



**EuroMed Rights 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Report**  
Brussels, 23-24 June 2018



EuroMed Rights  
EuroMed Droits  
الأورو-متوسطية للحقوق



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Brussels, 23-24 June 2018





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# I. Introduction

On 23-24 June 2018, EuroMed Rights convened its 11th General Assembly in Brussels. It was preceded by a seminar on shrinking space for civil society entitled “Enabling civil society and countering the repressive trends: what role for EuroMed Rights?”.

All regular, associate and honorary members of the network were invited, as well as external observers such as EuroMed Rights’ donors, partner NGOs, and EU representatives. Approximately 110 participants gathered at the Renaissance Hotel in Brussels to attend the event.

The gathering of all EuroMed Rights’ members was also an opportunity for the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders to hold its 5th Consultation of the Council of Representatives on 23 June.

The present report details the discussions held during EuroMed Rights General Assembly, where the Activity Report, Financial Report, Gender Audit, Work Programme for 2018-2021 and proposed amendments to the statutes were presented, debated, and voted on. The report also provides an overview of the discussion on the Work Programme and the Strategy, held in two plenary sessions focusing on economic and social rights and discrimination. Finally, it presents the outcomes of the vote on new members and the results of the Executive Committee and Presidency elections.

The outcomes of the shrinking space seminar on *Enabling civil society and countering the repressive trends: what role for EuroMed Rights?* are presented in a separate report.

## II. Opening of the General Assembly

The 11th General Assembly was opened in Brussels by EuroMed Rights President, Michel Tubiana, on Saturday 23 June.

The General Assembly unanimously adopted the meeting agenda (see Annexe), appointed the Assembly Steering Committee – composed of the outgoing members of the Executive Committee and the chair and moderators of each session – and nominated the vote counters for the Executive Committee and Presidency elections.



Opening Session: Isaias Barrenada (SUDS), Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH) and Raji Sourani (PCHR)

# III. Assessing the Past

On Saturday 23 June, President Michel Tubiana opened the floor with the President's report. This was followed by the presentation of the Activity Report 2015-2017, by Marc Schade-Poulsen, EuroMed Rights Executive Director, and the Financial Report, by Moataz El Fegier, Treasurer. Then, Nabia Haddouche, Vice-President and Gender Political Referent, presented the 2018 Gender Audit. Finally, Hamdi Shaqqura, member of EuroMed Rights Executive Committee, outlined the membership report.

## A. President's Report

The text below presents a summary of the President's report, written by Michel Tubiana himself.

*Never since the end of the cold war has the European Union been confronted with such power struggles at its eastern borders, or even the use of arms.*

*These regional relations are all the more difficult to manage while the European Union, minus the United Kingdom, is divided according to interests that undermine its very principles and strengthen bilateral ties to the detriment of a real common policy.*

*The battlefield that Syria has become is no longer, and hasn't been for long time, the manifestation of a popular revolt. Rather, it is subsumed under the competing interests of regional and international powers, to the benefit of the current dictatorship.*

*Either as cause or consequence, peripheral wars add to the chaos by relegating to the background situations that are no less crucial to the future of the region such as those in Palestine or the Kurds.*

*The general trend is that of a restriction of individual and collective freedoms, the exacerbation of nationalistic reflexes, a flourishing xenophobia, and even overt racism.*

*The instrumentalisation of religion by states must be pointed out here. One tends to seek in religion the justification of this or that conflict, or designates a religion as the cause of all evils.*

*The conclusion of bilateral agreements between the European Union and the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean prolong the extant inequality by forcing southern countries to accept an opening of their markets to the sole benefit of the countries of the north.*

*This leads to a challenge to the democratic system, given its perception as being incapable of ensuring the economic and social security of the people.*

*As far as we are concerned, the consequence of these developments is a languishing civil society, its criminalisation or even eradication in an effort to challenge the concept of human rights.*

*The overall situation has resulted in the increasing difficulties of the men and women of this region to move freely. The sacrosanct principle of freedom of movement within the European Union itself is beginning to falter. What has been incorrectly labelled a "refugee crisis" reflects a political mantra: what is the best tool to prevent movement, all of which has become suspicious? On top of the deadly human toll of this policy come the restrictions on all cultural and personal exchanges.*

*We are a mutually supportive, credible and independent network. Through working groups, as well as through country-led actions or thematic campaigns, we have been able to build a true community that transcends its members, and that shares the same values and interests.*

*The quality of the work provided by our members as well as by the staff of the Network has allowed us to gain credibility with the various authorities we work with. All the audits*



*we have been subjected to are unanimous in viewing the Network as a reliable and effective organisation.*

*And the future? We have ensured that the “gender” dimension is present in our statutes and in our activities. It needs to be better assimilated within our members as well as in our functioning. At the same time, we must fully integrate the need to promote institutional and legal equality between the sexes.*

*Alongside the activities that are already in progress, we must open other areas of action and take back those we’re no longer active in: justice and the police, that our limited means don’t allow us to reactivate to this day. The question of discrimination: freedom of conscience, sexual orientation, disability, racism; what’s at stake here must be appreciated for what it is: infringements of rights.*

