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Vth EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS
(Valencia, 22-23 April 2002)

PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

1. The 5th Conference of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers ¹ held in Valencia on April 22nd and 23rd took place against the background of the highest levels of tension in the region in recent times. Under these difficult circumstances, the Ministers stressed the need for an increased dialogue and the relevance of the principles and objectives agreed in the Barcelona Declaration in 1995 to make the Mediterranean a region of peace and stability, development and common prosperity, cooperation and understanding between cultures and civilisations.
2. The Ministers agreed that the tragic situation in the Middle East demands to be addressed both in an urgent manner and with a longer term perspective. In this sense they stressed the value and the need for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as an essential framework of dialogue and cooperation, a true meeting point of different cultures and civilisations. To make this diversity a factor of enrichment is one of the Partnership's most decisive challenges.
3. The Ministers agreed that, after the reinvigorating of the Barcelona Process in Marseilles, Valencia must mark the starting of a new phase six years after its launching. The challenges of the EU enlargement, the events of September 11 and the serious developments in the Middle East and other structural changes in the international scene make the Barcelona Process more necessary than ever. The moment is now right to demand a renewed mutual commitment which will contribute to regional stability and peace and give a greater depth to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. A tangible reinforcement of the sense of ownership of the Process by all partners was underlined and concrete initiatives to this end were agreed.

¹ The Conference was chaired by Mr Josep PIQUÉ I CAMPS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Spain and acting President of the Council of the European Union. A list of other participants is annexed.

4. In order to have a working programme, in which the many different initiatives and commitments are clearly specified, the Ministers adopted an Action Plan that, taking into account the globality of the Process, covers the three chapters and institutional provisions. This document has been elaborated after extensive consultations with all partners which included visits conducted by the Presidency, jointly with the Commission and the Council General Secretariat to Mediterranean capitals. The Valencia Action Plan includes a number of initiatives in a short and medium term perspective to give a political impetus to the Process and to make it advance substantially in the pursuit of the objectives of the Barcelona Declaration. It reflects the principles of co-ownership visibility, efficiency and credibility of the Barcelona Process and will be provided with adequate follow-up and implementation mechanisms.
5. Among the initiatives adopted in the Valencia Action Plan, some relevant features can be emphasised:
 - In the political and security chapter and in the institutional provisions, the Ministers agreed to reinforce political dialogue, including on defence matters; agreed upon a common approach on dialogue and cooperation in the fight against international terrorism; a deepening of the dialogue on Human Rights and drew up the main lines of future work on Partnership Building measures.
 - The Ministers reiterated their firm political commitment to democracy, human rights and rule of law in the region and agreed to further develop the parliamentary dimension of the Partnership. They welcomed the holding of the meeting of the Speakers of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliaments in Athens last February, recognised the value of the existing Euro-Med Parliamentary fora and agreed to recommend the creation of a Euro-Med Parliamentary Assembly as proposed by the European Parliament.
 - In the economic and financial area, Ministers agreed on the need to increase investment in order to promote growth and employment around the Mediterranean. They welcomed the decision to create a reinforced Facility within the EIB to mobilize resources in particular for private sector investment. In this respect, the Presidency took note of the strong support voiced by Mediterranean partners for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Bank.
 - Building on the conclusions of the meetings of Trade and Industry Ministers, the Conference asked that a close follow-up be given in the framework of the Action Plan, especially on the harmonization of rules of origin and in the areas of investment promotion, regional integration, liberalization of services, regulatory reform and access to new technologies. The Ministers also welcomed the Greek proposal to hold a Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Energy.
 - The Ministers welcomed the progress made in the Agadir process and reiterated their strong support for similar sub-regional initiatives. The EU renewed its offer to provide technical assistance to these initiatives. Furthermore, Ministers reaffirmed that sustainable development should be included among the guiding principles of the Barcelona Process and welcomed in this respect, the forthcoming Conference of Environment Ministers in Athens next July.

