



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN



Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights

JOINT MEETING
Friday, 21 May 2010
10.00 - 13.00
15.00 - 18.00

Hotel Sheraton Maslak - Istanbul

Tokia Saïfi, Chair of the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights, opened the meeting.

She welcomed this first joint meeting between the Political Committee and the Committee on Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean.

She said that, because Eduardo Cabrita (Portugal) had been prevented from coming at the last minute, the meeting would be co-chaired with Miloud Chorfi (Algeria) and Walid El Khouri (Lebanon), Vice-Chairs of the Culture Committee.

She thanked the Grand National Assembly of Turkey for its hospitality and highlighted the role played by Ms Zeynep Dagi, head of the Turkish delegation.

She welcomed the choice of Istanbul as a venue, since it was the European Capital of Culture in 2010, and recalled that the Alliance of Civilisations had been founded on the initiative of Turkey and Spain.

Zeynep Dagi, chair of the Turkish delegation, welcomed the members of the Assembly's Political and Culture Committees. She recalled her country's very strong commitment to intercultural dialogue and the dynamic nature of its foreign policy, which Minister Davutoglu would outline during the morning.

1. Adoption of draft agenda

The Chair confirmed that the morning's working meeting would consist of an exchange of views on Turkey's place on the world stage, which would be attended by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. The afternoon's meeting would cover intercultural dialogue.

The agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of minutes of meeting of 12 March 2010 in Amman

The minutes were approved.

3. Chair's announcements

The Chair said she was deeply disappointed at the likely postponement of the second UfM summit, which was due to be held in Barcelona on 7 June, noting that the lack of a satisfactory solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was once again impeding the UfM's functioning.

She restated her wish to have the Parliamentary Assembly fully confirmed in its role as the UfM's democratic arm. She also recalled the Assembly's decision, made in Amman, to change its name to 'Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM'.

The members of the two committees unanimously endorsed these statements.

4. Exchange of views on 'Turkey's place on the world stage'

The Chair welcomed the following speakers:

- Professor Ehmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey,
- Hélène Flautre, EU Co-Chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee,
- Ishak Alaton, founder of the Open Society Foundation and of the TESEV think tank,
- Hakan Altınay, senior member of the Brookings Institution,
- Ünal Ceviköz, Ambassador, Deputy Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

a) Ehmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs:

The minister's speech and exchange of views with members may be summarised as follows:

The minister stated that the Mediterranean and Turkey had played a leading role throughout history and that Mediterranean civilisation had always kept up with the times.

Turkey had decided to promote peace by focusing on security for all, economic interdependence and political and intercultural dialogue.

The objective of having no problems with neighbours guided Turkish foreign policy, which the minister presented using the image of concentric circles. A regional problem could become a global problem.

- Domestically, Turkey had a political, economic and social model which was constantly changing, seeking a balance between rights and duties, as was the case with all democracies. The Kurds, like the other minorities in the country, had the same rights as all other citizens.

- In the broader region, Turkey did not forget its geographical position or its history, holding talks, mediating and concluding agreements with its partners. Meetings had been held with the representatives of a hundred countries in a twelve month period, including with the Caucasian countries, Georgia, Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Greece, and dozens of agreements had been concluded.

Iraq, Syria and Israel were also a focus. Turkey wanted peace in the Middle East and was offering its assistance.

The agreement on uranium enrichment for civil purposes recently offered to Iran by Turkey and Brazil was an illustration of this.

- With the European Union, Turkey was continuing negotiations, showing its willingness to open up, including to Cyprus, with which it was prepared, together with Northern Cyprus, to sit around the table if the other parties were prepared to do so. The minister regretted the fact that the United Nations plan had been rejected.
- As regards the world as a whole, Turkey was alive to all the important issues. The minister gave some examples of the agenda for the coming days: a conference on Somalia in Istanbul, an Alliance of Civilisations summit in Rio, a seminar on Palestine, an ASEAN security conference, a Turkish-Arabic business forum, a meeting on Balkans-South Mediterranean relations and a Mercosur event in Argentina.

In conclusion, the minister confirmed his country's desire to continue efforts to remove threats to peace.

b) H el ene Flautre (EP, F), EU Co-Chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, considered that Europeans viewed the issue of Turkish EU membership from too limited a perspective. She was in favour of a long-term view and endorsed the Minister of Foreign Affairs's presentation.

c) Ishak Alaton, businessman and founder of the Open Society Foundation and of the TESEV think tank, recalled the conditions under which Turkey had opened up to Europe and the world in the past few years.

d) Hakan Altınay, senior member of the Brookings Institution, and Ambassador  nal Cervik z added to the Minister of Foreign Affairs' speech regarding Turkey's bilateral and multilateral approach.

The Chair closed the first working meeting at 13.05.

The session reopened at 15.10 for the second working meeting.

5. Union for the Mediterranean – Intercultural dialogue

The Chair recalled the previous debates in 2006 and 2008, which had taken place in a context of extreme tension, and drew attention to the conciliatory statements which the Political Committee had succeeded in delivering. The debate would be continued during the meeting, for the first time with the members of both the Political and the Culture Committees.

Walid El Khoury (Lebanon), Vice-Chair of the Culture Committee, underlined, in his opening address, the role which the Parliamentary Assembly should play within the UfM. He was in favour of a strong message on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recalling that there could be no solution as long as injustice continued.

