



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

Meeting of the Executive Committee of the EMHRN Tunis, 24-26 February 2012

Minutes – approved

The Executive Committee (EC) of the EMHRN held a meeting in Tunis February 24-26, 2012. Discussion at the meeting focused on recent development in the region, the agenda of the regional seminar on human rights, preparations for the General Assembly to be held in Copenhagen May 31 to June 3, the new Strategy, and the organizational restructuring of the Network.

Coinciding with the meeting, a EC delegation, accompanied by the President of the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), met the President of Tunisia, the President of the Constituent Assembly and the Minister of the Interior on February 23-24. On February 25, the delegation, this time accompanied by the Secretary-General of the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH), visited the Ouardiyya holding centre near Tunis where foreign nationals whose papers are not in order are detained.

PARTICIPANTS

Executive Committee (EC) of the EMHRN:

Kamel Jendoubi (President), Lone Lindholt (Vice-President), Maysa Zorob (EC member), Michel Tubiana (EC member), Magaly Thill (EC member), Wadih Al-Asmar (EC member) and Marie Lavrentiadou (EC member).

Secretariat:

Marc Schade-Poulsen (Executive Director) and Caroline Rey (Executive Secretary, rapporteur).

Other participants:

February 25: Peter Marinus Jensen (consultant)

Absent:

Moataz El Fegjery (Treasurer) and Emrah Seyhanlioglu (EC member) – excused. Danial Saoud (EC member).

AGENDA

1. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda of this meeting
2. Political discussion on recent development in the region
3. EMHRN, EuroMed Non-Governmental Platform & Regional Consortium of Civil Society
4. The human rights situation in Tunisia: meeting with Tunisia's civil society
5. Preparations for the General Assembly and the Seminar
6. Elections to the Executive Committee and candidates
7. Membership applications
8. Finalization of the Strategy ahead of the General Assembly
9. Organizational structure
10. Position of the Executive Director
11. Report of the Secretariat
12. Financial report of the Secretariat, including fundraising
13. Press release
14. Miscellaneous



1. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda of this meeting

Moderator: Kamel Jendoubi

The agenda was approved with some minor changes concerning the schedule of the sessions. The minutes of the EC meeting in Athens 11-13 November 2011 were also approved.

Decision:

- The minutes of EC meeting in Athens 11-13 November 2011 are approved

Documents:

- 1.1. Agenda (for approval)
- 1.2. Minutes of the EC meeting in Athens 11-13 November 2011 (for approval)

2. Political discussion on recent development in the region

Moderator: Michel Tubiana

The EC members exchanged information on the current human rights situation in the EuroMed region, particularly regarding:

The overall situation: The South is entering a new era ushered in by Tunisia, where everything is in flux. Legal proceedings against several human rights organizations are still continuing and there are concerns regarding the results of parliamentary elections that saw the Muslim Brotherhood, but also the Salafists, make important gains. In the North, leaving aside looming elections in some countries, Europe is facing serious challenges at a moment when there is no political cohesion.

Morocco, where a EMHRN mission went in February: The ongoing constitutional reform has positive aspects, including official commitments to human rights instruments and the concept of participative democracy. On the other hand, the socio-economic climate is very tense and clashes between demonstrators and police forces are frequent. Regarding the rights of women, the EC is concerned that the dialogue with the authorities is insufficient; they have cancelled a number of meetings that had been scheduled with actors of the civil society on that issue.

Spain, where both human rights and economic rights are being undermined: a overview of a depressing situation was made by the EC - lack of heating in schools, a crumbling health system, privatization and deterioration of public services, changes to the labor code to make lay-offs easier, violent break-up of a student demonstration, which has provoked new demonstrations.

Greece, where the political system is in crisis: Traditional bipartism is being challenged by the people but also by deputies from the two major parties who have blocked a number of bills submitted by the majority group. The population wants general elections as well as the cancellation of the national debt. Unemployment and poverty have risen dramatically in the wake of this devastating socio-economic climate. The EC wonders how the civil society will react.