*We must reaffirm our adherence to the premise of a single and unique humanity and therefore to the human rights viewed in their universality and indivisibility.*

*Cultural traditions, specificities of all kinds and the degree of development of peoples etc. are taken to justify a differentiated application of rights. The purpose of such a discourse is never to demand more rights but always to justify fewer rights. Especially when it comes to maintaining inequality between men and women. We must oppose this discourse. There can be no backtracking on this front.*

*Human Rights are not a closed universe. It is time to admit that if humanity brings forth and enjoys rights, they must include the responsibility that falls upon us, as a human race of the entire planet, of what constitutes it and lives on it. Fundamental rights correspond to non-derogable responsibilities that require us to define together the rules that apply not only to humanity, but to a planet of which we are but one of the inhabitants.*

The President concluded his remarks by thanking the members of the Network for their commitment. He also praised the work done by EuroMed Rights staff members, particularly thanking the executive director of the Network, Marc Schade-Poulsen. Michel Tubiana declared that it was a real privilege to meet and work with men and women fighting together for the noble cause of humanity and freedom.

## B. Activity Report

The Activity Report 2015-2017 was presented by EuroMed Rights Executive Director, Marc Schade-Poulsen.

Mr. Schade-Poulsen began by informing the Assembly that EuroMed Rights has recently been evaluated by one of its donors, SIDA. The report outlined the main strengths and weaknesses of EuroMed Rights:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highly relevant network, in terms of both political situation and membership</li><li>• Unique access to the EU institutions</li><li>• Only network gathering members from the entire region</li><li>• Unique Working Group methodology, focusing on both national and regional issues</li><li>• Fine balance between members, Executive Committee, and staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tendency to work in boxes, especially at Working Group level</li><li>• Need for an internal learning process</li><li>• Risk of spreading over too many issues</li><li>• Funding issues</li><li>• Need to show results in a more effective way</li></ul>

Concerning the funding situation, Mr. Schade-Poulsen pointed out that the network does not get the majority of its funds from its members and is therefore dependent on funding, which rests on political consideration. Although EuroMed Rights can rely on a high number of core funders, it has nevertheless to face some challenges, primarily the fact that only few donors today have a comprehensive vision of the region, many of them rather focusing on specific countries, due to political considerations, or on the South Mediterranean only for stabilisation purposes. In this context, it proved particularly challenging to fundraise on human rights issues affecting both shores of the Mediterranean, such as discrimination.

The above reasons prevented EuroMed Rights from accomplishing all the goals it set in 2015. Without compromising on its policy, the network had to change the balance between regional and national work to the advantage of this latter, which explains why it was not able to work on justice and discrimination, but, on the other side, could strengthen its work on Morocco and Turkey. Mr. Schade-Poulsen concluded by expressing his hope that EuroMed Rights would improve in this sense during the next three years.

Mr. Schade-Poulsen then presented the network's main achievements during the past three years:

## Regional level

Shrinking Space	EuroMed Rights took the lead of the Majalat project, opening a regional mechanism on the issue of shrinking space.
Migration & Asylum	EuroMed Rights showed that south Mediterranean countries are not "safe countries" to which migrants and refugees can be returned.
Gender	EuroMed Rights set the Istanbul Convention on Combatting Violence against Women on the agenda of several EU countries, as well as southern Mediterranean ones. The Convention was used as a reference for the elaboration of national legislation on gender-based violence.
ECOSOC rights	EuroMed Rights demonstrated the gap in understanding the impact of EU-South Mediterranean countries economic relations on the enjoyment of economic and social rights.

## Country level

Tunisia	EuroMed Rights is a meeting place for civil society, enabling it to influence the political process. It supported the tripartite dialogue between EU, government, and civil society.
Israel/ Palestine	EuroMed Rights has been a platform for lobbying towards the EU and managed to keep accountability on the EU agenda. It responded to attacks on civil society.
Egypt	EuroMed Rights supported human rights defenders within and without the country
Algeria	EuroMed Rights was one of the few organisations bringing Algerian concerns to the UN. Algerian CSOs are now working together (e.g. production of a joint UPR report).
Syria	EuroMed Rights supported networking and empowerment of Syrian organizations. It proved impossible to continue working on Syria with EU funding, as the EU pushed for a focus on reconciliation, while the network prioritised accountability and monitoring
Turkey	EuroMed Rights is now able to monitor human rights trials.
Morocco	EuroMed Rights started a pilot project and created Working Groups to facilitate the EU-civil society dialogue.

In conclusion, Mr. Schade-Poulsen evaluated that during the period 2015-2017 EuroMed Rights realized approximately 80% of what had been planned in 2015, while accomplishing results in unforeseen areas.

Expressing his gratitude to the members for their contribution, Mr. Schade-Poulsen stressed that the richness of the network lies in its membership. He also thanked the Executive Committee and the staff.

