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EU must play a leading role in the Mediterranean political and social changes

Position paper of the Mediterranean Commission
adopted by the Bucharest Central Council (17 June 2011)

We are witnessing an important moment in history, as citizens across Mediterranean and in the Middle East countries call for a change. This is a perfect time to discuss how Europe could, and should, contribute to the sustainable development of our neighbouring countries, grounded in the principles of democracy and the respect of human rights.

Launched in 1995, the Barcelona process, a benchmark for a more coherent and comprehensive European foreign policy towards the Mediterranean, is the result of the joint effort of European and Mediterranean countries to strength their. Working together, the two regions have developed a framework of cooperation.

Aiming at further developing its activities regarding European cooperation with Mediterranean Countries, the European League for Economic Cooperation (ELEC) established the Mediterranean Commission, in 1996. Over the past 15 years, the Commission has followed closely the development of European Union relations with third countries from the Mediterranean region, with particular attention to cooperation on economic issues.

ELEC, through its Mediterranean Commission, has welcomed the institutionalization of the Union for the Mediterranean, as we believe it represented a milestone for the further development of cooperation between the two regions. More than constituting an act of important political value, the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean holds the potential to foster the promotion of a sustainable development of our neighbouring countries, improving the living conditions of their citizens.

In an attempt to identify focal areas that should be given priority when determining the projects that should be supported, representatives from the Union for the Mediterranean met at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean to agree on projects areas they wanted to develop. According to the Summit's declaration, initiatives should focus on six key areas:

- First, maritime and land highways;
- Second, civil protection;
- Third, de-pollution of the Mediterranean;
- Forth, alternative energies, and one of the achievements in this area has been the establishment of the Mediterranean Solar Plan;
- Fifth, higher education and research, and here the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean University and Erasmus mobility programmes is to be mentioned; and
- Finally, the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative.

Taking into account the priority areas set, considering the shared interest of both sides of the Mediterranean to develop their relationship, the Mediterranean Commission of ELEC would like to emphasize the importance of the EU support to the neighbouring countries in this particular moment.

The European Union has the responsibility to contribute to the reinforcing of Democracy within these countries, as well as to the promotion of human rights. Yet, we are all aware

that peace and stability come along with economic development. Therefore, contributing to economic growth in the region should be a priority for the European Union.

For these reasons, we believe that the Union for the Mediterranean has the great responsibility of playing a leading role in the development of the regions. Projects and initiatives to this should be encouraged, taking account of the possibilities offered by the PPP and the participation of financial institutions.

We should then take advantage of this wind of change that has been blowing in the region, and promote the changes that the citizens want and deserve.

This moment is a big responsibility for the UfM to assist the Mediterranean countries to overcome the challenges ahead of them. The UfM should work in supporting the re-launching of the economy in Mediterranean, and the EU has a special responsibility in this context, according to the *Declaration Extraordinary European Council (11/3/2011)*:

"The EU will support all steps towards democratic transformation, political systems that allow for peaceful change, growth and prosperity, and a more proportionate distribution of the benefits of economic performance".

And also "It will be crucial to provide the countries with the means to rebuild and modernise their economies. Economic development and job prospects, especially for youth, are of paramount importance to stabilise democracy. The Council should urgently agree on pending proposals on pan-Euro-Mediterranean rules of origin and the Commission is invited to present proposals on further means to enhance trade and foreign direct investment in the region in the short, medium and long term. It is also urgent to revitalise the tourism sector in the region. The Council should rapidly consider the Commission's proposals on European Investment Bank reflows and look at further possibilities to increase the EIB's overall financial support capacity. Coordination with other international financial institutions is important".

And also according to the *Resolution of the Committee of the Region on "Dealing with the impact and consequences of revolution in the Mediterranean" (12/5/2011)*, the Committee of Regions

"19. underlines the practical usefulness of capacity building programmes within the context of the enlargement and the European neighbourhood policies and - taking the Local Administration Facility pilot programme as a concrete example ¹ - suggests that equivalent initiatives should be developed for the Southern Mediterranean countries in order to support their capacity building at local and regional level;

20. notes the connection between migration and development policies and sees the need to develop policies supportive of the creation of economic and social conditions in the region that can guarantee a sustainable future for the local populations, thus decreasing the incentives to migrate; in particular, considers it essential to reduce poverty and to create jobs for the younger generation and therefore calls for full use to be made of existing EU resources and experience to support education and vocational training in these countries;

21. underlines the importance of boosting trade and investment with these countries, and of providing micro-credit facilities for the creation of small businesses, as a means to enable these countries to increase their own economic growth and reduce poverty; increased trade with North Africa would also be of benefit to Europe, resulting in the creation of many jobs for Europeans and economic growth for the EU; therefore calls for a joint effort to bring down remaining trade barriers as appropriate.

¹ The CoR already cooperates closely with the European Commission in supporting this pilot programme that is currently restricted to candidate and potential candidate countries