

PA-UfM



AP-UpM

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY – UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE – UNION POUR LA MEDITERRANEE

الجمعية البرلمانية للاتحاد من اجل المتوسط

Bureau

EMPA_PV(2021)0616

DRAFT MINUTES

of the Bureau meeting of 16 June 2021, 15.00-16.30

**Brussels
(Remote meeting)**

The meeting opened at 15:15 with European Parliament President David Maria Sassoli presiding.

Participants:

European Parliament President Mr David SASSOLI;

Mr Habib EL MALKI, President of the House of Representatives of the Kingdom of Morocco;

Mr Alfonso RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ DE CELIS, first Vice-President of the National Congress of the Kingdom of Spain, on behalf of President Meritxell BATET;

Mr Stelios KYMPOUROPOULOS, Chair of the Working Group on Financing of the Assembly and Revision of the Rules of Procedure of the PA-UfM;

Ms Fabrizia BIENTINESI, Co-Secretary General *ad interim* of the Rome PA-UfM Secretariat

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of the minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings on 9 September 2020, and 27 January 2021 were adopted

2. Chair's announcements

The Chair informed participants that the decisions taken by the Bureau at its last meeting on 27 January have been finally adopted, following written consultation of all national delegations. They concern the Assembly budget for the year 2021-2022, and the creation of a 'Post-COVID-19' Working Group.

In addition, the Chair announced that the two vacancy notices for the positions of PA-UfM Secretary-General and Accounting Officer (in the Rome Permanent Secretariat) would be published shortly on the official PA-UfM website and circulated by the PA-UfM co-Secretaries General *a.i.* to all PA-UfM partners and to the EEAS. At its next meeting, the Bureau should be in a position to select and appoint the Secretary-General and the accountant. Until then, the current interim co-Secretaries General, will continue their work.

Since no other southern Mediterranean parliament has so far expressed an interest in joining the Bureau, it will continue to operate with its current members: the European Parliament, Morocco and Spain.

Finally, the Chair informed the meeting that the next Speakers' Summit and the plenary will take place before the end of the year, probably on 19 and 20 November 2021. The plenary meeting will mark the handover of the Presidency of the Assembly from the European Parliament to a southern partner, the Moroccan Parliament. Members will be informed as soon as the new dates are confirmed. He also stated that in the next enlarged Bureau meeting, he would call on the Chairs to convene their respective Committees as soon as possible in order to draw up resolutions in time for the plenary.

4. Exchange of views on the current situation in the Mediterranean and future prospects for multilateral cooperation

The Chair initiated the discussion by underlining that in recent months the whole Mediterranean region has continued to experience worrying instability in the form of simmering conflicts, the pandemic emergency, economic crises and migration. On the conflicts, the Chair expressed cautious optimism about the situation in Libya. The United Nations was planning to hold a conference in Berlin on 23 June 2021 on the situation in Libya, where the civilian population, despite minor improvements, continues to suffer the problems intrinsic to a fragile and divided country, all exacerbated by abuses of power and the COVID-19 crisis.

Recalling the recent escalation of violence, the Chair expressed his concern at the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, further incidents had occurred in the Gaza Strip the day before the Bureau meeting - a reminder of the intrinsic instability and unsustainability of the situation. The situation has been unsustainable for a long time and there has to be a political solution to end the conflict. Work must continue to seek a just, lasting and durable peace. The European Union and other partners on the southern shores of the Mediterranean have a particularly significant responsibility, and should play their role in supporting the relaunch of the Middle East peace process. To that end, the Chair proposed inviting the Chair of the Assembly's Political Committee to convene a meeting of the Working Group on Palestine in order to encourage participation of both parties in a constructive dialogue within the PA-UfM. On this particular point, the Chair expressed his keenness to hear other members' views on what the UfM and the PA-UfM can do to ease tensions and revive dialogue between the parties, given that the Assembly is the only regional organisation in which Israelis and Palestinians sit together.

