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الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

**3rd Standing Committee on Dialogue among Civilizations and
on Human Rights**

Special Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures and Religions

Building on Dialogue

Rapporteur: Sónia Sanfona (Portugal)

*Report endorsed by consensus by the 3rd Standing Committee
during its 4th meeting on 26 June 2009 in Lisbon*

The Special Task Force on the Dialogue of Cultures and Religions was established under the Third Standing Committee to further one of PAM's principal aims: that of contributing to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue promoting pluralism and diversity so that the peoples of the Mediterranean can live peaceably alongside one another. The initial findings of the Special Task Force concluded that there was a general dearth of knowledge, awareness and understanding of each others' cultures and religions and decided action needed to be taken to actively promote awareness and understanding and exchange of knowledge in cultural and religious areas.

At the meeting of the Special Task Force in Fez (Morocco), 12 June 2008, it was agreed that a comparative report on the national policies and experiences of the PAM States with regard to promoting dialogue and understanding would serve as the basis for sharing knowledge of existing and forthcoming legislation and policies, best practices and lessons learnt. Accordingly, it was decided that the Secretariat would draw up a questionnaire to be forwarded to the national delegations so that the essential information could be gathered to provide the basis for the report. Secondly, the Special Task Force meeting in Fez defined a programme of concrete actions to be implemented by PAM and/or its Member States with the aim of promoting cultural and religious dialogue, which are now known as the "Fez Program"¹.

Progress made with questionnaire

It is not necessary here to restate the terms of the questionnaire. Suffice it to say that its principal themes request information on: ethnic and religious groups and the principal actors in their interrelations (community, cultural or religious); the legal framework promoting tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity, and the policies administering such interrelations; moreover, the questionnaire asks for national member delegations to identify events and trends relating to interrelations, and in particular asks for the identification of good practices. The questionnaire

¹ The points of the Fez Program are attached to this report in Annexe 1.

also asks for self-critical evaluations in the form of a SWOT analysis, specifically requesting information about areas of weakness and suggestions for improvements.

A large number of PAM countries have answered the questionnaire, for which we are very grateful. The detailed and substantive answers will form a basis for our future work.

Follow-up on implementation of the Fez Program

As regards the implementation of the Fez Program to carry out concrete actions to further intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, we can confirm, as you are all well aware, the establishment of the Mediterranean Day on 21st March, which is dedicated to integration, unity and diversity. This year's theme will be "Shared Values – Shared Aspirations" and its emphasis will be on Mediterranean youth. I would like to invite all members to share with us any other initiatives that have been taken in their respective countries for the celebration of this Day.

We can also be proud of the fact that in accordance with the Fez Program point (x), which foresees the launching a regional prize to promote cultural dialogue, PAM has instituted an award scheme, to reward individuals, organizations or institutions for their commitment and outstanding achievement in promoting Mediterranean ideals. There are two type of prize under this award scheme. The PAM certificate, awarded every year, and the Silver Bowl, awarded to outstanding achievers who have demonstrated their long-term commitment to PAM's vision. Last year, the first person to be presented with a PAM certificate was the French conductor, Philippe Bender, who conducts the Provence Alpes Côtes d'Azur Orchestra.

Furthermore, in accordance with the terms of the point (ix) of the Fez Program, we have made it to Rome with a delegation to meet representatives of different religious orders. In particular, we would like to thank the Italian delegation, the Holy See, and the Secretariat for organizing our Audience with His Holiness Benedict XVI, Vatican City. Addresses will be made by Rev. Father Bernard Ardura, Secretary, Pontifical Council for Culture, Rome, Dr. Riccardo Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome, and guest speaker, Mr. Abdelhak Azzouzi, Professor and Researcher at the Moroccan Centre for Interdisciplinary, Strategic and International Studies.

Moreover, within the context of individual Member State actions furthering the aims of the Fez Programme, I am pleased to inform you of the following:

- Morocco has already awarded a prize to a student for his thesis dissertation on the Mediterranean. The prize was presented by the Morocco Parliament on Mediterranean Day, 21st March.
- the first ever International Competition to find the "Journalist of the Mediterranean" took place this year in Bari, Italy, under the patronage of PAM and the Presidency of the European Parliament, as well as the Embassies of Greece, Sweden and Turkey.
- finally, the PAM Secretary- General, Dr Piazzzi, addressed a student's delegation from the University of Naples on the subject of Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Mediterranean on 9th March.

Developing collaboration with international and regional bodies

The First Report and Resolution of this Special Task Force also advocates collaborating closely other international and regional bodies, such as the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (PUIC), the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union, the Arab Maghreb union,

the Arab League and the Council of Europe. In this respect, the PUIC regularly attends our meetings and became an Observer Member of PAM, as did the Mediterranean Foundation. PAM has also established close links with the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly in particular, and has established regular and continuous exchange of information, including specifically in relation to intercultural and inter-religious diversity. A Memorandum of Understanding for future collaboration shall shortly be concluded with the League of Arab States.

A new approach to cultural diversity: intercultural dialogue

At this stage, it is important to recall the recent **Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue** “Living together as Equals in Dignity”², laying down the basis for a new approach to dealing with cultural diversity among States. As such, it marks a significant departure from traditional multicultural approaches acknowledging the co-existence of differentiated majorities and minorities with co-existing rights and responsibilities, adopting a new vision of cultural diversity based on “intercultural Dialogue”. *Intercultural dialogue* aims to create an open society without discrimination. Accordingly, it is defined as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. More specifically, this is articulated as shared fundamental values, respect for common heritage and cultural diversity, and above all, equal dignity for every individual.