- On the social, cultural and human dimension of the Partnership, the Ministers expressed their conviction that the construction of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership needs the participation and the engagement of the Governments as well as of the societies and all the relevant actors, emphasising in this sense the need to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the Third Chapter of the Barcelona Declaration in all its different areas.
- After intensive work, a Framework document was endorsed with a view to implement a regional cooperation programme in the field of Justice, in combating drugs, organised crime and terrorism as well as cooperation in the treatment of issues relating to the social integration of migrants, migration and movements of persons.
- Against the background of the current international situation, the Ministers stressed the importance of promoting dialogue and cooperation between cultures and civilisations.

To this end, Ministers agreed to the principle of creating of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to promote further dialogue between cultures and civilisations and to increase the visibility of the Barcelona Process through intellectual; cultural and civil society exchanges

- Ministers welcomed the adoption of the Action Programme for the Dialogue between cultures and civilisations, which includes important initiatives in the fields of youth, education and media
- Ministers also welcomed the extension of the Tempus Programme for inter-University co-operation to the Mediterranean partners and will permit Universities to become active Partnership actors and to contribute to the widening of educational offers adapted to the demands of labour markets.

6. The Ministers discussed the latest developments in the Middle East. They expressed their grave concern at the present situation, which involves serious risks for regional security and is leading to a grave humanitarian crisis. Violence, destruction, suffering, human rights violations and bloodshed have continued to increase in the region, reaching an unprecedented level last weeks. They expressed their condemnation of terrorism and violence and deplored the loss of human lives and extended their deepest sympathy to the families of those killed and wounded.
7. Ministers stressed that there is not a military solution to the conflict and reaffirmed that UNSCR 1402 must be fully implemented immediately, as called for in UNSCR 1403, with a view to start negotiations and reach, within a well defined timeline, a political solution based on UNSCR 242, 338 and 1397 and on the principles of the Madrid Conference, Oslo and subsequent agreements, and taking into account other initiatives, like the Arab initiative referred to in paragraph 9, which would allow two States, Israel and Palestine, to live in peace and security and play their full part in the region.

The negotiations should lead to the creation of a democratic, viable and independent State of Palestine, bringing to an end the occupation of 1967, and the right of Israel to live within secure and recognized boundaries, guaranteed by the commitment of the international community.

The end of the conflict requires agreed solutions to all aspects of permanent status issues.

Comprehensive peace must also include Syria and Lebanon on the basis of the same principles.

8. Ministers urged immediate implementation of UNSCR 1405 so that humanitarian and medical organizations and agencies are allowed unrestricted access to the Palestinian populations, which are facing a dire humanitarian situation. They welcomed the initiative of the Secretary General to develop accurate information through a fact finding team regarding events in the refugee camp in Jenin.
9. The Ministers warmly welcomed Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's peace initiative, as endorsed in Beirut by the Summit of the Arab League, as a significant framework towards a comprehensive peace.

Other initiatives, like the Abu Ala-Peres, were also mentioned by Minister Peres.

10. The Ministers warmly welcomed the Joint Statement by the Quartet made in Madrid the 10th of April. They stressed the need for a sustained and concerted international action in the search of peace and look forward for further steps by the quartet. Different views on the possibility of an international conference were expressed.
11. The Ministers noted the general conviction that a third party monitoring mechanism would help both parties in their efforts and urged them to consider proposals to accept observers. The need for international peace keeping forces was underlined by several delegations.
12. The Ministers called on the international community to preserve, strengthen and assist the Palestinian Authority, including through efforts to rebuild its infrastructure, security and governance capacity. They called also on the donor community and the international financial institutions to renew their commitment and urgently mobilise resources to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and to assist in economic and institutional reconstruction, in the context of the promotion of regional development and economic integration.

The normalization of trade flows, transfers and economic conditions in the Palestinian territories are an essential dimension of the recovery of the Palestinian economy.

13. In conclusion of the debate, the Presidency called on the authorities of Israel to halt its military operations, to immediately withdraw its military forces from Palestinian cities, in particular Bethlehem and Ramallah, including the headquarters of President Arafat, whose personal security and freedom of movement must be respected and guaranteed. A peaceful solution must be also found for the situation in the Nativity Church. It called for the full respect of International Humanitarian Law.