## C. Financial Report

Moataz El Fegeiry, EuroMed Rights Treasurer, presented the financial report.

During the period 2015-2018, the finances of the network have been almost stable, with a slight increase. EuroMed Rights managed to collect 9.6 million euros, compared to the target of 12.4 million set in 2015.

Country funding vs Regional funding	- Country approach: 48% of resources - Regional approach: 16% of resources Difficulties in fundraising for regional work and necessity to adopt a specific approach for each country 2018-20 budget: reasonable funding is expected to be available for regional work.
Core funding vs Project funding	- Country work mainly funded through project-based funding. - Increased funding is needed for economic and social rights and discrimination. Importance of maintaining core funding from major donors, as it allows some flexibility in the project implementation.
Fundraising strategy 2014-17: Challenges	<u>Maintaining sustainability</u> : EuroMed Rights has few reserve funds and depends, therefore, on funding. <u>Diversifying the sources of funding</u> : as EuroMed Rights is mainly dependent on public funding, it will try to raise more funds from private donors. <u>Improving the quality of bookkeeping</u> : EuroMed Rights does not have many resources for fundraising and financial control and needs to maintain its performance.

## D. Gender Audit

The 2018 Gender Audit was presented by Nabia Haddouche, EuroMed Rights Vice-President and Gender Political Referent. The Audit, which is carried out every three years, was conducted by EuroMed Rights Gender Programme Officer, Sarah Gjerding, under the supervision of the Programme Director, Marit Flø Jørgensen. The author relied on a clear methodology, including surveys among the staff. The preliminary outcomes were shared with the members of the Gender Working Group for feedback.

Ms. Haddouche pointed out that, despite some gaps, such as the insufficient time allocated for the completion of the report and the limited involvement of the Executive Committee in its elaboration, the Audit is a document of considerable importance. It measures the progress in terms of Gender Mainstreaming made by the network, outlines the main challenges, and sets the way for further action, conveying a series of recommendations for the purposes of the next EuroMed Rights Strategy.

### Recommendations

- » Gender Mainstreaming should be institutionalized and prioritized at internal level and be reflected in all the activities and policies of EuroMed Rights.
- » Gender Mainstreaming should be separated from the women's rights strategy and considered as a priority on its own. The network shall adopt a policy with a clear responsibility and task sharing, allocate financial and human resources, and create a monitoring mechanism.
- » Members should integrate Gender Mainstreaming in their own structures and activities.
- » Synergies between the Gender Working Group and the other Groups should be reinforced

## E. Discussions of the reports

The presentation of the reports was followed by a discussion in plenary session. The participants brought forward the following comments and recommendations:

### Country Work

- » Syria: EuroMed Rights should support Syrian organizations and work on accountability, by documenting violations and lobbying the EU and other international bodies. There is a need to assess where the added value of EuroMed Rights lies, to avoid duplicating the work of Syrian CSOs.
- » Morocco: EuroMed Rights should organize trial-monitoring missions and support human rights defenders who are facing trials on politically motivated charges.
- » Tunisia: EuroMed Rights should lobby the EU and strengthen its presence in the consultations related to economic and social rights.

### Thematic Work

- » Shrinking space: EuroMed Rights should prioritize the work on Shrinking Space and effectively mainstream it in all the Working Groups.
- » Human rights education: EuroMed Rights should address the topic of human rights education and culture, especially targeting the youth.
- » Gender: EuroMed Rights should mainstream gender in all the programmes, especially in the work on economic and social rights and shrinking space.

### Working Groups

- » Methodology: EuroMed Rights should consolidate and expand the Working Groups, capitalize on the Groups' recommendations and results, and improve the synergies between them
- » Working Groups: EuroMed Rights should revive the Freedom of Association Working Group and the Justice Working Group and create a Working Group on economic and social rights. The panellists commented that working and

financial constraints, as well as the need to identify relevant advocacy outlets, make it necessary to focus on a limited range of issues, but other options (e.g. consultation sessions) may be envisaged to address additional topics

**The moral report, the activity report and the financial report were unanimously approved by the General Assembly on 23 June.**

**The Gender Audit, which was not voted, will be used as a basis for discussion by the next EC.**

**On Sunday 24 June, the Assembly appointed an independent auditor, Deloitte Denmark, to audit the financial statements of EuroMed Rights for the years of 2018-2020.**



Moataz El-Feigieri (CIHRS) and Wadiah Al-Asmar (CLDH)

## F. Membership report

On Saturday 23 June, the 2018 Membership Report was presented to the Assembly.

### New members, resignations, and terminations

The Assembly was invited to vote on the accession of new members. Representatives of the nine applicant organisations introduced themselves to the General Assembly. The seven organisations applying for regular membership and the one applying for associate membership were formally welcomed as new members by the General Assembly.

