

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CLOSING CONFERENCE OF THE TRESMED 3 PROJECT

I - INTRODUCTION

TRESMED 3, A PROJECT FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE EUROMEDITERRANEAN REGION

The Closing Conference of the TRESMED 3 Project was held on 19, 20 and 21 May 2010 in the headquarters of Spain's Economic and Social Council in Madrid. This final meeting brought together representatives of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions of the Maghreb and Mashrek regions, Israel and Palestine, as well as representatives of the ESCs of France, Italy, Bulgaria and Luxembourg, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the European Training Foundation from Turin and prestigious international experts from other institutions and organisations.

The aim of the Conference was to review the work done during the Project, to update it and to evaluate activities, summarising the main results. The Conference participants first noted the large amount of work done at the various seminars and the depth of the debates. It can therefore be affirmed that the prime result of TRESMED 3 was to indicate the great potential for combined work by the ESCs and social and economic agents in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, based on the sharing of experiences and of good practices.

In order to carry out this combined work, it was essential to set up a dialogue amongst the economic and social agents in the Region. In spite of some important socio-economic and political differences among the countries, with areas in which the situation is especially critical with regard to peace and security, the social and economic agents participating in TRESMED entered a dialogue on social and economic affairs and showed that they are able to carry out an in-depth analysis of the Region's socio-economic situation. This is a key

lesson to be learnt from TRESMED 3 – that there is potential for dialogue on economic and social affairs in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

This activity of TRESMED 3 would not have been possible had the initiative not been taken to set up the first TRESMED and the subsequent TRESMED 2. The diversity of situations over space and time, the complexity of the subject matter, the plurality of participants and the difficulty of establishing agreements make it necessary for projects such as TRESMED to take place over a long period of time with a sustained effort made by those involved.

This document brings together the socio-economic subjects on which interest was shared at the various meetings, indicating the existence of shared diagnoses and criteria. The document comprises 10 sections. The first five include the common viewpoints regarding the subjects on the socio-economic panorama of the Euro-Mediterranean Region that were considered most relevant. The next four cover aspects that could be described as institutional, relating to the socio-economic and political possibilities of the Euro-Mediterranean Region, the role played by social and economic agents and, in particular, the role that should be played by the ESCs in governance of this transnational region and within the various States. The last section covers proposals.

II - THE KEY TOPICS IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FIELD IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION, IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF TRESMED 3

1. Changes in production models after the economic crisis:

- The socio-economic effects of the crisis make it necessary to combine efforts to restore the economy and employment. Although the impact on employment has varied from country to country, the crisis has pinpointed

problems in the labour market having serious, negative social effects. This crisis in employment has also affected migratory trends.

- Analysis of the origins and effects of the economic crisis also leads to broader reflections on the production model, on a pattern of growth that can avoid such serious economic crises.
- Alternatives to the crisis relate to notions such as the knowledge economy or sustainable development. When such alternatives are considered in connection with employment, the inclusion of young people and women in the labour market plays a key role.
- The diversity and breadth of measures that need to be adopted and the essential search for balance between economic efficiency and social cohesion make it even more advisable for the social agents to participate.

2. The situation of young people

- The negative employment situation is of special importance for young people and not only because of the high levels of unemployment among them but also because of more general problems of social integration for young people, which is hindered by unemployment. Training is a key element for socialisation based on values of democracy and tolerance and for inclusion in the labour market under decent working conditions.
- The problem of unemployment, especially for young people, is related to a matter that appears constantly on the Euro-Mediterranean scene, namely emigration, its causes, effects and ways to deal with it.
- Actions regarding young people should use mechanisms that allow them to participate. In the framework of the TRESMED 3 Project, a specific activity was carried out to promote the participation of young people as representatives of organised civil society. Its purpose was the drafting of a

report on “The role of women in social and economic life and especially their integration in the labour market”. The young people represented some ESCs and organisations representing the civil society in Euro-Mediterranean countries and they followed the method approved by the Euromed Summits of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions for drafting the reports.

