



# EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY



## RECOMMENDATION

of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly

on:

the women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean countries

tabled on behalf of the ad hoc Committee on Women's Rights in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries by Mrs Grażyna Ciemniak, chairwoman

adopted on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2007 in Tunis

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly:

- pursuant the decision on appointing the *ad hoc* Committee on Women's Rights in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries was made by the Bureau of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) on 24 May 2005;
- having regard that the mandate obtained during the extraordinary conference of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly held on 22 November 2005 in Rabat;
- having regard that the Report on the women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean countries, accepted by the *ad hoc* Committee on Women's Right in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries at the sitting on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007;

the *ad hoc* Committee hereby presents the Recommendation concerning the rights of women in the Euro-Mediterranean countries, based on the Report it has drawn up and unanimously adopted during the sitting of the *ad hoc* Committee on Women's Right in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries in Tunis, on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007:

### **General recommendations**

1. While stressing the urgent need to improve the situation of women in the Euro-Mediterranean countries, the *ad hoc* Committee hereby notes that a great and continuous effort is still required in order for discrimination to be confronted and eliminated by respective legislation and its implementation in every country participating in the Barcelona Process. Active promotion of women's rights is also required in all sectors of economic, political, educational and social life.
2. The *ad hoc* Committee strongly highlights that women's rights are fundamental human rights and their respect is necessary for the quality of democracy and for the success of the political and economic objectives of the Barcelona Process.
3. Calls for the fulfilment and effective application of the financial commitments laid down in the MEDA programme to support women's active participation in economic and social life and asks to take under consideration systematically gender dimension in the framework of MEDA Programmes; calls on the European Commission to include the gender dimension in the evaluations of MEDA programmes and their conclusions to be used in the planning of the future programmes.
4. In consideration of the above, the *ad hoc* Committee unanimously believes it is necessary to establish, within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, of a permanent Committee for Women's Rights. The composition of the Committee for Women's Rights ought to correspond to the composition of other EMPA Committees.
5. Stresses that regular cooperation with the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and respective Committees of National Parliaments as well as with representatives of the European Commission responsible for MEDA I and MEDA II programs should contribute to more effective implementation of the gender equality principle.

6. The Committee for Women's Rights of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly should be provided with all information on any undertakings and decisions made by committees dealing with the issue of women's rights and operating in national parliaments of all countries participating in the Barcelona Process, in the European Parliament and in international organizations. It should play the role of a coordinator of all efforts undertaken in this area.
7. The *ad hoc* Committee insists that representatives of the Committee for Women's Rights of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly should be also invited to ministerial conferences concerning the role of women in society. In this context, the Committee insists that a delegation of the *ad hoc* Committee's members attends the review ministerial conference in 2009.
8. At the same time the *ad hoc* Committee stresses the need to determine the amount of financial resources earmarked for implementing the outcomes of the ministerial conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, which was held on November 14-15, 2006 in Istanbul.
9. The *ad hoc* Committee requests the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly to submit its Report on Women's Rights in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries to all permanent Committees of the Assembly, so that it can be taken advantage of in the work of the mentioned Committees.
10. Welcoming the decision of the European Parliament and the European Council of 17 May 2006 naming 2007 the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (Decision No. 771/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006 establishing the Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) – towards a Just Society), the *ad hoc* Committee hereby request the Member States to show the greatest possible involvement in the achievement of the objectives set for the European Year of Equal Opportunities, by means of the following:
  - a) raising social awareness in the field of the right to equality and non-discrimination both de facto and de jure,
  - b) stimulating a debate on ways to increase the participation of men and women in social, economic and political life, and boosting their involvement in efforts aimed at counteracting discrimination in all sectors and on all levels,
  - c) highlighting the positive contribution that each of the sexes may have in the life of the society as a whole, in particular by stressing the advantages of diversity and parity in the interest of the society at large,
  - d) contributing to increase the awareness of the importance of fighting stereotypes, prejudice and violence, promoting good human relations and values constituting a foundation stone for the fight against discrimination.

**Recommendations concerning the integration of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians with the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly**

11. The *ad hoc* Committee recommends that national parliaments of countries participating in the Barcelona Process appoint, to work in the Committee for Women's Rights of the Euro-

Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, women parliamentarians who are also members of the Forum, in order to ensure that the Forum's experience is utilized to the fullest.

12. The *ad hoc* Committee proposes that the Forum's Chairwoman would take part, on a regular basis, in the meetings of the EMPA Committee for Women's Rights.

