



EuroMed Rights
EuroMed Droits
الأورو-متوسطية للحقوق

Meeting of the Executive Committee of EuroMed Rights Beirut, 16-18 March 2018 *Minutes*

The meeting of the Executive Committee was preceded, on Thursday 15 March, by meetings with the European Union delegations in Lebanon and Syria; and a meeting with representatives of civil society, including Ziad Abdel Samad from the Arab NGO Network for Development, George Ghali from ALEF, Ghassan Abdallah from the Palestinian Human Rights Organization in Lebanon, and Monique Sokhan from the UNHCR in Beirut.

PARTICIPANTS

Executive Committee of EuroMed Rights:

Michel Tubiana (President), Nabia Haddouche (Vice-President), Moataz El Fegjery (Treasurer), Anitta Kynsilehto, Søs Nissen, Wadih Al-Asmar, Isaías Barreñada, Catherine Teule

Excused:

Raffaella Bolini, Messaoud Romdhani, Hamdi Shaqqura, Osman İşçi

Secretariat:

Marc Schade-Poulsen (Executive Director), Eliana Capretti (Director of Communications) and Christel Décatoire (Rapporteur).

1. WELCOME ADDRESS, APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA, APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Decision: The minutes of the meeting of 23-24 September in Tunis were approved.

2. COMMENTS ON THE REGIONAL SITUATION

The members of the EC shared the following thoughts:

- The protest movements against the difficult economic and social conditions experienced by the populations in Tunisia and Algeria were recalled. In this context, it makes sense for the Network to work on economic and social rights and it may be appropriate to look for new members specialised in these issues.

- The seriousness of the humanitarian situation in Istanbul, Libya, Syria and Yemen was mentioned and, according to some EC members, demonstrates the international community's inability to manage these conflicts.
- The Network must continue to support human rights defenders in Egypt, where efforts are made to muzzle all forms of opposition, and in Tunisia, where gains remain fragile.
- Given the current difficulties of some Maghreb and Mashrek nationals in obtaining visas in the south of the region, it was proposed to launch a survey on freedom of movement in the south, as part of the Migration Working Group.
- Syria: as the current regime seems to be maintained, it is likely that the European Union will seek to normalize its relations with the regime. How will the Network take this situation into account?
- Turkey: It is recalled that the EU's relations with the country will enter a new phase due to the ongoing negotiations of a new instalment of financial assistance for Syrian refugees.
- Western Sahara: Negotiations are underway between Morocco and the EU following the 2nd decision of the European Court of Justice, but relations remain strained.
- The current situation in Europe is not conducive to the promotion of partnerships with the southern Mediterranean: the rise of xenophobia in EU countries is making relations with the countries of the South tenuous. In addition, the European elections scheduled for 2019 tend to focus on systemic discussions. Finally, movements aimed at grouping countries by interest groups weaken the Union's cohesion.

Some EC members question the value of systematically including this item on the agenda.

3. REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Presentation by Marc Schade-Poulsen

The Director welcomes the good results achieved in recent months, despite the difficulties encountered within the organization and more particularly in the Tunis office, and commented on the following points:

Thematic work:

- **Shrinking space for civil society:**
 - A seminar was held in Brussels and was also an opportunity to celebrate the 20 years of EuroMed Rights (video message from Mogherini).
 - Ambition to integrate this topic into all the work themes, in a transversal way.
- **Gender:** good results of the campaign on the Istanbul Convention. How to continue work using this dynamic and integrate issues related to family codes?
- **Migration:** this topic provides access to the European institutions, in particular via the annual meeting on European policies. The working group is an important forum for experts. The subject is a vast one and it remains difficult to achieve tangible results in the current situation.
An assistant has been recruited to support Marie Martin, head of the migration and refugees programme.
- **Advocacy:** how to use the European elections to promote the Network's issues?

Work by country:

- **Tunisia:** Implementation of the entire programme with the EU, which is an impressive amount of work, and the continuation of the working groups.
- **Morocco:** programme currently being structured. Local dynamics different from those observed in Tunisia, in relations with the EU.
- **Syria:** Working group stopped due to the end of funding. Departure of the Project Manager. It seems, however, that the group would like to continue its work without the support of the Network. EuroMed Rights must also identify its potential added value on Syria and how the issue of accountability could be integrated into its advocacy work.
- **Egypt:** field mission organized to show the Network's presence alongside human rights defenders. Funding is available until the end of 2018, but it is now time to prepare for 2019.

- Turkey: Census of the trials of human rights defenders in order to track and publicize the trials.

Concerning the Hub:

- Holding of a meeting to launch the Civil Society Hub project: it is important to show EuroMed Rights' ability to use an inclusive approach.
- Recruitment of a project coordinator and an assistant for the Hub.
- The annual Civil Society Forum in the framework of the Hub is scheduled for November in Brussels.
- Mapping civil society's actions on the topics of migration, economic and social rights and security, and governance, at regional level
- Topics selected for thematic seminars: shrinking of the space for civil society, EU migration policies and climate justice, EU economic and social development and financial and investment policy. EuroMed Rights will lead on the first topic.
- Calls for projects will be launched in countries where it will not be possible to hold meetings (Egypt, Algeria, etc.)
- Wadih Al-Asmar will be a member of the Hub's Steering Committee.

