

Republic of Tunisia
Chamber of Deputies

Minutes on the meeting
of the Committee on Women's Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly
of the Union for the Mediterranean (AP-UfM)

The Committee on Women's Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (AP-UfM) held its meeting in the European parliament headquarters in Brussels on Thursday 28 October 2010, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Afifa SALAH, President of the committee of general legislation and general organization of the administration in the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies, with the presence of the two vice-Chairmen Mr. Sergio Paolo Francesco SILVESTRIS, Member of European Parliament and Mrs. Fatima CHELLOUCHE, Member of Algerian National People's Assembly.

Parliamentary delegations from the southern shore of the Mediterranean participated in the meeting: (Algeria, Morocco, Jordan and Palestine), four members of the European parliament, and a member from Hungarian parliament. Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Italy apologized to attend the meeting (list attached).

First: Communication of the Committee President:

After the adoption of the draft agenda and the minutes of the committee meeting held in Amman on 12 March 2010, Mrs. Afifa SALAH delivered an opening address in which she thanked the European parliament for accepting to host this meeting in Brussels, and for its cooperation with the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies to provide all the requirements for the meeting success.

She indicated that the committee had committed to hold its first meeting during this session before 2010, for the purpose to have enough time for well preparing for the next plenary session which will be held in Rome in March 2011. She also said that the committee attempted to hold this meeting in Istanbul during may 2010 in conjunction with other economic, political and cultural committees, but it was not able to do so.

The committee chairwoman informed the attendees about the outcome of her participation in the meeting of the enlarged Bureau which was held in Rome in 18

June 2010, and presented an overview on the two themes to be studied by the committee during the current session, and to enable the committee to elaborate draft recommendations about them to be presented to the next plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean.

She reminded, in this context that the first theme related to illiteracy in the euro Mediterranean region is an Italian proposal which is of social nature and is of great importance, regarding that illiteracy phenomenon is still widespread in many countries of the Euro- Mediterranean region.

The second theme is of economic and political nature related to: “Promotion of women role: her involvement in economic life as best tool to have access to decision making positions”, and it is a compromising theme suggested by the committee chairmanship, regarding that it seemed some amendments according to the suggestions of the Italian presidency, in addition to the suggestions of Mrs. Viorica DANCILA, member of European parliament.

It should be noted that Mrs. Afifa SALAH expressed her regret for the low participation by the parliamentary delegations from Northern shore of the Mediterranean, although the committee members were informed three weeks prior to the meeting date , besides the invitations and attached documents were addressed by fax and e- mail to them.

She pointed out the importance of the work made by women rights committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean through their examination of important themes relating to women situation in the entire Euro Mediterranean region in order to enhance their rights in all the political, economic and cultural fields.

Commenting on the committee chairwoman observation concerning the presence of European parliamentarians, Mr. Marc TARABELLA, member of European parliament indicated that the meeting of women rights committee of the AP-UfM coincided with the meeting of the committee on women’s rights and gender equality of the European parliament. He also underlined that it would be better for the administration of the European Parliament to avoid organizing the two meetings at the same period.

Second: exchanging of views on themes and appointment of reporters:

The discussions between the committee members focused on the two themes which were chosen, and the modus operandi of the committee. Mrs. Afifa SALAH clarified in this context that the themes examined by the committee do not concern only the south Mediterranean, but they are related to Mediterranean region as a whole. Moreover, the committee used to adopt the principle of consultations between all its members, in order to choose themes. The reporters are also, appointed on the basis of egalitarian principle between both south and north Mediterranean shores, for the purpose to prepare equilibrated reports to depend on them in the elaboration of the committee recommendations.

The Committee Chairwoman referred the call to Mr. Sergio Paolo Francesco SILVESTRIS, member of European Parliament and vice chairperson, who affirmed the commitment of the European parliament to develop women role in all the fields, indicating the importance of chosen themes, regarding that they fall within the framework of celebrating the 15th anniversary of world conference on women. He invited the participants to discuss in depth about these topics in the context of a frank and responsible dialogue between representatives of the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, so as to achieve the desired objectives of the committee's work.

1- First theme: Women and illiteracy in the Euro- Mediterranean region:

At the beginning of discussions, Mrs. Afifa SALAH indicated the importance of this issue, due to the prevalence of illiteracy among women in the Euro – Mediterranean region and its negative repercussions on both women and society, referring to the recently published international on the occasion of the celebration of International Women's Day on September 8, 2010.

These reports indicated that women represent 64% of 800 million illiterates in the world, which explain the obstacles that women face in the Euro-Mediterranean region and hamper their development.

She then referred the call to the participants in the meeting who raised the following points:

- Mrs. Aicha Al KORCH, Member of Morocco House of Representatives affirmed that illiteracy phenomenon is not only in south Mediterranean countries, but it is a global phenomenon, noting that illiteracy is among the reasons of unemployment widespread even in the developed countries. She expressed that women is the first victim of this phenomenon. She also mentioned in this context the Moroccan experience in this field, considering that eliminating illiteracy among women is still difficult and pointed out the importance of the private sector, role and support of northern countries to southern ones in combating this phenomenon.