New Regular Members	AdalaJustice	Morocco
	People in Need	Czech Republic
	Portuguese Human Rights League	Portugal
	Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) – Legal Aid	Jordan
	Spanish Aid Commission for Refugees (CEAR)	Spain
	Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)	Syria/France
	ALEF – Act for Human Rights	Lebanon
New Associate Member	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom	Switzerland

The General Assembly then took note of the fact that the following organisations had either ceased their cooperation with EuroMed Rights, ceased all activities related to the fields of work and objectives set out in the EuroMed Rights Statutes, or did not honour their financial obligations towards EuroMed Rights:

Resignation	Bruno Kreisky Foundation for Human Rights (regular member)	Austria
	International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (associate member)	UK
Expulsions	Solidaritat Desevolupament I Pau (SODEPAU) (regular member) - cessation of activities	Spain
	Rights and Freedom Association (regular member) - cessation of activities	Cyprus
	Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (regular member)	Jordan
	Beirut Bar Association (regular member)	Lebanon
	Collectif 95 – Maghreb égalité (regular member)	Regional
	Committees for the Defense of Democracy Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria (CDF) (regular member)	Syria
	Damascus Center for Theoretical and Civil Rights Studies (regular member)	Syria
	Human Rights Centre – University of Essex (regular member)	UK
	Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (regular member)	Malta
Syrian Organisation for Human Rights – SAWASYA (regular member)	Syria	

Michel Tubiana elaborated on the procedure adopted by the Executive Committee in the cases of termination of membership, based on a case-by-case assessment and repeated efforts to get in touch with the organisations deemed inactive within the network. Following the decision by the Executive Committee, emails were sent to those organisations whose membership would be terminated to notify them of such decision and inform them of their right to appeal it within one month. Three organisations, including SAWASYA (Syria) and the Committees for the Defense of Democracy, Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria (Syria), responded contesting the decision after the deadline had already expired.

Abdeslam Lassal (AMDH) informed the participants that the AMDH received a letter from SAWASYA, addressed to the EuroMed Rights Secretariat, to object to the termination decision. Within this letter, SAWASYA denounced such decision as illegal in both form and content, claiming that it had informed the President of its intention not to withdraw from the network and explaining that, despite the difficult and peculiar circumstances, the organization is still active.

During the following debate, the participants raised a number of issues, including:

- » Should the termination of membership of such a high number of Syrian organisations be considered as a loss of interest in Syria? In response, Mr. Tubiana reaffirmed that Syria remains a top priority of EuroMed Rights.
- » When deciding on the termination of membership of an organization, EuroMed Rights could establish a fact-finding committee to investigate whether the member is active. Also, a clearer definition of “being active” needs to be provided to avoid confusion.
- » In the cases at stake, the network could give the organisations concerned a second chance. Mr. Tubiana commented that no violation of the EuroMed Rights Statutes occurred during the decision-making process and reaffirmed that the Statutes should be respected.

## EuroMed Rights 2018 membership status

In 2018, EuroMed Rights has 88 members – 63 regular members, 7 associate members, 18 honorary members. The geographical distribution of the regular membership, which, according to the network’s Bylaws, should not exceed 60% for the South, is 57% South, 40% North, 3% both North and South . Although EuroMed Rights is supposed to maintain a maximum of 4 members per country, Morocco is represented by 5 organisations: this derogation is justified because other countries have less than 4 members.

As for the thematic distribution, 45% of member organisations are generalist, 15% have a women and gender agenda, and 14% focus on migrants and refugees. The remaining organisations work on justice, education, disappearances, media, torture, economic and social rights, and institutions. Although the Bylaws require that at least one member per country focuses on gender equality, this is not the case yet.

## Recommendations

- » The number of regular members should not exceed 80.
- » EuroMed Rights should try to integrate new members from Malta, the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe.
- » EuroMed Rights should prioritize new members including gender mainstreaming in their work.

**Votes:** The report on membership, including new members and members leaving the Network was unanimously adopted

The Membership report was approved by the Assembly. The members also approved an increase in the membership fee to 200 EUR for regular members and 150 EUR for associate members.



EuroMed Rights Staff and its members

# IV. Preparing for the Future

This chapter focuses on the future of EuroMed Rights. On Saturday 23 June, the membership report and the planning documents for the upcoming years were presented and participants were called upon to vote on the accession of new members. On Sunday 24 June, the Assembly discussed the Work Programme and the Strategy 2018-2021, revised the Statutes of the network, and elected a new EuroMed Rights Executive Committee and President.

## A. Adoption of a new Work Programme and Budget 2018-2021

The debate on the new Work Programme and associated budget started with a general presentation of the Work Programme and Strategy 2018-2021 by Marc Schade-Poulsen, EuroMed Rights Executive Director. This was followed, on Sunday 24 June, by two plenary sessions on the Work Programme and the Strategy, discussing the questions related to economic and social rights and discrimination, and by a final discussion on the subject.

### Presentation of the Work Programme and Strategy 2018-2021 and of the related budget

Mr. Schade-Poulsen pointed out that, given the volatile nature of the region, there is no sense in focusing on a long-term horizon: the new EuroMed Rights Strategy covers therefore a three-year period. A draft of the new Strategy was shared with members, whose comments showed among other things an interest for the issue of shrinking space. In general, it does not deviate significantly from the past priorities, while introducing the Majalat project.

