



**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT
OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS
AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS**

Athens, 15 – 16 October 2007

FINAL DECLARATION

1. The representatives of the Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) and similar institutions, together with the representatives of socio-occupational 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 the Economic and Social Council of Greece for its hospitality and contribution to the success of the Summit.
2. During the summit, delegations from all ten partner countries, the European Economic and Social Committee, and most EU Member States discussed issues relating to the participation of civil society in the Euromed partnership and the European neighbourhood policy, strengthening participatory structures in the partner countries of the South, competitiveness and social cohesion in an integrated Euromed area, and follow-up to the Euromed ministerial conference on the role of women in society and civil society initiatives for young people. These discussions took place in the presence of the socio-occupational networks and the political authorities of the partnership.

The participants adopted the following recommendations:

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On the Euromed partnership: relations with political authorities and consolidation of networks

3. are pleased to note that regular contacts have been established with representatives of the Euromed Committee of the Council with a view to raising awareness of the concerns of civil society. They welcome the strengthening of relations with the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly, and in particular the observer status granted to the EESC in order to represent the network of ESCs: this observer status could also be granted to socio-occupational networks organised at Euro-Mediterranean level. They will develop closer working relations over the next few months with the various committees of the Assembly. They also welcome the support provided by the European Commission to their activities with a view to ensuring that the concerns of civil society are taken into account more closely;

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4. under the Euro-Mediterranean partnership framework, call for the systematic involvement of ESCs and similar institutions, together with Euro-Mediterranean civil society networks (social partners, social economy and farmers), in defining policies concerning job creation and social infrastructures (health, housing, education, transport, etc.);
5. building on the network of ESCs and similar institutions, commit themselves to the development of activities involving all other socio-occupational networks at Euro-Mediterranean level, and in particular the networks of social partners. In 2008, special initiatives will be taken regarding the social dimension of relations between the European Union and its southern partner countries. These initiatives will be taken in close cooperation with the Slovenian and French presidencies of the European Union in the course of 2008;

On civil society participation at local level in implementing the European neighbourhood policy action plans

6. welcome the strengthening of the European neighbourhood policy and the new approach to trade liberalisation, financing, governance and the mobility of persons, which open up new opportunities for promoting the social dimension of Euromed cooperation. They call for regular monitoring of civil society involvement in defining and implementing national action plans, and suggest that ESCs and similar institutions could serve as a means of facilitating such monitoring;
7. feel that implementation of the European neighbourhood policy through the national action plans must fully incorporate the local and regional dimension, in the context of sustainable development;
8. consider that establishing a European neighbourhood and partnership instrument clarifies the prospects for decentralised cooperation at regional and local level, particularly by means of cross-border cooperation. However, they would like to see an increase in the resources for such actions, together with simpler procedures in order to facilitate full take-up of the resources available. They also ask that action to support the development of civil society organisations be stepped up under the European Neighbourhood Policy;
9. emphasise that participation by civil society is essential for the implementation of balanced and sustainable territorial development, and would point out that consultative bodies can play a decisive role in this regard at national, regional and local level;

On strengthening participatory structures in the southern partner countries

10. call for ESCs and similar institutions in the partner countries to benefit from stronger support and recognition from their political authorities and European institutions. They also commit themselves to ensuring that such consultative bodies pay renewed attention to EU-related dialogues and policies, and in this context remain open to civil society representatives not included in such bodies;

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11. are pleased at the positive changes in Jordan, Morocco and Egypt intended to promote the emergence of civil society forums. They call on the political authorities of these three countries and the European Union to provide appropriate support for establishing autonomous consultative structures which 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;
12. stress that the freedom of association must be respected in order to facilitate civil society dialogue;

On competitiveness and social cohesion in an integrated Euromed area

13. consider that the different policies and initiatives for development in the context of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation should be based on competitiveness and social cohesion as mutually reinforcing and complementary aspects. In this regard, they encourage the promotion of a social dialogue at Euro-Mediterranean level and emphasise the importance of promoting corporate social responsibility based on identical criteria on both sides of the Mediterranean;
14. consider that the development of knowledge is a crucial common concern which impacts on both competitiveness and social cohesion in the economy of each country, given that appropriate and quality education and vocational training enhance economic growth and help to reduce inequalities relating to income, gender and all other factors;
15. recommend making public expenditure more effective and efficient at all educational levels, by promoting action to combat illiteracy and to improve the quality of pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training in the action plans of the European Union with its Mediterranean partners, in order to reduce early school leaving, to improve attendance at secondary education institutions and to facilitate the transition from education systems to labour markets;
16. call upon the European Union and its southern partners to set up a Euro-Mediterranean investment and development bank;

On the follow-up to the Euromed ministerial conference on the role of women in society

17. welcome the commitment by the European Union and the Mediterranean countries to strengthening the role of women in society. They are pleased to have been invited to participate in follow-up mechanisms to the 2006 Istanbul ministerial conference on this subject;
18. urge that the evaluation mechanisms set up subsequent to the ministerial conference be used to closely monitor and evaluate the development of entrepreneurial activity by women and the measures taken to promote it;

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19. in particular, recommend that measures targeted specifically at women be taken in the context of implementing the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Business and that specific objectives and programmes to promote female entrepreneurship be integrated into national action plans adopted in connection with the European neighbourhood policy (ENP).
20. Underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in all policy areas. In particular, they request that the statistics used in this context are broken down by gender.
21. recommend that special attention be paid to women entrepreneurs in connection with FEMIP and EIB micro-credit programmes in the Euro-Mediterranean region;
22. urge that women be given improved access to economic and social opportunities in all the countries of the region. In this regard, they consider that it is important to open up women's access to better jobs and to improve their qualifications, thereby fully reflecting the International Labour Organization's agenda on decent work;
23. note the absence in many countries of a social context and legislative fabric inspired by a culture of equal opportunities and equal treatment. To this end, they propose that specific funding be allocated to countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region which commit themselves to taking positive action aimed at achieving specific improvements in women's status including their legal status;
24. pay special attention to children's rights and recommend the establishment of a Euromed network for children to ensure that every child in the Euromed region enjoys his or her rights as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child equally, with no discrimination;

On the 2007-2008 work programme

25. warmly welcome the Moroccan proposal to hold the 2008 Summit in Morocco. The Euromed Follow-up Committee will examine the possibility of holding the 2009 Summit in Egypt;
26. decide that the following themes will be discussed at the 2008 Summit:
 - a) Factors facilitating access by women to economic and social life and higher qualifications in the context of national, regional and global development.
 - b) The social dimension of relations with southern partner countries, with a specific contribution on the priority actions to be implemented in employment policies.

In addition, a detailed analysis will be carried out to identify available programmes for civil society in the southern partner countries since the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The results of the study will be presented to the next Summit.

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The ESCs will also pay particular attention to cultural questions as part of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue

and decide that the following themes will be discussed at the 2009 Summit:

- a) Climate change and the Mediterranean: environmental and energy challenges.
- b) Towards an economic and employment strategy based on a knowledge society in the Euromed region.

THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE EUROMED SUMMIT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS PROPOSE TO PRESENT THIS DECLARATION TO THE NINTH EUROMED CONFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS TO BE HELD IN LISBON, PORTUGAL, ON 5-6 NOVEMBER 2007.

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