



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 20 May 2007

10154/07

**COMPET 184
MED 17
EDUC 107
RECH 173**

NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Competitiveness Council

Subject: Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Education and Research (Cairo,
18 June 2007)
– Presidency briefing

At their eighth Conference held in Tampere (Finland) in November 2006, the Foreign Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership under the Barcelona process (EU Member States, eight Arab countries, Turkey and Israel) agreed to hold the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Education and Research. The meeting was held in Cairo on 18 June 2007, was co-chaired by the current Council President, Ms. Annette Schavan, and the Egyptian Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, Professor Hany Helal and Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research. It was attended by the ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Denmark, Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Israel, Lebanon and Syria and representatives of the ministries of Higher Education and Research of the remaining Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (27 EU Member States and 10 Mediterranean partner countries). The Ministerial Conference was held in connection with the first Euro-Mediterranean University Conference (Alexandria, 10 to 12 June 2007), whose task was to chart the course for future Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in higher education.

The most important outcome of the Conference was the adoption of joint conclusions in the form of the "Cairo Declaration" (see annex), setting out specific measures to step up cooperation. In the joint declaration, the Euro-Med ministers reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the relevant objectives of the five-year work programme of the Barcelona Summit and of the Association Agreement, as well as the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans. They also agreed that Higher Education, Research and Innovation should be defined as a priority sector within the Euro-Med Partnership.

Euro-Med ministers committed to create a Euro-Mediterranean Research and Higher Education Area and endorsed the Slovenian initiative for a Euro-Mediterranean University through a co-operation network of existing universities.

The existing Monitoring Committee for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in RTD will be complemented, as appropriate, with the creation of an expert group so as to cover Higher Education, with a view to implementing the conference objectives, deliverables and actions. They will meet periodically, or as required, to review the achieved progress and report to the Euromed Committee, not later than the second semester of 2008.

The second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research, will be held in 2009 to assess the achievements made in this regard, as well as promoting further co-operation.

**TOWARDS A EURO-MEDITERRANEAN
HIGHER EDUCATION & RESEARCH AREA
First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference
on Higher Education and Scientific Research
(Cairo Declaration - 18 June 2007)**

Almost twelve years have elapsed since the launching of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), which constitutes with its main pillars (Political / Economic/ Socio-Cultural as well as Migration, Social Integration, Justice and Security) a unique framework for dialogue and co-operation between the two shores of the Mediterranean, based on co-ownership and common interest.

This partnership aims at achieving a common area of peace, stability and prosperity, as well as ensuring a better knowledge and promoting mutual understanding among peoples across the Mediterranean.

To date, the issue of education and RTDI did not receive the sufficient attention it merits in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Only at the Barcelona Summit, Euromed Partners have recognised for the first time in the Five-Year Work Programme the crucial role of education for political, social and economic development, as well as the major importance of the research, innovation and Human Resources Development as a key to modernization. The Monitoring Committee for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation (MOCO) in RTD was initiated and meets regularly since 1996 providing valuable input to bi-regional S&T Cooperation, *inter alia* to the Framework Programmes.

In this vein, the 8th Euromed Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed in Tampere (27-28 November 2006) upon the importance of convening the First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Scientific Research, which represents a landmark step in this regard.

Building on the objectives and actions stipulated in the Five-Year Work Programme of the Barcelona Summit and on the goals of the Catania Declaration 2006;

Recognising the importance of literacy, primary, secondary, higher education and technical and vocational education and training for the development of the human capital of the region;

Underlining the necessity of reducing disparities in educational achievement between Euro-Mediterranean countries under internationally recognized education standards, as well as facilitating the mobility and employability of students and researchers and supporting the economic development of the region;

Emphasising also the urgent need to support a labour market based reform of Education, including Technical, Vocational Education and Training as well as convergence to frameworks of qualifications;

Investing the opportunities provided by new information and communication technologies that allow bolstering distance learning and permanent training systems in the Euromed area;

Acknowledging the necessity to structure the collaboration between high quality training institutions and Centres of Excellence in order to uphold the development of a Euro-Mediterranean research area;

Stressing the need to link the industrial and productive sectors through cooperation in the scientific and technological fields, based on the conclusions of the Sixth Euromed Conference of Ministers for Industry, and in particular those related to the promotion of innovation and competitiveness;

Underlining the importance of Euromed cooperation in supporting the development and modernisation processes in higher education, especially through the TEMPUS programme, as well as fostering the RTDI in cooperation with Mediterranean Partner Countries, in particular through the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7); Welcoming the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window and the prospects offered by the Euromed scholarship scheme for university students and higher education staff from Partner countries endorsed by the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in 2005, which will add to the existing funding opportunities both by European Union Member States and Mediterranean partners;

With the aim of upholding the EU's commitment at the Barcelona Summit to increase significantly funding devoted to education in the Mediterranean region through EU assistance and Mediterranean partners' national plans and raise education as a priority sector within the ENPI;

In this regard the Slovenian initiative for the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean University will constitute an important step forward through a cooperation network of existing universities;

The Euromed Ministers reaffirm the commitment to implement the relevant objectives of the Five-Year Work Programme of the Barcelona Summit and of the Association Agreement, as well as the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans. They agree that Higher Education, Research and Innovation should be defined as a priority sector within the Euromed Partnership.

This Conference aims at:

A. In Higher Education:

❖ **Creating a Euromed Higher Education Area:**

1. Approximating the Euromed Higher Education Systems;
2. Promotion of a Permanent Euromed University Forum;
3. Promoting Educational Innovation and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT);
4. Promoting mobility through exchanges of higher education students, teachers, researchers and administrators;
5. Enhancing participation in the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window.