#### Regional level

Shrinking Space	EuroMed Rights will launch the Majalat project. The shrinking space approach shall be mainstreamed in the work of all Working Groups, but no specific regional Working Group on shrinking space will be created
Migration and Asylum	EuroMed Rights will promote the networking and empowerment of organisations defending refugee rights in both the Maghreb and the Mashreq as well as in Europe..
Gender	EuroMed Rights will keep working at the Gender Programme, focusing on issues such as equality in inheritance and personal status law.
ECOSOC Rights	EuroMed Rights will work on the issue of the impact of trade agreements on human rights. It is however important not to duplicate the work already done by other organisations.



In addition, the network will organise internal regional seminars on the question of justice and discrimination, to identify how to work on these issues at regional level.

## Country level

Morocco/ Western Sahara	EuroMed Rights will continue the dialogue with its members on gender, migrations, and justice. It also aims to resume the work on the question of Western Sahara, which was interrupted after a mission was denied entry to Tindouf by the Algerian authorities.
Algeria	EuroMed Rights will continue its systematic solidarity work with Algerian civil society.
Tunisia	EuroMed Rights has the opportunity to increase the financial support and expand the programme, to facilitate the dialogue between civil society and national institutions provided for in the Constitution.
Egypt	EuroMed Rights will continue supporting human rights defenders both in the country and abroad. It will step up its work on accountability.
Syria	Discussion is needed on what the added value of the network is in the current context, not to duplicate the work already done by different organisations.
Israel /Palestine	EuroMed Rights will prioritise protecting its members from attacks and working on shrinking space.
Turkey	Launch of an EU-supported programme to monitor trials attacking freedom of assembly, speech, and association, through the selection of emblematic trials.

## Axes of work

Networking	Euromed Rights will continue to promote networking and capacity building and seek to strengthen its work in Europe.
Advocacy	The number of missions to EU member states will be increased. Different countries shall be targeted based on the theme and interests.
Communication	EuroMed Rights will increase its media presence and develop its social media use.

Mr. Schade-Poulsen further highlighted a few key issues. First, the network will try to counter the compartmentalization of the different Working Groups and bring them closer, thus strengthening EuroMed Rights' internal cohesion. Second, Gender Mainstreaming will be separated from the work on promoting women's rights, as it is necessary to integrate it in all programmes. Further discussion is needed to set priorities and agree on the best way forward. He also informed the participants that EuroMed Rights is working with SIDA on finding a way of strengthening its techniques of monitoring and presenting results.

Regarding the budget, the main issue will be to ensure that EuroMed Rights continues to receive core funding and increases its reserve funds. Several agreements, including a five-year agreement with SIDA and a three-year contract with Open Society, have been signed, ensuring that the network has the necessary funds for 2018 and 2019, and perspectives look good for 2020. The ratio between national and regional funding will be improved, due to the Majalat project, and increased funding will be available for the work on migration, internal cohesion, and gender mainstreaming

## Work Programme and Strategy: session dedicated to economic and social rights

Isaias Barrenada (SUDS, Executive Committee) stressed that EuroMed Rights' mission is to promote human rights in the Euromed region. Economic and social rights are of particular importance in the region, where calls for social justice have been among the root causes of the Arab upheavals. Economic and social rights include the right to a decent work, health, food, housing, education, and development, i.e. the right to everything that touches a person's life. The promotion and protection of these rights remain primarily the responsibility of the state, which should use international cooperation as a tool to uphold economic and social rights. Within this context, civil society has the duty to keep states accountable for fulfilling these rights.

In 2013, EuroMed Rights organized a seminar to identify its added value in the promotion of economic and social rights. This culminated in 2016 in two reports: "Civil society initiatives in economic and social rights" and "Economic and financial analysis of EuroMed relations", a mapping of what CSOs are doing in the field of economic and social rights. These reports concluded that CSOs started late to focus on economic and social rights, which were not among their core activities before the Arab revolutions.

After the revolutions, economic and social rights became a common concern for both shores of the Mediterranean. Governments started to take action, without however revisiting the institutional structures (e.g. trade agreements) that constitute the framework of economic and social rights. Thus, gaps in the protection of these rights can be detected in all EU-South Mediterranean countries agreements, which do not set accountability mechanisms nor are based on a proper impact analysis and remain geared towards controlling migrations. Due to this heightened interest and the regional character of these concerns, EuroMed Rights decided to include the work on economic and social rights in its activities. In the new strategy and work programme, resources have been set aside for a regional working group on this. The network will also need to work in cooperation with non-member organisations, to benefit from their expertise in this field and avoid duplicating their work.

Nawla Darwiche (New Woman Foundation), chair of the session, further commented that economic and social rights should be considered as indivisible from political rights. No rights can be defended without freedom of association, which is today under immense pressure, due to repressive laws and the general tendency among governments in the region to brush aside economic and social rights and systematically repress organisations, including trade unions, working to promote them. It is, therefore, necessary to use international and regional mechanisms to counter these attacks, while lobbying governments in the North not to impose inequitable free trade agreements.