Secretariat:

- Brussels office: welcoming staff to larger premises
- Launch of an approach to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system, following Sida's recommendations. More detailed information will be presented to the EC after the summer.

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- Migration: It is important, on the one hand, to continue working on the list of safe countries, and on the other hand, that the North and the South should be united at the regional level on these issues - which is not sufficiently the case today, even though these issues are worked in the north and the south.
- Morocco: The project's activities as well as the link between the work on the tripartite dialogue and the thematic working groups do not seem clear to some EC members.
The Secretariat recalled that the spirit of the Morocco project is similar to that of the Tunisia project: it aims to provide civil society with a space for dialogue and to work on the tripartite dialogue with the European Union. The actual implementation of the project will necessarily be different, however. The issue currently under review relates ensuring that the Maghreb countries work together.
There followed a discussion on the organization of the Network's activities in the Maghreb.
The Secretariat informed the EC that a coordination meeting would be organized to improve coordination between the regional and local working groups.
Finally, some EC members requested clarification of their role in this project. The Secretariat explained that a project for consulting with the EC is being finalized.
- Algeria: request for feedback on the results of the mission by the members of the EC. Secretariat: report being finalized.
- Hub: In response to a question about the link between the Hub and the Network's work, it was pointed out that the interfaces between the two are manifold as a result of members' participation in the Hub's activities and as a result of staff and EC members' involvement in the Hub. An integration process is therefore in progress but needs to be deepened and clarified.
- Regarding the format of the Secretariat's report, some EC members suggested that the figures be provided as an appendix and that a list of acronyms be created.

Decision: approval of the report

4. FINANCIAL REPORTS

In the preamble, Marc Schade Poulsen noted that an exception was made to the Articles of Association in 2017: the EC met twice in 2017 to save money, which is not in accordance with the Articles of Association which provide for three meetings per year.

Presentation of the 2017 and 2018 financial reports by Marc Schade Poulsen

- The low level of equity is one of the organization's main financial issues. Despite an annual budget of almost 4 million Euros, spending must be controlled as much as possible because the organization is not allowed to generate profits. The only possible adjustment remains the payroll.
- A slight deficit is expected for 2017.
- Two key issues in 2018: the delay in the payment of Open Society's funds, combined with an unfavourable Euro-Dollar exchange rate, and the decline in the Norwegian krone, which mechanically lowers the amount of Norwegian funding. The Secretariat must therefore make last-minute savings on projects.
- End of funding for Syria.

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- The EC members recommend working on the issue of equity to secure employee salaries in order to ensure business continuity and to be able to cope with the fact of a donor pulling out. In particular, it was proposed that the Secretariat work with budget margins and constitute reserves.
- The EC members asked for details on the 2019 budget ahead of the General Meeting.
- The members of the EC discussed the appropriateness of organizing events to raise private funds, some even suggesting that alternative fundraising methods, in particular inspired by those used in the English-speaking world, be explored; others consider that an international network such as EuroMed Rights probably has little chance of raising private funds and that the Network's funding is linked to the geopolitical context.

Decision: Approval of the 2017 and 2018 financial reports presented.

5. EVALUATION OF THE FINANCING STRATEGY FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS

Presentation by Marc Schade Poulsen

This assessment was performed in order to guide future work.

The overall picture is positive and shows in particular: a stable level of income and stable relationships with key donors, the ability to obtain new financing, a level of dependence limited to key donors.

However, over the course of the past financial year, EuroMed Rights was unable to find funding to launch the new thematic work on justice and discrimination requested by the General Meeting. It should also be noted that funding is very much linked to the Nordic countries and that the network is not financially supported by any regional political heavyweights (France, Spain, etc.). Regional projects are financed by core funding and the level of equity has remained low.

Thus, despite the increase in income, the situation remains fragile. EuroMed Rights has visibility at 3-5 years but the trend as regards human rights funding is generally not favourable.

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- The EC welcomed the quality of the report and the overall good results achieved in the implementation of this first funding strategy.

- The EC reminded the Secretariat that it is not recommended to increase the staff in proportion to the funding in order to avoid difficult situations when funding stops.
- Some EC members raised the issue of the desired development model for EuroMed Rights and controlling the organization's growth: continue increasing the number of programmes and activities? Or remain a small and flexible organization?
- The EC members then proposed several avenues for obtaining new funding and sources of income:
 - Develop human rights consulting activities
 - Open up even more to donors, including involving programme managers, in order to show the added value of the Network's work
 - Integrate the issue of funding into advocacy activities, given that seeking funding is not solely an administrative responsibility
 - Invite public stakeholders to the General Meeting to promote recognition of the Network
 - Better promote our know-how in our communication with the public authorities but also with the general public
 - Work on joint funding projects with members
 - Improve and enhance the impact of our activities, a better way of raising funds
- Finally, it was proposed to increase the membership fee. The Secretariat must make a proposal with regard to the amount.