Palestine, where Israeli colonization is continuing despite condemnations by the European Union. The Director General of Al Haq is still being prevented from leaving the country. The Network has just published the EU confidential report that could serve as a useful advocacy tool. The critical stance of the EU regarding Israeli action was underlined.

Lebanon, which finds itself in an uneasy situation and is waiting anxiously to see how the situation in Syria will evolve: The EC is concerned that a long period of instability might set in (neither peace nor war).

The position that the EC should take regarding the declaration to be forwarded to the Friends of Syria who are organizing an international meeting in Tunis on February 24. There is consensus among the members of the EC that the EMHRN work on Syria is highly valuable and that the Network comes up as a strong voice on this issue in Europe. The Network condemns the massacres perpetrated in Syria and calls for sending humanitarian aid.

3. EMHRN, EuroMed Non-Governmental Platform & Regional Consortium of Civil Society

Moderator: Magaly Thill

EuroMed Non-Governmental Platform:

Michel Tubiana explained that the Platform has difficulties organizing its General Assembly due to financial difficulties but that it still intends to hold its GA and seek candidates to run the organization. He suggested that the Network should remain on the Board in order to keep its place and influence within the Platform, but it should not get involved in the running of the organization.

Regional Consortium of Civil Society:

As a follow-up on discussion on this issue at the Quartet meeting last January 30, Marc Schade-Poulsen explained that the EMHRN wished to withdraw from the Consortium because it is in disagreement with the Consortium's lack of a political approach. However, in order not to precipitate the closing of the Consortium by formally withdrawing (its contract would be canceled if the Network were to withdraw), the Network then decided to remain in the Consortium as a "passive" member.

The EC members then discussed what would be the consequences of the Network formally withdrawing from the Consortium and how this could be done without this action being prejudicial to both the Consortium and the Network's image. It was agreed that the EMHRN should meet with the European Commission in order to inform them directly of its decision to withdraw from the Consortium and explain to them why. Subsequently, an email would be sent to the Consortium officially advising them of the decision.

Lastly, Marc Schade-Poulsen informed the EC members that the Network has been asked by IEMed to join a newly-formed Consortium. The members discussed the suitability of joining that new entity. There was a consensus that the mandate of the EMHRN might preclude such a move because the Network would then become a service provider to the European Commission. Therefore it was decided to decline the invitation of IEMed while remaining available on a consultative basis if the need arises.

Decisions:

- The EMHRN will not renew its membership of the executive office of the Platform but will remain a member of the board of directors
- Kamel Jendoubi will meet representatives of the European Commission in Brussels on March 19 or 21, 2012 and will inform them personally of the Network's decision to withdraw officially from the Consortium.
- The EMHRN will not accept the offer of IEMed to join the new Consortium.

Documents:

- 3.1 Civil society letter

4. The human rights situation in Tunisia: meeting with Tunisia's civil society

Moderator: Wadih Al-Asmar

The meetings planned with representatives of Tunisia's civil society were cancelled due to time constraints.

Day 2 - February 25, 2012

5. Preparations for the General Assembly and the Seminar

Moderator: Marie Lavrentiadou

The EC members discussed at length the programs of both the Seminar and the General Assembly. They based their discussion on the documents *5.1 Draft Program of the seminar* and *5.2 Draft Program of the General Assembly*, that were based on the comments made during the last EC meeting in Athens 11-13 November 2011.

Some of the main points of the discussion:

Seminar:

It has become imperative to identify high-level discussion contributors and session leaders in order to ensure the success of the seminar. Contributors will be asked to prepare a briefing note and circulate it among the participants ahead of their intervention. We will need to temporarily assign someone either from the EMHRN or from outside, who will work full-time on the preparation of the seminar, in particular to identify potential discussion contributors.

