

BUILDING BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

DECLARATION EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CIVIL FORUM NAPLES 28-30 NOVEMBER 2003

From 28 to 30 November 2003, more than 300 participants from the Euro-Mediterranean region met in the Euro-Med Civil Forum in Naples, to discuss the promotion of sustainable development and of strengthening civil society in the context of EU Mediterranean Partnership.

The Forum was organized by the Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo, under the responsibility of a Steering Committee and the collaboration of the NGO Platform for the Euro-Med Civil Forum, with the support of the EU Commission and the Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo.

We adopted the present declaration addressed to the Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, 3-4 December 2003 in Naples:

- 1.** We, representatives of EuroMed Civil Society have a common wish to build bridges of solidarity in a region that needs urgent reforms bringing real changes to people's lives. We met in a common quest to move beyond the superficial changes the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) so far brought to the region and to break out of the constraints and adverse pressures caused by the one-sided pro-liberalization trade policies as well as the increasing political tensions in the region.
- 2.** We believe that peace and security in the region and the respect for UN decisions are the basis for the success of the EMP.
- 3.** We condemn the continued occupation of Iraq, and the subsequent cycle of violence, in the denial of UN decisions. We are also deeply concerned about the violation of international law and human rights caused by an otherwise legitimate fight against terrorism.
- 4.** Moreover, the intensified Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land, the continued violation of the Palestinian people's rights and the consequent suicide attacks, has led to an unprecedented cycle of violence and insecurity in Palestine and Israel. The devastating realities produced by the Wall of Separation, that seeks to kill the prospects for a viable Palestinian state, negate all values upon which the Barcelona process is founded.
- 5.** We ask the governments of the EuroMed Partnership to work proactively to immediately establish the respect for international law, international humanitarian law

and human rights and bring an end to occupation of Iraq and Palestine, with the help of the UN.

6. In Naples we warmly welcomed participants of civil society from future EU countries. We call the governments of the future EU Member States to fully participate in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and contribute actively to promoting the ideals of democracy and human rights, civil society participation, sustainable development and cultural exchange upon which the Barcelona Declaration is built. We insist that the new neighborhood policy of the EU does not reduce the significance of the Partnership but increases the importance of its regional dimension.

The participants in Naples examined a range of issues related to strengthening civil society, sustainable development and employment. A detailed overview of the Civil Forum debates and recommendations, and of the national consultations preceding the meeting, will be forwarded to the Ministers in a separate report. Here, we wish to highlight the following points in anticipation of the Ministerial meeting:

7. The Mediterranean region is characterized by widespread poverty, with 30% of the population in the southern countries living on less than 2 US\$/day, and economic developments that are aggravating the economic situation for parts of the population. It is threatened by serious and persistent environmental problems, due to the nature of economic activities and the absence of effective government intervention. The human rights situation has in general deteriorated over the past 8 years and there is an urgent need for establishing, strengthening and guaranteeing gender equality, women's dignity and participation.

8. Sustainable development must become a central objective of the EMP. While the concept appears in many political statements, reality goes in a different direction. We urge the European Commission to finally conclude the Sustainability Impact Assessment it promised in Stuttgart 1999, welcomed by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs in Valencia in 2002, who called for its launch by the end of that year.

9. We urge the Ministers to adopt the framework for a Euro-Mediterranean Strategy for Environmental Integration as developed by the EMP Environmental Ministers Conference in Athens, 2002 and take decisions on its practical, immediate, implementation.

10. We are deeply concerned about the prospects for employment in the region in particular for women, young people and people with special needs. We call upon the governments to organize a Euro-Mediterranean meeting of Ministers of Labour to examine the situation and design urgent policies and instruments to redress the situation of unemployment.

11. We ask the member states of EMP to implement economic and financial instruments in order to redress commercial imbalances in the region. We request that the association agreements do not lead to a deterioration of the socio-economic

situation in the South. In this regard we recall that no real partnership can operate without sub-regional integration in the South based on empowerment of their productive and competitive capacities and the respect for rule of law as well as an environment conducive to productive investment.

12. We call upon the Ministers to initiate the development, with full civil society participation, of a Mediterranean Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development policy to ensure better rural livelihoods, environmental protection and food security, to be adopted by their next meeting.

13. We urge the governments to consider migration as a resource and a cultural asset for the development of region rather than a persistent security problem.

14. In general we request that social considerations and measures are integrated into all policies of the EMP and to encourage the social dialogue within the countries.

15. We urge the government to require the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the emerging Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment to work on the basis of strict environmental, social and human rights standards for all its activities in the region, developed and reviewed from time to time with meaningful involvement of civil society organisations from the region.

16. We express the need for the Partnership to introduce policies and measures that strengthen civil society and its effective participation in the EMP.

17. In this context we ask the governments of the EMP to end the current visa policies, and other impediments of free movement, that for many years have systematically complicated EuroMed civil society meetings, including the one in Naples, harassing civil society actors, affecting their dignity or simply impeding them to meet.

18. Strengthening of civil society means in the first instance the respect of the rule of law and providing civil society with legal means to act. It means the effective respect of freedom of association, assembly and of expression in all the countries of the EMP – including the right to set-up, and be organized in, trade unions.

19. It further implies the release of all prisoners of conscience and the ending of current attacks on, and harassment of, human rights defenders in several of the EMP countries as well effectively supporting their right to act according to the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration of December 1998 including their right to unconditionally receive international funds.

20. It implies the guarantee of the rights of minorities and refugees wherever they live as well as the fight against all kinds of racism and xenophobia. It also implies effective plans and strategies for integrating women into all aspects of the Partnership through affirmative action as well as gender mainstreaming of the three baskets of the EMP. A precondition for achieving these latter goals is to remove the reservations to the

Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by all EMP countries and to implement it within the national legislation as a top priority for the political agenda of the Partnership.

21. We welcome the Commission Communication on Reinvigorating Democracy and Human Rights in the Mediterranean and urge the governments of the EMP to give high priority to its effective implementation. We recommend to establish a legal body to monitor the human rights clause of the Association Agreements.

22. We discussed the cultural aspects of the EMP and agreed that its priority task should be to create the necessary conditions for cultural exchange on an equal basis. We insist that, to be credible, the Foundation for dialogue between cultures must benefit from an independent juridical status and receive significant funding. We call upon the Foundation to support and promote the contemporary dimension of cultures, the mobility of all cultural actors and their independence from political and religious powers and to base its activities upon the reality of those who act on the ground.

23. We wish to emphasize the new and participatory approach of the Civil Forum in Naples that introduced qualitative changes of civil society's relation to the EMP. It confirms the existence of a vibrant independent EuroMed civil society that more than ever is willing to forge alliances, strengthen solidarities and build bridges across the Euro-Mediterranean region. We look forward to close contacts and dialogue with a committed and transparent EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly.

24. Finally, we ask the governments of the EMP to adopt a plan of action for civil society in the EuroMed region and for systematically including dialogue with civil society at all levels in its dealings and decision making procedures. We would like to see the opportunity given at the recent Crete EMP Ministerial Meeting, to discuss the outcomes of the Civil Forum debates directly with the Ministers, to become a regular feature.