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PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY– UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE – UNION POUR LA MEDITERRANEE

الجمعية البرلمانية للاتحاد من اجل المتوسط

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

DRAFT MINUTES

of the meeting held in Vienna, Austria
19 October 2015

1. Opening of the meeting, address by the President of the Austrian Federal Council, adoption of the draft agenda and of the minutes of the meeting held in Lisbon on 11 May 2015

The development of the European Union requires the concerns and interests of the peoples of the Mediterranean to be duly considered, the President of the Austrian Federal Council, Mr. Gottfried Kneifel, said when addressing the Committee. The civil war in Syria and the IS-terrorism challenge the international community while hundreds of thousands of refugees are in search for a better future in Europe. If the peace process in the Middle East is to continue, environmental protection, sustainable development, new technologies for the use of renewable energy and new jobs have to be included as well.

After the adoption of the draft agenda and the approval of the draft minutes of the Committee meeting in Lisbon on 11 May 2015 the Chairman, Mr. Stefan Schennach, underlined the need for parliamentarians to cooperate with each other and recalled the work of the Committee during the past years.

2. The refugee tragedy and its challenges for local authorities

Ms. Melissa Fleming, UNHCR, Head of Communications and Public Information Service, Spokesperson for the High Commissioner, described the fate of a young Syrian woman on her way to Europe together with her partner witnessing the suicides of desperate castaways, the death of her fiancé and the death of many young children who had been entrusted to her by drowning and exhausted mothers and grandparents. This boat tragedy in the Mediterranean had never been investigated, Fleming noted. In order to help refugees adequately the UNHCR would need twice as much resources as currently available, as for example in Lebanon where 25% of the population were refugees. Ms. Fleming proposed offering Syrian refugees legal ways to come to Europe. In addition, the war in Syria had to be stopped. "The world is facing its worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War," concluded Ms. Fleming.

Mr. Kilian Kleinschmidt, Advisor to the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, said that this crisis had now reached Europe. He reported from his work in Jordanian refugee camps and urged solidarity in the international community to improve the disastrous situation in the camps regarding in particular food, medical care and future perspectives. "We need massive investment in the infrastructure of the camps in order to turn them into living spaces where young people receive education and training."

The Secretary General of the Austrian Association of Municipalities, Mr. Walter Leiss, described services and responsibilities of local authorities in housing and integration of

refugees. Many communities which might be ready to receive refugees in the amount of 1.5% of their population now had to comply with international standards. Creating accommodation, kindergartens and school places, language teaching, health care and job creation were just some of the many challenges to mention.

Delegates from Estonia, Latvia, Italy, Jordan, Croatia, Israel and Lebanon took the floor in the following discussion.

3. Increasing environmental challenges for the Mediterranean

Mr. Antonio D'Ali, Member of the Italian Senate, underlined that the Mediterranean Sea was confronted with various environmental threats such as water pollution, rise of the sea level and decrease in fish stock and that water exchange was a very slow process so that the sea water would take 80 to 100 years to recover. In that regard the legal framework – the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea – existed but it was unacceptable that countries which had signed it had failed to implement it. For instance investments in security of cargo vessels had not been made and ships were often poorly maintained.

Ms. Rima Tarabay, Initiator, Coordinator & President of Eco-Towns Project, gave an update on the Eco-Towns Project initiated in 2012 and having attracted partner towns in Lebanon, Greece, Slovenia, France, Morocco and Tunisia. It focuses on small towns, education and awareness raising, fostering renewable energies, waste management and sustainable tourism. Connecting people for environmental issues would go far beyond politics or religion, she said.

The Chair reported on the outcome of the Let's Do It! Mediterranean Campaign 2015 on 8-9 May where over 80.000 volunteers had participated.

4. International cooperation in the field of energy and sustainability

Mr. Stephan Ressler, European Commission, Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS), Resident Energy Advisor for Cyprus, gave an overview on the scope of the SRSS: implementation of growth enhancing administrative and structural reforms and efficient and effective use of the EU structural and investment funds. This support by the European Commission had been available on request to all EU member states since July 2015. With regard to energy and sustainability in Cyprus the focus lied on re-structuring the energy market including the creation of a new electricity target model, fostering the introduction of renewables through the market model, technical capacity assessment and market modelling as well as on support in raising energy efficiency potential through potential analysis and best practice training.

5. Improving access to sustainable energy

Ms. Antina Sander, Deputy Executive Director of the Renewables-Grid-Initiative (RGI), started her keynote speech by stating that renewables needed grids, to build grids it would be necessary to deal with public concerns and therefore strong political commitments were needed. In addition, grids were one main enabler to balance local volatility and fully seize generating capacity, but that unfortunately grids were not very popular. In order to equally meet the interests of grid operators and environmental NGOs grids should be built in time and in line with environmental objectives and with people's concerns. Ms. Sander described the tasks of the RGI that included both sides and had been launched by a memorandum of understanding in 2009.

In the discussion delegates from Italy, Germany and Jordan took the floor.

6. Any other business

The day after the meeting the Committee visited best practice models at a higher technical institute with a special traineeship programme on renewable energies, a district cooling center partially alimented with energy coming from waste incineration and a pilot project producing hydrogen from wind power.
