



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY



MINUTES of the EMPA plenary sitting of 16 March 2009 Brussels

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1. Opening of the Fifth Plenary Session by Mr. Abdelhadi Majali, Vice-President of the EMPA and Speaker of the Jordanian House of Representatives

The Assembly was opened and addressed by Vice-President Majali, mandated by President Pöttering to chair the sitting of 16 March of the plenary session.

Mr. Abdelhadi Majali expressed his pleasure that the EMPA plenary meeting was taking place despite the difficult times marked by challenges that affect the entire Euro-Mediterranean region. Reference was made to the EMPA Bureau meeting of 29 January 2009 as well as to the EMPA high-level fact-finding mission on 23-24 February to Gaza, Ramallah and Jerusalem, as important factors which contributed to the resumption of the work of the Assembly, temporarily suspended, at the beginning of 2009, due to the war in Gaza.

The main subjects to be debated by the plenary; the situation in the Middle East and the impact of the global financial crisis on the Euro-Mediterranean region, were briefly introduced.

The agenda of the plenary session was adopted.

2. Speeches of guest speakers

The Assembly heard **Mr. Joaquin Almunia**, Commissioner responsible for Economic and Financial Affairs, representing the President of the European Commission, who underlined the commitment of the Commission to the development of the Union for the Mediterranean and stressed that EMPA, as the parliamentary assembly of this Union, is the political branch of the partnership and constitutes an excellent platform for strengthening the cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Regarding the financial crisis, the Commission once again stressed its commitment to engage all efforts, resources and instruments of action in order to prepare a coordinated response. Their entire support will be given to international financial institutions, towards a better functioning and a more efficient action to help economies in need. The conviction was expressed that, after the crisis, the potential of emerging economies will increase. The need to establish stronger links and more efficient relationships between the Euro-Mediterranean partners was also stressed, a commitment taken at time of the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Mr. Philippe de Fontaine Vive, Vice President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), recalled that the current financial crisis is one of the most serious in modern history and stressed the importance of coordinated measures to tackle its causes and alleviate its negative effects. With regard to the Mediterranean partner countries it was mentioned that the impact of the crisis is not yet so visible, but the effects, even if less direct, may become even more serious unless appropriate measures are taken. The principal ways in which the crisis impacts on Southern Mediterranean countries was underlined: the reduction of remittances from migrants; the impact on the real economy, with exports becoming more difficult as demand from developed countries falls; possible slow-down in foreign direct investments (even if in 2008, FDI in the Mediterranean countries was of around \$30 billion, which was double in comparison with 2007). The EIB is sending strong signals of support towards potential investors in the area and one of the most recent measures, in this respect, is the signing of letters of commitment for €500

million for the financing of the pipeline Algeria-Spain. FEMIP continues to be a very important development instrument for this area and the €7,5 billion allocated until 2013 are going to be used for projects with direct benefit for the population. The planned UfM projects are part of these priorities. The importance of all these measures for stimulating growth and creating jobs was underlined.

3. Debate on the impact of the international financial crises on the Union for the Mediterranean

The debate was introduced by **Mr. Mohamed Abou El Enein**, the Chair of the Economic Committee, who presented the analysis of the Committee on the impact of the current financial crisis on the real economy and on the lives of the citizens in the region. A great deal of attention was paid to: the need for increased cooperation, bilateral, as well as at regional or international level; the importance of appropriate recovery plans; supporting free trade and rejecting protectionist measures. The importance of financing and implementing as soon as possible the UFM programmes was equally stressed. The main conclusions of this analysis are presented in the Recommendation adopted by the Committee.

The following Members and guests (Topalli at this moment) participated in the debate:

Dr. Sorour, Egypt - Mr. Del Picchia, France (Sénat)- Mr. Tabarki, Tunisia - Mr. Botopoulos, EP (PES group) - Mr. Meroune, Morocco - Mr. D'Antoni, Italy (Camera) - Mr. Bendjedidi, Algeria - Baroness Nicholson, EP (ALDE group) - Mr. Kazak, EP (ALDE group) - Mrs. Topalli, Albania - Mr. Bouhrizi, Tunisia - Mrs. Kyriacou, Cyprus - Mr. Whbee, Israel - Mr. Hammerstein, EP (V/ALE group) - Mr. Costa, Italy (Senato) - Mr. Tcherveniakov, Bulgaria - Mr. Arif, EP (PES group) - Mr. Tzitzikostas, Greece - Mr. Schennach, Austria - Mr. Grau, EP (PES group) - Mr. Salagoudis, Greece

Interventions focused mainly on the need for joint action and strengthened cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean framework to tackle the causes and the negative effects of the global financial and economic crises. Reference was made to the need to support free trade and act against protectionist measures. The importance of timely implementation of the UfM programmes was largely underlined.

