



Draft Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Committee on the Promotion of the Quality of Life, Human Exchanges and Culture

Friday, 18 July 2008

Assembly of the Republic

1.

The Inaugural Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) Committee on the Promotion of the Quality of Life, Human Exchanges and Culture was held in Lisbon, at the Assembly of the Republic.

The proceedings followed the proposed draft agenda and involved the participants listed on the annexed documents (I).

The Officers of the meeting were appointed as agreed at the 4th EMPA Plenary Meeting, held in Athens on 27 and 28 March 2008:

Chairman: Portugal

Vice-Chairmen: Lebanon, Algeria and the European Parliament

The representatives of the countries appointed to these positions are the following parliamentarians:

Portugal: Alberto ANTUNES

Lebanon: Walid KHOURY

Algeria: Miloud CHORFI

European Parliament: Carlos CARNERO

Due to circumstances beyond his control, the Committee Officer Miloud Chorfi could not be present at the meeting, and was represented by the parliamentarian Tahar ABDI.

The parliamentarian Alberto Antunes opened the meeting by welcoming the Officers, the other delegates and all present, by asking for everybody's help in developing the work to be carried out during the next mandate and thanking them in advance.

He expressed his desire that those who were visiting Portugal for the first time enjoyed their stay, and hoped that they would have the opportunity to delight in both our excellent scenery, and our rich historical heritage.

2.

Next, and in accordance with the decisions taken during the last Plenary Session, the approval of the election of the Officers of this Culture Committee was put to the vote.

Rule 5.3 of the Rules of Procedure states:

“Each parliamentary committee shall elect, in accordance with the criterion laid down in Rule 4(1) concerning the composition of the Bureau, from among its members a chairman and three vice-chairmen; their term of office shall, in principle, be two years. The office of committee chairman and vice-chairman shall not be compatible with the office of President of the Assembly.”

As there were no objections, the Committee Officers were formally elected and established.

The parliamentarian Alberto Antunes recalled that the 4th Plenary Session represented the end of the first EMPA mandate. For this new mandate, EMPA consists of 260 delegates (there used to be 240) and a supplementary standing Committee, guaranteeing the rights of women.

He added that this expansion had consequences for the number of delegates on each of the Committees and on the breakdown of the delegations for each Committee, and that in view of these changes the Culture Committee would be made up of **70 delegates**, broken down in the following way:

- **Mediterranean Countries** component: **35**
- **European** component: **22 members of the EU National Parliaments** and **13 members of the European Parliament**

He said that in order to ensure that all the delegations, especially those from the EU National Parliaments, were represented on each of the four committees, the EMPA Bureau decided, at its meeting of 11 June, to approve an amendment to the *“Guidelines for the Meetings of the Parliamentary Committees”*. This allows delegations to nominate substitutes for the committees where they are not represented.

He added that Italy, who represents the EU National Parliament component at the EMPA Bureau, carried out the draw for the permanent members of the Committee on 18 June in Strasbourg. As a result, the permanent members of the Culture Committee representing the EU National Parliament are: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

3.

The newly-elected Committee Chairman continued with the proceedings by giving thanks for the votes of confidence deposited in the elected Officers.

He referred to the Mediterranean Summit, held in Paris, and to the relaunch of the Barcelona Process mentioning that this new challenge would necessarily be reflected in the Committee's work during this new mandate.

He considered that it was time that the political authorities took a decision about whether we would continue to live with our backs turned to our Southern partners, or if alternatively, we would be willing to build a common destiny and live together.

He underlined the need for increased openings in the dialogue and an effective cooperation in solid projects.

He explained that the suggested topics for debate at this first committee meeting were included in the view of the common environment that we wish to help build.

- Inter-religious dialogue as a platform for mutual understanding in the Mediterranean.
- Migratory flows as a vehicle for regional development.

Next, he introduced the invited Speakers:

- Jorge Sampaio, a former Member of the Portuguese Parliament, former chairman of the Lisbon City Council and former President of the Republic, who currently holds the position of High Representative to the United Nations for the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations,
- Moisés Espírito Santo, University professor and Portuguese researcher in the field of History of Religions,
- Rosário Farmhouse, holder of the position of High Commissioner for Immigration and Inter-cultural Dialogue in the current government. This speaker was, due to last-minute circumstances beyond her control, substituted by her Head of Cabinet Duarte Miranda Mendes.

The order of the day was approved and the proceedings continued with the indication of the topics that the Committee was to work on, which had earlier been approved by the EMPA Bureau. The topics chosen were approved unanimously. Hence, the topics to be worked on, with a view to the preparation of a Recommendation to be presented at the next Plenary Session are:

- Inter-cultural dialogue as a platform for mutual understanding in the Mediterranean. The role of civil society.
- Migratory flows as a vehicle for regional development.

4.

To this end, he said that it was important to name rapporteurs for the two topics, taking the two components of the Assembly (Europe and the Partner Countries) into account. He asked for volunteers to come forward. Only the representatives of the European Parliament made themselves available to work on the proposed topics, giving priority to the first of these. Hence, it was decided that the Committee Secretary would set a time limit for candidates to be presented.

He announced that a Culture Committee website had been created - www.empacult.parlamento.pt , and that it could already be accessed. He asked for contributions (documents, information or links for the website – in English and/or French), to be submitted with the purpose of efficiently sharing and spreading information amongst all the members of the Committee and the respective Secretariats.

He said that he had attended, at the invitation of the EMPA Chairman, the enlarged Bureau meeting, which had taken place in Paris on 12 July. He said that during that meeting, he had notified the Bureau that this meeting had been scheduled, and told them of the topics that were to be discussed here.

He mentioned that the Bureau had taken the following decisions:

- 1 - The holding of a Special Plenary Meeting, in Jordan (at the Dead Sea Conference

Centre), scheduled, in principle, for 12 and 13 October. The topic for this Plenary Meeting is to be "The Middle East Peace Process: Annapolis and its Perspectives"

2 - The idea of having an EMPA delegation "*in loco*" to get detailed information about issues related to the conflict in the Middle East and the points of view of the different players.

3 - The possibility of a joint meeting of the Political Committee and our Committee to debate the issue of dialogue between Religions, to be held in Paris, at the end of November or the beginning of December dedicated to the topic: "Freedom of Expression and Respect for Religious Beliefs."

5.

The speeches given by the guest Speakers (annexed), roused the participants' interest and opened the doors to future discussions and work for the Committee.

After Jorge Sampaio had made his speech, the following delegations also contributed: Egypt, Algeria, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Estonia, the European Parliament, Turkey and Slovenia.

The following delegations contributed to the second debate which resulted from the speeches made by Moisés Espírito Santo and Duarte Miranda Mendes: Hungary, Estonia, Palestine, Tunisia, European Parliament, Jordan, Syria, and Algeria,

6.

The proceedings were brought to a close with a special thank you to all the Speakers and to all the participants for their contributions to the development of the work done.

The parliamentarian Alberto Antunes gave thanks for the support that was always provided by the European Parliament Secretariat and praised the work that had been developed by the previous Committee Chairman.

Finally, the dates of the next meetings were programmed for December (joint meeting with the Political Committee) and January (perhaps in Madrid).