A round table discussion was held in order to identify potential contributors.

Comment on session 2: topics 2 and 3 should be merged since they are closely linked.

In general, it is advisable to make a distinction between a plenary session, where greater emphasis is put on presentations and where discussion contributors address the participants longer, and workshops, where greater emphasis is put on interaction between participants and where discussion contributors act more like facilitators.

Furthermore, it was agreed that there would be no conclusions drafted at the closing of the seminar; instead the teachings of the seminar will be included in the final declaration of the GA.

The EC members agreed that they will come up with and discuss a list of potential discussion contributors at their next meeting in Barcelona on March 31, 2012. In that context, a restricted distribution list will be prepared for the EC.

General Assembly:

The Gender Equality policy paper will be discussed both during the presentation of the activity report and during the discussion on the new Strategy.

Regarding the three workshops, having in mind the need to strengthen the feeling of appropriation of the Strategy by the members and to ensure greater cohesion inside the Network, it has been agreed to focus the three topics on the main lines of the Strategy: 1) regional approach; 2) country approach; 3) methodology (training, advocacy, etc.). The goal here is embracing a participatory approach that will allow us to determine if the solutions proposed in the Strategy correspond to the expectations of the members.

There was some reservation concerning the country approach. Discussion on this matter continued during session 8 on the new Strategy.

Decisions:

- In the coming weeks, Marc Schade-Poulsen will hire someone whose main responsibility will be getting in touch with potential discussion contributors for the seminar.
- The members of the EC will exchange names of potential contributors ahead of the meeting in Barcelona March 31.
- Michel Tubiana will prepare a draft final declaration of the GA.

Documents:

- 5.1 Draft program of the seminar (*for discussion*)
- 5.2 Draft program of the general assembly (*for discussion*)

6. Elections to the Executive Committee and candidates

Moderator: Kamel Jendoubi

Members were reminded that according to the statutes of the EMHRN, application for membership to the EC must be sent to members at least 75 days prior to the GA and completed applications must be returned to the Secretariat at least 30 days prior to the GA. Therefore, the Secretariat will send application forms to all members before March 18 and the deadline for returning the completed application will be April 19.

Members were reminded that the statutes specify that a member organization is allowed to serve a maximum of three consecutive terms on the EC. However, any member that has served three consecutive terms may apply for the position of President of the EMHRN. Consequently, according to this regulation, only a very limited number of the current members of the EC are entitled to submit an application, namely:

- SOLIDA (Lebanon)

- Human Rights Association (Turkey)
- ACSUR (Spain)
- Committee for the Defense of Democracy Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria (Syria).

In order to open up the participation and to ensure that a fair number of candidates will run for elections, it was agreed by the EC that, exceptionally, the new members of the Network whose candidacies have been approved by the current EC but have not yet been ratified by the GA would be eligible to stand for election to the EC. Their election would be legal provided their membership to the Network was to be ratified by the GA.

Decisions:

- Exceptionally, election to the EC will be open to all new members of the Network, provided their membership is ratified by the GA. A letter explaining the new rule will be sent to all members, including new members whose membership has not yet been ratified by the GA.
- A restricted distribution list will be prepared for the EC and emailed to its member so that they are kept informed of candidacies for election to the EC.

7. Membership applications

Moderator: Maysa Zorob

Membership applications were submitted to and discussed by the members of the EC. The following applications were approved by the EC:

- Greek Council for Refugees
- Human Rights Institute of Catalonia (IDHC):
- Solidaritat Desenvolupament i Pau (SODEPAU):
- MIZAN Law Group
- Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Non Violence Studies

Marc Schade-Poulsen then presented note 7.3 *List of organizations whose membership in the EMHRN needs to be reviewed*, stating that it was not desirable for the Network to have inactive members.

According to the statutes of the EMHRN, the exclusion of inactive members is the responsibility of the General Assembly. The EC decided that a letter should be mailed as soon as possible to all the organizations on that list to inform them of their current inactive status so that they will be prepared for any decision that the GA might take.

