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
at

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Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights

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The EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly: a vital, new institution to rejuvenate the Barcelona Process

I am delighted to participate, for first time, in a meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs of the EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly. This assembly is a terrific new addition to the EuroMed family. We all know that to realise Barcelona's full potential - of building a zone of shared security and shared solidarity - we must mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including parliamentarians and civil society representatives.

The rationale of the Barcelona Process is simple: to build stronger links between both shores of the Mediterranean; to meet common challenges through dialogue and practical co-operation; and to prepare our societies for a challenging future. None of these objectives can be achieved without support from our citizens. That is why your role is vital. In particular, I see three main functions for the EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly:

First, as elected representatives to either the European Parliament or national parliaments, you provide a new source of legitimacy. That is why we have to ensure a proper link up between your work and the rest of the EuroMed family. Second, you can help to make sure that the significant sums we spend are spent in the best possible way. Third, you play a vital role in ensuring that the aims and actions of Euromed fit with the needs and aspirations of your constituents. You can provide a 'reality check' of what works on the ground and what does not. In a sense, your task is 'to speak truth to power'.

The Luxembourg Ministerial: a pathway to the November Summit.

As you know, we had a very successful Ministerial meeting in Luxembourg. It was the first time since the Barcelona Declaration itself that we arrived at joint conclusions. Even if these required delicate negotiations and, in some cases, difficult concessions, this was a significant achievement. These joint conclusions are the pathway to the November Summit.

In Luxembourg, everybody agreed that the Barcelona Declaration, and the principles it enshrines, must remain the cornerstone of our partnership. In many ways it is even more relevant than before. Equally, everyone agreed that we must update our work for a world of changed circumstances and new expectations. This is true across the spectrum: from political and security co-operation, to respect for good governance, democracy and human rights, to sustainable development and economic reform, to education and cultural exchanges as well as migration and social integration.

The Review Process has highlighted that in terms of outcomes we have a mixed picture. There is much we have achieved together. But there is also a lot more work to be done. Many people stressed that we ought to focus on a smaller number of priority areas and adopt a more result-oriented approach. I very much agree. In everything we do, we must also inject a greater dose of urgency. The challenges are multiplying and time is not on our side.

The way ahead for Barcelona.

What, concretely, should be our priorities? Let me focus first on the issue of political and security co-operation, second on good governance and human rights and third on involving civil society and ensuring greater visibility. I will end with some reflections on the state of play and future prospects of the Middle East Peace Process, since I know that many of you are especially interested in that crucial issue.

- Intensify co-operation in the area of security.

Everybody knows that today's 'new' security threats are complex, diffuse and unpredictable. They defy traditional ways of thinking and operating. They have multiple causes and manifestations. But they are nearly always related to political extremism, poverty and a sense of injustice. It is clear that we can only deal with them collectively. In Barcelona, we have already strengthened our dialogue on the fight against terrorism and ESDP. Let us now do the same on proliferation. In terms of practical co-operation, we have moved forward on civil protection and much else.

This thematic and pragmatic approach is useful. But it does not quite fulfil the promise of the Barcelona Declaration. At present our efforts are too scattered. EuroMed should give strategic political direction to existing collaboration - and open up new avenues for future co-operation. A good example of an area where we can and should do more, in a joined up manner, is maritime security.

- Speed up our efforts on economic modernisation, political reform and human rights.

Let us be clear: our citizens are measuring Barcelona's success in terms of the economic and political improvements it has delivered. Thus far, we have not met all their expectations. That is why a crescendo of voices is calling for Barcelona to become a catalyst and supporter of reforms.

For some, the term 'reform' may be controversial. It need not be. Reform is not and should not be a dirty word. After all, the European Union is all about reform. We Europeans know how difficult and how necessary they are. But we also know that it helps if the security climate is favourable and if others offer encouragement and support. And that is exactly what Barcelona is all about.

Across the Mediterranean, we agree that successful leaders must respond to changed environments and the aspirations of their citizens. We often stress, as we did again in Luxembourg, that we share fundamental values of accountable government, the rule of law and human rights. Our citizens expect us to live up to these commitments - and so we should.

