

Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture

Minutes of the meeting of 24 October 2014

Executive Summary:

On 24 October 2014, in the Refectory Room of Palazzo del Seminario, the Italian Chamber of Deputies hosted a meeting of the Culture Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM), chaired by the Right Honourable Khalid Chaouki.

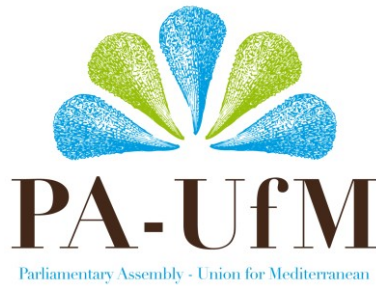
Participants:

- European Parliament (1 MEP): Ernest Maragall i Mira
- Countries of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean (6 MPs): Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Turkey.
- National parliaments of EU states (13 MPs): Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

Proceedings:

The Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini opened the meeting with a welcoming address. The following persons then addressed the meeting: the Vice President of the European Parliament David Sassoli, the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Benedetto Della Vedova, and the Director of the Secretariat General of the UfM George Saliba.

The Chairman of the Committee, Khalid Chaouki, called the meeting to order, setting out the agenda and submitting the minutes of the previous meeting in Amman on 8 February 2014 for approval. The minutes were approved with certain amendments added by the delegations. In particular, the Hon. Slimane Saadaoui of the Algerian delegation requested that the minutes of the next meetings also include the names of the MPs contributing to the discussions. The Chairman then made the following observations: that uniform criteria for recording the minutes had been laid down for all Committees; that the minutes summarised the contents of the discussions; and that, where necessary, it would be possible to mention by name those who spoke at meetings, provided that they had presented themselves beforehand.



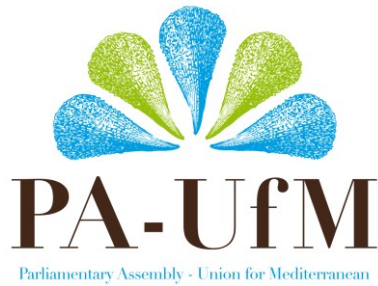
Following the adoption of the agenda and the minutes, the Chairman then opened the first session, which was dedicated to "Immigration and integration", and introduced the reports prepared by Prefect Mario Morcone, by Ms. Ghita Zouggari, of the Directorate on Migration Affairs of the Ministry for Moroccans Residing Abroad, and by the Deputy Director General of IOM Laura Thompson.

In the debate that followed the presentation of the reports (with contributions from the delegations of Algeria, the European Parliament, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Spain and Turkey), a number of important points were raised regarding: the daunting situation of the countries subjected to unprecedented immigration pressures because of the crises in Gaza and Syria; the strong correlation between dictatorial regimes and emigration, which is therefore not driven exclusively by economic forces; the need for a new kind of Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean region to attract investment, and the need for the Assembly to canvass support for such a plan in the EU.

The second session, which was dedicated to the theme of the free movement of students and researchers in the Euro-Mediterranean area and the experience of Erasmus, began with the presentation of the reports prepared by the Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament Silvia Costa, the President of the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) Abdelhamid El Zoheiry, and the Rector of the University of Bologna Ivano Dionigi.

In the debate that followed, which saw contributions from the delegations of Algeria, the European Parliament, Italy, Luxembourg and Malta, the following points in particular emerged: that a major step forward had been taken with the new Erasmus Plus programme, the 2014-2020 budget for which had been increased by 40% compared to the previous period; that the Erasmus experience had shown that culture is a powerful tool that can break down barriers and overcome xenophobia and intolerance; that bureaucratic obstacles needed to be overcome to make the programme even easier to use.

The third session was dedicated to the presentation of the 2014 report of the Anna Lindh Foundation on cultural trends and social changes in the Mediterranean region. The report drew two main conclusions. First, the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean have more values in common than is generally believed: both set great store by hospitality, work and freedom. Secondly, in spite of media accounts to the contrary, the mentality of ordinary people in the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean is fairly close to that of those on the northern shore. Far from cultivating extremism, people are motivated mainly by a desire for mutual knowledge and friendship.



Finally – as part of other business and at the request of delegates from Algeria and Palestine, the question of the protection of the Mosque of Jerusalem was raised. Mr Qubaa, MP (Palestinian delegation), denounced Israel's attempt, through a bill under consideration by the Knesset, to take possession of a part of the Mosque of Al-Aqsa and the Esplanade of the Mosques. The Palestinian MP asked for a PA-UfM delegation to be sent to Jerusalem and for the Assembly to condemn the Israeli initiative. The Chairman undertook to bring the request to the attention of the Portuguese Presidency before the next meeting of the Bureau, scheduled for December. The Portuguese representative, Mr Rodríguez, MP, declared that he was in favour of addressing the issue at the next meeting of the Speakers of Parliaments of the PA-UfM.

Finally, the Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Culture Committee would be held in Barcelona at the headquarters of the UfM Secretariat.