Decisions:

- The EC approved the membership applications of: Mizan Law Group, Greek Council for Refugees, Human Rights Institute of Catalonia, SODEPAU and Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Non Violence Studies.
- The Secretariat will mail a letter as soon as possible to all inactive members of the Network to inform them of their current status as inactive members.

Documents:

- 7.1 Summary on current members (*for information*)
- 7.2 Summary on membership applications (*for information*)
- 7.3 List of organizations whose membership to the EMHRN needs to be reviewed

8. Finalization of the Strategy ahead of the General Assembly

Moderator: Lone Lindholt

Marc Schade-Poulsen presented the third draft of the new Strategy explaining that this latest version had taken into account the observations made by the EC during its meeting in Athens in November 2011, as well as those submitted by a number of member organizations, staff members of the EMHRN and the Working Group on Gender.

The main change from the second version is the regional approach / country approach formula that is replacing the former formula (regional approach / thematic approach). Wadih Al-Asmar expressed some reservation regarding the

country approach that, in his opinion, should only be used exceptionally. In order not to distort the work of the Network, the decision to work at the country level should be justified by special circumstances in a given country.

The EC members then commented on various aspects of the document:

- "training unit" will be replaced by "training".
- References to the Union for the Mediterranean and the Barcelona process should be clarified.
- In order to facilitate reading, it is not necessary to systematically refer to women rights each time human rights are mentioned.
- There is not enough focus on freedom of association.
- Conflicts and international humanitarian law should be dealt with in the regional approach section rather than in the country approach section.
- The passage where it is written that the region is no longer homogeneous should be reworded. The region was never homogeneous and various areas evolved at different paces.
- The heading of the theme on freedom of conscience and the fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia should be shortened to "freedom of conscience".

Decisions:

- The members of the EC will forward their written comments on the Strategy to the Secretariat before March 10.

Documents:

- 8.1 Current Strategy (*for information*)
- 8.2 New Strategy project – Version 3 (*for discussion*)
- 8.3 Comments by members and staff on the Strategy project.

9. Organizational structure

Moderator: -

Peter Marinus Jensen, consultant, presented the draft of his final report on the organizational structure of the Network.

The members of the EC commented on various aspects of the draft report:

Development of competences:

Maysa Zorob welcomed the approach on training and the strengthening of competencies as presented in the report. She underlined the need to discuss specifically of the results expected from the training as well as on the role of the unit on competencies. Will training always be provided inside the working groups or will it be provided only by the department in charge of competency development?

Lone Lindholt insisted on the importance of complementarity: it is essential that the department in charge of competency development works closely with the working groups.

Reduction in the number of offices:

The EC supported the proposal to reduce the number of offices. However, it pointed out that the process will take time since such a far-reaching decision cannot be carried out overnight. The reduction in the number of offices will imply close communication with the staff regarding the impact it will have on their job and their working conditions.

Lone Lindholt said priority should be given to the best solution for the Network, which is not necessarily the best solution for the people at the employ of the Network. This is why the new structure might have serious implications for the staff. This is a sensitive issue that should be managed carefully.

Wadih Al-Asmar pointed out that while retaining the Copenhagen and Brussels offices makes sense, maintaining two offices in the South is not appropriate. Having a single office of sufficient size in the South should be sufficient to implement projects and ensure good synergy among the staff, under the direction of a dynamic office head. In addition, Wadih Al-Asmar said he disagreed with the distinction made between the Maghreb and the Mashreq. He added that representativity at the political level is the responsibility of the EC and not of the offices; this is why the existence of a single office in the South should not have a negative impact on the representation of the EMHRN in the region. Lastly, he suggested that a procedure on the organization of ad hoc missions should be put in place; it would take into account specific needs of each country.

