



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE

الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

« Building on Dialogue »,

Presentation of the draft report and resolution

Prepared by Hon. Sonia Sanfona (Portugal)

Speech by Hon. Justyne Caruana (Malta)

IVth PAM Plenary Session, Istanbul, 24 October 2009

Mr Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Allow me to start with two special mentions. One goes to our dear friend Askin and her colleagues for the organisation of this event in Istanbul. And secondly I would like to thank Hon. Sonia Sanfona for her sterling work in PAM especially in the third Standing Committee.

Back to the Agenda it is now my pleasure to present to you the report of the Special Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures and Religions, which

was prepared by Hon. Sonia Sanfona from Portugal and who regretfully could not join us today.

The 3rd Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean established a Special Task Force on the Dialogue of Cultures and Religions in order to contribute and promote respect, mutual understanding - and I would dare to say “curiosity” – about our different but so similar cultures. This Special Task Force was also intended to promote pluralism and diversity among peoples of the Mediterranean.

On 12 June 2008, a meeting was held in Fez (Morocco) where members of the Special Task Force agreed to conduct a comparative report on national policies of the PAM States which would serve as the basis for sharing knowledge of existing and forthcoming policies and legislations concerning the promotion of dialogue and understanding. In Fez, the Task Force decided to draw up a questionnaire in order to gather information for the report. This questionnaire was drawn up by the University of Malta, which I take the opportunity to thank. In Fez, we also agreed to launch a programme of concrete actions to be implemented by PAM and its delegations. And this is what we now know as the “Fez Programme”.

The questionnaire’s principal themes requests information about ethnic and religious groups and the legal framework promoting tolerance,

pluralism and respect for diversity. A large number of PAM delegations have answered the questionnaire for which we are very grateful. These answers form the basis of the report before you today.

Following up on the implementation of the Fez Programme, the PAM launched the “Mediterranean Day” to be celebrated on 21st March, each year, in dedication to integration, unity and diversity. This year’s theme was “Shared Values – Shared Aspirations”. Many of you have contributed to events organised throughout the region and within your own parliament. In Malta, we marked the occasion with meetings at the House of Representatives.

I should also mention the launching of regional prize to promote cultural dialogue, in accordance with point (x) of the Fez Programme. PAM has instituted an award scheme to reward individuals, organizations and institutions for their commitment and achievement in promoting Mediterranean ideals. May I remind you that you may put forward names of such institutes of individuals from your respective countries if you so wish. Later today, we will in fact be awarding prizes to 4 outstanding organisations and individuals.

I would also like to mention, as did Hon Fedala, our Chair today, that while in Rome for a meeting of our 3rd Standing Committee last March, some of us met His Holiness the Pope Benectict XVI as well as officials from the Vatican. It was a very special moment. Men and Women of

different corners of the Mediterranean, of different beliefs and religions ... in Rome. Some of our colleagues presented His Holiness and His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of the Holy See beautiful editions of the Coran. Some of us went to Assisi as well, it was another special moment. We must thank the Holy See for welcoming us but we must also thank the Italian delegation and our Secretariat for making this possible. We hope that, next time, we may meet such spiritual figures in other corners of the Mediterranean.

Now, let me mention a few of the actions taken by some of our Members:

Morocco has awarded a student for his thesis dissertation on the Mediterranean, while Bari, Italy, held the first ever International Competition to find the “ Journalists of the Mediterranean.” Finally, the PAM Secretary General, Dr Piazzzi, addressed a delegation of students from the University of Naples on Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Mediterranean on 9th March this year.

We have had meetings with representatives of the Arab League, and we are strengthening our ties with the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Arab Maghreb Union who are represented here today as well as the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (PUIC) whose Secretary General is here with us today and who will address us in a short while.

Some of the challenges ahead of us:

- On information exchange and the questionnaire, despite the number of important initiatives that PAM has taken to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we need to continue to work toward knowing more about each others' national policies and practices. Therefore we need to pool our knowledge to enable us to know where our strengths and weaknesses lie. I invite the delegations who have not yet responded to the questionnaire to do so in the coming weeks so that we can gather a full picture of the situation in our region.
- On inter-parliamentary diplomacy, we need to continue our actions to contribute to mutual understanding among politicians but also among our citizens. As parliamentarians, we have that special link with the citizens of the region, and we therefore must put it to good use.
- Initiatives on the educational level have to continue to be a priority for promoting cultural and religious diversity, the starting point for such policies is that “we need to live together”, and in harmony as much as possible.

- On cultural spaces: education takes place at schools and at home, it is therefore equally important that education about cultural and religious diversity finds space in non-formal learning spaces, such as youth associations, sports, cultural and religious centres..etc
- While furthering PAM's cooperation with regional/international actors, we need to carry out further research into the work of other influential organisations such as the European Union, the Organisation for Security and co-Operation in Europe and the UNESCO who have already worked hard on the similar issues. We also need to ensure that our work reflects a balanced pan-Mediterranean vision and forge closer links with organisations in the south of Mediterranean, like the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALESCO).

Finally, you will remember that Hon. Sanfona had suggested drafting a kind of *Commitment Letter* to be signed by each PAM delegation and whereby it accepts a commitment to bringing intercultural and inter-religious dialogue before its youth parliaments (where they exist), and undertaking to identify the specific actions taken by national governments, civil society and NGO's to contribute to the intercultural and religious dialogue.

Well, this *Commitment Letter* was endorsed in Lisbon during the meeting of our Standing Committees. All the delegations present in Lisbon signed it. We have the text ready for signature for all of you today, and I would like to therefore ask the Head of your Delegation to come forward and engage his/her own parliament to nurturing this intercultural dialogue in the coming years. During the coffee break, you are kindly invited to sign this letter.

While thanking you for your attention , I request the Assembly to adopt this resolution and report and sign the letter of commitment.

Thank you