Its authors were concerned that traditional multicultural management approaches to diversity were no longer adequate to deal with the pace of change and ever-growing diversity of our society in a globalised world. Moreover, it states that the lack of dialogue is considered as poses a major threat to peaceful cohabitation since, “*Not to engage in dialogue makes it easy to develop a stereotypical perception of the other, build up a climate of mutual suspicion, tension and anxiety, use minorities as scapegoats, and generally foster intolerance and discrimination*”.

The White Paper, then, identifies five interrelated dimensions of intercultural dialogue: **democratic governance of cultural diversity** (advocating a political culture that values diversity, respects human rights and freedoms, ensures equal opportunities and equal enjoyment); **participation and democratic citizenship** (implying civic and political engagement in society or minority groups, and the opportunity for naturalisation); the **acquisition of intercultural competences** (by public authorities, educational professionals and the media); the **creation of open spaces for dialogue** (cultivating public spaces for dialogue, including virtual spaces created by the media and electronic media); **action on an international scale** (developing partnerships and synergies with organisations the promote cultural and religious dialogue).

Dialogue and cooperation are also key priorities of **Religions for Peace**, the world’s largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace. In its 20th Annual Report, “promoting dialogue” is considered an essential tool for reconciliation and building trust in troubled regions. As a pluralistic organization, it aims to respects religious differences while celebrating our common

² White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, *Living together as Equals in Dignity*, Committee of Ministers, 7 May 2008, Council of Europe, CM(2008)30 final 2 May 2008

humanity. It is an active player in the Middle East peace process and plays an important role in furthering Christian-Muslim-Judaic dialogue in Israel and Palestine, and last year welcomed the establishment of two new bodies: *Religions for Peace* Middle East/North Africa Council and the Inter-religious Council of Palestine (*Religions for Peace* Palestine).

Promoting intercultural and inter-religious interrelations through dialogue is at the heart of this Special Task Force's ambitions, and we welcome this new approach, intensifying the role of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as the key to achieving peaceful cohabitation in multicultural societies, and as the key to breaking down barriers to achieving durable peace in conflict areas.

The challenges ahead

- Information exchange/questionnaire. At present, we have drawn up a 10-point action plan, the "Fez Program" which suggests areas in which PAM can actively contribute to promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. As we have seen above, PAM has taken a number of important initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural and inter-religious awareness raising that has been widely acclaimed and supported both at national level and by other regional and international actors. However, we are still not in a position of knowing about each others' national policies and practices, which makes it difficult to foster a shared vision for the Mediterranean – we urgently need to pool our knowledge, to know where our strengths and weaknesses lie, to be able to refine our future actions. The first stage is therefore to complete the questionnaire as soon as possible.
- Inter-parliamentary diplomacy. Mutual awareness, knowledge and understanding of each others' cultures and religions continue to lie at the base of strengthening relations in the Mediterranean. We need to continue our actions to contribute to the strengthening of inter-parliamentary diplomacy between our respective countries.
- Education. Initiatives in the field of education have to continue to be a priority source of action for PAM in its promotion of intercultural and inter-religious diversity. Any vision of an open, democratic and peaceful Mediterranean has to ensure that education policies at all levels promote tolerance for diversity, whether cultural, religious, or other. Such policies can begin at an early age; a child's intercultural life will normally begin in the classroom, so intercultural education should begin with nursery school /kindergarten, and continued through primary, secondary and further education: the starting point for such policies is that we need to "learn to live together".
- Cultural spaces. Education takes place not only in the school, but also in the home and through youth associations (cultural, religious, or sporting). It is therefore equally important that education about cultural and religious diversity, whether scholarly or informal finds spaces, and penetrates spaces of non-formal learning, such as youth associations and sports organisations; cultural and religious centres, museums or any public places where people meet and exchange their points of view.

- Furthering PAM's cooperation with regional/international actors: the Special Task force has begun a process of developing synergies and cooperation strategies with other regional and international actors on the question of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Reference was made in particular to the work of the Council of Europe. We need to carry out further research into the work of other influential organisations such as the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and UNESCO. More specifically, we need to ensure our work reflects a balanced pan-Mediterranean vision and develop specific links in this sector with organisations to the South of the Mediterranean such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) and the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA). Other important organisations for our work could also be the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures; the "Alliance of Civilizations", launched by United Nations Secretary General and sponsored by Spain and Turkey.
- Finally, we suggest drafting a kind of *Commitment Letter* to be signed by each PAM delegation in which it accepts a commitment to bringing the issue of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue before its respective youth parliaments (where they exist) and debating the issue before national parliaments, as well as an undertaking to identify the specific actions taken by national governments, civil society, NGO's to contribute to the intercultural and religious dialogue.
- Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue needs institutional and specific legal framework to guarantee human rights standards are met at national level. We could draft a letter calling for the establishment (where necessary) and strengthening of such a framework to be circulated to national governments, with a series of recommendations on the importance of taking action to deal with racial or religious hatred, discrimination and intolerance.