These presentations were then followed by a lively debate. The issues raised included:

- » Economic and social rights are important drivers of unrest and conflict, as it can be seen in Tunisia. Nevertheless, governments in the region overlook them, while European countries act based on their own economic interests.
- » In a situation where new violations of economic and social rights take place on a daily basis, it is imperative that EuroMed Rights create a Working Group on this issue. The members of this Group shall provide regular updates on the socio-economic situation in their countries, to enable the network to make sound recommendations. Terms of reference for the Working Group, also outlining the Group's gender dimension, should be drafted.

## Work Programme and Strategy: session dedicated to discrimination

Hassan Jabareen (ADALAH) opened the session by pointing out the difficulty of defining the concept of discrimination, as inequality manifests itself at several levels, and left the floor to Anitta Kynsilehto (TAPRI) and Mazen Darwish (Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression). Ms. Kynsilehto stressed the importance of addressing the question of LGBTQI rights in the framework of the work on discrimination, as LGBTQI groups are increasingly subjected to attacks both in the South and in Europe. In particular, the work on migration and refugees should integrate a gender approach and a sensitivity towards the issue of LGBTQI rights. Mr. Darwish then continued by emphasizing that discrimination affects all human rights:

indeed, it represents an instrument of warfare, as it rests on a complete refusal of diversity. This phenomenon is today exacerbated in the South (e.g. suppression of Kurdish rights in Syria) as in the North (Islamophobia, hate speech), and it is exploited by dictators and right-wing parties, and can only endanger democracy and lead to conflict.

The floor was then opened for debate. Several issues were raised by the participants, including:

- » Every act of discrimination is an act of racism based on the overemphasis on a certain identity, leading to the refusal of the other. The most dangerous discrimination is the one aiming at destroying the other, especially when it is a state policy. Although there are international instruments in place to condemn it, discrimination remains embedded in policies and laws. Further, most Southern countries lack a legal framework to fight discrimination and

do not take into consideration forms of discrimination affecting freedom of religion or LGBTQI rights.

- » Discrimination is not only a political question but also affects society in its entirety, representing an instrument of social war. Hate discourse is present in all societies, both in the South and in the North, at all levels (legislative, media, etc.).
- » It is necessary to adopt a global approach and strategy when addressing the question of discrimination and individual freedoms, without focusing only on one specific form of discrimination.

## Final discussion on the Work Programme and the Strategy

During the concluding session on the Work Programme and the Strategy, the participants brought forward several comments and concerns, including the following:

- » EuroMed Rights should focus on the issue of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, integrating it in the work on discrimination. Mr. Schade-Poulsen informed the Assembly that a mission was organized in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, to meet organizations working on this topic and build bridges between them. He stressed the key role played by local civil society and the importance to make its voice heard in Europe.
- » Some participants voiced their concerns regarding the presence of religious organisations among EuroMed Rights' donors, as they may adopt positions in contrast with the values of the network, e.g. on the issue of abortion. Mr. Schade-Poulsen commented that all the network's donors have clear human rights policies and comply with universal human rights standards.
- » EuroMed Rights is too absent from Europe and should focus on those issues that interest both North and South, such as monitoring the situation and documenting the victims in the Mediterranean Sea, addressing the criminalization of NGOs helping migrants, and monitoring and condemning the EU policies and agreements with South countries.
- » As part of its work on discrimination, EuroMed Rights should focus on education, through either a dedicated Working Group or a different approach.



Voting on the adoption of the Work Programme & Strategy

Education against discrimination should be addressed as a cross-cutting theme.

- » EuroMed Rights should agree on its goals in terms of Gender Mainstreaming and the manner of implementing it. Gender should be mainstreamed in all programmes and, in particular in the network's approach to accountability with reference to the Israeli occupation. Mr. Schade-Poulsen pointed out that EuroMed Rights decided to separate the work on gender equality and Gender Mainstreaming and have this latter as a cross-cutting issue in all Working Groups.

Further, participants raised questions concerning EuroMed Rights' country work:

- » Is Palestine still present in the work of the network? Mr. Schade-Poulsen pointed out that EuroMed Rights is working extensively on this issue, focusing on advocacy at EU level.
- » What is EuroMed Rights doing in Turkey? Mr. Schade-Poulsen informed the Assembly that, during the next couple of years, the network is going to monitor key trials, in coordination with its Turkish members, and bring up these trials when addressing the EU-Turkish negotiations.
- » Will EuroMed Rights keep working on Lybia, perhaps within the framework of the Majalat project? Mr. Schade-Poulsen commented that, due to the country's current volatile situation, it is very difficult to operate in Lybia, identify partner organisations and secure the funding. The Tunis office is following up on this, while the Foundation is supporting a number of Lybian human rights defenders.
- » Will EuroMed Rights resume its work on Western Sahara? Mr. Schade-Poulsen explained that the network did not neglect this issue but needs to visit Tindouf to be able to work more comprehensively on it. A new Visa application will be submitted to the Algerian authorities and the new Executive Committee will discuss the way forward.