3. Mobility/Emigration

- The subject of emigration arose in almost all the subjects covered in the Seminar. We have already mentioned its connection with employment and the situation of young people and we shall find it also arises when considering co-development.
- It is therefore clear that emigration is of key importance in the Euro-Mediterranean area which sees large migratory flows in a south-north direction. When analysing emigration, it is essential to gain real knowledge of its economic and social causes in both the source and host countries.
- Migratory flows should be dealt with on the basis of this knowledge and organisation should consider the various aspects of the phenomenon, from its link with the labour market, which stresses the role to be played by the social agents, to the inclusion of immigrants in host societies.
- In order to deal with immigration, it is essential to reconcile the evaluation of the economic and social situation in the countries of origin and the host countries with the need to promote effective equality of immigrants in these countries.

4. Equal opportunities

- The states are fighting to guarantee the principle of equal opportunities for their citizens and this has been and should continue to be a top priority for

them. There is still a certain gap between this principle of equal opportunities and real equality for citizens in the Euro-Mediterranean countries.

- A characteristic of the Euro-Mediterranean area is its ethnic and cultural multiplicity. It is precisely recognition of this that should guide our actions in achieving real equal opportunities.
- Moreover, if growth is to be sustainable and balanced it must attempt to overcome unequal opportunities. Policies for positive discrimination may be useful tools in the fight against unequal opportunities.
- Achieving equal opportunities requires the elimination of many inequalities: North/South, Urban/Rural, Immigrants/Nationals, Men/Women, etc. It also requires that the focus be placed on the underprivileged or groups that are at risk of social exclusion such as young people, women, the elderly, the disabled, those with learning difficulties and ethnic and cultural minorities.
- In order to achieve these objectives, the ESCs must take a proactive role by monitoring and evaluating social realities in their different countries.

5. Economic human capital: employment and education

- The above reflections on employment, the situation of young people, emigration and the production model indicate the key role of education and training. Training is a factor for employability, for improving production models, for influencing emigration, and for helping achieve social integration for young people.
- Education is a basic tool for the economic and social development of our societies so investment in human capital is essential for generating growth and wealth in the Mediterranean.
- It is necessary to promote education and training not only for young people, women, the long-term unemployed and underprivileged sectors but also for society as a whole as a tool for facilitating job creation, encouraging self-

employment and promoting entrepreneurship from school age and at every level of the educational and training system, providing skills that will enable people to participate fully in social and labour life and encouraging on-going training.

- The focus should be placed on quality and excellence in education.
- There should be improved links between the production system and education and training. It is essential to identify training needs and mechanisms for adjustment between the training that is on offer and the skills and competencies required by the emerging production system. The correlation between education and training systems and production systems must be improved.
- It is essential to invest more in innovation and research in order to generate employment on both shores of the Mediterranean with the aim of making the Euro-Mediterranean region more competitive. Environment-friendly, technological and social jobs must be created based on a sustainable economy.
- Career guidance services and services to evaluate the quality of training must be promoted and improved.
- There must be Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in different areas and at different levels in the fields of education and training.
- Today's financial crisis should be seen as an opportunity for adopting and promoting a new model of sustainable economic growth based on knowledge.

III – THE EUROMEDITERRANEAN REGION, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AGENTS AND THE ESCs: TRESMED AS A CHANNEL FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE

6. Economic globalisation and the role of the regions, especially the Euro-Mediterranean Region

- While the reality of economic globalisation and especially financial globalisation is clear, it is also clear that there is a lack of correlation between economic globalisation and global governance of the economy. The sovereignty of States does not go beyond their national frontiers, and supranational institutions are not able to exert a real influence on a global scale.
- Taking this into account, Regions can play an important role as intermediate areas which are larger than States and are able to group together common interests in a particular area.
- The experience of TRESMED shows the possibilities of sharing experiences and of identifying matters of common interest in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.
- Moreover, the European Union has organisational experience at the regional level. In spite of its limitations, it offers results and practices for adopting policies within its territory, from more general ones such as those in economics or employment to more specific ones such as those relating to workers' geographical mobility.
- TRESMED is an example that shows how the European Union carries out important activity in international cooperation, which is of special significance in an area such as the Mediterranean. Factors such as geographical proximity, the existence of common cultural roots, the reality of migratory flows in the Euro-Mediterranean region and the extensive potential for

economic activities open up considerable possibilities for cooperation in the region.

- The experience of TRESMED also indicates the great variety of fields in which cooperation is possible in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, and also the variety of EU tools for cooperation that can be used.

