

# EMHRN ACTION PLAN

2004-2008

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The Barcelona Process and the EMHRN: A Recent Regional Framework, a New Human Rights Approach.*

### a. The Barcelona Process

Eight years ago the governments of 27 countries (the Partners), and the European Union, agreed to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership initiative (EMP) with the aim of creating a zone of peace, prosperity and stability in the Mediterranean region. They founded the EMP on the assumption that the way to achieve these goals was by means of economic development, increased political dialogue, social and cultural exchange and the building of democratic institutions, based on respect for human rights and a strong, independent civil society.

In Barcelona the Partners committed themselves to act in accordance with the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They agreed to develop the rule of law and democracy in their political systems and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression and freedom of association, and to combat racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Furthermore, they recognized the important role civil society can play in contributing to the Euro-Mediterranean development process by promoting better mutual understanding and closer co-operation between peoples.

Several intentions of the Barcelona Declaration were since made legally binding in bilateral Association Agreements between the EU and seven South Mediterranean partners<sup>1</sup> Article 2 of which states that *the respect for human rights and democratic principles underlies their policies and is an essential element of the agreements*. Also the accession of Cyprus and Malta to the EU and pre-accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey are based on human rights criteria, i.e. the Copenhagen Criteria requesting that stability of institutions has been achieved guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities<sup>2</sup>.

### b. The EMHRN

The EMHRN was established in January 1997 in response to the Barcelona Declaration and the establishment of the EMP upon the initiative of North and South based human rights organisations. Since then it has grown into a network of more than seventy members representing human rights organisations and institutions, as well as individuals, from over twenty countries in the region.

Its overall objective is to

- Support and publicize the universal principles of human rights in the Partner States and the whole of the Middle Eastern region as expressed by all international instruments on human rights and as expressed by the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995.
- Strengthen, assist and coordinate the efforts of its members to monitor compliance by the Partner States with the principles of the Barcelona Declaration in the field of human rights;

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<sup>1</sup> Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Morocco, the PNA, and Tunisia. The 12<sup>th</sup> non-EU partner, Syria being still negotiating an agreement with the EU while Libya remains in the position of observer

<sup>2</sup> Countries wishing to become members of the EU are expected not just to subscribe to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, but actually to put them into practice in daily life.

- Support the development of democratic institutions, the promotion of rule of law, human rights and human rights education in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Since its establishment the EMHRN has built its activities on networking and organisational methodologies aimed at information and dissemination; dialogue and advocacy; capacity building and human rights education.

It has succeeded in creating broad credibility within civil society in the region as well as with representatives of the EU and EMP institutions and has established a strong profile in relation to the EuroMed human rights agenda while influencing human rights policies on a regional level.

On thematic issues the EMHRN published innovative reports and created regional synergies in members' work. A pool of experience now exists upon which to build future work.

Work on country level did also produce significant results in relation to promotion and protection of human rights although conducted on an ad hoc basis

The following Action Plan looks forward into the period ranging from 2004 to 2008. It describes the values upon which the EMHRN builds its activities and the human rights and socio-political environment of the Barcelona process. Finally, it outlines the main tracks of work and methodologies of the EMHRN in the next years to come.

The Plan of Action should be adopted by the AGM in Malta 5-7 December. Thereafter, under the responsibility of the Executive Committee, the EMHRN will draft a detailed program of activities aimed at implementing the Action Plan according to the Malta Assembly's recommendations.

## 2. VALUES

### *Networking and Cooperation, Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and Democratisation in the EuroMed Region*

The EMHRN is a network of independent human rights organisations and institutions, as well as individuals, from all parts of the EuroMed region who adhere to universal human rights principles and are convinced in the value of cooperation and dialogue across, and within, national, cultural, social and economic borders. The EMHRN membership is genuinely committed to intercultural exchange and learning, building on dialogue and promotion of mutual understanding. It is committed to support joint actions at a variety of levels both thematically and geographically that touch upon the EuroMed region.