B. In Research and Innovation:

❖ **Towards the creation of a Euromed Research Area:**

1. Modernizing Science and Technology, R&D policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries;
2. Supporting Institutional Capacity Building, including human and research infrastructure development;
3. Enhancing the participation of the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the Framework Programmes while taking into account their particular needs, as well as areas of mutual interest and benefit between EU and Mediterranean Partner Countries;
4. Promoting innovation in the Mediterranean Partner Countries and enhancing exploitation of the RTD outputs by society and industry;

5. Favouring mobility of researchers;
6. Enhancing participation of the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the "People" Specific Programme of FP 7.

With a view to contributing to the above-mentioned objectives, Ministers commit to undertake appropriate measures to realise the following actions:

1. **Approximation of the Euromed Higher Education systems with relevance to the Bologna process and ECTS system.** This could be achieved through the following actions:
 - a. Structured cooperation to promote the comparability and readability of Higher Education systems in the Euromed area, notably through the further development of the current MERIC network, aiming to facilitate the recognition of merits;
 - b. Cooperation, including technical assistance through existing schemes to establish Education and Training paths based on systems of comparable transferable credits;
 - c. Support Mediterranean Partner Countries in the establishment of comparable Quality Control and Accreditation schemes;
 - d. Develop - parallel to higher education reform - initiatives to support market-based reform in the field of Technical, Vocational Education & Training (TVET);
 - e. Institutional Capacity Building and Human Resource Development by supporting joint teaching and training programmes for academic, technical and administrative staff;
 - f. Cooperation, including through existing schemes to increase the relevance of the awarded degrees to the Mediterranean Partner Countries labour market needs.

2. **Support the implementation of the Euromed University Forum objectives**, notably:
 - a. Promotion of knowledge and information society;
 - b. Improvement of quality of education and research;
 - c. Encourage collaboration and dialogue among higher education institutions;
 - d. Increase the efficiency of higher education institutions;
 - e. Increase the involvement of civil society in education.

3. **Exploit the use of innovative methodologies and ICT to enhance Higher Education**. This could be achieved through the following actions:
 - a. Cooperation between Euromed Distance universities;
 - b. Cooperation aiming at the creation of a Mediterranean Digital Library and portal including translation between Euromed languages.

4. **Enhancing participation to a Euromed Scholarship Scheme in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window**, including by providing a more flexible framework and by studying the possibilities of joint funding to allow increased participation.

5. **Support Euromed Higher Education Programmes**. This could be achieved through the following actions:
 - a. Sustain the TEMPUS Programme with a more strategic orientation through university networks and participation of Higher Education ministries;
 - b. Strengthen the participation of the Mediterranean Partner Countries' universities in the Erasmus Mundus Actions.

6. Integration of the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the European Research Area.

This could be achieved through the following actions:

- a. Promotion of links between centres of excellence in the Euromed region;
- b. Promotion of joint networks of Excellence in fields of mutual interest, e.g. renewable energy, biotechnology, environment, etc.;
- c. Promotion of regional initiatives in RTDI;
- d. Promotion of contact points in Mediterranean Partner Countries' Universities and research Institutes to disseminate information and promote participation in FP7;
- e. Promotion of National funds in Mediterranean Partner Countries for Scientific Research and Development;
- f. Explore the possibility of co-finance by Mediterranean Partner Countries in FP7 for coordinated activities;
- g. Enhance the participation of Mediterranean Partner Countries in FP7;
- h. Cooperation in capacity building in:
 - i. Formulating research projects;
 - ii. Particular areas of mutual interest.

7. Promote innovation, knowledge-sharing and its return on the Industry and economy in Mediterranean Partner Countries. This could be achieved through the following actions:

- a. Promotion of the creation of national and regional innovation funds within the Mediterranean Partner Countries to support innovation and exploitation of research outputs by industry;
- b. Implementation of the 'Euromed Innovation & Technology Programme', which aims at developing innovativeness in Business firms (esp. SMEs);
- c. Promote the participation of Mediterranean Partner Countries in activities related to innovation, including under the EU Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP);
- d. Develop Capacity building in R&D and innovation management.

8. **Enhance Effective Mobility in the Euromed region.** This could be achieved through the following actions:
- a. Establishing Mobility Centers and Portals as well as promoting mobility contact points in the Mediterranean Partner countries;
 - b. Establishing national programmes of mobility and open access to incoming mobility from EU Member States to Mediterranean Partner Countries;

In this framework, Ministers make a call to facilitate exit and entry procedures, including visa procedures for students, researchers and teachers among Euromed countries.

9. **Attain Brain Circulation and Knowledge Dissemination.** This could be achieved through the following actions:
- a. Support to expatriate researchers through networking opportunities and allowing periodic research sabbaticals to countries of origin;
 - b. Promotion of a regional network of Institutes for Advanced Studies & Research, through which European Academic Institutions cooperate with selected Mediterranean Partner Countries' Universities to form the best human capital;
 - c. Address the issues linked to brain circulation, notably through strengthening the return phase in the different mobility programmes.

Implementation & Follow-up:

The existing Monitoring Committee for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in RTD will be complemented, as appropriate, with the creation of an expert group so as to cover Higher Education, with a view to implementing the conference objectives, deliverables and actions. They will meet periodically, or as required, to review the achieved progress and report to the Euromed Committee, not later than the second semester of 2008.

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