



*European Economic and Social Committee*

## **2015 EUROMED SUMMIT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS**

30 November and 1 December 2015, Brussels

### **FINAL DECLARATION**

The representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean region economic and social councils and economic and social players held their annual meeting on 30 November and 1 December in Brussels. This meeting marked the 20th anniversary of the Euromed Summits, which were launched on the basis of the mandate conferred by the Barcelona Declaration in 1995.

The participants discussed the situation in the region, focusing firstly on **the new European neighbourhood policy, the regional dialogue perspective, the participation of social and economic councils and players in the development of the region** and secondly, on the need for common responses to the **challenge of migration and refugees**. The participants:

*On the situation in the Euromed region*

1. **condemn all forms of violence and terrorism**, human rights violations and the infringement of fundamental rights in the Mediterranean region;
2. remind the Member States and the institutions of the European Union and the Southern Partner countries' authorities of the pledge taken 20 years ago that **the peace, stability and security of the region are common assets** that need to be promoted and strengthened by all means at their disposal, and call for these pledges to be put into practice;
3. underline that the 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;
4. strongly urge the EU and its Member States to provide further political, financial and material support, as has been the case with Turkey, to other countries in its southern neighbourhood, especially Lebanon and Jordan, which are already hosting millions of refugees, which clearly exceeds their economic and social capacity to deal with such a crisis;
5. call for all aspects of dialogue and joint work (political, economic, social and cultural) to be revitalised in the region in order to enhance development and improve cohesion in their societies in view of the challenges that the Euromed region is facing;

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 of the principle of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel;

*On the new European Neighbourhood Policy*

7. welcome the adoption of the proposal to revise the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the assurance that **the Euro-Mediterranean region is a priority for the European Union** on a basis of mutual respect, and call for neighbourhood countries to be involved in developing EU policies of shared interest adapted to their specificities;
8. underline the need for a greater role for civil society in the ENP, not only **in further involving civil society organisations** in ENP related commitments and activities, but also by calling on the ENP to ensure that it **empowers civil society in all countries** and **ensures compliance with fundamental human, civil, political, economic and social rights**;
9. ask for the revised ENP to clearly aim at **an effective dialogue between representative civil society organisations and public authorities and regions**, rather than mere indiscriminate on-line consultations;
10. expect an ENP which rewards human rights implementation, a human rights-based approach to stability, sustainable and inclusive development, better mutual understanding of cultural diversity and the importance of social protection as a cohesive factor in society;
11. underline that the free trade agreements between the EU and southern countries must seek to promote not only economic interests but also fundamental human values, respect for national sovereignty, and sustainable economic and social development that benefits both sides, and must contribute to creating a common area of shared values;
12. urge the authorities to **offer better education and opportunities to young people** and women around the Mediterranean, to develop better mechanisms to match education and training with the needs of the labour markets, to ensure that measures that have a positive impact on the future of young people are included in their political priorities, and that demands of young people are better taken into account in those same decisions;
13. demand that all the governments of countries in the Mediterranean region fulfil their obligations to sign, ratify and effectively implement **international conventions on women's rights**;
14. recognise the need to promote women's participation in civil society organisations and highlight that enhancing women's rights, political participation and economic empowerment is not only a

crucial factor to achieve **equality between women and men**, but that the region's development depends on making full use of its human capital at all levels;

*On the role of the ESCs and economic and social players*

15. call upon the governments of countries of the region to **recognise civil society associations founded on democratic principles**, to respect their independence, freedom of speech, right of association and demonstration, to provide them with a legal environment for access to information and to prevent restrictions and repression against them, wherever present; recall the importance of preserving the freedom of the media as a pivotal element for democracy;
16. call for social dialogue and collective bargaining, as an instrument for consolidating democracy and sustainable development, to be strengthened in all the countries of the region;
17. underline the key role of the economic and social councils and players in the consolidation of political democracy, in combating terrorism, and in the development of participative democracy;
18. request that **economic and social councils and players be regularly consulted** and that their proposals and recommendations be incorporated into policy decision-making processes through dialogue with their relevant political authorities, as in the case of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, which has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize;
19. encourage the development of economic and social councils 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;

*On the response to refugee and migration flows*

20. recommend that the European Union authorities **increase legal and safe pathways into the EU for refugees and migrants**, so that they do not fall victim to criminal networks, that their human rights are respected, and that the negative impact of the military and security-based approach be kept to a minimum;
21. urge EU Member States to develop **a true common migration and asylum policy** and greater cohesion and consistency in EU policies to address the different causes of migration;
22. encourage all civil society organisations to do whatever possible to help welcome and **integrate refugees in their countries**, and praise the commitment of people working in local public administrations, non-governmental organisations and volunteers active in grassroots initiatives all around Europe and in its southern neighbourhood providing assistance to people in need;

23. call on the governments of all the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region to develop policies aiming at integrating migrants in their societies with equal rights and at **combating intolerance, racism and xenophobia towards immigrants**, and to ratify the international conventions on the protection of the rights of migrant workers and members of their families;
24. demand that the renewed ENP establishes a clear and coherent link between policy actions on the southern countries and the EU's decisions on **refugees asking for international protection in the EU countries**;
25. call on the national and EU authorities to take urgent measures to assist refugees and migrants who are currently in the EU but have no access to assistance;
26. urge the national authorities and those responsible for refugee camps to take immediate steps to address the situation of women in these camps in order to ensure their protection and prevent abuse;

*On future actions*

The participants commit themselves:

27. to maintain their activities and yearly summits, through continued cooperation between the economic and social councils of the region, the follow-up to the new ENP and their contribution to the work of the Union for the Mediterranean;
28. to work on actions designed to facilitate legal migration from the southern countries into the EU, without compromising the capacity of the countries of origin to benefit from this resource which is vital to their development;
29. to closely follow up on existing and newly launched negotiations for free trade agreements between the EU and some southern countries;
30. to contribute to the follow-up to the Conference of the Parties of Paris on Climate Change, especially considering that the next conference, COP22, is to take place in a southern Mediterranean country (Morocco);
31. to step up contacts with the ESCs in order to strengthen relations between them and to set up new ESCs in those countries that do not have such a body;
32. to continue the debate on whether to set up an assembly of Mediterranean ESCs as approved by the 2010 Rome Euromed Summit.