7 The role of the economic and social agents in the Economic and Social Councils

- Action by social and economic agents strengthens participatory democracy as well as the efficiency of economic and social policies, precisely because of the capability of such social and economic agents to understand the socio-economic reality.
- The TRESMED experience has shown how important it is to consolidate the role of social and economic agents in the region and in their respective States. For this to be possible there must first be freedom of association, independence from the public authorities and independent capacity for negotiating. The social agents can act in several ways, including social dialogue and institutionalised forms of social dialogue, such as the ESCs themselves. These offer a stable forum for participation and dialogue amongst the social agents, make it possible to offer broad, cross-cutting views of the socio-economic reality and afford the added value of allowing expression of criteria that are shared by the social and economic agents.
- The legitimisation, autonomy and capability of the organisations that represent civil society is what makes it possible to establish social dialogue in our societies.
- Action by social and economic agents, social dialogue and activity by ESCs may be key for developing greater cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean

region. Such action takes place in close contact with socio-economic reality, so can offer very valuable information for political actions in this area.

- Stress was placed on the essential role that can be played by the Economic and Social Councils in structuring civil society, creating a privileged forum for promoting social dialogue and harmonisation. The ESCs and Similar Institutions are the leading exponents of institutionalised social dialogue and are useful tools for promoting economic and social growth in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.
- From a more general point of view, TRESMED has shown us how important it is for social agents in the area to share experiences. One of the conclusions of such contacts is their capability for finding subjects of shared interest beyond State frontiers and even beyond the limitations caused by political situations within them.

8. The experience of TRESMED in the case of Israel and Palestine

- The TRESMED debates involved very active participation by the ESCs of Israel and Palestine. This allowed the other participants to understand better the problems they face. It goes without saying that reaching a situation of peace in this area is essential for many of the social and economic advances that could result from joint work by the two ESCs in the TRESMED context.
- In spite of the limitations of the current political situation, the capacity shown by the ESCs of Israel and Palestine to discuss matters together during the TRESMED activity was very positive. And during such discussion subjects of shared interest arose, as did shared criteria. The first of these was the need to consolidate the role of the social agents, specifically that of the ESCs in Palestine and Israel. The second was the importance of contacts between the two institutions, as an expression of the role of civil society in the area. With regard to matters of shared interest, the ESCs of Israel and Palestine

agreed with the general reflection during TRESMED about the importance of dealing in greater depth with the topics of mobility, young people, SME activity and the identification of feasible economic projects for the area as a whole.

- Such matters would probably have to be dealt with differently in comparison with the rest of the region, but there is still a shared interest in dealing with them and in applying techniques and criteria that have been positively evaluated from a general point of view.
- The key role of vocational training for the integration of young people in the labour market, the link between labour integration and socialisation, the role of education as a tool for training in the values of peace and dialogue, the importance of resolving specific problems regarding labour mobility and the key role that can be played by economic projects of shared interest are all examples of matters that could be very positively dealt with in a forum such as TRESMED.

9. The role of cooperation amongst social partners in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

A number of characteristics of the TRESMED 3 Project, noted during the activity, are summarised in these conclusions.

- The sharing of experiences and dialogue amongst the social and economic agents of the Euro-Mediterranean Region has positive results: better knowledge of the socio-economic situation of the area and the positions of the social partners regarding this situation; joint analysis of subjects that are of importance for all the countries, and the drafting of criteria for dealing with such subjects. All these activities can be carried out using general formulae for joint work, or can form part of more specific programmes or activities.

- TRESMED is also serving for ascertaining the dimensions and possibilities of the notion of the EuroMediterranean Region, as a socio-economic area and as an area in which the social partners can act. TRESMED is very useful for finding out the possibilities of the policy for cooperation in the EuroMediterranean area, for considering its real influence and for guiding possible corrections or new areas of action.
- TRESMED 3 and the previous projects have now been seen as useful tools for achieving the objectives of the Barcelona Process: “creating an area of peace and stability based on respect for fundamental rights, creating an area of shared prosperity and contributing to better mutual understanding among the peoples of the region”. However, it is still necessary to evaluate the projects and be self-critical so that we can detect and strengthen the most positive aspects of these programmes and eliminate or at least minimise any negative aspects.

There must therefore be closer links between the ESCs and Similar Institutions on both shores of the Mediterranean. Such closer involvement is key if we are to set up stable, lasting links that will guarantee peace and stability throughout the area.

