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DELEGATION TO THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

MINUTES

Meeting of 12 March 2008

STRASBOURG

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The meeting opened at 17.40 with the President, Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering (Chairman) in the chair.

1. Adoption of draft agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of the minutes of 16 January 2008

The minutes were adopted.

3. Chairman's announcements

The President informed the members of the constitutive meeting of the EP's Working Group on the Middle East held in Strasbourg on 20 February 2008 as well as the positive outcome of his visit to Egypt (on 24-25 February 2008) following the EP's Resolution of 17 January 2008 on the Human Rights situation in that country.

The Members took note of the EU Presidency's statements on the situation in Gaza and Southern Israel (issued on 28 February and 02 March) and on the terrorist attack in Israel on 06 March (issued 07 March), and which are in accordance with the EP's position as outlined by the President in his statement on the situation in Gaza on 10 March 2008.

4. Debriefing on the EMPA Bureau meeting on 28 February 2008 in Athens

The President also informed the members on the decisions taken by the EMPA Bureau at its meeting on 28 February in Athens:

- the Bureau agreed, in principle, that the EP would take over the EMPA Presidency for the next year (March 2008-March 2009). This is still subject to approval by the Plenary (and has not yet been accepted by Jordan, who had been proposed by the Southern-shore Parliaments);

- subject to approval by the Plenary, the new members of the Bureau representing the Southern Mediterranean Parliaments would be Jordan and Morocco;

- at that Bureau meeting, due to the absence of candidates to the post in the EMPA Bureau allocated to the EU National Parliaments, the Greek Parliament expressed willingness for its mandate to the Bureau to be renewed. This would entail a slight modification to the Rules of Procedure through the addition of the word "in principle" to the Rule which states "the term of office of the members of the Bureau shall be four years; this mandate is not *in principle* renewable".

The President informed members of the Italian Parliament's intention to request a post in the EMPA Bureau. This news, however, remained to be confirmed.

- the President had proposed that the EP be represented in the Bureau of each of the Assembly Committees, the proposal was accepted by the other Bureau members;

- it had been decided to propose to the Assembly that the ad-hoc Committee on Women's

Rights become a permanent standing Committee and that a new ad-hoc Committee for Environment and Energy be created.

The President also informed Members that the EMPA Bureau had decided to ask the Political Committee to prepare a draft declaration on the building of new settlements in Abou Daes / Jerusalem and on the anti-Islamic film "Fitna", made by the Dutch MP Geert Wilders.

Mr. Hammerstein recalled the 2006 recommendation adopted by the EMPA Plenary requesting the "*creation of an ad-hoc Committee, including wise persons and experts from both sides of the Mediterranean to strengthen Inter-cultural dialogue and mediation*" and calling on the "Anna Lindh" Foundation to take appropriate action to this effect. He asked what follow-up had been made by the Anna Lindh Foundation to this recommendation.

Several members (Mr. Carnero Gonzales, Ms. Saifi) were of the opinion that the discussion on the freedom of expression and the dialogue of cultures and civilisations should remain within the framework of the EMPA Parliamentary Committees and that wise persons and experts be invited to share their views with the members of the appropriate committees.

Mrs Saifi informed members that the EMPA Political and Culture Committees had proposed the holding of a joint meeting and suggested that the topic of inter-cultural dialogue and the anti-Islamic cartoons be the main topic of that meeting.

The Secretariat was requested to contact the "Anna Lindh" Foundation regarding the follow-up to the 2006 recommendation. The President suggested that the issue could be discussed at the EMPA Bureau in Athens.

5. Preparation of the fourth EMPA Plenary session, Athens, 27 - 28 March 2008

(Vice-President Rodi Kratsa in Chair)

The Chair informed members that the Greek Presidency had invited a number of high level speakers to address the Plenary, but confirmation of their participation was still to be confirmed. The only confirmation received to date by the Greek Presidency of the EMPA was the participation of the Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis.

The participants were also informed that the main topic for the plenary sitting on 28 March in Athens would be "Energy and environment: perspective for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation"

Members wishing to take the floor during this debate were asked to inform the Secretariat in advance.

6. Any other business

Mr. Carnero Gonzales emphasised that were the European Parliament to take the EMPA Presidency from March 2008 to March 2009, this would be of great significance in the context of the current debates on the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean as a complement to the Barcelona Process, in order to ensure that EMPA, via the EP Presidency, would play a role in these discussions. He stressed the importance of a parliamentary dimension to this project and that the existence of EMPA should be taken into account in the context of the proposal to be presented in Paris in July 2008.

Ms. Saifi informed the participants that the EMPA Political Committee, at its meeting on 28 January 2008, had proposed that a fact-finding delegation of this Committee be sent to the Gaza Strip and the Israeli border towns in order to assess the developments in the region following the Annapolis Conference. The suggestion had been approved by the EMPA Bureau on 28 February 2008 and proposals are awaited as regards the membership of this delegation and its timing.

Mrs Kratsa suggested that the proposal for the creation of a "*Euro-Med Woman of the Year Prize*" should be put on the agenda of the next EMPA-Bureau meeting in Athens. The proposal for the creation of such a prize had been made in the Recommendation of the ad-hoc Committee on Women's Rights adopted by the EMPA plenary of March 2007 in Tunis (paragraph 53).

The meeting closed at 19.00.