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PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart and humane migration across the Mediterranean

Conference for parliaments from the European Union and the Mediterranean region, organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliament of Malta and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean

16-17 November 2017, La Valletta, Malta

RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY STATEMENT

By Patrick Taran, Conference Rapporteur¹

I. Overview

1. Some 164 participants, including parliamentarians from 26 national parliaments from the Mediterranean region and beyond, took part in the first Mediterranean Parliamentary Conference on Migration, held on 16 and 17 November 2017, in Malta. Representatives and experts from regional parliamentary bodies in Africa and Europe, governments, United Nations specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations and civil society non-governmental organizations also attended the event.
2. The conference aimed to promote better regional cooperation towards smart and humane migration across the Mediterranean. Participants discussed the complexity of migration and the refugee exodus affecting countries of origin, transit and destination around the Mediterranean region.
3. The conference was organized in a truly multi-stakeholder fashion by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the Parliament of Malta, which hosted the event effectively and elegantly.
4. Parliamentarians shared national experiences of migration and its impact on their respective countries. Many called strongly for cooperation, solidarity and common solutions. Invited experts provided reasoned analysis along with options for action. Topical sessions covered issues such as labour migration dynamics, changing the discourse around migration, refugee protection, border management, addressing migration push factors and promoting development.
5. The event offered parliamentarians the chance to engage in frank, and often passionate, discussion. Representatives highlighted the push factors leading to migration, including war and absence of decent living conditions in countries of origin, and remained committed to ensuring the protection, safety, and welfare of refugees. They expressed regret at the long-standing, and as of yet, unresolved plight of Palestinian refugees and called for timely solutions backed by parliamentary

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action and cooperation across the region and beyond. They expressed concern about refugee and migrant children, underscored the need for gender specific responses to migrant and refugee women and formulated pleas for solutions supported by parliamentary action and cooperation across the region and beyond.

II. Observations, conclusions and recommendations

1. Rule of law, parliamentary responsibilities and standards-based governance

6. Participants stressed the central role played by parliaments in the governance of migration throughout the event. From the opening session of the conference, speakers highlighted the importance of parliamentary initiative to ensuring effective national ratification and implementation of the various international conventions concerning migration governance, protection of migrants and their families, and refugee protection and assistance. Specific references were made to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the relevant International Labour Organization conventions, and the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. In subsequent sessions, parliamentarians discussed the ratification of the Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Protocols to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as relevant corresponding regional instruments.

7. Participants highlighted the importance of referring to migration governance, rather than migration management. The broader term, governance, better encompassed the responsibilities of representative parliamentary law-making and the judicial functions of the State that were required to ensure that migration - and society in general - were governed by the rule of law.

2. Addressing the root causes

8. Many parliamentary delegates emphasized that migration was a consequence of causal factors. Those root causes must be addressed in order to ensure that migration was voluntary and safe, and conducted in a manner which protected the rights of migrants.

9. Delegates highlighted a range of push factors that led to migration. Particular emphasis was placed on the numerous instances of armed conflict and war across the world which had displaced millions of people, particularly in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Concerns were raised about the supply of arms, military intervention and external support for internal combatants by other countries in such situations of conflict, which had led to the killing of thousands of people and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands more.

10. Participants identified various factors for migration such as poverty, lack of decent living conditions, absence of decent work, lack of development opportunities and the destructive effects of climate change on the environment. Others spoke of a search for a better life, while several delegates called for recognition of the huge and growing demand for labour and skills in destination countries - not only in Europe, but in virtually all countries around the Mediterranean basin.

11. Numerous calls to action were made, including in terms of the urgent need to resolve and seek non-military solutions to ongoing conflicts. Parliamentarians agreed that material and financial support for development, increased investment, functioning democratic States, and regional economic integration would be essential to resolving the pressures that pushed, if not forced, people to leave their countries of origin. Passing reference was also made to the importance of fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a viable long-term strategic approach to the issue.

3. Recognizing the needs and demand for migration

12. In tandem with the concerns regarding migration push factors, participants expressed growing, albeit reluctant, recognition of the large and growing migration pull factors present in Europe, and increasingly, countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean.

13. Speakers underlined that, given current technological, structural and demographic changes, migration would be essential to maintain the viable skills and labour forces necessary to sustain productive, functional economies. They noted that current immigration to European Union member states as a whole stood at nearly 5 million persons per year, the large majority of whom arrived in regular circumstances and provided skills and labour not available locally.

14. Participants' recommendations echoed the emerging international assessment of migration governance. In short, that ample accessible, regular and rights-protected migration channels must be put in place. Noting that the majority of migration took place within existing free movement regimes, delegates mentioned the need to maintain and strengthen the implementation of those systems.

4. Refugee safe havens, protection, assistance

15. Recent events in the Mediterranean region and beyond had cast a spotlight on the situation of, and the protection required by, refugees and the need to support countries of destination that faced huge influxes of people seeking safe haven from conflict in neighbouring countries. Participants reiterated the importance of offering protection and assistance to refugees throughout the European Union, pursuant to the established principles of "liberty, democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law", and in contrast to the rising anti-immigration discourse and ill-feeling towards refugees.

16. Particular concern was expressed about the situation of certain countries, namely Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Serbia, that had been confronted by, and had responded generously to, huge influxes of refugees.

17. Participants called for the full implementation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and greater accessibility of comprehensive and fair refugee determination procedures, decent accommodation and integration mechanisms for refugees in countries of destination.