- This capacity of TRESMED to promote work by the social partners, especially the Economic and Social Councils, in the Euro-Mediterranean area, may have very positive effects on the growing role of social agents and or organised civil society in any type of political action in the region.

10. After TRESMED

In view of these positive results, this experience of TRESMED 3 should continue in the future as a forum in which the Economic and Social Councils and the social partners in the Euro-Mediterranean Region can share experiences and good practices, identify matters of shared interest and reach agreements on shared criteria regarding them.

- In order to achieve continuity, it is important to move from the more general, exploratory approaches adopted so far towards more specific programmes relating to specific problems in different areas in the Euro-Mediterranean Region in which results can be obtained which will be visible in the short term. The possibilities seen for collaboration between the ESCs of Palestine and Israel should receive a special focus.
- From this viewpoint, the tasks of evaluation and follow-up are increasingly important, involving active participation by those involved.
- The ESCs of the Euro-Mediterranean Region should be proactive in their use of economic and social information in order to understand and describe social changes. The possibility of drawing up periodic reports on socio-economic trends in the Region and the role of the social agents and ESCs should be explored.
- More specifically, with a view to continuing this joint work by social agents in the Region, a number of areas have been identified, including education and the utilisation of human capital, the role of SMEs, migratory flows, policies for young people and the inclusion of women in the labour market.
- Continuity in the formulae for cooperation amongst social partners in the Euro-Mediterranean Area is a key element for developing participatory democracy in the Region, regarding the individual States and also the political arena created by the Union for the Mediterranean.
- Formulae such as TRESMED should help consolidate the growing awareness of the role of the ESCs in the different States, supporting the creation of Councils and, in general, the various forms of social dialogue and institutional participation.
- Within the Union for the Mediterranean, formulae such as TRESMED may help to increase participation by social agents in political decision-making in

the Region alongside institutions that are already functioning, such as the Euromed ESC summits, as well as any others to be set up in the future following the model, for example, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. Frameworks such as TRESMED can play a specific role focusing especially on analysing and drafting criteria to be debated outside them.

- Such formulae for joint work by the social agents and the ESCs may serve to both prepare contributions made by civil society to political summits and to monitor the socio-economic aspects of any political decisions adopted. Joint working frameworks such as TRESMED can serve as observatories on socio-economic development in the Region and on the role played by ESCs.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

The Closing Conference aimed to give the opportunity to all members to submit proposals for future cooperation amongst the ESCs in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, stressing areas of cooperation that need to be strengthened and promoting other fields in which the region's ESCs might have an important role to play. Below is a summary of the ideas expressed during the Conference, although it would be necessary to consider their feasibility in a framework for future action.

- a. Firstly, the role of training and education was stressed as being key for the future. This no longer refers to a single stage in people's life but is now seen as a lifelong situation. We need to make joint efforts to make this a reality. The European Training Foundation in Turin has offered to provide any information needed for drawing up any type of project in this area.
- b. The TRESMED young people's initiative is seen as an opportunity for subsequent editions. Young people's knowledge of new technologies for generating extensive, fluid, lasting, dense social information networks, as well as their strength and enthusiasm

amount to opportunities that should not be neglected. Creation of a young people's TRESMED 4 is therefore proposed to improve the efficiency of future projects.

- c. On-going monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of the project is an immediate need. The information generated on the project, the impact of the discussions and agreement and social development should be evaluated in order to detect the most positive aspects of the project, maintain them and improve them if possible. Also, negative aspects should be detected in order to minimise their impact or eliminate them.
- d. A permanent observatory should be created to bring together the socio-economic information on the Euro-Mediterranean countries, as well as all the information of interest held by ESCs in the region.
- e. New markers should be developed to be more quality-based so that aspects and dimensions of social welfare can be measured. This is impossible using quantitative markers. It would, for example, be of interest to analyse progress in the human development index.
- f. Follow-up of levels for achieving the strategic decisions taken by the "Euromed agents".
- g. "Pilot Projects" should be created on subjects of common interest (e.g. gender, young people and training), to analyse common factors and allow exchanges that will be useful for the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole.
- h. Finally, the TRESMED Project should be presented at the Euromed summit as an example of "good practices". We also stress the need for annual follow-up of it and of the extent to which the shared objectives established during TRESMED 3 and any established in the future are achieved.