On migration, the Chair stressed that there have been dramatic shipwrecks in recent months on the central Mediterranean route. For example, in April there was a terrible incident where over 100 people lost their lives. The Chair maintained that national governments should give the European Union powers and a mandate to intervene, save lives and build humanitarian corridors. Similarly, many countries on the southern Mediterranean side are making enormous efforts to accommodate significant influxes of refugees. Cooperation between countries on the two shores is vital. The Chair stressed the need for North and South to work together in order to develop a common response that is in line with Mediterranean history and basic principles of humanity.

The Chair stated that at the enlarged Bureau meeting he would call on the Chairs of the PA-UfM Committees to look into the link between climate change and migration flows. A recent international study involving a number of research institutes, including the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change, notes that ignoring the signs of climate change and failing to take proper and timely action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will lead to extreme and life-threatening heatwaves in the region, with severe impacts on the local populations. The study finds that these events might lead to temperatures of up to 56 °Celsius in urban environments that could last for several weeks, posing a danger to human and animal life. Projections suggest that around half of the population of Southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, in other words more than 600 million people, could be exposed to these extreme weather conditions every year. These conditions will affect health, access to water, agriculture, biodiversity, the economy, and, of course, migration flows.

The Chair emphasised that the message that should be conveyed by the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular at its upcoming plenary session, to the main European and international institutions and to the partner governments of the UdM must be clear and unambiguous: immediate and effective climate change mitigation measures are needed, along with sufficient financial resources to meet this huge challenge. As part of the efforts to promote carbon neutrality and renewable energy, members also need to look at the region's considerable and still largely underutilised potential, particularly in the wind and solar energy sector. Cooperation is needed in the whole Mediterranean region, as nobody is safe until everyone is safe.

Regional cooperation can be decisive, for instance as in the case of partner countries' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has tested citizens and economies to the limit, and the time has now come to pull together.

The Chair ended his introduction by stating that the Mediterranean is facing challenges of historic proportions. Partners need to act with much more determination in order to identify areas for cooperation and common strategies.

President EL MALKI stated that we are at a point in globalisation where regionalisation is encouraged for countries to enhance their complementarities and capitalise on their comparative advantage. He noted that a very important report by the UfM classified the Mediterranean region as one of the least economically integrated regions in the world, despite the fact that it is one of the largest global markets with over 12% of global goods trade in 2018. This is worrying, and illustrates the gaps between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Mr EL MALKI noted that there are several reasons for this. One is security. Peace remains fragile in Libya. Palestinian rights are not a priority on the international scene,

and the war in Syria is ongoing. Secondly, regional migration and its exploitation by criminal organisations are creating tensions, especially in the Southern Mediterranean. Morocco has a particular experience as a country of transit and destination.

A third problem is the lack of foreign direct investment, which are the only way to make up for inequality and improve situation of the South.

In addition, there is the problem of climate change. It is leading to population movements and it entrenches positions. It makes it very difficult for host countries to host migrants, who are driven by despair. The PA-UfM needs to foster co-development and deepen solidarity in the Mediterranean. For Morocco, the development of South-South cooperation is working very well, and there is no reason why this should not work also in the trans-Mediterranean context.

The UN needs to be trusted to find fair, durable and mutually acceptable solutions for Morocco-Algerian differences in order to build a united Maghreb. The pandemic has demonstrated our vulnerabilities as human beings. Health is now a priority for decision-makers globally. In the Mediterranean region and elsewhere, mistakes of the past should not be repeated. Morocco can be a driver of north-south partnership, economically as well as in terms of migration and stability.

Vice-President RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ DE CELIS agreed with the Chair on the impact of conflicts on the Mediterranean region, particularly in Libya and Israel-Palestine. He reiterated what the Chair had said - that as the UfM and the PA-UfM are the only regional organisations where both Israel and Palestine are both represented, they have a specific responsibility to offer a platform for constructive dialogue and cooperation.

Moreover the region is a focus of geopolitical interests, particularly when it comes to protecting the economy and energy. Regarding the pandemic, the solution that Spain emphasises is vaccination. Developed countries have an immense responsibility to ensure vaccine equity. Perhaps greater efforts are needed here. It will be difficult to achieve global solutions to the pandemic unless there is global vaccination.