**On Sunday 24 June, the Assembly unanimously adopted the Work Programme 2018-2021 and the associated budget.**

## B. Revision of the statutes

The revision of the EuroMed Rights Statutes took place on Sunday 24 June. A fruitful debate on the amendments proposed by the Executive Committee was followed by the vote on the adoption or rejection of such amendments.

The members approved the following amendment to article 3.2 governing conditions for admitting members:

*The phrase stating that "They undergo an initial review by the Executive Committee, which recommends new Members to the general assembly. The general assembly alone may make the decision to admit a Member. The Executive Committee may decide to abstain from presenting a specific membership application."*

was replaced with

*"They are examined by the Executive Committee, which decides on the admission of the candidate organisation, which is then subject to the approval of the nearest subsequent general assembly."*

The modifications that did not obtain the required support are the following:

Creation of a conflict commission composed of 4 persons elected by the General Assembly among the members of the network. The commission would be entrusted with the final decision with regards to termination of membership and exclusion and, in the event of conflicts over a barring or exclusion, it would take the final decision. This amendment did not meet the needed 2/3 of the votes on grounds that decisions on termination and exclusion should remain a prerogative of the General Assembly.

## C. Election of EuroMed Rights Executive Committee and President

Elections for the new Executive Committee and Presidency were held on Sunday 24 June. 56 regular members registered and voted in the elections. The electoral committee was composed of Tony Daly (80:20 - Educating and acting for a Better World), Patrizia Scannella (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) and Lilia Rebai, Housseem Cheikhrouhou and Christel Décatoire from EuroMed Rights' staff.



General Assembly voting system

Six representatives from member organisations in the North and six representatives from member organisations in the South were elected - seven women and five men - as follows:

ORGANISATION	CANDIDATE	COUNTRY
<b>NON-EU MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES</b>		
Adala-Justice	Jamila Sayouri	Morocco
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies	Moataz El Fegiery	Egypt
Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDES)	Messaoud Romdhani	Tunisia
Mizan for Law	Lubna Dawany	Jordan
Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR)	Hamdi Shaqqura	Palestine
<b>EU MEMBER COUNTRIES</b>		
Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI)	Sara Prestianni	Italy
Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales	Theodora Christou	United Kingdom
Center For Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria	Radostina Pavlova	Bulgaria
DIGNITY	Søs Nissen	Denmark
European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDH)	Catherine Teule	Regional / Belgium
Human Rights Institute of Catalonia	David Bondia	Spain
<b>EUROMED RIGHTS' PRESIDENT</b>		
Lebanese Center For Human Rights (CLDH)	Wadih Al-Asmar	Lebanon

Michel Tubiana, former EuroMed Rights President (2012-2018), was appointed Honorary President with acclamation.

# V. Taking a Stand

At the conclusion of the two-day meeting, the General Assembly issued a declaration on the situation of civil society, a key issue of concern to EuroMed Rights and its members.

The Executive Committee prepared a first draft of the declaration, which was then shared with the members for comments. The following final resolution was adopted by the Assembly.

## A. 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Declaration

### **Guaranteeing the rights of civil society**

*The existence of free and independent civil societies is one of the foundations of any democratic society and an essential guarantee of the observance of human rights.*

*Civil societies, the organisations of all kinds that compose it, are the expression of everyone's right to meet and express themselves without interference from the States. They contribute, with others, but in a decisive way, to democratic discussions and thus participate in the choices of peoples without usurping the role of political parties and the public authorities. Finally, they foster gender equality in a context in which women are too often denied the right to participate in public activities.*

*It is that role and those goals that are questioned by certain countries of the European Union and most countries on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.*

*To the South of the Mediterranean, it is the very principle of freedom of association that is denied by legislations subjecting such freedom to the whims of the public authorities, through practices that violate existing legislation and by controlling associations' financial resources.*

*Added to this is the impossibility of expressing themselves, either because the freedom of the media has been violated, or because the right to demonstrate has been repressed, or, more generally, the expression of any dissenting voice has been prohibited.*

*The men and women who work within those civil societies are also the victims of arbitrary imprisonment and, under certain regimes, worse abuses: forced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions. In the countries of the European Union, although the freedom of association is guaranteed and observed in principle, attempts to restrict the action of civil societies are increasingly common. Through defamation campaigns or the desire to portray the stakeholders of solidarity, in particular with regard to migrants and asylum seekers, as delinquents, the public authorities attempt to limit NGOs to a role of State-controlled support and to reduce association activists to silence.*

*There is, between the two shores of the Mediterranean, a convergence of objectives that leads to civil societies being limited or disappearing entirely.*

*Such an approach is incompatible with the international commitments undertaken by all of the countries concerned, often with their own constitution, as well as with the democratic process in general.*

*This is why, meeting as a General Assembly in Brussels on 23 and 24 June, EuroMed Rights calls on:*

- » *All countries of the region to fully observe freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom to assemble.*
- » *To provide transparent information and maintain an open dialogue with their civil societies.*
- » *To end all proceedings of any kind against the women and men who campaign within civil societies.*

*EuroMed Rights calls on the European Union and its members to make the observance of the rights of civil societies and their members an absolute priority in the relationships and agreements they maintain with the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean.*

*The EuroMed Rights General Meeting welcomes the courage of those who are engaged in the fight for the freedom of civil societies and expresses its solidarity with them.*

## B. Acknowledgment

At the closing of the General Assembly, EuroMed Rights President, Wadih Al-Asmar, took the opportunity to thank all the participants for the three days spent together and all EuroMed Rights' members for their past work and the work to come.