- Mrs. Agnes VADAI, member of Hungarian House of Representatives suggested that the reports of the committee should be based on the good practices in the field of fighting illiteracy in the euro-Mediterranean region's countries, in order to enable the Committee to prepare valued and efficient recommendations about this issue. She also highlighted her country's experience in terms of putting an end to illiteracy phenomenon among women, especially through the compulsory education for the girl till the age of 18 years and the punishment of these law violators.

- Mr. Said Tahar LASSOUED, member of Tunisian Chamber of Deputies delivered a presentation on women and illiteracy in the Mediterranean. He raised the importance of women awareness about her rights, foremost the right in education given the role assumed by women in educating generations. He considered that illiteracy among women is one of obstacles hampering the realization of a comprehensive and equilibrated development, considering that woman shares with the man the same responsibilities in the society. He also referred to the importance of changing mentalities through the development of legislations and intensification of field working, appreciating in this context the Tunisian achievements and assets (law of personal status, associations and organization for women, training centers for woman, adults education programs...) which have contributed to the achievement of positive results, therefore Tunisia is ranked the first among Arabic countries according to a study prepared by the United Nations organizations for Education, Sciences and Culture (UNESCO).

- Mrs. Jehad ABUZNAID, member of Palestinian legislative council underlined the importance of developing the legislations on illiteracy, in order to reduce the spread of

this phenomenon in the Euro Mediterranean region, the work to change mentalities, woman awareness about her rights for the purpose to raise her contribution to the region development, and the search for the reasons of its widespread which enable finding the suitable solutions for illiteracy.

She also stressed the importance of integrating the roles played by private sector, civil society and governments to eliminate this phenomenon, especially in rural areas through financing the projects relating to this sector, indicating that illiteracy rate among Palestinian women has reduced from 23% in 2007 to 9% which is considered one of lowest rates in the Arabic region although the situation in Palestinian territories, praising in this context the support of Jordanian kingdom to her country in this field.

- Mrs. Malika BENARAB – ATTOU, member of European Parliament raised the necessity of differentiating between illiteracy and ignorance, she also indicated that the increasing of illiteracy rate among women, especially in the Arabic region, as compared with international rates thus it reached 27.6% during the period from 2005 to 2008 (60 million persons including 39 million illiterate women, equal to two thirds). Moreover, the development rate of illiteracy reduction in Arabic countries is still slow, therefore it reached 51.3% in 1980 and 61.5 % in 1990, besides, she pointed out that according to 2002 international report on human development, this situation can not ameliorate before 2040 because of the slow growth of scholar rate and decline of growth rate during the nineties, reduction of public expenditures in education sector since 1995. As for Europe, the problem of illiteracy lies on the level of immigrant women and means of their integration in host countries.

- Mrs. Tamam El GHUL, Member of Jordan Senate, mentioned that illiteracy phenomenon among women is not widespread in her country, thus it does not exceed 7% thanks to the measures taken in Jordan in this field, like the encouraging to join schools and provision of modern techniques in educational spaces. She also insisted on the role of private sector in helping the financing of the education role.

- Mrs. Emna SOULA, member of Tunisian Chamber of Councilors indicated that the public sector in North African countries especially in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco which makes great efforts to fight illiteracy phenomenon, thus they allocate

the greatest part of their budget for education sector. She also stressed, in this context, the importance of private sector in supporting the public one in order to lighten the burden borne by the State in this field.

- Mrs. Fatiha BAKKALI, Member of Morocco House of Representatives called to make further efforts to eliminate illiteracy among women, regarding its negative impact on States economies. She also indicated that Morocco Kingdom did not entrusted only the Ministry of education with illiteracy issue although the importance of the ministry role, but she involved the private sector in this matter, praising the role of Morocco civil society, especially the associations and organizations in supporting the State efforts which established a ministry to deal with this issue, calling to follow this modal and offering financial helps to encourage girls to join schools.

2- Second theme: “Promotion of women role: her involvement in economic life as best tool to have access to decision making positions”:

During the discussions on this topic, many important issues were tackled:

- Mrs. Fatima CHELLOUCHE, member of Algerian National People’s Assembly and vice chairwoman of the committee raised, in her taking the floor about this issue, the difficulties that women face to arrive to decision making positions, foremost the mentalities, back warded habits and inequality phenomenon, in addition to the solutions able to overcome these difficulties .

In the context of her speaking about the Algerian experience, she pointed out that, thanks to women beneficiation from education and joining universities, they succeeded in entering all job fields, therefore the rate of women working in judiciary instances as magistrates has increased (59%), medicine and teaching, but women presence in political positions and making decision positions is still weak, although the efforts made by civil society in this field for the purpose to change mentalities. She also clarified that, in her country, they think about new suggestions and ideas to enable women to reach decision making positions as changing election means, adoption quota system, election lists and enhance her presence in syndicates.

