SECOND MEETING OF THE MEDITERRANEAN CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY

Crises and change in the Mediterranean: Citizens on the move

TUNIS 1st - 4th December 2011
SUMMARY AND DECLARATIONS
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. DECLARATIONS BY THE MCA ADVISORY COUNCIL</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 On Tunisia</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 On Syria</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 On Palestine</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 On the changes in the Mediterranean</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly (MCA) aims to favour the emergence of a common voice and a common citizens’ action, through permanent communication using innovative methods and tools, the first being a founding charter. This initiative, which is complementary to other existing undertakings, nevertheless rests entirely on one observation: it is mainly through the action and involvement of citizens, that a united and positive “community of destiny” will be set up in the Mediterranean.

The MCA is a medium and long term process that claims to meet all different sectors of the society: citizens' movements, public and private institutions, companies, associations, unions, experts, universities, research centers etc.. To develop dialogue between citizens’ perspectives, the emergence of priorities, common strategies, concrete proposals that can be used, inter alia, to direct political action in the Mediterranean region.

The first Mediterranean Citizens’ Assembly, which took place in Valencia in July 2010, underlined the need to push for the emergence of a Mediterranean community of peoples, anchored in a Mediterranean political space and in a Mediterranean citizenship. Since 2011, the developments both in the North and South of the Mediterranean have demonstrated the citizens’ determination to make a strong mark on the life of the City.

Thus, the nature and scope of the changes taking place in the South of the Mediterranean in 2011 are considerable. Whatever will be the outcomes of the shockwaves that started in Tunisia, there is no doubt that the face of this geographical area will have changed for good. Egypt has underlined the all but insignificant character of these events, and all the Mediterranean countries are expressing today, at different degrees, the depth of the gestations already in motion.

These dynamics can also be felt to the North of the Mediterranean, where a conjunction of factors has also reinforced the strong affirmation of citizenship in reaction to the political crisis. This same determination highlights the depth of their faith in a possible and profound improvement of their perspectives.
This second Assembly, which was held in Tunis, brought together 150 citizens from all countries of the Mediterranean, including representatives of various institutions and public entities present in the region.

II. OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The MCA meeting was held in Tunis, capital of Tunisia, a city and country with deep resonances in Mediterranean history and which has the distinction of having initiated a process of political and social transformations that deserves our full support.

The people of Tunisia should be proud, as should the people of Egypt, of having initiated a new phase in the political life of the Mediterranean. This is a process through which all the peoples of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean are now going, taking different forms and at different paces, in the search for democracy, development, dignity and peace.

This meeting brought together more than 150 participants from every corner of the Mediterranean region: citizens’ circles from Salonika, Albania, Montenegro, Rome, Naples, Cyprus, Valencia, Casablanca and Oran, as well as friends from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria and other Mediterranean countries. Thanks to everybody’s efforts, we were able to develop our ideas for the future.

The meeting also brought together the representatives of diverse public institutions that play a role in the region: the European Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), the Euro-Mediterranean Economic and Social Council, the Council of Europe, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (MPA), the Arab League, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the African Union.

The MCA is a permanent dialogue forum, a meeting place where citizens’ diplomacy is practised between equals, with no discrimination on the basis of
cultural or national origin, religion or gender. The MCA was born free and remains free, allowing for the expression of Mediterranean identity founded on a recognition of its diversity.

In July 2010 we were in Valencia, Spain. On that occasion, we had invited participants to an open dialogue that would enable progress towards a community of Mediterranean peoples, built through the participation of citizens. Today, we can assert that citizens are on the move throughout the region.

THE 'AGORAS'

During this second meeting of the Assembly in Tunis, the geographical and thematic agoras gave us the opportunity to analyse, each from our own perspective, the situation and events taking place around the Mediterranean Sea, from Turkey to Spain and from Morocco to Egypt. What is happening? Why? Who are the players? What are the major issues at stake?

We reaffirmed that freedom and dignity are individual and collective values that are fundamental for human beings. Struggles in support of these eternal values span the history of humanity. Our history as Mediterranean peoples cannot be written without talking about these struggles: for equality, justice, solidarity, democracy, tolerance and mutual respect. This is the deepest meaning of the recent changes that have taken place and for which Mediterranean peoples continue to push very strongly, with young people as the initiators of citizens' protests both to the North and to the South of the Mediterraneaen.

Participants see the Mediterraneaen as a diverse human space, a place of exchange and dialogue, with a common history of citizens demanding change.

Recent events are generating a political will to work together and rethink Euro-Mediterranean relations, and could lead to a new, more equitable form of regional cooperation. These events also provide citizens with the opportunity to develop a new model of democracy that is adapted to their history and culture.
The richness of the debates, the relevance of the challenge set out and the clear wish to strengthen citizens' participation in political life demonstrates the real importance of an initiative like the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly. It is only through citizens' commitment that we will be able to create greater unity in the region.