It called upon the Palestinian Authority and President Arafat, as the recognised elected leader of the Palestinian people, to act decisively and take all possible steps within its capacity to fight terrorism, in particular suicide bombs, and to stop incitement to violence. To be successful, fight against terrorism must include the dismantling of terrorist infrastructure and financing.

14. On the occasion of the Valencia Ministerial Conference, and in the presence of President Bouteflika of the Algerian Republic and President Aznar of the Government of Spain, the ceremony of signing the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with Algeria took place. They welcomed the signature to come in the next weeks with Lebanon and the entry into force of the Association Agreement with Jordan on May 1st. The conclusion of eleven of the twelve Association Agreements thus opens a new stage in Euro-Mediterranean relations and most partners are now embarked on a process which will lead to the progressive establishment of a free trade area in the region.
15. The EU Presidency welcomed the Libyan delegation to the Valencia Conference. Taking into account Libya's role in the Mediterranean region and in the African continent, the EU Presidency hopes Libya will fully contribute to the relaunching of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. It also welcomed the presence of other Special guests of the Presidency: Arab League, UMA and Mauritania.
16. The Conference regretted the absence of Syria and Lebanon but showed respect for their decision. The Presidency expects that both countries will continue their cooperation within the framework of the Barcelona Process.
17. The Ministers took note of the final report of the Civil Forum which took place April 12 and 13 in Valencia and of the efforts undertaken to assure continuity in the works of the civil forums. They encouraged actors in civil society to reinforce their contribution towards the fulfilment of the objectives of the Partnership.
18. The Ministers concluded that the Valencia Conference provided the opportunity for a full, frank and constructive discussion of what has been achieved since Barcelona, what problems have been encountered and what solutions found. The Barcelona Process is now sufficiently well established and resilient for the participants to be able to engage in an open dialogue on all issues of mutual concern. The Presidency took note of the wishes of partners to improve the visibility of the Process by increasing public awareness of its activities.

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The Ministers welcomed the proposal put forward by Greece to host a Ministerial Meeting during the first half of 2003. The VI th Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Ministers (Barcelona VI) will take place in the second half of 2003 during the Italian Presidency.

**Vth Euro-Mediterranean Conference
of Ministers for Foreign Affairs**

VALENCIA ACTION PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

The partners of the Barcelona Process taking part in the Euro-Mediterranean Conference Barcelona V held in Valencia (Spain) the 22nd and 23rd of April 2002,

Stressing that the strategic importance of the Mediterranean and the prevailing political, economic and social circumstances call for a global response based on comprehensive co-operation and solidarity;

Expressing their conviction that the peace, stability and security of the Mediterranean region are a common asset which they pledge to promote and strengthen by all means at their disposal;

Reiterating the importance they attach to sustainable and balanced economic and social development with a view to achieving the objective of creating an area of shared prosperity;

Recognising that dialogue among cultures, civilisations and religions throughout the Mediterranean Region is more necessary than ever before in order to promote understanding among them;

Aware that the coming perspective of the European Union's enlargement reinforces even more the relevance of the Barcelona Process;

Convinced that after six years of Partnership, the Barcelona Process should achieve new levels of Euro-Mediterranean integration thus generating new momentum in their relations and to foster a more balanced approach to the common objectives.

Agreeing that the sense of ownership of the Process by all partners must be reinforced;

Favouring an increased visibility of the Process by the public opinions of all partners;

Convinced that these objectives may be achieved within the framework and the development of the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona on the 27th and 28th of November, 1995;

Conscious that the incomplete implementation of the main objectives of the mentioned Declaration, despite the progress obtained since 1995, demands a global reassessment and a new commitment from all participants to build on the reactivation of the Process since Barcelona IV (Marseilles 2000);

Hereby agree to establish an Action Plan on reinforced political dialogue, further development of economic, commercial and financial co-operation and renewed emphasis on the social, cultural and human dimension.