### **Detailed recommendations**

#### **Comparative analysis of legislations in the European Union and the Euro-Mediterranean Partner Countries**

13. The *ad hoc* Committee calls the governments of European Union Member States and the social partners to fully respect and implement the rights stemming from EU's legislations, as well as from the legislative systems of individual Member States.
14. The *ad hoc* Committee calls the governments to take cohesive and coordinated decisions so as to establish a joint strategy to create a society where men and women are equal in their rights and obligations, with mutual respect for their differences. Effective legislative and other practices will be the most useful and non-discriminating instrument.
15. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages the European Union to ensure greater support for NGOs operating for the benefit of women and equal opportunities and highlights the importance of regular assessments of this co-operation. The EU and other donor organizations have to determine and coordinate their efforts undertaken in individual countries. If required, the EU ought to stress that there are women's organizations operating in the MENA region countries that are willing to support initiatives to do away with gender disparities.
16. Welcomes the creation of institutions to promote gender equality in the southern and eastern part of the Mediterranean such as the Arab Women's Organisation and other similar NGOs which co-ordinate the activities of national institutions in these fields and stresses the importance of regular assessments of this co-operation.
17. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages governments to take into consideration the specific gender equality policies and measures, and to use gender mainstreaming strategies (gender budgeting and gender impact analysis strategies) during macro/micro economic and social policy making.
18. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages MENA region women participating in the political life to initiate a discussion, in the press, concerning gender equality, thus laying a foundation stone for effective and constructive mechanisms introducing, to the new legislation, the spirit of gender equality.
19. The *ad hoc* Women's Committee welcomes the numerous legal reforms in the southern countries of the EMPA but is also concerned that the legal status of women still has several forms of discrimination in comparison to other countries and notes that not all partners in the south have signed or ratified the CEDAW; therefore calls on all these partners to

commit to the CEDAW as well as the UN Human Rights Conventions introducing stronger regional and national monitoring mechanisms.

20. Recognises that shortcomings are also found in "cross-Partnerships" when dealing with marriages, nationality, parental authority, inheritance and freedom of movement and hence urges all EMPA partners to tackle such deficiencies found in "cross-Partnerships" by the harmonising of legislation on marriage, divorce, nationality, parental authority and inheritance.
21. The *ad hoc* Women's Committee calls upon all States, notably the southern partners of the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue, to sign and ratify the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons that supplements the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and to ensure close cooperation and effective action in this field.
22. Recognises the role of the Media for the promotion of the issues regarding the situation of women and their role in society as well as their influence on the attitude of the citizens in these countries and calls upon the governments to cooperate with the Media in this direction.

#### **Participation of women in political, economic and social life**

23. The *ad hoc* Committee hereby acknowledges that in order to increase the participation of women it is necessary for all the countries taking part in the Barcelona Process to observe the women's right to equal treatment in all areas of social, economic and political life.
24. The *ad hoc* Committee stresses the need to ensure the equality of men and women in political, economic and social spheres of life, by means of a multi-dimensional approach to the issue and by applying various measures in all of the aforementioned areas including establishing or strengthening the national mechanism on gender equality.
25. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages countries to undertake efforts aimed at promoting the awareness of the need to introduce the principle of more balanced representation of different sexes, both in international institutions and in domestic structures and bodies, and to do away with disparities concerning the participation of women in the political life. Therefore, the *ad hoc* Committee considers it necessary to facilitate women's active efforts to establish women's organizations and institutions, in the framework of enhancing the democratisation process.
26. While in all EMPA countries efforts are made to reach gender equality, women who reach positions of power are often still unable to exercise their rights fully, given the barriers imposed by formal and informal, patriarchal networks of influence that discriminate against women and exclude them de facto from gender equality; underlines that this is notably the case for women in parliaments and in politics and therefore urges for action aimed at removing limitations in their rights (private and social).
27. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages countries to boost the number of employed women by fixing an employment rate, as well as by offering incentives for women reconciling their

professional lives with household duties and the upbringing of children, and in particular for single mothers. The above can be achieved by supporting and developing the network of crèches and kindergartens, by introducing legal regulations protecting women who come back to work after a maternity or upbringing leave, as well as by a common introduction of regulations allowing the parents to share the upbringing leave.

