete work programme and an agenda for social development addressing the specific needs of the region;

On access by women to economic and social life

25. fully support the 2006 Istanbul Ministerial Conference which established a number of priorities to improve the condition of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and applaud the fact that the network for cooperation of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions, with the European Economic and Social Committee, has been involved in following up the implementation of the work programme. In this connection, they reiterate the recommendations adopted at the last Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and similar organisations held in Athens in 2007, and particularly the need to ensure that the commitments set out in the work programme are honoured;
26. propose to draw up an action plan to ensure the participation of women of the partner countries in social, cultural, economic and environmental areas. This action plan will comprise practical measures, including positive discrimination, in order to develop women's education and participation in the labour market, especially by promoting women's entrepreneurship and

facilitating women's access to research, innovation and funding. Such actions would recognise women as a valuable and crucial resource in the face of global challenges;

27. recommend fuller representation of women in Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions and in the economic and social partners' organisations;
28. regret that gender equality has not been clearly restated under the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. They stress that this aspect must be explicitly stated and systematically and strategically applied when policies are implemented;
29. intend to continue the activity of the study group on the factors facilitating the access of women to economic and social life, with the aim of deepening other aspects of the condition of women in the Euromed area;

On the creation of a free trade area in the Euromed region

30. acknowledge that trade liberalisation is, under certain conditions, a factor for development and, in this connection, support efforts to create a free trade area in the Euromed region;
31. stress that trade is a necessary, but insufficient condition for the sustainable development of countries, and that the negotiations for free trade agreements must include social and environmental provisions that will maximise the development-friendly dimension of the agreements;
32. welcome the progress of negotiations, particularly concerning agricultural products, and emphasise the importance of backing up this market openness with measures to promote rural development, improve agricultural productivity, and develop quality products;
33. call for civil society organisations, and especially Economic and Social Councils, to be kept regularly informed on the progress of the negotiations and to be able to contribute. These organisations should also be involved in monitoring the implementation of the agreements;
34. call for impact studies to be carried out on the economic, social, environmental and cultural effects of free trade agreements, with the close involvement of representatives of civil society and in particular the Economic and Social Councils;
35. argue that south-south regional integration between the partner countries is crucial if the economic area as a whole is to be made more attractive to investment, and in this connection, welcome the implementation of the Agadir Agreement. They urge the other partner countries to join this integration process. They also draw attention to the importance of backing this agreement by developing infrastructure, human resources, tax reforms, governance and promoting SMEs in order to enhance trade and investment conditions;

36. support the proposal to create a trade facilitation mechanism that would improve information-swapping on trade and investment opportunities between economic operators in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and welcome the Invest in Med initiative;
37. welcome the invitation extended to the private sector to attend Ministerial Trade Conferences, and to take part in drawing up the trade agenda, but reiterate the importance of involving the other economic and social players in these meetings too, in order to ensure that the social and environmental dimension of the agreements is truly taken on board;
38. express their concern regarding the effects of the present financial crisis and its potentially negative consequences for funding and development in the region;

On the 2009-2010 work programme

39. decide that the following themes will be discussed at the 2009 Summit:
 - a) Climate change and the Mediterranean: environmental and energy challenges;
 - b) Toward an economic and employment strategy based on a knowledge society in the Euromed region;
 - c) Effective participation of civil society in the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the context of demographic and cultural changes in the future of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean;
40. decide that the preparatory work for a report on Vocational training as a factor for competitiveness and job creation: priorities of the economic and social actors will begin in 2009. the report will be presented at the 2010 Summit;
41. and also decide, at the request of the representatives of the Moroccan delegation, and pending the creation of an Economic and Social Council in that country, to launch a debate on the issue of development and consumer law in the Euromed area.

THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS PROPOSE TO PRESENT THE PRESENT DECLARATION TO THE TENTH EUROMED CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO BE HELD IN MARSEILLE, FRANCE, ON 3 AND 4 NOVEMBER 2008.

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