This Action Plan will abide by all the Principles of the Barcelona Declaration, through regional, sub-regional and other multilateral actions. It is complementary to the bilateral co-operation implemented under the Association Agreements between the EU and its Mediterranean partners or between partners themselves.

The implementation of this Action Plan shall start immediately after the Barcelona V Conference and will be reviewed at Barcelona VI.

II. POLITICAL AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

1. The Conference agreed:

- That the political dialogue, in order to implement the principles adopted by the Barcelona Declaration, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the Euromed partnership, must focus among others on the following items:
 - a) Effective dialogue on political and security matters, including on the ESDP;
 - b) Enhancement of stability and reinforcement of democratic institutions;
 - c) Conflict prevention, crisis management and consideration of the causes of instability;
 - d) Regular information on EU enlargement developments and implications for the Euro- Mediterranean partnership, taking into account the interests of Mediterranean Partners;
- To confirm the mandate of the Senior Officials on the Draft Charter for Peace and Stability to continue their work as appropriate so as to enable the Charter to be adopted as soon as the political situation allows.

2. Terrorism

Referring to the deliberations of the ad hoc working group on terrorism, which met in Brussels on March 27th, the following axes of dialogue and cooperation in the domain of the terrorism have been retained:

- a) That the Barcelona Process cannot remain indifferent to the phenomenon of Terrorism which should continue being examined from a global and multidisciplinary approach, and in a spirit of partnership and solidarity.

- b) To recognize the central role of the UN in the fight against terrorism and to show strong support to the work of the UNSC Committee against terrorism.
- c) Taking note of the progress of work at regional and inter-regional levels, to reiterate that all 27 Partners are committed to the implementation of relevant UN Resolutions, particularly 1373 and 1390 and, as appropriate, to International Conventions.
- d) Taking into account that only a multilateral approach and practical measures can assure an effective fight against terrorism, to renew the mandate of the Ad hoc Group on Terrorism.
- e) To pursue the activation of the Euro-Mediterranean network of contact points for the fight against terrorism.

3. Human Rights and Democracy

The Conference agreed to encourage the continuation of the political dialogue on human rights by means of national and regional presentations. They also mandated Senior Officials to study the setting of a more structured dialogue on this sensitive topic so as to increase its effectiveness and deepen the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in this area.

4. Partnership Building Measures

The Conference confirmed the mandate to Senior Officials contained in the conclusions of Marseilles and Brussels Conferences, to consolidate partnership measures already in force, identify new ones and strengthen good-neighbourly relations on a regional or sub-regional basis.

Following a gradual approach, concrete proposals could, inter alia, go along the following lines:

- a) Working towards a common language on defence and security issues. One of the major problems in the region is the absence of a common strategic language. It is essential to overcome prejudices and conceptual and terminological misunderstandings. An initial common basis could be found in International Conventions ratified by Countries from the North and South of the Mediterranean.
- b) Developing preventive diplomacy mechanisms. The Mediterranean region requires bilateral and multilateral cooperation on conflict prevention with a special emphasis on crisis management. Presentations of national concepts of conflict prevention and related structures to manage crises. Med partners' experiences in these areas can become a subject of exchange of views by Senior Officials.
- c) Reactivation of the Bilateral and Multilateral Register of Treaties concluded by Partners.

Recognize the usefulness of some existing PBMs such as the Malta Seminars; EuroMeSCo contribution and the experience accumulated by the pilot project on mitigation of natural or manmade disasters and identify new partnership measures progressively while consolidating those already in force within the limits of existing budgetary constraints.

III. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIP

5. Association Agreements

The Conference recalled the objective of creating a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by the target date of 2010 and in this context underlined the importance of completing the grid of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements by concluding negotiations with Syria, and accelerating the ratification processes and the implementation of the Agreements.