EMHRN membership is rooted in humanistic thinking, human rights values and human rights instruments as they spring from the international conventions and humanitarian law. It is rooted in democratic principles which comprises the promotion rule of law, good governance, gender equality, and the recognition that all human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and interrelated, as it is expressed in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993

The EMHRN seeks to promote a vibrant civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Its constituency is rooted in NGOs, social movements and academia that adhere to democracy and transparency that have a real presence on the ground and are concerned with situations of injustice, discrimination and inequality.

The EMHRN is committed to pro-actively linking-up to the international human rights community and civil societies beyond the EMP framework in a broader regional European, Mediterranean, Arab, and Middle Eastern context.

### 3. HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE CONTEXT OF THE BARCELONA PROCESS

#### *Building Opportunities for Human Rights and Democracy in a Conflict Ridden and Unequal Region*

As mentioned above, the EMHRN was founded in the wake of the Barcelona Conference, November 1995, and the potentials thereby created for regional civil society cooperation, human rights and democracy promotion.

Events following Barcelona 1995 have challenged the assumptions upon which the EMHRN was founded and necessitate analysis in order to define future lines of action:

#### **a. The problems**

Thus, the human rights situation in the South of the Mediterranean has, with few exceptions, not improved since Barcelona 1995. In the eight years time span members of the EMHRN have continuously documented how in parts of the region governments erode press freedoms and use torture and extra-judicial executions; in several countries freedom of association is under attack or severely hampered and women's rights are denied; in some cases freedom of movement is arbitrarily restricted, and more generally it is systematically impeded.

The tragic events of September 11 2001 in New York have led to a reinforcement of the trends mentioned above. Regimes have seized the legitimate need to fight terrorism as an opportunity to emphasise order and security while the democratic space have been reduced and human rights restricted in line with the previous ratification by Arab states of the Arab Convention against Terrorism. Within the EMP dialogue on human rights remained on an inter-governmental level and key governmental players showed reluctance to involve civil society.

As such, human rights protection standards have been under attack in the wake of the 11<sup>th</sup> September. UN legitimacy has been challenged by the occupation of Iraq with the support of governments of present and future EMP countries.

The Oslo process did not produce peace and sub-regional integration as hoped for but brought the regional, political dimension of the Barcelona process to a stalemate. The breakdown of the Palestine-Israeli peace process and the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and concomitant gross violations of international human rights standards have led to the radicalisation of policies and to a dramatic spiral of lethal force used against the civilian populations. The incapacity of the EU and the EMP contribute pro-actively to stop occupation and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law deceived many who initially welcomed the Barcelona Declaration.

Thus the EMP has not yet developed according to the lines set out in Barcelona 1995. Hereditary monarchies or autocratic regimes still dominate political life, and government approaches to human rights remain governed by internal and external security considerations. The Arab region lags behind the major part of the world in terms of democracy, public liberties, women's participation in public life and production of knowledge (as shown by UNDP Arab Human Development Reports). Adding to this are neglects of religious and cultural minorities basic rights.

Furthermore, the scarcity of resources and increased economic inequality between the North and the South has become sources of social tensions.

Given the already widened development divide between the North Mediterranean countries and their Southern neighbours in political, economic and social terms, the current eastward expansion of the EU may further marginalize the South Mediterranean countries, and the EU's Eastern involvement and expansion may strain its commitment to the EuroMed Partnership. Thus, the latest EU policy papers on the Wider Europe see the Southern rim through the prism of a security

zone rather than a region with a dynamic and a future of its own. In general the regional dimension of the EMP has low priority as compared to the bi-lateral dimension.

In this overall atmosphere, extremist, fundamentalist and inward looking nationalist movements are on the rise, displaying ambivalent attitudes towards democratic values and individual rights. Protection standards of refugees and the right to seek asylum have deteriorated. Racism and discrimination towards third country nationals has grown and found mainstream political support in support in political parties.

#### **b. The possibilities**

Nevertheless, the Barcelona process remains a relevant framework for Mediterranean cooperation and has shown that human rights, democratic principles and civil society possess a legitimacy that transcends the inter-governmental dimension of the Partnership.

Although civil society remains weak in the South as press freedoms, the freedom to form political parties, trade unions and NGOs are muzzled or hampered, human rights defenders have nevertheless placed possess a strategic position in society.

