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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 from 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

### RAPPORTEURS SUMMARY STATEMENT

By Patrick Taran, Conference Rapporteur<sup>1</sup>

#### The Overview

1. 164 participants, including parliamentarians from 26 national parliaments on all sides of the Mediterranean –and beyond—took part in the first Mediterranean Parliamentary Conference on migration on 16-17 November, 2017, in Malta. Participants also included officials and experts from regional parliamentary bodies in Africa and Europe, governments, United Nations specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society NGOs.
2. Titled **Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart and humane migration across the Mediterranean**, the conference conducted a sweeping review of the complexity of migration and refugee exodus into, across and from countries around the Mediterranean region.
3. The conference was organized in truly local-regional-global tripartite cooperation 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 presented dramatic stories of the situations and impact of migration in their countries. Many proffered passionate pleas for cooperation, solidarity and common solutions. Expert presentations provided reasoned analysis along with options for action. Topical sessions addressed labour migration dynamics, changing discourse around migration, refugee protection, border management, and addressing push factors of migration and development.
5. The forum privileged parliamentary contributions in frank and often passionate discussion. Representatives highlighted push factors of war and absence of decent living conditions in home countries; concerns for refugee protection, safety, and welfare; the long-standing and ever unresolved Palestinian refugee plight; concern for refugee and migrant children; need for gender specific responses to migrant and refugee women; and pleas for solutions backed by parliamentary action and cooperation across the region and beyond.

#### Observations, conclusions and recommendations in ten points:

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

6. Participants emphasized throughout the event recognition that parliaments are paramount actors in governance of migration. From the opening session, speakers highlighted the importance of parliamentary initiative to obtain ratification and implementation by their countries of the international Conventions concerning migration governance, protection of migrants and their families, and refugee protection and assistance, as foundations for governance under the rule of law. Specific references were made to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, relevant ILO Conventions, and the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees. In later sessions, parliaments referred to ratification of the Protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, as well as to relevant regional instruments.

7. The debate suggested the importance of referring to migration governance rather than migration management, noting that the broader term governance clearly invokes responsibilities of representative parliamentary lawmaking and the judicial functions of government, complementary to management functions of the executive, but necessary to ensure that migration –and societies– are governed with, by and under the rule of law.

## **2. Addressing causes**

8. Many parliamentary delegates emphasized that migration is a consequence of causal factors and it is these factors that must be addressed to ensure that migration is voluntary, safe, and rights-protecting.

9. Delegates highlighted a range of 'push' factors compelling migration. Particular emphasis was made on armed conflict and outright warfare displacing literally millions of people, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Concerns were raised about arms supply, military intervention and external support for internal combatants from many other countries in these situations of warfare, warfare that continues killing thousands of people and forcing displacement of hundreds of thousands more.

10. Participant assessments identified causal factors of poverty, lack of conditions for sustainable living, absence of decent life, lack of development and consequences of climate change-induced environmental destruction. Others spoke of a search for opportunity, for better life, while several presentations and comments urged recognition of 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. Multiple recommendations for action were proposed, among them urgent need for conflict resolution and seeking non-military solutions to conflicts that otherwise will remain eternal warfare. Material and financial support for development, increased investment, functioning democratic States, and regional economic integration were highlighted as long and short-term keys to resolving pressures pushing if not forcing people to leave. Unfortunately, reference to the importance of fully implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as the viable long term strategic approach was only evoked in passing.

## **3. Recognizing needs and demand for migration**

12. Complementing the imperative concerns around push factors was an increasing if still reluctant recognition of the large and growing migration demand factors characterizing all of Europe. and increasingly, countries on Southern and Eastern sides of the Mediterranean.

13. Speaker assessments underlined that, given technological, structural and demographic changes, migration is the essential element in maintaining viable skills and labour forces necessary to sustain productive, indeed simply functional, economies. It was noted that current immigration to the EU member states as a whole is nearly 5 million persons a year –the large majority arriving in regular circumstances and a vast majority filling jobs and providing skills and labour not usually available locally.

14. Recommendations echoed the evolving global assessments: in sum the need for ample and accessible safe, regular and rights-protecting channels for migration. Evoking that the majority of migration takes place within already established free movement regimes, mention was made of need to maintain and strengthen implementation of these.

#### **4. Refugee safe haven, protection, assistance**

15. The realities around the Mediterranean and beyond compelled particular attention to refugees, their protection, and to support for countries and peoples facing huge influxes of people seeking safe haven from warfare in neighbouring countries. As well, concerns were reiterated for the imperative of maintaining protection for and assistance to refugees throughout Europe, in context of Europe's professed principles of "liberty, democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law" and in contrast to discourse and actions of exclusion and rejection of refugees in particular, migrants in general.

16. Particular emphasis was raised on the situation of countries –and their peoples--confronted by and responding generously to huge influxes of refugees –far beyond any capacity to face alone. Those named were Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Serbia.

17. Recommendations called for upholding fully the implementation of the Refugee Convention and Protocol; for ensuring full and fair refugee determination procedures; for providing decent accommodation; and ultimately, facilitating integration in host countries.

18. Proposals echoed recommendations elsewhere: for all EU member countries to accommodate a fair share of refugees for resettlement (according to population, economic conditions, etc); for suspending Dublin restrictions requiring arriving refugees to apply for asylum and remain in overwhelmed first countries of arrival; and for maintaining operations that are saving lives at sea. While these were policy invocations, they were understood as recommendations for parliamentary action required to achieve them.

