

## **EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (EMPA)**

### **Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture – Portuguese Presidency**

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) is a forum for international dialogue that fosters Euro-Mediterranean relations, notably with regard to the development of parliamentary diplomacy, in order to bring together the two shores of the Mediterranean by building bridges for dialogue that promote the understanding between two very different realities.

Even the national parliamentary delegations have different party colours, which is an asset for the creation of a "culture of understanding". An understanding that inevitably involves solving problems that concern both shores of the Mediterranean and that are currently on the agenda: terrorism, illegal immigration, security, environmental degradation, among other issues.

EMPA was founded in 1995, within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, also called the Barcelona Process.

The main working areas established in the Barcelona Process are a platform for understanding with the following purposes:

- to establish a common area of peace and stability based on the fundamental principles, in particular the respect for human rights and democracy (political and security partnership);
- to create an area of shared prosperity through the progressive establishment of a free-trade area between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners by 2010, and between the latter by 2012;
- to develop human resources, to promote understanding between cultures and the rapprochement of the peoples in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The inaugural session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly was held on 22 and 23 March 2004 in Athens.



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Its creation constitutes a decisive step towards the institutionalisation and strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. EMPA is the tangible expression of the common interest in strengthening security and stability in the region, promoting and undertaking political, social and economic reforms, as well as preventing terrorism, extremism and organised crime from impeding progress in this direction, considering that the Assembly is based on common values and objectives, namely those of a just and lasting peace with due regard for international law.

### **Composition of the EMPA**

In the beginning, EMPA consisted of 260 members of parliament (MPs): 130 Europeans (81 MPs of EU national parliaments and 49 MPs of the European Parliament) and 130 MPs of EU partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).

During the plenary session held on March 2009 in Brussels, it was decided to raise the number of the EMPA members from 260 to 280, granting 10 seats to Mauritania and 2 seats to each of the new Member States (Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Monaco and Bosnia-Herzegovina), the North-South balance remaining unchanged.

Since its inception and in accordance with its rules and regulations, EMPA holds plenary sessions (one per year) and committee meetings. It comprises three standing committees (the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights; The Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Social Affairs and Education and the **Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture**), as well as the ad-hoc Committee on Women's Rights that became a standing committee in March 2008.

The Assembly monitors the implementation of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements and adopts resolutions or issues recommendations to the Ministerial Conference. When requested by the Ministerial Conference, the Assembly issues opinions and proposes, if deemed necessary, to adopt appropriate measures for each of the three areas of the Barcelona Process. The Assembly's decisions are not legally binding.



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The mission of EMPA is also to provide parliamentary support, impetus and contribution to the consolidation and development of the Barcelona Process. The Assembly publicly debates issues of common interest, which may involve the participating countries. In this context, its endeavour is to foster the dialogue and peace in the Middle East and, for this purpose, during the first term of office, EMPA set up a working group on "Peace and Security in the Middle East".

The Assembly maintains close relations with the institutions of the Barcelona Process, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission.

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Composition – 70 MPs

35 MPs from 10 EU partner countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey).

35 European MPs (22 from EU national parliaments and 13 from the European Parliament).

This Committee meets on average three to four times per year.

The main topics debated in this Committee were the following:

- Quality of life improvement programmes, exchanges between civil societies and culture, including the development and links with the audiovisual communication media;
- The role of civil society within the framework of the Barcelona Process;
- Immigration and management of migration flows;
- Cultural cooperation and dialogue between cultures and civilisations;
- Climate change and desertification; Blazes and access to water;
- Protection of the Mediterranean Sea - Horizon 2010 Programme;



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- The Euro-Mediterranean University and cooperation between universities (training and research).

During the plenary session held in Athens, the Assembly agreed that in the years 2008-2009/2009-2010 the Presidency of the Committee would be handed over to the Portuguese Parliament and the Vice-Presidencies to Lebanon, Algeria and the European Parliament.

The first year of Portuguese Presidency was devoted to the following topics:

- The role of civil society in inter-cultural dialogue; Inter-religious dialogue as a common platform for understanding in the Mediterranean;
- Migration flows as important determinants for (Euro-Mediterranean) regional development.

The first meeting under Jordan Presidency was held on 4 July 2009 in Amman. Portugal presented the following working themes of the Committee of Culture:

- a) Our common history;
- b) Religions - basis for mutual dialogue and respect;
- c) Our common sea:
  - Its preservation and durability (including the sensitive issue of the Dead Sea);
  - The preservation of its wealth (tourism, sports activities and maritime leisure);
  - Fishing and aquaculture;
  - Maritime transport;
- d) Higher education of administrative staff: The University of the Mediterranean and the *Erasmus Mundus* Programme