



**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNION FOR THE
MEDITERRANEAN**



**COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS
IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES**

'Strengthening the role of women: promoting participation in economic life as the best means of access to decision-making posts'

Report by Marc Tarabella, Member of the European Parliament

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean,

Having regard to the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

Having regard to the final declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, held in Alexandria on 19 October 2009;

Having regard to the approval of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean by the Brussels European Council of 13 and 14 March 2008;

Having regard to the Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, held in Paris on 13 July 2008;

Having regard to the final statement issued at the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Union for the Mediterranean, held in Marseille on 3 and 4 November 2008;

Having regard to the unanimous decision by the General Assembly to establish the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women;

Having regard to Heads of State and Government meeting on the Millennium Development Goals held at the United Nations on 20–22 September 2010, against a backdrop of slow progress towards the achievement of the gender-equality aspects of those goals;

Having regard to the forthcoming 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security;

Having regard to the conclusions of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Istanbul (November 2006);

Having regard to the conclusions of the Second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Marrakesh on 11 and 12 November 2009;

Having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation on Women, Development, Peace and Security in the Mediterranean, and Women, Education, Training and Employment of 17 March 2009, and previous recommendations;

Having regard to the recommendations adopted by the committees of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean at its sixth plenary session, held in Amman on 13 and 14 March 2010;

Having regard to the conclusions of the inaugural meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), held in Barcelona on 21 January 2010;

Having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2010 on the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which calls for the adoption of a project under the auspices of the UfM on the subject of women's entrepreneurship and their participation in public life;

Having regard to the Millennium Development Goals, in particular MDG 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women, both of which are vital in order to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education and in all professional circles, and achieve equitable control over resources and equal representation of men and women in public and private life;

Having regard to the European Parliament's resolution on EU policy towards Mediterranean partner countries in relation to the promotion of women's rights and equal opportunities in these countries (2001/2129(INI));

Having regard to the European Parliament's resolutions on the EU's Mediterranean policy, in particular those of 15 March 2007 and 5 June 2008, and its resolution of 19 February 2009 entitled The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean;

Having regard to the Commission's Strategy Paper for the Thematic Programme 2007-2013, which includes the empowerment of women and makes provision for a specific budget to improve the skills of non-state actors involved in promoting women's civil and political rights and their economic and social empowerment in the battle against gender stereotypes in the Mediterranean countries covered by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI);

Having regard to the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004, and in particular to the Commission's progress reports on its implementation;

Having regard to the guidance documents of 4 December 2006 on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, of 5 December 2007 on a Strong European Neighbourhood Policy, and of 12 May 2010 on Taking Stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

Having regard to the statement of 3 February 2011 by a group of United Nations independent human rights experts;

Having regard to the conclusions of the European Council and the statements by Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on the situation in Tunisia and Egypt;

Having regard to President Van Rompuy's declaration of 4 February 2011 on Egypt and the region;

Having regard to the statement of 4 February 2011 by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on the current situation in North Africa;

Whereas gender equality is not only a basic human right, but working towards it has significant socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women helps economies thrive and boosts productivity and growth;

Whereas gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied

access to basic education and they are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes;

Stressing that gender equality is a universal value and right, an absolute prerequisite of democratisation processes and one of the key objectives of the Euromed partnership, in which every man and woman should enjoy equal rights, and that democracy can only be established on this basis, particularly in the southern Mediterranean countries;

Whereas no specific cultural or religious factor can be used to justify gender inequality, and the societal development of Euromed partnership member countries cannot be based on an unequal relationship between men and women;

Whereas women's rights are not incidental, but essential to the future prosperity of all developing countries;

Whereas education is the best way to bring about the social changes needed to make effective progress towards good governance and thereby help to resolve conflicts and to consolidate progress towards democracy as a means of social transformation;

Whereas education and training can break the vicious circle of inequality, although it is essential that the reforms undertaken should go hand in hand with economic and social reforms;

Whereas women's organisations have played a decisive role in the peaceful demonstrations held in several Arab countries, calling for political, economic and social change and for women to be involved in the political transition currently underway in order to guarantee their right to participate in public and political life, in accordance with the requirements laid down in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Expressing grave concern at the flagrant violation of women's human rights in the context of the current economic and democratic crisis;

Whereas the failure to break down social and economic barriers and the relegation of subjects relating to equal opportunities between men and women to the bottom of government agendas have ensured that the role of women in economic and political life has not been strengthened;

Whereas there is still some way to go before all women in the MENA region can develop their potential and make a full contribution to the economy and society;

Whereas in its relations with the countries concerned the EU cannot overlook the need for a dialogue with civil society and democratic forces on the southern shore of the Mediterranean that involves all democratic political forces and all civil society stakeholders;

Whereas gender issues and improvements to the situation of women need to be part of public policies on sustainable development. This presupposes that women can participate in decision-making, particularly in relation to agriculture and biodiversity;