He proposed that the committees should make specific proposals to the Heads of State or Government. The Culture Committee recommended that students should be able to obtain visas more easily.

The Chair proposed that the meeting should proceed in the following three stages:

- an introductory presentation by Wassyla Tamzali (Algeria), defender of women's rights,
- speeches by the Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Mahmoud Erol Kilic, and by Renata Pabsch, director of cultural projects at the Anna Lindh Foundation,
- finally, three first-hand accounts, from Samir Abdallah, film-maker, Christian Chesnot, journalist, and Elif Sapak, writer.

a) Wassyla Tamzali (Algeria) was a lawyer, writer and defender of women's rights in the Mediterranean area, for which she had fought for a long time in UNESCO. She said that a degree of hypocrisy and confusion surrounded the concept of culture. A secularised world was confronted with a world which had made culture sacred. Women's social status was being presented as a quasi-religious status. She said that culture was all about freedom; there could be no culture without freedom.

As regards dialogue, she found it more appropriate to talk of a dialogue between peoples rather than dialogue between cultures.

Finally, she highlighted the concept of 'otherness' as opposed to 'difference'.

The necessary bridges would be built by the peoples themselves, which was why no new borders should be drawn in the Mediterranean area.

b) Speeches by OIC and Anna Lindh Foundation representatives

- Professor Mahmoud Kilic outlined the workings of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC, of which he was the Secretary-General. It had been set up in 1999 to strengthen the ties between the members of the OIC, established 30 years earlier. He advocated permanent, open dialogue to bridge the gap between hearts and minds. Dialogue should be the means of settling disputes in the third millennium.

- Renata Pabsch spoke of the mission assigned to the Anna Lindh Foundation under the Barcelona process. She reported on the key issues discussed at the forum on intercultural dialogue, which had brought together more than a thousand participants in Barcelona in March.

The major topics of research included mutual perception and the role of the media (under preparation).

In the ensuing debate, the following spoke:

- Hélène Flautre (EP), who noted that progress had been made and that certain issues could now be addressed. Dialogue should continue.

- Raimon Obiols (EP), who stressed the importance of listening, which was an indispensable requirement for genuine dialogue.

- Mr Chorfi, Mr Korichi and Mr Mezgui (Algeria), who expressed regret at the fact that words were not always followed by deeds, particularly as regards the issuing of visas, and spoke about the feeling of injustice in the Muslim world in relation to the assertion of fundamental principles.

- Mr Hilal (Egypt) stressed Islam's commitment to tolerance.

- The Palestinian delegation, which deplored the ongoing repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and noted once again that Vice-President Hassan Kreishi was absent since he had been prevented from leaving the country by the Israeli authorities.

Wassyla Tamzali wound up debate, calling on everybody to fight for positive ideas rather than to attack each other over differences.

The Chair thanked the speakers.

c) First-hand accounts

The Chair gave the floor to the three guests in turn.

- Christian Chesnot, journalist at Radio France (Paris), expressed concern about the freedom of the press on both sides of the Mediterranean. Objective restrictions were increasing, reflecting a degree of uneasiness in the corridors of power. He took the view that a balance could be struck, which should, in particular, reflect the development of new technologies.

- Samir Abdallah (France/Egypt), a film-maker, was the ideal representative of the Union for the Mediterranean: his was father Egyptian, his mother Danish, and he was now French. He stated that there could be no real dialogue between dominant and dominated groups. He stressed that freedom of expression had a price. As regards the Mediterranean, he called for equality between the peoples of the north and the south. There could be no real freedom of expression without the possibility of communication.

- Elif Sapak, a Turk, was a popular writer inspired by both East and West, and her novels were at the top of the bestsellers list. She had personal experience of restrictions on freedom of expression, and had come to speak about them. She stressed that in a time of nomadic behaviour and migrations, writing should remain a means of exchange that sheds light on the future.

The ensuing exchange of views turned into a verbal confrontation between several delegations (Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria) and the Israeli delegation over the situation in the Middle East.

The Chair insisted on keeping to the agenda and called on members to demonstrate the tolerance they advocated.

Wassyla Tamazali concluded by encouraging participants to step up action to promote culture in their home countries, and, in particular, to support women and intellectuals.

6. Conclusion

The Chair decided to postpone the exchange of views on the topics to be covered by the next recommendation, and asked members to send her their suggestions.

Zeynep Dagi, head of the Turkish delegation, quoted Amin Maalouf, who had said that human beings were individuals, and called on the participants to stand up to injustice, in particular injustice to Palestinians.

Miloud Chorfi (Algeria), Vice-Chair of the Culture Committee, stated that he was satisfied with the joint meeting, at which the profile of the speakers and the intensity

of the discussions had highlighted the difficulties of co-existence between peoples, but had also given cause for hope.

The Chair, Tokia Saïfi, thanked all the speakers, who had demonstrated throughout the day their commitment to tolerance and dialogue.

She welcomed the joint initiative of the Political and Culture Committees and conveyed her thanks once again to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and to Zeynep Dagi, the committee' hosts in Istanbul.

7. Next meeting

The Chair reminded the members of the Political Committee that their next meeting would be in Brussels on 30 September 2010.

The meeting closed at 18.02.