The Conference agreed on the following:

6. South-South trade integration

- To express strong support to the Agadir Process and to all initiatives that aim at extending free trade agreements to Southern and Eastern Mediterranean partners, including integration at the sub-regional level such as the UMA.
- To welcome the decision taken by the Ministers of Trade to create a Working Group on Trade Measures relevant for Regional Integration, whose task will be to implement a Plan on Trade and Investment Facilitation covering:
 - a) Customs procedures
 - b) Standardisation issues and conformity assessment
 - c) Regulatory framework of investment
 - d) Protection of intellectual property rights.
- To endorse the decision taken by the Ministers of Trade to accept the principle of the participation of the Mediterranean partners to the system of pan-European cumulation of origin and urged:
 - a) The continuation of the technical work of the working group on rules of origin to solve practical problems and to reach concrete proposals at the earliest.
 - b) The introduction of the necessary amendments to the Association Agreements' protocols.
 - c) The conclusion of Free Trade Agreements with harmonised rules of origin between the Mediterranean partners.
- To work to promote investment through concrete measures.

7. Developing of Free Trade in Services

To welcome the decisions of Ministers of Trade, namely:

- To ask the Working Group on Trade in Services to continue its meetings in order to organise in- depth examination of various key service sectors and to discuss how to improve and liberalise the existing regulatory framework on transports, telecommunications, tourism and services to enterprises
- To ask the Commission to examine and meet, as much as possible within the existing MEDA programmes, relevant technical assistance needs in areas such as impact studies, capacity building and statistics.

8. Improving Market Access in Agriculture

To examine the prospects for greater reciprocal liberalisation of trade in agricultural products, in conformity with the provisions of the Association Agreements and the progress achieved in the multilateral context. The Conference asked the Commission to elaborate a study on the impact of such liberalisation on the European Union and the Mediterranean Partners

9. Financial co-operation

- To welcome the ECOFIN and the Barcelona European Council Conclusions on the need to enhance Mediterranean Partnership and financial assistance towards its partners in the Barcelona Process.
- To take note of EIB estimates of 2 billion per annum of net lending and risk sharing commitments to the countries in the area by 2006, including a growing share to finance private sector projects.
- To welcome the establishment within the EIB of a reinforced Investment Facility to promote infrastructure and private sector Investment; complemented with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Arrangement and an EIB representation office located in the area.
- The Conference took note of the interest expressed by the Mediterranean partners in the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Bank to promote investment and economic development.
- To note that the European Council has agreed that, on the basis of an evaluation of the Facility's performance, and taking into account the outcome of consultations with our Barcelona Process Partners, a decision on the incorporation of an EIB majority owned subsidiary dedicated to the Mediterranean Partner Countries will be considered and taken one year after the launching of the Facility.

10. Improvement of the Meda programme management

The Conference took note of the tangible improvements recently achieved in the management of Meda, through the reform of external assistance, the creation of Europe-Aid and the gradual devolution of Programme management to the delegations of the Commission. It asked the Commission to continue its efforts to ensure rapid and efficient delivery of financial assistance under Meda programme.

11. Infrastructure investments and interconnection

The Conference decided:

a) Transport

- To welcome the launching of a first regional transport Project, which will identify, starting from existing studies, the key priority infrastructure in the region and the necessary interconnection between them as well as linking them to the Trans-European Transport Network.
- To ask the Commission to speed up preparations to draw up an Action Plan on transport sector reform integrating security, safety and environment aspects.
- To invite the Commission to take the necessary steps to boost co-operation regarding navigation by satellite (GALILEO), considering its concrete applications in the field of transport and also in the field of energy (see b)).
- To request the Commission to promote in the VI Framework Research Programme, the priorities of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation in the field of transport with regard to research and technological development.

b) Energy

- To invite the Commission and the EIB to identify priority projects with the southern Mediterranean partners which will help to develop connections between them and with the Trans-European energy networks.
- To request the Commission to make proposals for reinforcing co-operation regarding the security and safety of energy infrastructures, in particular the promotion of the use of new technologies such as GALILEO.

c) Telecommunications

To ask the Commission to draw up a strategy aimed at identifying the priority needs of the Mediterranean partners in this field and to make proposals to facilitate the integrations of telecommunications infrastructures on both shores of the Mediterranean.

d) Investment provisions

To encourage private sector and financial institutions, including the EIB and the World Bank, to actively participate in the development of these regional strategies with a view to financing their implementation.