Whereas women's participation in public life and especially in decision-making processes, is crucial. This participation must include not only devising and managing projects, but also

monitoring and evaluating them. The gender-based approach must be mainstreamed in all public policies. Although political will is essential, it is also crucial that additional funds should be earmarked to achieve these objectives;

Whereas the joint declaration issued at the Paris Summit on 13 July 2008, which marked the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, fails to mention the promotion of gender equality or women's rights among its priorities. Political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights have not been incorporated either into association agreements between the EU and its partners or into the European Neighbourhood Policy action plans;

Whereas the European Union should bolster the efforts that are being made in the southern Mediterranean to achieve gender equality by incorporating the gender-based approach into its cooperation and development policies and into the selection criteria for this type of project, and also by promoting gender parity in all areas. Although EU partnership agreements with Mediterranean countries contain a fundamental rights clause, explicit reference must be made to women's rights and a non-discrimination clause must be added. The same applies to European neighbourhood policies and all negotiations conducted by the EU;

Whereas it is not possible to talk about political and economic development without talking about women's participation, since there is a direct correlation between the economic weakness of a country and women's involvement in economic life. In the southern Mediterranean, women are starting to become the drivers of economic and cultural growth, but there is still much to be done to eliminate gender inequalities in that region;

Whereas a stronger, healthier and fairer economy, in the MENA region and in the rest of the world, will be possible only if the balance between men and women in business is improved and if the enormous productive potential of women is released. If women are not empowered, half the economy is under-utilised;

Whereas women are largely relegated to more precarious forms of employment and are over-represented in the informal sector, which offers no security and social advantages, while top-level jobs are still mainly the preserve of men;

Whereas stereotypes concerning women's unfitness for certain jobs exist in every society, often bolstered by the importance attached to respecting tradition, and play an important part in excluding women from certain occupations, such as manual trades (plumbers, masons, joiners) or jobs related to security (firefighters, police officers);

Whereas women are slowly achieving political power, albeit mainly when quotas and other special measures are put in place to encourage them; positive discrimination remains the main driver of women's progress;

Whereas expenditure on women's support programmes is a highly profitable investment, as women's productivity constitutes an excellent investment opportunity;

Convinced that financial investments in gender equality must match our ambition for change. We must reverse decades of accepting minimal resources for work on gender equality and

advocate greater investment and a commitment to tailoring budgets to gender-equality considerations;

Whereas the OECD-MENA Women's Business Leaders Forum, held in Marrakesh on 22 November 2009, produced a declaration on fostering women's entrepreneurship, calling on governments to take concrete measures, such as eliminating gender-related barriers to entrepreneurship, supporting the creation of networks of women directors of local, national and international companies, developing training programmes, and also encouraging the sharing of best practices between MENA and OECD countries;

Having regard to the development of micro-finance, which emerged in the 1990s in the Mediterranean countries and has enjoyed official status in Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia since the late 1990s; for women, micro-finance represents an effective way of combating poverty, achieving financial independence and increasing employment rates;

Having regard to the example of Morocco, where 77% of the customers of micro-finance institutions are women;

Whereas in many countries women have entered the labour market on equal terms with men, but the additional workload borne by women has not always been recognised;

Whereas the attitude public authorities adopt towards women in their personnel policies needs to be improved in many respects: legal standards, recruitment and promotion on merit, budgetary policies, capacity building and measures to improve the work-life balance;

Whereas the four key areas in which action is needed in order to integrate women into economic life are women's access to and participation in the labour market, business start-ups (micro, small and medium) by women, financial tools, and education and training;

Whereas the flow of information relating to women's networks in the Mediterranean region must be boosted with a view to exchanging data on all active groups, communicating effectively and discussing medium- and long-term objectives;

Whereas, in the face of piecemeal measures and funding, it is essential to join forces and create new momentum by sharing best practices;

Welcoming the launch of the Foundation of Women for the Mediterranean project as a forum in which women can meet, take initiatives, exchange ideas and share local experiences in order to consolidate the role of women as key players in development;

Reaffirming the central role of the Parliamentary Assembly for the UfM as a natural forum for political, economic and social dialogue between the democratically elected representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean countries;

Convinced that that Assembly plays a primary role in policy-making for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Mediterranean area, and in following up and monitoring the implementation of those policies and standards;

Reiterating that much more needs to be done to close the gap between women's rights in law and their actual implementation, and between commitments and practical action to level the playing field and empower women to take full advantage of rights, opportunities and resources and to contribute as equal partners to all aspects of development;

Supporting civil society's efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights in local development and support women's participation in politics and local decision-making processes, promoting dialogue with local authorities and actors on local development and the socio-economic strategies that can liberate women, and supporting gender-sensitive budget initiatives;

1 Insists that national strategies are needed in order to improve women's economic position, guarantee them equal access to property rights and capital to set up SMEs, and enhance their education and training opportunities;

2 Recommends full implementation of all the rights recognised by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in particular by ensuring that national legislation is fully compliant, reviewing discriminatory laws and rules and doing away with reservations and interpretations;

3 Recalls that entrepreneurial training and business creation by women are two of the main priorities of Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation;