- Mrs. Emna SOULA, member of Tunisian Chamber of Councilors pointed out that the modest presence of women in job market and in the positions of decision taking is a general problem that concerns all the Euro-Mediterranean countries.

She also underlined the reasons lying behind the low rate of women presence in job market (59%), in decision taking positions in south Mediterranean countries (5% the rate of women presentation in the parliament) which are mainly political , economic, cultural and psychological reasons which lie especially in the lack of equal opportunities between sexes (the election lists as an example), in addition to administrative and bureaucracy barriers which hamper their access into economic sector and decision taking positions. The representative of Tunisian delegation pointed out that Tunisia adopted, thanks to the political will and the adequate legislative framework, a proactive policy for the purpose to enhance women participation in economic life, their integration in decision making process and in political life until her presence rate in decision and responsibility position reaches 35% at least by the year 2014.

- Mrs. Jehad ABUZNAID, member of Palestinian legislative council affirmed the existence of many political, economic, cultural and religious obstacles hampering women from reaching the decision taking positions, pointing out that the adoption of quota system is not sufficient enough to enhance the presence of women in such positions. She also affirmed that the realization of real equality between man and woman requires the necessity of changing mentalities, development of legislations relating to jobs and facilitation of women beneficiation of small loans (high interest rate in Palestine from 8 to 10 %) stressing at the same time the role of media in that issue.

- Mr. Marc TARABELLA, member of European parliament, stressed the importance of this issue which is being examined within the committee on human rights and gender equality of the European parliament, and delivered an exposé in which he tackled the actual situation of women presence in employment market in the Euro- Mediterranean region where this rate reaches in European countries 60% in 2010 (53% in 2000), 45.6% in western European countries, 21.6% in Middle East countries and 23.1% in North African countries.

He then suggested some solutions which can be envisaged, in order to further integrate women in economic life, through affording the small loans and the appropriation of education with job market needs, affirming the role of civil society role in fighting these mentalities through awareness campaigns in the poor regions.

He presented a number of important recommendations to facilitate women participation in the economic life relating to supporting her presence in syndicates and implementation of laws which calls for gender equality.

He called in this context to rely on some European countries experiences such as Norway, France, and Belgium which adopted binding laws in this field.

- Mrs. Malika BENARAB- ATTOU, member of European parliament affirmed that women obtainment of an important part of decision taking decision is depending on respecting the parity principle and adoption of quota system.

- Mrs. Tamam El GHUL, member of Jordan Senate delivered a presentation that included the main reasons which hampered women reaching of the decision taking positions, which are mainly related to lack of gender equality and the weak participation of women in economic life, illiteracy and women ignorance of her rights, in addition to familial reasons.

She presented also some proposals to enhance women presence in decision taking positions even in political or economic fields, including encouraging to adhere to the committees on human rights, municipal councils, parties, legislative councils, in addition to the enhancement of training programs for the benefit of women, especially in the promising sectors and encouraging the private sector to provide more job opportunities for the benefit of women.

At the end of discussions, Mrs. Afifa SALAH thanked the committee members for the rich dialogue on the themes to be examined by the committee, the ideas and valuable proposals they presented, and which will be depended on in the elaboration of the committee's recommendations that will be presented to the plenary session during the next Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean to be held in March 2011.

After that, the committee chairwoman announced the candidatures for the position of reporter for the two themes to be examined by the committee as follows:

- **First theme: Women and illiteracy in the Euro – Mediterranean Region:**
 - Mrs. Malika BENARAB- ATTOU, member of European parliament.
 - Mrs. Fatiha BAKKALI, member of Moroccan House of Representatives.
- **Second theme: “Promotion of women role: her involvement in economic life as best tool to have access to decision making positions”:**
 - Mr. Marc TARABELLA, member of European parliament.
 - Mrs. Kalthoum WARDAH , member of Syrian People’s Assembly.

Third: Follow- up to the two paragraphs 37 and 50 from the recommendation of the committee adopted in the session of Amman (March 2010):

The committee chairwoman indicated that this item is included in the framework of the follow- up of the committee recommendations, and their concretization, especially those concerning the creation of an Euro- Mediterranean observatory on woman, suggesting the creation of a working group that deals with the examination of this theme.

After the discussions about this theme, it was decided to delay the debates on this item to the next committee’s meeting.

Fourth: Discussing the standing item related to women and conflicts threatening their security and fundamental freedoms in the Euro- Mediterranean region:

The committee chairwoman clarified that this item related to “Woman and conflicts threatening her security and fundamental freedoms in the Euro- Mediterranean Region”, was approved during the committee meeting held in Brussels on 1 December 2008. Since that time, this item was adopted by all the committee’s meetings. This topic was the subject of great discussions during the examination of the topic related to violence against woman and speaking about threats to which woman is subjected in the Middle – East during wars and conflicts.

No comment is registered by the committee on that item.

Fifth: Follow-up to the question related to «The Prize of the Euro-Med Women of the year”:

It was decided to delay the follow –up of this theme, till the entering of the budget of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean into force.