12. From the Free Trade Area to the Internal Market Harmonisation of policies and regulations

- To welcome the launching of the Euromed Internal Market Programme and, in this framework, ask the Commission to identify priority areas where harmonisation with EU rules could be viewed as particularly useful.
- To take note of the decision of Ministers of Industry to ask the Commission to study the development of a virtual network of relevant Euro-Mediterranean administrations with a view to managing information flows in the free trade area.

13. Fostering innovation and access to technologies

To endorse the decisions of Ministers of Industry, namely the launching of the Regional Programme on Innovation, Technology and Quality with its focus on the upgrading of Innovation and Technological centres, and to ask the Commission:

- a) To develop synergies with EU financed co-operation in the area of research and technological development, as well as with EUREKA.
- b) To encourage participation of Mediterranean Partners in the VI Framework Research Programme.
- c) To give special consideration to cross-sectoral issues such as development of electronic commerce, taking into account the results achieved in the framework of the EUMEDIS Programme.

14. Reinforcing the role of the private sector.

- To welcome the creation of the Union of the Mediterranean Confederations of Enterprises and to declare the readiness of policy makers in the Euro-Mediterranean region to deepen the dialogue with the private sector, including on the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area and the latter's place in the global economy.
- To endorse the decision of Ministers of Industry to encourage the Commission to continue its activities aimed at improving the business framework for enterprises.

15. Ensuring sustainable development with a high degree of environmental protection

The Conference:

- Taking note of the progress of work in view of the launching of a sustainability impact assessment to ensure that the establishment of the Free Trade Area and Environmental protection are mutually supportive.
- Welcomed the next Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Environment that will take place in Athens in July 2002 and its intention to adopt a strategic framework for the environmental integration process in a perspective of sustainable development.

- Urged the Ministers of Environment to promote in Athens a joint approach to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development.
- Asked the Commission to promote initiatives to strengthen technical and institutional capacity in the region, in synergy with other programmes such as the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development.

16. Tourism

The Conference asked the Commission to look at ways of helping partners to take account of the impact of tourism in other policy areas so as to ensure the sustainable development of the sector.

17. Reinforcing Economic Dialogue

The Conference welcomed the establishment of an institutional dialogue in the financial and economic chapter and took note that the second meeting of the strengthened economic dialogue will concentrate on growth and employment.

The Conference agreed that the Reinforced Economic Dialogue should in future meetings also take into consideration issues such as the implications of the Euro, the enlargement of the European Union and the social and economic impact of September 11, on the basis of the report presented by the Commission.

IV. SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HUMAN PARTNERSHIP

The Conference reiterated the importance of the third Chapter of the Declaration of Barcelona and mandated the Euromed Committee to study ways and means to develop further its contents.

18. Cooperation in the field of Justice, in combating drugs, organised crime and terrorism as well as cooperation in the treatment of issues relating to the social integration of migrants, migration and movements of people.

The Conference endorsed the Framework Document and asked the Commission to implement it with partners, notably through a regional cooperation programme including concrete measures on the above mentioned issues in a balanced, reciprocal and co-ordinated manner.

19. Migration and Human Exchanges

The Conference:

Welcomed the idea for a Ministerial Conference on Migration and Social integration of emigrants to be held in the second half of 2003, which should include aspects such as: co-operation with the countries of origin, social integration of its migrant workers and management of migratory flows.

20. Dialogues between cultures and civilisations

The Conference underlined the importance of promoting co-operation in the field of culture, involving the general population with a view to furthering mutual understanding and combating misconceptions and stereotypes.

The Conference agreed to the principle of creating a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to promote a dialogue of cultures and civilisations and to increase the visibility of the Barcelona Process through intellectual, cultural and civil society exchanges. The Foundation should be based on the principle of co-ownership and work in close coordination with other similar institutions including private sector entities. The modalities concerning the organization, the activities and the financing of this Foundation will be studied further.