4 Calls for continued in-depth analysis of the status of women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, with the emphasis being placed on the improvements required and the increased support which should be given to civil society organisations working on women's rights so that the numerous initiatives launched can receive the backing they deserve from the EU;

5 Recommends that gender issues be considered more thoroughly at every stage of the drafting of development policy, both in the EU and in the context of dialogue with partner countries;

6 Encourages the Commission to continue to apply its democracy and human rights criteria in trade negotiations and hopes that association agreements will be reviewed in the light of the new requirements stemming from the financial, economic and social crisis;

7 Reiterates that the objectives of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area must remain those of putting trade at the service of development and reducing poverty;

8 Calls for the gender issue to be incorporated into association agreements through the addition of specific provisions on the protection of women's rights and for the participation of women in negotiations on association agreements to be seen as a prerequisite for the balanced implementation of the future free trade area;

9 Suggests that the gender issue could be incorporated more effectively into political dialogue with partner countries by setting up effective partnerships with, in particular, public authorities, civil society, universities and international organisations, in order to discuss gender equality and development;

10 Calls for positive discrimination measures including a quota system and proportional representation to be incorporated into the electoral code in order to give priority to the recruitment of women as candidates;

11 Calls for the promotion of women's effective political participation and access to decision-making posts to be included in government strategies;

12 Calls on the Commission to strengthen its role as investor and partner and to draw up specific guidelines for responsible investment to reduce social inequalities;

13 Calls on the Commission and the UfM to provide information on the effective delivery of financial commitments designed to support the active participation of women in economic and social life and development, the implementation of action programmes to promote women's education and training and access to the labour market, and the promotion of women's role in business;

14 Recommends promoting microcredit schemes to help women entrepreneurs overcome laws which restrict women's access to bank loans; microcredit schemes should be one of a range of measures, including the provision of training to acquire the skills required in the labour market, and facilitating access to land and other goods and resources. It will be essential to move beyond microcredit towards the creation by companies in the formal sector of jobs protected by law. Advises the Commission to encourage Member States to follow Morocco's example by promoting microfinance and helping to increase access to microcredit;

15 Calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to launch campaigns to combat the stereotypes surrounding women's employment, particularly amongst poor communities and in rural areas, in order to improve both gender equality in society and women's financial independence;

16 Recommends that the Commission provide financial support to civil society organisations and associations combating the stereotypes surrounding women's employment;

17 Stresses that budgetary support should give partner countries greater ownership of the results and thereby further increase their awareness of the issues involved in gender equality management, and calls for greater investment and a commitment to tailoring budgets to gender-equality considerations;

18 Calls for the creation of networks and the exchanges of experience between EU and Mediterranean countries, but also between the countries in the southern Mediterranean, in order to increase the ability of key actors to improve gender equality in all areas, and especially in economic life;

19 Encourages the participation of women in social dialogue and collective bargaining and, in particular, greater representation of women in marginalised economic sectors. Trade unions must be strengthened and professional associations must be involved in a social dialogue that incorporates the issue of gender, including by adopting quotas for women in management positions;

20 Emphasises the need to translate the conclusions and recommendations of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Marrakesh on 11 and 12 November 2009, into political decisions and concrete actions, particularly as regards the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean observatory on gender equality and a Euro-Mediterranean university and scientific network on gender studies to serve as a meeting point and a bank of local development projects led by women in the region;

21 Recommends that the full citizenship of all women, including migrant women, living in the Euro-Mediterranean region should be recognised, and that their social, political, economic and legal rights should be guaranteed, including recognition of their equal rights to inheritance, property, land transfer, employment and the principle of 'equal pay for equal work';

22 Calls on the UfM to choose projects chiefly according to social and economic needs, taking account of gender;

23 Requests that the decisions taken at the Ministerial Conference in Marrakesh be included in the conclusions of all Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meetings, and that action be taken to ensure that they are fully and effectively incorporated into existing instruments, namely the European Neighbourhood Partnership, the Union for the Mediterranean and the national action plans of partner countries, and into all regional partnership agreements;

24 Urges the Commission to organise a follow-up meeting in 2011 to the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference held in Marrakesh, with broad participation by civil society in all its diversity, particularly women's rights and human rights organisations, in order to assess the implementation of the Conference's conclusions and to study ways of working together within this framework in order to promote gender equality and women's rights in the region. The European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean should be involved in the monitoring process;

25 Believes that EU financial instruments for external action in the region, notably the ENPI, the EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) and the Stability Instrument, can play a crucial role and calls for them to be strengthened so that they can be used effectively and consistently in these exceptional circumstances;

26 Stresses that the ongoing strategic review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the shaping of the EU's relations with its southern neighbours must take full account of and reflect current developments in the region; points out, in this regard, that the current action plans must be radically revised and must include priorities and incentives for political reform;

27 Instructs the President of the Assembly to forward this resolution to the Co-Presidency of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean and its Secretary General, the presidents of the parliaments and the governments of the member countries of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers, the President of the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and all institutions concerned.