

**Statement by the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies,
Hon. Gianfranco Fini
at the Plenary Session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly
(Amman, 13 March 2010)**

On behalf of myself and Renato Schifani, President of the Italian Senate, I am pleased to convey the greetings of the Italian Parliament, which is about to assume the annual Presidency of the Assembly under the rotating schedule provided for in the Rules.

Allow me to first congratulate the Presidency of the Parliament of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for the success of today's meeting. Expressing my heartfelt thanks to our host, President Abdulhadi Majali, I undertake to develop the positive results achieved in all sectors of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Italy was present at the birth of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, which was recognised as an institution of the Barcelona Process at the Ministerial Conference held in Naples at the conclusion of the Italian Presidency of the European Union in December 2003.

Beginning in 1996, the Italian Parliament also launched, alongside the European Parliament, a series of initiatives to develop cooperation between the Parliaments of the countries involved – for example the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Women Parliamentarians – that have all been appropriately merged into the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

For these reasons, in my inaugural address as President of the Chamber of Deputies on 30 April 2008, I specified the Presidency of the EMPA as one of the international priorities of my term, in the firm belief that the Mediterranean is an increasingly strategic component of peace and stability.

It is, therefore, a great responsibility for the Parliament and the country that I represent to head this Assembly, which has established itself as the most dynamic and active institutional forum of the newborn Union for the Mediterranean, proving its ability to meld courage and effectiveness.

In taking on this new role, I am heartened not only by the quality of the work of the previous presidencies, but also the friendship that my parliamentary colleagues have always shown towards the Italian delegation. I also know that I can count on the unanimous consensus of all political forces in my country, which, regardless of the coalition to which they belong, strongly support the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Thus, I consider myself committed first and foremost to strengthening the institutional profile of the EMPA within the Union for the Mediterranean, with a view to establishing a permanent liaison mechanism between the governmental and parliamentary dimensions. This is the primary goal that I will pursue at the second summit of the Union for the Mediterranean, which the Spanish Presidency will host in Barcelona at the beginning of June and which we all hope will produce a decisive revival of the Union itself.

I also intend to continue the important initiatives already begun by the Jordanian Presidency and developed further here, such as the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Development Bank. Only a fully fledged international financial institution can act as a flywheel to drive economic activity in the area and, in particular, support small and medium-sized enterprises in need of facilitated credit in order to interact with the opposite shore of the Mediterranean.

Naturally, the Italian Presidency will lend its full support to the committees and working groups that pursue the activities of the EMPA, also drawing on the cooperation of the other members of the Bureau, whom I greet and thank in advance for their help.

I trust that Italy's contribution can help us achieve additional results in three areas of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation of great political, economic and social importance.

First and foremost, I refer to the promotion of the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and political pluralism. In this field, we have too long been adversely affected both by the insistence on exporting one's own model and by isolationist defences of uniqueness. In truth, there is common ground to build upon, namely the democratic participation of citizens. Such participation does not grind to a halt after election day, but rather must accompany the exercise of parliamentary representation every day, a task greatly facilitated by new communication technologies.

Second, the environment is an unavoidable challenge: the protection of marine habitats, sustainable use of the resources of the sea and safeguarding biodiversity require us to develop strategies that will be effective only if they are pursued together. Otherwise, we risk having a Union for the Mediterranean without the Mediterranean!

A challenge of perhaps even greater importance for the future is represented by migration and the integration of immigrants into the social fabric of host countries. We must be able to conceive of immigration as a resource, to seize it as a historic opportunity for economic improvement, civil growth and cultural osmosis. If

successful, we will have triggered a fruitful circulation of resources and ideas across the Mediterranean.

One ambitious general goal that this Assembly should set itself is to develop a comprehensive political dialogue through the formation of a common body of parliamentary practice.

The dialogue that we seek is not the ritual exchange of political pleasantries, where each of us recites our lines by heart, but rather the mutual recognition of a capacity to analyse, recommend and critique that can be forged only if it is underpinned by equal dignity and full trust.

It is an incontrovertible fact that, despite the changing fortunes of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the EMPA has always preserved dialogue between parties in conflict. It has been exemplary in many cases as the only institutional forum in which the parliamentarians of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority have never ceased to meet and talk.

This is the added value of politics that the Italian Presidency intends to build upon, steering parliamentary proceedings towards the path of peace, learning to coexist and acknowledge shared values.

So often – too often - we have heard that Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has been blocked by the crisis in the Middle East peace process: an excuse often deployed as a convenient alibi for the perpetuation of old rivalries and isolation.

On the contrary, the very intensification of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation could well spur – through the achievement of concrete results - a substantive revival of efforts to achieve regional peace and integration.

This is the challenge that the parliamentary dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership must take up: to propose a reversal of perspective in a Union for the Mediterranean that sometimes gives the impression of getting bogged down in questions of detail, threatening to undermine the enthusiasm that it has engendered from the very outset.

The Mediterranean has not been the centre of the world economy for some centuries, and has perhaps seen its geopolitical importance diminish over time. It is however the beating heart to which a large part of humanity looks in search of its historical and spiritual roots. This is a responsibility that weighs on the peoples who inhabit the region now, on either shore.

Gaining greater cognisance of this should prompt us all to work to create a "sea of peace" in which there is no room for extremist threats - a source of instability and

insecurity - but instead allows the values of dialogue, tolerance and coexistence to blossom.

It is undoubtedly reassuring that the Mediterranean today is seeing the emergence of new generations with the aspiration to build an area of security, peace and shared prosperity.

This Assembly represents an extraordinary human and political resource to sustain this aspiration, a forum in which mutual understanding has overcome stereotypes, in which a desire for cooperation and integration has been nurtured, with the conviction that we share a future as well as a past.

The EMPA appears to be the best foundation for imparting new impetus to the Union for the Mediterranean. It is therefore an honour for me and for my country to be able to contribute to this effort in the coming year with all your support.