Many ideas emerged in the thematic Agoras (political perspectives, economic perspectives, equality and perspectives for peace, cultural and religious dialogue). The texts published in this report will enable us to design over the coming months much more specific activities in the different geographical areas where the MCA is structured.

The peoples of the Mediterranean are undergoing a period of severe political, economic and social crises. The drumbeats of the crisis and war are loud and clear. The events in Libya, the war crimes in Syria, the difficulties of the process in Egypt, the situation facing the Palestinian and Sahrawi peoples and the permanent interference of foreign powers are all of great concern. But we are also concerned by the social and economic situation affecting the Mediterranean peoples of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece in the face of a crisis and external powers that are undermining the legitimacy of their democratic political systems.

The Mediterranean is still far from being the Sea of culture, development and peace to which people aspire. It is necessary to unite our forces, our goodwill and our skills in order to reorient policies. There is a close link between the role of the public institutions and the role of the citizens since citizens are the source of the legitimacy of these public institutions. This must never be forgotten, at the risk of exacerbating the multitude of problems discussed during the meeting.

We reject fanaticism, exaggerated individualism, the abuse of power, the unjustified use of force and unrestrained violence, all of which have been and are still present in the Mediterranean. It is time to find effective solutions to the old conflicts which are still alive in our region today. It is time to proclaim Human Rights and to ensure they are respected.

The MCA supports the access of women to their political, economic, social and cultural rights and flags up the importance of the separation of
powers required to guarantee respect for individual freedoms and women’s rights.

Hope amongst young people must be maintained - since they are the agents of change - by facilitating their ability to travel and involving them in political and economic debate.

All citizens have the right to universal access to high quality state education. It must also be remembered that the contribution of diverse Mediterranean civilisations to school textbooks is important, and university exchanges should be encouraged. Education can be seen as being at the heart of a renewed multilateral Mediterranean framework. Special mention was made of the need to educate the army in democracy, as well as for a strengthening of the role of civil society in training the armed forces.

The development of Mediterranean peoples should be founded on the principles of justice and equality. The economic system should encourage employment creation. It would be desirable to create an observatory on Mediterranean employment and work-related migration.

We underlined the notion of Mediterranean identity and of a sense of belonging based on the historical interdependence of the diverse populations of the region. Cultural and religious diversity in the Mediterranean form an essential part of its common heritage, as does the respect for minorities.

North-South, South-North and South-South relations should be based on mutual trust and be seen in the framework of a regional agenda that is key to the relationship between the European Union and the African Union.

CONCLUSIONS

The partial summaries that accompany this report and the texts of the speakers' presentations illustrate the broad participation and the strong capacity for analysis and proposition in the geographical and thematic Agoras. Careful reading of this report will provide precious insights into the turbulent realities around today's Mediterranean.

In his presentation, Mr Edgar Morin, an example of resistance and intelligence, member of the MCA Advisory Council, describes a whole strategic process
for the peoples of the Mediterranean in which the key ideas are about resisting and asserting ones identity as part of a broad diversity. He also stressed the importance of being able to go to policymakers with political decisions, with concrete work plans that draw on the lessons of the past and that show an understanding of current realities, and thus build the Mediterranean space.

In his presentation, Mr Joseph Chilengi, Chairman of the African Union's Steering Committee on Dialogue with Civil Society Organisations, evoked ideas that will be useful for the design of MCA strategies : encouraging collaboration with citizens' fora whilst taking account of Africa's concerns about the Mediterranean.

In its message, the European Trade Union Confederation asks us to respect fully the role of workers in all the processes under way in the region. The Confederation expresses its readiness to continue strengthening relationships between European workers' unions and unions in all the countries of the Mediterranean.

The Director of the Office of the Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) told us that he has noted the MCA's programme and objectives and has read the Founding Charter with great interest. He says that he is impressed by the relevance of our initiative to the important events taking place in the Maghreb and noted that the democratic changes in progress very much reflect the values and principles expressed in the MCA's Founding Charter.

Mr Sergio Piazzi, General Secretary of the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (MPA), thanked us very much for the invitation and expressed the need to strengthen the partnership with the MCA in order to pursue joint efforts to support democratic transition processes in the region and plan future cooperation between our organisations. On this issue, it should be recalled that the MCA is currently in discussions with the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly over an agreement on observer status for the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly at the MPA.

We paid hommage to all the peoples of the Mediterranean who are working for its future, a future that will be built by them. It is not only the European
or African public institutions, even if they represent us, that will build a future for Mediterranean peoples. It is the peoples themselves who are in the process of forging their own destiny, in a spirit of freedom, with their own way of seeing things, their history, their youth and the whole of their societies.