18. Delegates' proposals echoed similar recommendations made elsewhere, namely that all European Union member states should accept their fair share of refugees for resettlement (according to population size, economic conditions, etc.), that the Dublin Regulation requiring arriving refugees to apply for asylum in overwhelmed first countries of arrival should be suspended, and that the life-saving missions to rescue migrants at sea should continue. While the recommendations touched on policy matters, parliamentary action would be required to achieve the stated policy aims.

19. Parliamentarians expressed particular concern at the long-standing, unresolved plight of Palestinian refugees and proposed holding an inter-parliamentary conference in order to take parliamentary action on the matter and reaffirm the need for a resolution to the situation.

5. Changing negative discourse

20. Hostile media attention, hardening public attitudes and negative discourse directed towards migrants and refugees by political, and even governmental, leaders were topics of grave concern at the conference.

21. While participants did not have sufficient time to conduct a comprehensive analysis or devise a programme of action to change the negative narrative surrounding migration, they were able to make a number of valuable suggestions for improvement. They called for assertive leadership with a focus on the positive aspects of migration, and fact-based discourse by parliamentarians, government officials, business leaders, the media and other stakeholders. Parliaments should introduce concerted national programmes of action and strengthen domestic legislation against racism and xenophobia and in favour of non-discrimination and equality. Efforts should also be made to promote and take inspiration from the Stop Funding Hate campaign and facilitate contact and engagement among refugees, migrants and host communities.

6. Inclusion, integration, equality and non-discrimination

22. Several participants referred to inclusion, non-discrimination, equality and integration as fundamental precepts for accommodating migrants and refugees in communities. Those principles would be essential to the successful inclusion of migrants and refugees in society and achieving social cohesion in increasingly diverse populations.

23. While the agenda did not provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss that crucial area in detail, they nonetheless stressed that renewed attention should be paid to ensuring the optimal conditions and support for integration, and respecting the identities of migrants and host communities alike in the interests of building an inclusive society. Participants also proposed that measures should be adopted to strengthen the capacity of independent national authorities to combat discriminatory acts and handle cases involving discrimination.

7. Education and training

24. Delegates discussed the key push and pull factors leading to migration, namely education and training, the lack of which resulted in the marginalization, exclusion and alienation of many working-age people, especially young people, in countries of origin and destination.

25. Participants recognized that improved access to education, training and continuous development would be crucial to tackling the increasing global shortages of people with tertiary-level qualifications and necessary vocational and technical skills, which, if not addressed, would threaten economies and societies and lead to a loss of talent and education resources, or “brain-drain”, particularly in less developed countries.

26. Delegates recommended various solutions, such as ensuring universal ratification across the Mediterranean region of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education; encouraging parliamentary advocacy for increased governmental funding of all levels of education including vocational training; enhancing efforts to harmonize education and vocational training standards, and recognizing academic qualifications and work experience obtained elsewhere.

8. Mobility versus control

27. A major talking point of the conference was the conflict between the recognized need for accessible, legal and regular migration channels and the calls for effective migration control and restriction of movement, specifically irregular migration.

28. An entire session of the conference was devoted to border protection and combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Participants discussed the best ways in which to manage the tension between strengthening migration control and ensuring free movement, particularly with regard to providing suitable regular migration channels.

29. Some solutions proposed included enhancing regular migration channels to prevent recourse to smuggling and strengthening efforts to combat organized trafficking operations and criminal groups. Participants called for increased international cooperation among countries and between regions in the fight against trafficking and smuggling.

9. International cooperation and global solutions

30. The need for international cooperation and adoption of global standards, policy frameworks was a recurring theme throughout the conference.

31. Participants stressed the importance of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in that regard and called for parliamentary input and perspectives to be taken into account during the elaboration and negotiation of the instrument.

32. Mention was also made to the important key role played by the intergovernmental Global Forum on Migration and Development, which was currently co-chaired by Germany and Morocco.

10. Universal demands for parliamentary cooperation and solidarity

33. Participants emphasized the need for parliamentary cooperation and solidarity on all aspects of migration during the conference.

34. They welcomed the convening of the conference and suggested that further meetings should be organized by the IPU, PAM and other regional parliamentary bodies in the future, including a follow-up conference to promote further regional dialogue, cooperation and action. They stressed the importance of establishing a regional parliamentarians' network on migration.

35. Participants also called for IPU and PAM support in facilitating parliamentary implementation and oversight of the recommendations from the present conference and future events.

36. Lastly, they requested continued and expanded dialogue and cooperation with:

- Regional parliamentary bodies, notably the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe.
- Relevant international organizations, including the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Regional organizations, such as the African Union, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and regional economic communities and their parliamentary bodies, including, inter alia, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community, and the Arab Maghreb Union.

III. Call to action and way forward

37. The observations, conclusions and recommendations articulated at the conference constituted a clear call to action by parliamentarians. The recommendations as a whole constitute a broad way forward and form the basis of a plan of action for parliamentary engagement on safe, orderly, and regular migration, grounded in international human rights law and focused on building inclusive and cohesive societies.

38. The Rapporteur will assist the secretariats of IPU and PAM in the elaboration of a detailed plan of action for the way forward, which will be circulated as a guidance document for parliamentary action and cooperation to complement the IPU Declaration on *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*, adopted at the 133rd IPU Assembly, held on 21 October 2015, in Geneva.

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