19. Particular recognition of the long standing, unresolved plight of Palestinian refugees was inevitably on the agenda. A particular recommendation put on the table highlighted that an inter-Parliamentary conference would be an important and timely response to reaffirm need for resolution and to engage parliamentary action.

#### **5. Changing the discourse**

20. The predominance of hostile and rejectionist media attention and discourse by political –even governmental—leaders, and consequent public attitudes, were a topic of intense concern at the conference.

21. While time permitted neither achieving a comprehensive analysis nor a program of action to *change the narrative* and move *from hostility to solidarity*, a number of suggestions were raised. These included demanding assertive leadership with a positive values and knowledge based discourse by parliamentarians, as well as by government officials, business leaders, communications media and other actors. Particular mention was made of the importance of

developing concerted national programs of action –as well as strengthening legislation—against racism and xenophobia and for non-discrimination and equality. Support was also recommended for *stop funding hate* campaigning and local efforts to facilitate contact and engagement between refugees, migrants and the peoples of host communities.

## **6. Inclusion, integration, equality, non-discrimination**

22. Several participants referred to the imperative of inclusion, non-discrimination, equality of treatment and integration as fundamental precepts for accommodating migrants and refugees in the communities, cities, societies and countries. These in turn were highlighted as essential to integration of migrants and refugees in communities, to their productive employment and to assure social cohesion in societies increasingly characterized by diversity.

23. While the agenda did not provide an opportunity to discuss this crucial area, parliamentarians nonetheless urged renewed attention to ensuring conditions and support for integration, to respecting identities of migrants and host communities alike, enabling inclusion and participation of all in the host communities and societies. Another recommendation was to empower independent authorities to monitor discriminatory acts and deal with complaints.

## **7. Education and training**

24. The discussion necessarily raised primordial issues of education and training as crucial push and pull drivers of migration –the lack of which results in marginalization, exclusion and alienation of many working age people, especially youth, in origin and destination countries.

25. Participants recognized that access to education, to training and to retraining are crucial elements to address the increasing global shortages of people with tertiary education and with vocational and technical skills –shortages indeed threatening economies and societies. And leading to loss of talent and education resources --"brain-drain," particularly from less developed countries.

26. Recommendations articulated included ensuring universal ratification across the region of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education; parliamentary advocacy for governmental allocation of increased funding for schooling and training –both technical-vocational and tertiary—everywhere, and enhanced efforts to harmonize education and skills training standards as well as to obtain recognition of educational attainment, skills qualifications and work experience obtained elsewhere.

## **8. Mobility versus control contrasts**

27. Major themes throughout the conference were the recognized need for accessible legal and regular migration channels contrasted with demands for effective migration control and restrictions in movement –at least of irregular migration.

28. An entire session of the conference addressed bolstering border protection and fighting trafficking in person and smuggling of migrants. Some questions were raised –without resolution-- about tensions between strengthening migration control and coercive measures and the ultimate benefits of free movement and more adequate regular migration channels.

29. Recommendations included enhancing regular migration systems and channels—as ultimately the resolution of the demand factor for recourse to smuggling-- and strengthening efforts to combat organized smuggling and trafficking operations and the criminal operators behind these –but not the migrants. Participants urged increased international cooperation among countries and between regions in fighting trafficking and smuggling.

## **9. International Cooperation and global solutions**

30. International cooperation as well as adoption of global standards, policy frameworks and were underlying topical themes throughout the discussion.

31. In addition to Conventions mentioned earlier, particular attention was given to the Global Compact on migration – with a clear recommendation for parliamentary input and perspectives in its elaboration and negotiation.

32. Mention was also made of the inter-governmental Global Forum on Migration and Development –currently co-chaired by Germany and Morocco.

## **10. Universal demands for parliamentary cooperation and solidarity**

33. Proposals, indeed demands for parliamentary cooperation and solidarity were universally raised throughout the conference. These demands both on each thematic topic and in principle as an overarching imperative.

34. The initiative of this conference was universally lauded; participants urged that IPU, PAM and other regional parliamentary bodies should be doing more such convening in the future.

35. Proposals included:

- A followup conference to continue building regional dialogue, cooperation and action.
- Convening a regional parliamentarians network on migration
- Calls for IPU and PAM activity and organizing to support parliamentary followup and implementation of recommendations from this event –and future consultations.

36. Parliamentarians urged continued and expanded dialogue and cooperation with:

- Regional parliamentary bodies, notably the European Parliament (EP), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
- Relevant international organizations, including ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNESCO, and UNHCR
- Regional organizations: the African Union, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and regional economic communities --and their parliamentary bodies—including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) among others.

## **Summary call to action and way forward**

37. As captured by the Conference Rapporteur, the observations, conclusions and recommendations articulated by this conference constitute a convergent *call to action* by the parliamentary participants. Put together, the recommendations constitute a broad **way forward plan of action** for parliamentary engagement on safe, regulated, rights-based migration contributing to sustainable and inclusive societies enabling well-being of all.

38. The Rapporteur will assist the secretariats of IPU and PAM to refine this statement with a detailed enumeration of recommendations into a *way forward* plan of action document. That report would be circulated as a guidance framework for parliamentary action and cooperation—in complement to the ***IPU Declaration on the imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*** endorsed at the 133rd IPU Assembly, Geneva, 21 October 2015.

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