

Resolution of the committee of the regions on the VI Euro-Mediterranean conference on 2 and 3 December in Naples

(2004/C 73/15)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament to prepare the VI Meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Naples, 2 and 3 December 2003 (Barcelona VI) ⁽¹⁾; Communication, which the European Commission has consulted on the Committee of the Regions on 5 November 2003,

having regard to the conclusions of the Conference, initiated by the Committee of the Regions, of local and regional representatives on 31 October 2003 in Livorno on a New Euro-Mediterranean Area;

having regard to its Opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours (CdR 175/2003 fin) of 9 October 2003;

having regard to its Opinion on Regional and local authorities and the European Union's strategy for the Mediterranean (CdR 123/2000 fin) of 20 September 2000 ⁽²⁾;

having regard to its Resolution on Decentralised cooperation and the role of regional and local authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (CdR 40/2000 fin) of 16 February 2000 ⁽³⁾;

having regard to the request by the European Commission of 5 September 2003 to provide an exploratory opinion assessing the progress made in the Barcelona process, analysing the functioning of the association agreements in force with the partner Mediterranean countries and providing insights, drawn from the experience of the CoR, on the development of cooperation between EU regions and regions of the southern Mediterranean countries or between the southern Mediterranean countries themselves;

The Committee of the Regions adopted the following resolution unanimously at its meeting on 20 November 2003

The Committee of the Regions

1. Strongly stresses the need to give a new impetus to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, considering that the economic, social and democratic development of the countries of the Mediterranean Basin constitutes a key issue not only for the States of the Southern side of the Mediterranean but also for the future of the enlarged European Union itself.

2.1. Emphasises the particular importance of the democratic dimension of this partnership. Welcomes therefore the proposed establishment of a new Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

2.2. Regrets the minuscule share of funding allocated to the Mediterranean countries from the horizontal programmes under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which has taken over from the 'MEDA democracy' programmes since the introduction of MEDA II.

3.1. Calls for a closer participation of local and regional authorities, since they are amongst the main players in realising an area of freedom, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean regions. This participation should be ensured through the establishment of a body representing the local and regional authorities within the institutional Euro-Mediterranean framework.

3.2. Furthermore, the CoR will offer to share the experience acquired by its members as regards the contacts established with local and regional authorities of accession countries in the course of the enlargement process.

4.1. Recalls the conclusions from the Ministerial meeting in Crete on 26 and 27 May 2003, which insisted on the fact that 'the local and regional authorities could also contribute significantly to the dialogue between cultures and civilizations through a decentralized cooperation and through town-twinning actions, and, in this context, be closely involved in this mission which constitutes an essential part of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership'.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2003) 610 final, 15.10.2003.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 22, 24.1.2001, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 156, 6.6.2000, p. 47.

4.2. In this context, stresses the need to provide for a proper legal basis for ensuring support to town-twinning actions.

4.3. Welcomes the launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue between cultures and civilizations, which is an essential element for the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, and requests to be directly involved in its activities.

5. Requests that the decentralised Euro-Mediterranean cooperation be made one of the pillars of the Barcelona process, and calls in this context for the establishment of guidelines for an interregional and transnational cooperation for regional and local authorities around the Mediterranean. In this framework, focus should be given to specific training programmes for administrative capacity building.

6. With regard to the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area ⁽¹⁾, considers that the enhancing of regional and sub-regional infrastructures in the fields of telecommunication, transport, energy, research and education is a necessary complement.

7. In addition, special attention should be given to social policies with local impact especially those targeting children, young people and women.

⁽¹⁾ The Barcelona Declaration establishes the objective to form, by the year 2010 as a target date, a Euro-Mediterranean Free-Trade Area.

8. Tackling the challenge of immigration in the Mediterranean area requires a strong EU immigration policy, based on social inclusion of immigrants. Furthermore, local and regional authorities in the Mediterranean area must be enabled to address the humanitarian issues related to the movement of refugees and asylum seekers. As regards the promotion of cooperation with the countries of origin together with the coordinated fight against illegal immigration, the CoR welcomes in particular the Commission's proposal on a legal framework and increased appropriations for a new instrument of co-operation with third countries in the area of migration ⁽²⁾.

9. Considers that the citizens on both sides of the Mediterranean must be made more aware of the aims of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. To this end, recommend that a specific information and awareness programme be drawn up and adopted, involving the local and regional authorities on both sides of the Mediterranean.

10. Gives its support to the various initiatives from cities and regions, which through their organisations, directly or indirectly, are preparing contributions to the VI Euro-Mediterranean Conference, dedicated to giving a full democratic dimension to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

11. Calls upon the Italian Presidency to actively involve it in the VI Euro-Mediterranean Conference.

12. Asks its President to forward the present resolution to the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.

⁽²⁾ COM(2003) 355 final.

Brussels, 20 November 2003.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Albert BORE