The defence and promotion of people's individual and collective dignity is at the heart of human rights promotion and protection and combines values related to equal access to justice and resources, non-discrimination, the respect of the individual by the state, conflict solution based on international law and human rights standards, and transparent and participatory decision making.

Before and since 1995, human rights activists have defended spaces for free debate and thinking, for opposition to totalitarianism and occupation, that place them in a key position to bridge between various social forces, including dialogue with various (often radical) social movements and thus a potential for bringing these into the orbit of democracy.

In support thereof, the EuroMed process has *de facto* become an important platform for civil society to meet, learn from one another, form joint projects and formulate recommendations and policies addressed at the governments. Civil societies have shown eagerness and willingness to meet and forge alliances across the region in a common quest to make the Euro-Mediterranean zone one of common prosperity, development and peace in the service of human beings.

In addition, the EMP has made noteworthy progress by establishing a number of mechanisms foreseen in the Barcelona Declaration. All non-EU Partners, except Syria, have now signed Association agreements with the EU and committed themselves to uphold human rights and democratic principles in internationally, legally binding agreements. Malta and South Cyprus have adopted the Copenhagen criteria and Turkey is bound by accession negotiations linking it committing it to abide by these in the medium or long term. Furthermore, the MEDA programs are managed on the basis of country strategy papers and national indicative programs. Taken together, there are far more instruments in place for human rights promotion than at the birth of the EMP and by extension a year later, the EMHRN.

This development has been accompanied by changes in the EU institutions' approach to human rights and democracy in the Mediterranean. The latest Communication on the human rights and democratisation by the Commission is promising and broadly adopts recommendations made by the human rights movement over the past years. Also the European Parliament continued to hold the human rights banner high in EU dealings with the Mediterranean.

In the future, the EMHRN will support the spaces created and carved out by human activists in the region and encourage the broadening of these by investing in the windows of opportunity created by the Barcelona process and beyond. It will do so with a high awareness of the need to rehabilitate international legitimacy following the changes induced in the region, and beyond, after 11<sup>th</sup> September and the US lead war against Iraq.

### c. Future perspectives

The EMHRN will focus its future actions on the implementation of the broad range human rights instruments created since 1995. In this regard it will strengthen its focus on the crucial role played by individual EMP states in effective delivery of human rights agendas on the ground. As EU enlargement will result in a clearer 'division of spheres of interest' within the EU, the EMHRN will particularly focus on countries that have substantially more to say than others in Mediterranean affairs.

Thus, the EMHRN will in the future focus more on the bi-lateral levels of the EMP while building on its achievements vis-à-vis Brussels. It will do so by addressing and using systematically the mechanisms of the association agreements, and monitoring key governments' performance within the human rights field in coordination with local civil society.

The EMHRN has experienced an eager and interest of civil society and the human rights movement to invest itself in thematic work on a regional basis and to build networks of cooperation. It will seek to strengthen regional synergies by bringing people together in working groups and in joint projects while exploring how to strengthen civil society work in priority fields that remain uncovered. In this context it will strengthen its internal coordination work and deepen its organisational support structures in the South.

The two levels above will constitute EMHRN support structures for work at the national level, for the protection of human rights activists and their capacity to develop into key actors for democracy development. In this regard it will promote capacity building on issues relating to the EMP mechanisms, redress of injustice, discrimination and inequality.

## 4. CONCRETE STEPS AND METHODOLOGIES 2004-2008

### a. Awareness raising and information

Following the analysis presented above one important dimension of EMHRN work will be awareness raising and information about the human rights situation related to EuroMed governments, institutions, NGOs and the public at large

The EMHRN will raise awareness about the human rights and democracy dimension of the EU and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the international human rights standards and humanitarian law to which most governments of the region have adhered.

It will inform and raise awareness among governments, institutions and the public at large about the need for promoting and protecting human rights in the EuroMed region and beyond, including the need to restore international legitimacy.

It will inform about the pioneering work done by human rights defenders and about the key role they have in promoting democracy and in protecting the rights of the excluded and disadvantaged.