4. Presentation by the Chairs of the Parliamentary Committees of the Draft Recommendations

Mr. Mohamed Abou El Enein presented the recommendation of the Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Social Affairs and Education.

Mr Alberto Antunes presented the recommendation of the Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture.

Decisions: The recommendations of the Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Social Affairs and Education and of the Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture were adopted by consensus.

5. Proposals of modifications of the EMPA's Rules of Procedure

The Chair presented the unanimous recommendations by the Bureau on amendments to the EMPA Rules of Procedure concerning, in particular, the modification of the composition of the Assembly following the enlargement of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership to six new members, the modification of the composition of the standing committees, the creation of an autonomous secretariat, and the setting up of a financial regulation with a view to create the necessary framework for a future EMPA budget.

On the question of the composition of the Assembly, the Bureau's recommendation considered that the Assembly should maintain the current number of its members (i.e. 260 members (with 130 members within each of the two components), and that the two components of the Assembly have to mirror those of the Union for the Mediterranean - i.e. the EU component and the Mediterranean partners' component - as decided by the Euro-Med Heads of States and Government on 13 July 2008 in Paris. That would mean that the six new members of the Union for the Mediterranean (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Mauritania, Principality of Monaco, and Montenegro) would be part of the Mediterranean partners' component, within which the current ten delegations plus Mauritania would each have ten members, whilst Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and Montenegro will each have four members.

On the composition of the standing committees, Mr. Majali, on behalf of the Bureau, proposed maintaining the current number of members within each of the permanent committees and formalizing the "substitute-members" approach, in order to enable every member delegation to take part in the work of each of the standing committees.

On the creation of an EMPA secretariat, the recommendation proposed a small-scale secretariat, based in Brussels and consisting of four members of staff seconded by the Parliaments members, at the time, of the EMPA Bureau (and thus financed by the Bureau's member parliaments).

A draft financial regulation, as requested by the Plenary of March 2008 in Athens, and the subsequent adjustments to the Rules of Procedure were also presented by the Chair for approval by the Plenary.

The Chair opened the debate on the proposed amendments.

Mr McMillan-Scott, the Chairman of the Working Group on Financing of the Assembly and Revision of the EMPA Rules of Procedure took the floor and emphasized the principles at the basis of the Working Group's work, in particular the Bureau's recommendations to the Working Group and the decision by the Euro-Med Heads of State and Government in Paris on 13 July 2008, confirmed by the Euro-Med Foreign Affairs Ministers in November 2008 in Marseille. He thanked the Bureau members (the Presidents of the European, Jordanian, Italian, and Moroccan Parliaments) for approving unanimously the proposals by the Working Group and for submitting them to the Plenary. He urged the EMPA members to adopt the concerned modifications, in order to allow the EMPA move forward and function effectively.

Mediterranean partners' delegations (Tunisia, Palestine, Algeria, Egypt, as well as some members of the Moroccan delegation) opposed the recommendation on the composition of the two components of the EMPA.

On the question of the EMPA financing, several delegations (Austria, Sweden, Spain) expressed reservations considering that they could not approve any proposals committing financially their

respective national parliaments, without a clear mandate in that respect from the authorities of their parliaments.

The proposal on the setting up of a small-scale secretariat, financed not through the EMPA budget, but by the Bureau's member parliaments, met reservations from the Greek delegation, who insisted on maintaining the modification which was approved in March 2008 in Athens and contested afterwards (providing for a secretariat composed of senior staff, experts, and highly trained staff and led by a Secretary General and a deputy Secretary General). Several delegations opposed the Greek position.

It was decided to postpone the decisions on the recommended amendments to the Rules of Procedure.

The meeting ended at 18h45.

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