

## **EUROMED WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The Euromed Women's Conference, which has been held in 24 and 25 of November 2005 in Barcelona, has gathered together governmental representatives and experts from Euromediterranean countries. The Conference, organised by the Generalitat de Catalunya in the general framework of the activities commemorating the tenth Anniversary of the Barcelona Process, stems from the need to continue the strengthening of the political, economic and social role of women in the Euromediterranean Partnership.

It is within this framework, and in line with the reflections of Euromed related bodies, and European institutions involved in the Barcelona Process, as well as other fora (as the Sana'a 2004 Regional Conference, and the Arab League meeting held in Algiers the same year) that this Conference's starting point is the conviction that equal opportunities between men and women is a cross-cutting issue. An issue with deep impact in the economic and human development of the people and the countries living together in the Mediterranean space. In this effect, the achievement of equality between woman and man is a common, important issue linking all Mediterranean societies.

The structure of the Conference has been dealing with three working sessions, each related to one of the main thematic areas of the Euro Mediterranean partnership: i) rights of women as a guarantee for human rights, for deepening democracy and as a vector for a more cohesive society; ii) women's contribution, from a micro- and macroeconomic level, to the achievement of sustainable development; iii) women's access to education, training and culture, as a means to improve occupation, competitiveness and active citizenship.

Participants' reflections and thoughts can be articulated around the following ideas:

- Women's Rights are a part of Human Rights; lack of respect for, or limited achievements in relation to women's rights implies lack of respect for Human Rights. It is thus necessary that these Rights be legally guaranteed.

- The gap between the expectations generated ten years ago, in the beginning of the Barcelona Process, and today's reality is huge, notably in relation to women's rights. We are far from equal opportunities between and women in all spheres, both in the Northern and the Southern sides of the Mediterranean.

- Advances have been made in the last few years in order to improving education and reducing illiteracy, and also on legal aspects. Notwithstanding, the role of women in the economic or political life has not been strengthened, owing to the resilience of social and economic barriers, and also to the marginal position in the Governmental agendas of issues related to equal opportunities between men and women.

- It is not easy for Women in the Euromediterranean space to achieve full and effective recognition of their rights. Women's rights are fragile, negotiable and vulnerable. One determining factor is patriarchy, which also affects the social, economic and political structures in the Northern side. Nevertheless, common denominators must be found which go beyond the false debate between universal rights and culture. Human Rights are unquestionably universal, and attention to cultural differences cannot stop progress in Human Rights.

- Women's participation in the public life is of fundamental importance, especially in decision-making processes. This participation should include consultation, project management, and project monitoring and assessment processes. Despite the need for women's participation, the gender perspective

must be applied in a cross-cutting way in all public policies. For this, political will is mandatory, as well as adequate financial resources.

- Euromediterranean Partnership works both ways, thus transcending the North-South dichotomy: the EU should ask itself what its contribution to the Mediterranean region can be; and at the same time, countries in the South have to be aware of the need to contribute in their turn with something to Europe. The European Union can support efforts for gender equality that have been made across the Mediterranean by including the gender perspective in their development policies and its criteria for selection of projects, and also by promoting equality in all spheres. Even if EU association agreements include a clause on fundamental rights, women's rights should be made explicit, and an anti-discriminatory clause incorporated. The same goes for the European Neighbourhood Policy, and all negotiations carried out by the EU.

- The issue of migration is central in the Euromediterranean Partnership, and it should include a gender perspective. Being a political question, it overlooks the fact that 50% of the migration fluxes are women who also suffer from intense marginalisation. The two shores of the Mediterranean have to co-operate to find a viable solution for dealing with migration-related problems, and which incorporates better integration policies that notice women's crucial role.

- Women's rights cannot be advanced as long as a safe environment, in a wide sense, is not guaranteed. Situations of conflict, violence and instability reinforce the situation of oppression of women. Thus, women must be involved in the development of a culture of peace, and become a part in the conflict resolution processes, as well as in the decision-making processes in the security and foreign policies.

- Violence against women is another problem with a global reach, of which we only come to know the tip of the iceberg. To fight this violence we must make progress in women's empowerment, and also promote their socio-economic

training to enhance their independence and autonomy.

- There is no economic or political development without the participation of women. There is actually a direct relationship between a country's economic weakness and women's rights. In the South of the Mediterranean, women increasingly become an engine for economic and cultural growth, but we are still far from overcoming the differences between men and women in these spheres.

- In many countries women have entered the labour market alongside with men, but a fair recognition of women's other job is still lacking: this relates to taking care of the family, the elderly and domestic work. This lack of recognition affects North and South.

- National strategies for women in the economic world should be furthered. These should include children care, equal access to property rights, and funding for SME creation, and the improvement of their education and training.

Besides these reflections, participants in the Conference

- consider that in all countries of the Partnership the women's movement has grown stronger. Notwithstanding, more funds are required, the legal framework for the operation of women NGOs must be enhanced, and their task more recognised. In this effect, it should be noted that civil society is the main promoter of social advancements that will be later integrated in government policies.

- consider that it is necessary to enhance the flow of information related to women's networks in the Mediterranean region, in order to exchange data on all active groups, achieve cohesive communication, and debate mid and long term objectives.

- underline the importance of involving civil society in this debate, both by listening to their voice in decision-making processes, and in relation to the need to support and strengthen their institutional development and their ability to work as a network that vitalises the Euromediterranean space.
  
- propose to establish a Euromed regional, qualitative instrument, involving both societies and governments, for the monitoring of the situation of women in the Euromediterranean space, the promotion of good practices, and the report of evidence of drawbacks and lack of implementation of Human Rights in gender policies.
  
- emphasise the need to integrate mainstreaming of women policies in the different action plans in the EU Neighbourhood Policy
  
- highly appreciate the initiative by the European Commission to organise a Euromed Ministerial Conference, with the participation of civil society, concentrating on women issues, and call for its effective realisation in the second term of 2006.