28. The ad hoc Committee notes that gender equality can only be achieved through the economic empowerment of women; so, the necessary measures for supporting women entrepreneurship through better access to financial resource should be taken; to increase women employment equal treatment on the labour market should be provided; measures should be taken to eliminate structural inequalities such as sectoral segregation; the social security system should be improved so as to cover women who work as part time workers and home workers.
29. Counteracting disparities urges the members of the *ad hoc* Committee who should take efforts designed to counteract mental and physical violence against women and men, as well as prevent unequal access to the political, economic and social sphere. Calls for the creation of a Euro-Med gender "disaggregated knowledge base" (in cooperation with the European Human Rights Agency in Vienna) in order to monitor and evaluate the situation of women's rights in all areas, in parallel with the setting up of local centres for each partner country entrusted with the task of producing annual reports on women's rights on the basis of fixed indicators since no data is available on gender violence in the southern countries of the EMPA; urges them to establish such mechanisms.
30. Calls upon the creation of an exchange programme between the northern and southern countries of the EMPA aimed at helping women in parliament in order to exchange political experiences and cultures; further calls for the setting up of special internships between parliaments of the EMPA states for young women in political youth organizations.
31. Calls on Member States of the EU, on the basis of their national legislation and the International Conventions, to guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of immigrant women and to promote policies for the fight against all forms of discriminations opposed to immigrant women.
32. Calls on the Member States of the EU and the countries of origin to provide their populations with systematic and responsible information about the EU's immigration policies and challenges, the opportunities and obligations of immigrants, both men and women, in the host countries.

### **Women's access to education and healthcare**

33. The *ad hoc* Committee stresses the unique role of education in facilitating women's access to all areas of social, economic and political life. In this context, the *ad hoc* Committee enthusiastically welcomes the increasing level of education and the diminishing illiteracy level among women in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

34. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages Mediterranean Partner Countries to pursue an even more active educational policies, that fosters a gender equality policies and not to draw up role models on a basis of the gender division of labour and simultaneously highlights that the growing level of women's education positively impacts the economic growth of a given country.
35. The *ad hoc* Committee recommends that new technologies be harnessed to solve educational and healthcare-related problems.
36. Referring to the Millennium Development Goals adopted in the Millennium Declaration of September 8, 2000 at the United Nations summit in 2000, the *ad hoc* Committee calls to ensure equal status of men and women in all spheres of life. In particular, the *ad hoc* Committee calls upon the countries to pay particular attention to the education of girls, including those from rural areas, so that they are not forced to leave schools prematurely, to provide them with the conditions required for personal growth and to allow them to fully utilize their abilities.
37. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages state governments to back the promotion of women and to ensure them equal remuneration for work.
38. Stresses the importance of taking account of the gender perspective in all health policies as well as in the framework of the scientific and research programmes.
39. The *ad hoc* Committee calls on the states participating in the Barcelona Process to undertake all efforts required to enhance the access of Euro-Mediterranean women to full healthcare in all regions, especially rural areas where there is an important lack of healthcare infrastructure for women. In this context the *ad hoc* Committee attaches special significance to the situation and health-related problems of elderly women.
40. Supporting the women's right to decide on their own body and sexuality, the *ad hoc* Committee recommends a better access for women to healthcare, in particular by:
  - a) ensuring access to contraceptives for each woman;
  - b) improving the childbirth methods ;
  - c) promoting breastfeeding privacy;
  - d) expanding the knowledge and skills of midwives;
  - e) limiting the numbers of abortions bearing the risk of loss of health or life;
  - f) implementing and ensuring the observance of regulations against mistreatment and rape;
  - g) combating each form of violence against women, both with regard to domestic violence, rape and forcing them into prostitution;
  - h) improving economic and financial conditions, and improving the status of women employed in health service;
  - i) appointing a greater number of women for managerial positions in the health sector;
  - j) providing continuous, high-quality training of the staff in the health sector regarding gender issues;
  - k) establishing an office for the health of women, which would deal with drawing up the intersectoral policy and action plans;
  - l) creating, in individual countries, national forums for the health of women;

- m) publishing detailed, periodical reports on the health of women and submitting them to parliaments, media and citizens;
  - n) defining, in a precise manner, priority areas for research, with ensuing undertakings also specified;
  - o) establishing mechanisms allowing for learning women's opinions on their needs and on the problems they encounter;
  - p) gaining relevant knowledge on government's actions undertaken on the international level (CEDAW and the Beijing Platform with regard to decisions concerning the already approved actions) and on the Euro-Mediterranean level (Barcelona Declaration and undertakings of individual forums and conferences);
  - q) sharing expertise between the citizens of EU and MENA countries, with particular attention paid to potential similarities (and to discrepancies considered accepted) in the social, economic, religious and cultural sector in those two geographic areas;
  - r) sanitary strategies and healthcare services protecting dignity of women and simultaneously ensuring their right to privacy.
41. Calls on all Member States of the EMPA to improve the management of Hepatitis B and HIV by putting in place better policies regarding screening, prevention and treatment of the disease for pregnant women and their babies at risk; considering that the health organisation reports state the increasing threat created by infectious diseases and particularly Hepatitis B and HIV in all countries, and taking into account that neonatal infections with the Hepatitis B virus carries a very high risk of resulting in a persistent infection, calls for the screening of all mothers during pregnancy as a key element in any nation's strategy to reduce the occurrence and impact and eventually eliminate HIV and Hepatitis B infection in its population.
  42. The *ad hoc* Committee also notices the growing problem of violence against women and recommends the Member States to establish appropriate legal provisions focused on victim protection, while simultaneously providing for economic measures to be applied in practice.
  43. The *ad hoc* Committee recommends the governments to take all necessary protective and preventive measures as well as ensure special training for professionals who encounter the victims of violence so as to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including female genital mutilation and foster marriage.
  44. The *ad hoc* Committee notices the growing problem of violence against women (physical and psychological violence, domestic violence, forced marriage, polygamy, crimes of honour and female genital mutilation), recommends countries to introduce and enhance relevant legal regulations focused on victim protection and to guarantee their implementation; asks for a better information of the general public about this phenomenon by information campaigns.
  45. Notes the statistics relating to violence and crime against women and therefore calls for the judicial and law reforms in all states of the EMPA aimed in particular at adopting protective legislation for women and stronger punishment of offenders especially in cases of domestic violence.