On migration, Mr RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ DE CELIS stated that members need to fight criminal groups operating in this field, especially to protect women and children, who are particularly vulnerable. The PA-UfM needs to work with its neighbours, especially with those who are geographically closest. There is a need for policies that can handle both challenges and opportunities.

On women, Mr RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ DE CELIS pointed to the Women's Committee of the PA-UfM and the continued need to work to ensure that women's rights, individual liberties and that their potential is fulfilled.

Fortunately, we have all these regional initiatives and the UfM resulting from the Barcelona process, although they are being implemented in an increasingly complex setting. Equality is needed to ensure all countries can exercise their rights in the Mediterranean region. The UfM has not yet reached its full potential. Some current challenges have perhaps become more serious than when the UfM was first created. Spain hopes to see significant improvement in cooperation in a number of areas, including protection of the environment, fighting climate change, economic, development including social protection, digital development and civil protection.

President Sassoli took note of the contributions to the discussion, and tasked the PA-UfM Secretariat to forward the Bureau request to convene a meeting of the Working Group on Palestine to Mr Mavrides, the Chair of the Political Committee. .

5. Establishment of the Working Group on the post-Covid economy in the Mediterranean: structure, mandate, duration

The Chair proposed that the Working Group should be made up of a total of 20 members, with 10 representatives each for the southern and northern shore. Morocco would chair the Working Group. Two Vice-Chairs are to be appointed by the Spanish Parliament and the European Parliament. The Working Group should have a two-year mandate, and its purpose is helping to relaunch Mediterranean economies and draw lessons from the past 15 months.

President AL MALKI and Vice-President RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ DE CELIS agreed with the Chair's proposal.

President SASSOLI tasked the PA-UfM Secretariat with sending out a call for expressions of interest for membership of the Working Group in order to proceed with its establishment.

6. Exchange of views with Mr Kypouropoulos, Chair of the PA-UfM Working Group on Financing of the Assembly and Revision of the Rules of Procedure, on the reform of the PA-UfM Rules of Procedure

Mr Kypouropoulos, Chair of the Working Group on Rules and Financing, reminded participants of the mandate received from the Bureau at its meeting on 27 January 2021: to review the Rules of Procedure in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat in Rome, following the adoption of the new Financial Regulation and the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat.

He underlined that following the first round of consultations, the proposal for revision can be summarised into three main categories.

The first is the core of the revision, which is to update the rules to ensure they comply with the rules of the new Financial Regulation and the relevant articles of the Statute of the Permanent Secretariat. This partly includes the revision of Rules 4, 14 and 15, which relate to the codification of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the structure of the Permanent Secretariat. It also partly includes the revision of Rule 14.5, which concerns the reimbursement of interpretation costs, and aims to enshrine the principle of the annuality of the budget (as required by the Financial Regulation) by introducing a deadline for interpretation reimbursement claims.

The second point concerns adapting to post-Brexit reality. This involves reviewing Rule 2 and Rule 5. This revision concerns the rules on the composition of national delegations (such as UK national delegation) and the redistribution of members within the Assembly. Two different options will be presented for discussion.

The third category concerns improving the efficiency of the PA-UfM. Rules 2, 4 and 11 will be updated. These changes relate to gender balance in the appointment of Members of the Assembly and its bodies; the adoption of a rule making it mandatory to hold at least two Bureau

meetings per year; the adoption of a rule for convening an extraordinary session in case of need, political urgency or any other development in the region within the remit of the Assembly, and, finally, the adoption of a rule allowing the Bureau to issue urgent statements concerning any matter relating to the Mediterranean Partnership.

The proposal will be submitted to the members of the Working Group for discussion during its first meeting in September.

President SASSOLI concluded by inviting the Working Group Chair to convene a first meeting of the Working Group.

7. Date and place of the next meeting

The time and place of the next meeting will be communicated by the Secretariat.

Meeting was adjourned.