In support of awareness raising and information work the EMHRN will use the following general methodology:

#### *Interface, annual report and media*

It will continue developing its office in Brussels as an important interface between EMHRN members and the EU and EMP institutions: It will bring member reports and concerns to the EU and EMP and organise meetings between members and EU/EMP; inform members about the development of the EU and EMP opportunities offered for protection and promotion work within the field of human rights. The interface function will focus on particular key events such as Association Council

and Committee meetings, working group meetings under the Association Agreements, preparation of country strategies and indicative programs, European Parliament hearings, visits of official delegations, etc.

The work of the interface, and of the EMHRN at large, will be facilitated by the development of a Media strategy.

Key activities of the EMHRN will be:

- The publication of biannual human rights reports evaluating EU and EMP compliance with their human rights commitments as compared to how the human rights situation develops in the region with a particular attention on countries that have a major saying in the EMP
- Initiating a support and advice group of human rights concerned media people
- Employ a coordinator in charge of external communication
- Further develop the EMHRN web site and a user friendly weekly news bulletin including press releases and briefs about the human rights situation in the region

#### **b. Research, advocacy and dialogue**

EMHRN research, advocacy and dialogue work is closely connected to awareness raising and information. In this regard the main focus of the EMHRN will be to bring life into the human rights instruments and mechanisms of the EU and EMP on a bi-lateral level, a regional level and beyond.

On a regional level the EMHRN will focus on monitoring and providing inputs to the recommendations the *EU Commission Communication on Reinvigorating Human Rights and Democracy in the Mediterranean* that to a large extent echoes the inputs of the human rights movement during the past year. This includes elements such as promoting national human rights action plans; the systematically addressing human rights issues in bi-lateral relations; promoting the role of women; promoting human rights mainstreaming within the MEDA programs; and the systematic dialogue between the EMP institutions and with civil society. In addition the EMHRN will bring attention to perspectives offered by establishing a human rights committee within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and by anchoring the activities of the EuroMed Foundation on Dialogue between Cultures and Civilisation in human rights.

#### *Implementation of human rights instruments and in-depth reporting*

The EMHRN will continue maintaining relations with representatives of EU and EMP institutions and key players of the Barcelona process while developing particular attention to:

- Addressing the bi-lateral association councils, committees and related working groups
- Publishing the above mentioned bi-annual human rights assessment of the EU and the EMP including focus on key countries, governments and civil society in the Barcelona process
- Commission and publish in-depth research reports on uncovered fields that are crucial to the development of human rights in the EuroMed partnership. Particular fields identified are:
  - Justice
  - Economic and Social Rights
  - Migration and Refugee Issues
  - Minority rights

#### **c. Capacity building and education**

Information, awareness raising, advocacy and dialogue within the field of human rights and of democratisation are best built on solid knowledge, organisational structures and deep-rooted values.



The EMHRN will consolidate and strengthen initiatives aimed at promoting a human rights culture in the EuroMed region and support members' capacity to act within the framework of the EuroMed partnership.

#### *Training, seminars and working groups*

It will:

- Organise reflection seminars on key EuroMed human rights and democracy issues (such as Islam and Human Rights)
- Seek to enforce members' capacity to deal with, and strategise in relation to, major and sudden political changes (as were the 11<sup>th</sup> September and the War in Iraq) on the basis human rights and democratic perspectives by organising meetings for members and other key actors when important events occur
- Organise training and reflection workshops that springs from EMHRH priority fields, for example the human rights dimension of the EMP and its mechanisms; Legal advise and fair trial methodology; Economic and social rights; etc.
- Cooperate closely with the EuroMed Human Rights Foundation that, amongst other, aims at enforcing human rights defenders' organisational capacity
- Strengthen the capacity of members to work on key human rights issues by supporting the development of effective working groups, in particular on Freedom of association and the independence of civil society; Human rights education; Women's rights; Justice; Palestine; and the Kurdish question
- Promote human rights education as an integral and crosscutting activity among its members, in particular by supporting the agenda of the Human Rights Education Working Group

#### *Web Site and Human Rights Education (HRE)*

More specifically, within HRE the EMHRN will support:

- Publication and dissemination of the EMHRN HRE framework
- A focus on the relation between Islam and the West
- Publication of specialized education resources (photo packs, readers, issue based educational resources) linked to EMHRN priorities, in particular about the understandings of human rights within Islam and the West; and about issues related to EMHRN priority areas (such as Women taking action; The Kurdish question; Economic and social rights, etc.)
- Bi-annual Human Rights Summer Schools aimed at developing capacity and methodologies on HRE within the EMHRN membership with a focus on youth
- Further develop the EMHRN web site (see also above)
- Dialogue with governments on developing HRE curricula within the educational system, for example through national human rights action plans.