Recently, Amartya Sen has emphasised again that it is neither correct nor helpful to think of democracy as a Western concept. Democracy, or government by discussion as he calls it, has a very diverse ancestry. We should recognise that. Therefore, while democracy is a universal aspiration, its manifestation will not be uniform.

So of course the reforms I am thinking about have to be home-grown and adapted to local conditions. Otherwise, they won't succeed or last. But the EU, as a true partner, can and should play a role. This is about managing interdependence and forming a shared community, not about interference. I am pleased that in Luxembourg, Ministers mandated senior officials to consider establishing agreed objectives in this area. Let us take this forward in a collaborative and constructive manner. Talking about reform is good. But setting objectives and working together on implementing them is even better.

- Involve civil society even more and ensure greater visibility.

Ten years ago, when we launched Barcelona, we set around the table as governments and took decisions alone. Those days are gone - and rightly so. Barcelona has built a network of interlocutors, including academics, municipal authorities and of course parliamentarians such as yourselves. This transition is proof of the maturity of our relationship. The Anna Lindh Foundation in Alexandria is another terrific example. The question is how we can maximise its potential, so that it reaches a large section of our populations and not just a thin layer of elites? Apart from the Foundation, is there more can we do, especially to involve the business community more?

Moreover, if we are to retain support of our citizens, we have to do better at selling the Barcelona vision and raising its profile. Money is not always the best indicator of the strength of any relationship. Still, the sums involved in MEDA are impressive: around € 900 million annually in grants, and close to € 2 billion in soft loans. These sums merit recognition and more visibility. The 10th anniversary gives us a unique chance to raise awareness. I count on this parliamentary assembly to play its full role.

In sum, I see Barcelona as a tool. What matters is what we make of it. Let us stick to our original Barcelona vision. Promoting security, justice and development: these are the right themes. But let us also update our agenda for our world has changed. And let us show more courage, ingenuity and urgency when implementing it.

- The Middle East Peace Process.

Finally, let me turn to the Middle East Peace Process and share with you my perception of where we are and where we should try to go from here. When Barcelona was created in 1995, a solution of the Middle East conflict looked close at hand. But despite our best efforts, our hopes vanished as the peace process ran aground. Now, we are again in a situation of opportunity, of hope, of progress. Of course the overall situation is delicate and fragile.

It is clear that we are at a critical juncture. The future of the peace process will hinge on how all of us – the parties and the international community – will manage the upcoming challenges. We all will have to work hard at:

Maintaining the momentum of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit of 8 February. This summit revived the spirit of constructive co-operation that had been lacking for far too long. But the stalling of this process causes us serious concern. It is extremely important to get that process going again. The implementation by both sides of all their commitments is the only way to rebuild the necessary confidence. We very much hope that the up-coming meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon will serve this purpose.

Managing the Israeli disengagement from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank. The EU is convinced that a successful withdrawal could pave the way towards realising our long-held goal of the two-state vision. This is why we want to see the disengagement take place. But that is also why we want to see it take place properly, i.e. in line with the five political requirements set out by the EU in March 2004 and re-emphasised by the Quartet. If done well, disengagement will not and should not be an end in itself but rather a move to boost the peace process and help to maintain its momentum afterwards.

Continuing our efforts to help the Palestinians build the institutions of their future state and to improve the socio-economic situation of the Palestinian people. The EU, which together with its member states spends 500 million euros for these purposes every year, will remain a committed partner of the Palestinian Authority. We of course give our full support to the work of James Wolfensohn, the Quartet's special envoy for Gaza disengagement.

Emphasising the full implementation of the Roadmap. We continue to underline that the parties should adhere to all their obligations under the Roadmap. This includes actions on settlements and outposts, as well as security, the rule of law and preventing terrorist attacks. Together with the other Quartet partners, we stress that no side should undertake any action that will prejudice the outcome of the two-state solution.

I know that the MEPP is a clear priority for the EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly. I welcome the plans of the current EMPA Presidency to organise a meeting of the Assembly in a symbolic city in the Middle East.

All of you also know of my personal commitment to the cause of peace in the Middle East. I hope to visit the region again in two weeks time and I assure you that I will spare no efforts to help achieve our long held goal of two states: a secure Israel recognised by the region and an independent, sovereign viable and democratic Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Thank you very much for inviting me. I look forward to your questions.
