

Conference of the Mediterranean Commission

Conclusions (Monaco - April 2006)
adopted by the Barcelona Central Council (2 June 2006)

Since its inception in 1996, ELEC's Mediterranean Commission has undertaken the task of critically assessing the progress of the Barcelona process. This process owed its launch in 1995 to three major challenges:

- ◇ the persistence of regional conflicts around the Mediterranean
- ◇ the economic under-development of countries in the southern Mediterranean
- ◇ the danger of the rise of religious extremism in these same countries.

The Barcelona process consisted of three pillars to meet these challenges:

- ◇ a political and security pillar, aiming to define a common area of peace and stability, and to contribute to the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict
- ◇ an economic and financial pillar, the main aim of which was to establish a free trade zone by 2010, first achieving the conditions under which free trade could be a real factor for progress in the southern Mediterranean
- ◇ a social, cultural and human pillar to encourage understanding across cultures as well as exchanges at the level of civil society between the countries concerned.

For the topic of its 7th Conference held in Monaco on 28 and 29 April 2006, ELEC's Mediterranean Commission chose "Education, training and technology as levers for economic development in third countries in the Mediterranean". This theme is situated at the point where the second and third pillars of the Barcelona process intersect, since education in its broadest sense and the new information and communications technologies represent both tools for economic and social development and an improved means of spreading information between neighbouring countries around the Mediterranean and of greater mutual understanding of their cultures. The speakers who expounded this theme in Monaco included experts from Morocco and Tunisia.

As a conclusion to this conference the Mediterranean Commission wishes to stress the importance to third countries in the region of universal, sustainable and financially affordable access to these new technologies because of the opportunities they offer to:

- ◇ spread the "digital culture" in geographically isolated or economically undeveloped areas, on condition of a conscious effort by public authorities in partnership with private enterprise. Tunisia offers a good example of this
- ◇ to use this spreading as a tool for education in schools and in lifelong learning (*on-line learning*)
- ◇ to facilitate technology and skills transfers
- ◇ to open the way to greater contact with the world, as well as to strengthening civil society and fostering gradual democratisation.

Nevertheless, the talks and discussions in Monaco have made the Mediterranean Commission aware of the extent of the problems to be resolved in the third countries of the Mediterranean region, and of the obstacles that must be overcome if the digital culture is to be spread under propitious conditions. The commission noted in particular:

- ◇ the still high illiteracy rate in some Arab countries, where the number of illiterate people is increasing in absolute terms
- ◇ the insufficient representation of women in economic, social and political life
- ◇ the rather small numbers of jobs being created to absorb a rapidly growing labour force

- ◇ the mismatch between education and jobs, partly due to a lack of coordination between education and employment policies, and which simultaneously produces a shortage of qualified workers and middle management staff, and significant unemployment among university graduates
- ◇ the brain drain towards developed countries, which could reduce the economic and social return on investment in education in the Southern countries.

The Mediterranean Commission further notes that education and training, necessary though they may be to economic and social development, cannot guarantee it. In consequence it stresses that other conditions for economic growth be introduced where they are lacking, not least:

- ◇ greater openness to foreign investment
- ◇ an institutional, administrative, legal and financial framework which encourages such investment and the growth of enterprises
- ◇ the development of appropriate transport infrastructure
- ◇ a more determined approach to the implementation of the *Agadir Process* aimed a much more advanced regional integration of markets.

Finally, it recommends:

- ◇ that, in the setting of priorities for third countries of the Mediterranean, greater attention be given to the quality of education and to the capabilities of teachers
- ◇ that education and training be better adapted to the job market requirements, inter alia through schemes of sponsoring of schools by businesses, which have been successful in some countries, and by the consultation of business associations and chambers of commerce regarding the definition of teaching programmes and the reform of education systems
- ◇ that efforts be made to narrow the democratic deficit which at present prevents a consistent strategy for developing human capital and the active participation of civil society in the reform of education systems.

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