#### **d. Networking, solidarity and promoting participation**

Networking and participation are key elements in promoting solidarity, dialogues and synergies across borders in the EuroMed region.

#### *Strengthening internal communication*

The EMHRN will as a matter of priority proactively encourage the participation of women and young people in all its activities. It will also encourage the adherence of migrants and refugee organisations to the EMHRN.

It will actively support member organisations in taking the lead on EMHRN priority policy issues by drawing-up cooperation agreements establishing responsibility areas and allocating necessary resources for activities.

It will strengthen and deepen communication and networking between members by employing a coordinator for internal communication and by placing a secretariat staff member in a South-based member organisation.

One activity will be to actively promote bi-lateral and multi-lateral communication and proactively seek integration of different agendas within the EMHRN and giving priority to projects that are driven by members and where joint partnerships are sought.

By extension the EMHRN will put demands on the members that they comply with membership obligations by taking active part in the EMHRN and by informing members and executive bodies about the activities relevant for the EMHRN mission and mandate

A core activity of the Network will be to establish and support working group activity in the fields mentioned above while feasibility of developing working groups on the question of migration and refugees, on economic and social rights and on minority rights will be actively explored.

#### *Protecting Human Rights Defenders*

An integral part of the EMHRN mission will be to promote solidarity between members and mainstream protection of human rights defenders in its activities:

The EMHRN will provide specific support to members in countries where civil society is particular weak or under attack.

It will systematically send solidarity missions and trial monitoring teams when the human rights situation endangers members' and their work. In these cases it will seek to mobilise the international human rights community and inform the public about and to activate the instruments of the Barcelona process, i.e the bi-lateral association agreements, etc.

#### *Networking*

The Network will strengthen cooperation with the international human rights movement and pro-actively forge alliances with civil society on a human rights agenda in relation to EuroMed and Arab Civil Forums and the Mediterranean, European and Global Social Forums

Finally, it will proactively seek to establish and build effective links with human rights organizations in the new accession states and broader Middles East, in particular Iraq or states in transition towards democracy.

## **5. EMHRN NETWORK STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTING BODIES**

#### *Strengthening transparency and participation*

In general the EMHRN will continue developing its internal democratic structures by holding a General Assembly every two years as well as regular Executive Committee meetings in-between the AGMs. The publication of internal reports will continue to be an integral part of EMHRN work including the issuing of internal newsletters and briefs.

The supreme decision making body of the EMHRN will be the General Assembly that will have the power to deliberate on all issues relating to the objectives of the Network. An important part of its mandate will be to adopt overall policies, strategies and action plans of the EMHRN.

Subject to the authority of the General Assembly and in between meetings of the General Assembly the Executive Committee will conduct the general policies of the Network in consultation with the members. The EMHRN will over the next period ensure that the EC members are provided necessary resources to pro-actively fulfil their mandate on a daily basis.

Main areas of activity will rest with working groups and lead agencies that aim at developing member capacity within EMHRN priority areas and at developing EMHRN agendas and bringing these further.

In general, thematic focused activities should be implemented under the responsibility of the member organisations dealing with the relevant issues when they have the backing and support of more than one member organisation in more than one country.

Finally, role of the Secretariat will be to facilitate the development of the Network. It will be responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the agenda of the Network in partnership with the member organisations. It will function as a support agency within the Network in the fields such as communication, translation, preparation for meeting and seminars, documentation etc., and will have responsibility for developing core communication needs within the Network, to the governments, institutions, academia and donors and the public at large.

By-laws presenting the organisational functioning of the EMHRN will be published when initiating the present action plan.