The Conference endorsed the Action Programme on Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisations aiming at Youth, Education and the Media which will be regularly updated and welcomed the Commission's Proposals:

- To extend the Tempus higher education Programme to the non-candidate Mediterranean partners as an intellectual and financial contribution to the development of new curricula and the adaptation of qualifications to today's needs and standards.

- To open to non-candidate Mediterranean partners NETD@YS and e-schola activities such as school-twinning, joint projects between schools and exchange of teachers.
- To streamline the existing EuroMed Youth Programme with the aim of increasing its efficiency.
- To launch the Programme on Information and Communication aiming at improving the visibility of the partnership. In this field, the Conference asked the Commission to study the possibility of supporting the efforts of Euro-Mediterranean audio-visual media to foster co-operation and thus contributing to a greater public opinion awareness of the Partnership.

The Conference underlined the importance of pursuing and enhancing the existing programmes on intercultural dialogue (Euromed Heritage and Euromed Audio-visual) as well as launching, when budgetary conditions allow, a regional programme on human sciences and exploring the possibilities of further use of current programmes Culture 2000 and Media Plus.

21. Social dimension

The Conference asked the Commission to continue its activities with a view to launching a regional vocational training programme including arrangements for the setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean Observatory on Employment and Training; the programme will aim at promoting employment opportunities, in particular for the young, and in the field of new technologies.

The Conference took note with satisfaction of the preparatory work undertaken by the Commission with a view to launching, as soon as possible, a programme aiming at increasing opportunities for women in economic life.

A dialogue will be conducted on the implications for all partners resulting from demographic evolution.

The Conference welcomed the recommendations of the Euro-Mediterranean meeting of Economic and Social Consultative Bodies held in Athens.

22. Co-operation between local entities

The Conference welcomed the Declaration of the Meeting of Euro-Mediterranean cities held in Barcelona last February. It also agreed that the Euromed Pact proposal presented by Eurocities merited further study.

23. Civil Forum

The Conference welcomed the holding of the Civil Forum in Valencia and agreed to define the best way to support and develop further the involvement of civil society in the Partnership at the earliest possible stage.

V. INSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Conference agreed on the following:

- While recognizing the value of existing parliamentary fora, to recommend the strengthening of the Parliamentary dimension through the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, as proposed by the European Parliament, and to this end to mandate Senior Officials to liaise with the Parliaments of the Euro-Mediterranean partners and the European Parliament to examine the necessary agreements and steps to facilitate its establishment, as soon as possible.
- The holding of ad hoc meetings of Senior Officials with the participation of competent Directors of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the 27 Partners and the Commission, or Officials responsible for the issues being discussed in the ad hoc meetings.
- To examine ways and means to restructure the Euromed Committee, with a view to ensure a greater involvement of partners in the elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, actions and projects agreed upon by the Conference.
- The discussion of the next meeting's agenda will be included as a permanent item in the agenda of each Senior Official and Euromed Committee meeting.
- The principle of co-chairmanship is consistent with the essence of the Partnership and shall be implemented.
- The principle of alternate venues of Ministerial meetings is consistent with the essence of the Partnership and shall be put into effect.
- To mandate Senior Officials to study and put forward proposals leading to:
 - a) The holding of "like-minded" exercises or meetings, depending on the circumstances in hand and with a goal to form a group of like minded Euro-Mediterranean countries whenever issues of relevance for the Euro-Mediterranean region, notably those in the framework of the UN system are discussed. To this end, the establishment of an informal Euro-Med Working Group should be studied.
 - b) The idea of holding meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the established basis, including mid-way informal meetings and extraordinary sessions when the circumstances so require.

The Conference also agreed that in view of changes that the partnership will undergo in the near future, it is necessary to further examine the different proposals made, that are intended to give the partner countries more responsibility, involving them more directly in the elaboration and preparation of actions, programmes and initiatives, through a permanent and better structured dialogue.

VI. FOLLOW-UP

This Action Plan will be the object of a first evaluation at the next formal Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Barcelona VI).

The Conference mandated the Euro-Mediterranean Committee to examine adequate follow-up and implementation mechanisms for this Action Plan.

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