It was also an occasion to thank the retiring President and members of the Executive Committee as well as the staff in Copenhagen, Brussels, Paris and Tunis and the interpreters.

In his concluding speech, Mr. Al-Asmar stressed that the EuroMed region is experiencing unprecedented discrimination and barriers to mobility. To succeed in their fight for a better world, civil society organisations need to reappraise their modes of action and communication, embracing innovative forms of struggle and striving to maximise their efficacy, while keeping volunteerism and commitment at the core of their model.

In this context, EuroMed Rights shall encourage stronger participation by its members, who represent the network's richness and added value, and rely on their support. Capitalising on its ties with the European Union, it should advocate for a better integration of the fundamental principles of human rights in all the EU policies on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, especially promoting the principle of the universality and indivisibility of human rights.



General Assembly plenary

# VI. Programme of the General Assembly

## SATURDAY 23 JUNE - General Assembly

### 09.00-09.30 **Opening of EuroMed Rights General Assembly**

- » Quorum call
- » Presentation of the Steering Committee of the General Assembly
- » Approval of the agenda
- » Appointment of 2 vote counters

Chair: Michel Tubiana (President LDH)

### 09.30-10.30 **Presentation of the reports: political report, activity report, financial report, gender audit**

Presentations by

- » Michel Tubiana (President-LDH)
- » Marc Schade-Poulsen (Euromed Rights Executive Director)
- » Moataz El Fegier (Executive Committee – CIHRS)
- » Nabia Haddouche (Executive Committee – ADFM)

Chair: Søs Nissen (Executive Committee - DIGNITY) and Wadih Al-Asmar (Executive Committee - Lebanese Center for Human Rights)

### 10.30-11.00 **Coffee break**

### 11.00-12.30 **Discussion on the reports:**

Chair: Søs Nissen (Executive Committee - DIGNITY) and Wadih Al-Asmar (Executive Committee - Lebanese Center for Human Rights)

### 12.30-13.30 **Session:**

- » Presentation of the membership report
- » Presentation of EuroMed Rights' new members
- » Vote on the reports and new members
- » Appointment of an auditor

Presentation by Hamdi Shaqqura (EC - PCHR)

Chair: Michel Tubiana (President-LDH)

### 13.30-14.30 **Lunch**



- 14.30-15.30 **Presentation of the work programme and Strategy 2018-2021 and of the associated budget**  
Presentation by Marc Schade-Poulsen (EuroMed Rights Executive Director)  
Chair: Theodora Christou (Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales)
- 15.30-16.00 **Coffee break**
- 16.00-17.30 **Consultation of the Council of Representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF)**

## SUNDAY 24 JUNE - General Assembly

- 09.00-09.45 **Presentation of candidates for the Executive Committee and presidency elections and opening of ballot boxes (until 13.00)**  
Chair: Marie Lavrentiadou, EMHRN Honorary member, President of Greek Committee for International Democratic Solidarity (EEDDA), Greece
- 09.45-10.45 **Plenary session on the Work Programme and the Strategy: economic and social rights**  
Speaker: Isaías Barreñada (SUDS, Executive Committee)  
Chair: Nawla Darwiche (New Woman Foundation)
- 10.45-11.15 **Coffee break**
- 11.15-12.15 **Plenary session on the Work Programme and Strategy: discrimination**  
Speakers: Anitta Kynsilehto (TAMPERE, Executive Committee) and Mazen Darwish (Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression)

Chair: Hassan Jabareen (ADALAH)

- 12.15-13.15 **Final discussion on the Work Programme and Strategy**  
Chair: Francoise Brié (Fédération Nationale Solidarité Femmes)
- 13.15-14.15 **Lunch**
- 14.15-15.30 **Discussion and vote on the amendments to the statutes**  
**Vote on the Work Programme and on the membership fees**  
Presentation by Wadih Al-Asmar (Executive Committee - Lebanese Center for Human Rights)  
Chair: Issam Younis (Al Mezan Center for Human Rights)
- 15.30-16.00 **Coffee break**
- 16.00-17.00 **Result of the Executive Committee and presidency elections and saying goodbye to former EC members**  
**Reading of the declaration on the situation of civil societies**  
**Closing of the General Assembly by the President of EuroMed Rights**  
Chair: Anna Palacios (Human Rights Institute of Catalonia)
- 17.00-17.30 **First meeting of the new Executive Committee**