The MCA is not a political Assembly, nor does it seek to substitute the role of political parties and public institutions. It is an Assembly exclusively made up of citizens, men and women, with all the power – or lack of it - that the word citizen brings with it: great power because citizens are the source of all political legitimacy, the foundation of community and of people’s rights responsibilities. Lack of power at the same time, because the people – citizens – have to face up to the huge power of economic forces and interests who dominate current realities.

The presentations that we heard during the meeting of the Assembly give us hope and strength to continue our work. This work is based on the universal principles and values expressed in the MCA’s Charter, principles and values that we know cannot be imposed by force, but which are shared through knowledge, understanding, tolerance and the practice of solidarity between individuals and between peoples.

We, the peoples of the North and South of the Mediterranean, know, from our distant and recent history, what servitude and fear are. These are two constant experiences throughout our history and we know just how difficult it can be to progress in the face of these dominant forces, but we are progressing.

We spoke of the democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal and Greece. They were not miraculous transitions, but were complex and fraught with internal contradictions that can explain the origin of some of the current economic problems. Democratic political transitions do not resolve all the problems of a society, but they are processes that are necessary for the construction of the democratic political space in which people’s voices can find expression.

Our Assembly seeks, through citizens’ dialogue, to construct spaces where free exchanges of opinion and ideas can take place between Mediterranean
citizens. This is at a time when the Euro-Mediterranean institutions find themselves obliged to seriously review their positions, since many of them have been called into question by citizens' movements; at a time when the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East are asking themselves questions about their own future and are demanding serious answers to their political, social and economic problems; and a time when the peoples of Southern Europe are trying to ride, with considerable difficulty, the storms, coming from both within and beyond, that threaten to force them to make major sacrifices in their lives.

It is young people and women who are the principal protagonists of the pages of history that are currently being written. It is they who, through the use of the new information and communication technologies, are driving forward the processes of change under way. We wish to pay them homage here today.

During the meeting several proposals for partnership have been made that will enable us to broaden the work of the MCA. In particular with the Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (MPA), the Committee of the Regions, the ARLEM, the Euro-Economic and Social Council and the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI).

We have adopted four declarations from the Advisory Council relating to the current situation in the region. They are included in this summary.

We must also thank once again our Tunisian friends who have made it possible to get to know the real situation in their country. I would also like to thank all the public institutions that have been here with us, the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind for its permanent support which enabled the MCA to emerge and develop, as well as all the members of the organising team, especially Mr Ahmed Driss of the Centre for Mediterranean and International Studies.
III. DECLARATIONS BY THE MCA ADVISORY COUNCIL

3.1 On Tunisia

We, citizens of the Mediterranean, having observed the political changes in Tunisia, welcome the remarkable advances that have been made by Tunisian citizens in order to respond to their aspirations for dignity and freedom and set about the creation of a democratic society founded on respect for their political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The MCA warmly welcomes the political transformation of the country towards a participatory democracy following the organisation of elections that were unanimously acknowledged to be free and fair, with the establishment of real and representative pluralism.

The MCA offers its full moral support for the advances made by the Tunisian people on the path to a healthy, stable and lasting democracy.

3.2 On Syria

We, citizens of the Mediterranean, affirm that the serious human rights violations and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against the people constitute crimes against humanity. For this reason, we unreservedly condemn the crimes committed in Syria by government forces against an unarmed people demanding its freedom.

We call on Arab and European societies, and the international community:
- to assume their responsibilities towards the Syrian people;
- to seek an end to the massacres through peaceful mechanisms available in international law;

and to denounce all these crimes at the International Criminal Court.

3.3 On Palestine

We, citizens of the Mediterranean, congratulate UNESCO for having admitted Palestine as a member state; we call on the international community to
respect its commitments and recognise the right of Palestinians to independence and to membership of the United Nations.

We support the negotiation of peace agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis that promote the recognition of two States and permit all the countries in the region to live in peace and security.

We commit ourselves to support joint Palestinian-Israeli civil society projects that are founded on mutual respect and the common interest.

3.4 On the changes in the Mediterranean

With the events of 2011, the citizens of the Mediterranean have proved that they want change. From Tunisia to Egypt, and from Spain to Israel via Greece, citizens' movements have shown their readiness to struggle for dignity and freedom. In this context, the MCA:

- pays hommage to the victims who have paid with their lives the price of their struggles for their convictions;
- calls on all citizens' initiatives to remain non-violent;
- calls on governments to take into serious consideration the demands of their citizens, in a spirit of dialogue, openness and respect for human rights, whether it be by respecting the freedom of association and organisation, the freedom of expression, or the freedom to disseminate ideas and initiatives;
- insists on the importance of structuring citizens' initiatives in networks that are able to develop political space for the Mediterranean community of peoples.

For its part, the MCA will continue to promote

- the principles and values contained in its Founding Charter;
- its mission to coordinate and help structure efforts to ensure the emergence of Mediterranean citizenship.
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Sign the founding Charter for the emergence of a Mediterranean community of peoples
http://acimedit.net/en/signature