According to Lone Lindholt, the difficulty resides in the choice of a location in the South where that one office would be. She also drew the attention of the EC on the wrong, not to say condescending, signal that would be sent by having two third of the offices of the EMHRN in the North, when two third of the Network's activities take place in the South.

Evolution of the structure:

Michel Tubiana pointed out that the new Strategy raises a new challenge: the need for the Network to be reactive both in its endeavors and its structure. The *raison d'être* of the EMHRN is no longer solely to protect, but also to present alternatives and solutions in order to help fill the void left by the governments. The current structure pre-dates the Arab revolutions and the situation is in constant flux. Unavoidably, the new structure of the Network will need to be revisited in the coming months.

Day 3 - February 26, 2012

10. The position of Executive Director

Moderator: Kamel Jendoubi

[The session was held in the absence of the rapporteur]

Decisions:

- During the EC meeting in Barcelona on March 31, one session will be dedicated to a presentation on the human resources situation within the EMHRN, career plans and salaries. Fabrice Liebaut will be asked to attend that session in order to develop those points.

11. Report of the Secretariat

Moderator: Magaly Thill

Marc Schade-Poulsen presented the report of the Secretariat. He pointed out that the lengthy restructuring process raised some problems in that a number of employment contract are not being renewed due to the expected changes. That said, the EMHRN is still quite active (see *11.1 Summary of the information bulletins no. 57 and 58* and *11.2 Working plan 2012* for more details on recent activities of the Network).

Regarding the mission to Tunis, Marc Schade-Poulsen explained that the mission head had resigned and that Kamel Jendoubi has taken over the direction of the mission on a temporary basis in order to give time to the Network to decide on what the next move should be.

Furthermore, Kamel Jendoubi drew the attention of the EC on the very disturbing circumstances the Egyptian NGOs find themselves. They are now facing three adversaries: the Military Council, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. In addition, a very restrictive bill on freedom of association is on the point of being adopted. It allows control by the Ministry of Social and Cultural Affairs over the creation and functioning of associations.

Finally, the EC broached the issue of communication inside the network and deplored the fact that the good work done by the Network is not publicized outside the Network. We need a consultant from the outside who will put in place a clear, comprehensive and efficient communication strategy.

Documents:

- 11.1 Summary of information bulletins no. 57 and 58 (*for information*)
- 11.2 Working plan 2012 (*for information*)

12. Financial report of the Secretariat, including fundraising

Moderator: Magaly Thill

Marc Schade-Poulsen gave an overview of the document *12.2 Activity-based budget 2012* (for adoption) indicating that it was difficult to finalize the budget as long as the Strategy and the Work Program were not themselves finalized. More details will be forthcoming at the next EC meeting in Barcelona. He highlighted a few points in the budget indicating that funds had been earmarked for the project on economic and social rights, and that despite the underutilization of the migration project, the EU has agreed to continue funding it in 2013. He also indicated that the Open Society Foundation will fund a portion of the seminar to be held before the opening of the General Assembly, and that it may agree to co-fund the Network after the GA. The EC approved the activity-based budget 2012.

Decisions:

- The EC approved the activity-based budget 2012.

Documents:

- 12.1 Budget 2011 – results (*for information*)
- 12.2 Activity-based budget 2012 (*for adoption*)
- 12.3 Document on fundraising (*for information*)

13. Press release

Moderator: Michel Tubiana

The EC discussed about the important points to be included in the press release:

- Situation in Tunisia
- Point on Syria: Condemnation of the helplessness of the international community + prohibition to leave the country imposed on Danial Saoud
- Point on Palestine: Continuing expansion of the colonies
- Point on Egypt: Calling on the suspension of the trials, on guaranteeing freedom of assembly in the country, on the abolition of military tribunals.
- Democratic failure inside the EU (economic and social rights)

Decisions:

- Michel Tubiana will prepare a draft press release that will be sent to the EC members for comments.

14. Miscellaneous

Moderator: -

No points were raised.