46. The *ad hoc* Committee calls for greater solidarity within the Mediterranean region, among governments, parliaments, citizens - men and women - and for EU's more active approach on the international scene in order to find solutions to the conflicts in the region.

### **Women in the media**

47. Having noticed the unfavorable image of women in all types of media operating in the Barcelona Process countries, the *ad hoc* Committee calls for undertaking all necessary actions aimed at improving the image of women in the media.
48. The *ad hoc* Committee stresses the role that women parliamentarians play in improving the image of women in the media and calls on political parties and the relevant institutions to give the appropriate means and opportunities with a view to achieving this objective.
49. The *ad hoc* Committee recommends that action plans be drawn up to facilitate the improvement of women's image in the media and to ensure their more egalitarian position in the media. The said plans should be then implemented in a consistent manner.
50. To this end, the Committee considers it advisable that:
- a) Women's NGOs should be supported in order to organize campaigns to create demand for awareness of non-discriminatory content presented in the media.
  - b) Undertakings aimed at improving the social position of women, implemented by media companies, ought to be supported, based on the principle of responsibility.
  - c) Greater emphasis should be placed on programs, broadcast by public radio and television stations, raising women's awareness of and informing them about the rights they are entitled to.
  - d) Lobbying should be in place encouraging private broadcasters to offer similar programs.
  - e) Care should be taken to ensure the effective use, by women, of new communication technologies, to expand their computer skills and to promote educational programs organized by governments in cooperation with the media. Educational programs, however, should place greater emphasis on the media usage skills, with negative effects of second-class treatment of women by the media and the potential consequences of such a situation taken into consideration.

### **European Union projects and financing for programs promoting women and gender equality**

51. The *ad hoc* Committee encourages the European Union to include gender-equality dimension in all of EU's policies, programs and projects undertaken within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the European Neighborhood Policy. Special emphasis should be placed on increasing the share of women in all types of activity, in particular by establishing positive action plans, providing the necessary financial and technical support, as well as by enhancing the procedures for informing and consulting non-governmental organizations in issues related to women.

52. Urges for action aimed at closing the gender gap in secondary and further education in the southern countries of the EMPA and further calls for a balanced participation of young women as well as young men in the education exchange programmes of the European Commission, such as Erasmus, Leonardo Da Vinci, Comenius and Grundtvig programmes, and in the Socrates, Culture 2007-2013 and Youth in Action 2007-2013 programmes.
53. Underlines the significance of an enhanced cooperation between North-South in the Mediterranean in this sector and supports the idea to establish a "Euro-Med Woman of the Year Prize" to be awarded annually to the southern and northern organization or individual deemed to have made, in cooperation with other Mediterranean actors, the greatest contribution to promoting the rights of women.
54. Calls upon the European Commission and the Council of the EU to include in addition to the democratic clause regarding respect for fundamental rights, also the gender dimension in the Association Agreements by introducing an explicit provision on the protection for women's' rights and to provide for monitoring and evaluation of the national legislation, action plans and Community programmes in this field.
55. Expresses satisfaction over the funds allocated within the framework of MEDA I and II as well as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights for this issue and further calls for a regional MEDA programme aimed, in particular, to promoting women's rights.
56. Strongly supports the aims and goals of the 2005 Five-Year Work Programme on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership but recommends that objectives be better defined and accompanied by a timetable for their implementation.
57. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Speakers of Parliaments members to the Barcelona Process, to the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, to the European Commission, to the Governments of the countries members to the Barcelona Process as well as to the institutions concerned.