Décisions :

- **Invite all donors to the General Meeting, as well as other personalities likely to promote access to funding**
- **Propose an increase of the membership fees to the General Meeting. The amount remains to be determined.**

6. PROGRAMME ON ALGERIA

The closure of the Paris office implies the relocation of the Algeria programmes and the recruitment of a new programme officer who will be based in Tunisia.

The Algerian members are not satisfied with this situation, on the one hand, because they were used to working with the head of the Algeria programme based in Paris, and on the other hand, because they find it more difficult to organize meetings in Tunisia than in Paris. Michel Tubiana made the commitment to refer the matter to the EC.

Decision: After discussing the matter, the EC upheld the decision to recruit a new programme officer for Algeria, to be based in Tunisia. Special attention will be given to the selection of the new programme officer. Michel Tubiana wrote to the Algerian members to inform them of this decision.

7. MEMBERS

a. Application from ALEF

Wadih Al-Asmar and Anitta Kynsiletto presented a summary of ALEF's candidacy.

Decision: the EC approved ALEF's full membership.

b. Amendments to the Articles of Association

Michel Tubiana presented the project aimed at creating a Dispute Resolution Committee. The latter's role would involve handling the appeal procedures of the members that have been struck off, without waiting for the holding of a General Meeting once every 3 years. This project aims to streamline the entrances and exits to and from the Network.

After discussion, the members of the EC proposed that, should the General Meeting adopt this amendment, the elections of the first Dispute Resolution Committee could be conducted online, after the General Meeting (terms to be defined with the support of the Communication Department). Moreover, they wished that the adoption of new members remains a power vested in the General Meeting, on a proposal from the EC, in order to keep the symbolic time of entry of new members to the Network during the General Meeting.

Decision: Michel Tubiana addressed a revised draft taking into account the EC's proposals mentioned above as well as an introductory report, with a view to sending them to members by 9 April.

c. Member Issues

Marc Schade-Poulsen first informed the EC of the resignation of the Bruno Kreisky Foundation.

He then gave an update on the exchanges that have taken place since September with the members whose removal the EC proposed at the last meeting of the EC. A number of them did not respond to letters from the Secretariat sent in the autumn. Each member's situation was discussed. It is important for the EC, on the one hand, to allow membership renewal for organizations ready to make an active contribution to the Network's work and, on the other hand, to preserve the serenity of the discussions held during the General Meeting.

Decision: The Secretariat will send a new e-mail to the members listed to inform them of the final decision of the EC, within the time limits provided for in the Articles of Association.

d. Membership Report for the General Meeting

Christel Décatoire presented a draft report on membership, ending with questions to EC members about their intentions regarding the evolution of the profile of regular members.

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

The members of the EC first discussed the appropriateness of setting a maximum number of members for the next 3 years, as required by the Articles of Association. It was recalled that the integration of a new member involves costs and work for the organization, as all members are integrated into working groups.

In addition, to integrate new members, it was suggested to first invite organizations to participate in a working group and then to offer them the possibility of joining the Network, if the collaboration is mutually positive.

Finally, the members of the EC would like recruitment efforts to focus on specific countries (see below) in order to maintain a balance of regional representation.

Decisions: The Secretariat will produce a report on membership which will propose that the General Meeting vote on a maximum number of 80 full members for the 2018-2021 period and try to integrate in particular new members from Malta, the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe.

8. STAFF ISSUES

In camera session

9. EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATION WORK OF THE LAST 3 YEARS

Eliana Capretti presented a report summarizing the 2015-2017 period and outlining courses of action for the 2018-2021 period. It is essentially based on quantitative data (website, database, etc.) and on interviews conducted within the Secretariat. In summary, it shows:

- Positive points: EuroMed Rights' good ability to provide background information to journalists, the successful launch of audio-visual communication and communication on social networks
- Points for improvement: lack of planning and implementation of strategic communication with the press and social networks
- Proposal: develop proactive, on-the-ground exchanges with our members and journalists

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- The members of the EC welcomed this evaluation exercise.
- Some expressed dissatisfaction with regard to some aspects of EuroMed Rights' communication activity in recent years (website, link with journalists, drafting press releases, internal communication with members), while recalling the difficulty inherent in working in a trilingual environment, the limited resources and the co-responsibility of the EC for communication with members. The general opinion is that there is a gap between the quality of the Network's work and the value it is given.
- The key role of communication within an organization such as EuroMed Rights as well as the strategic link that must exist between communication and advocacy were highlighted.
- The members' respective promotion of the communication was discussed.
- It was proposed that EuroMed Rights, like other NGOs, produce reports or information sheets for journalists and to inform members; and that the programme officers be more involved in communication relating to their work topic.
- The EC recommended that the next communication strategy be the subject of internal consultation within the Secretariat, so that the staff can adopt it, and that it be realistic with regard to available resources.

Decision: A communication strategy will be presented for approval at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

10. OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITY REPORT FOR THE GENERAL MEETING

Eliana Capretti presented excerpts from the 2015-2018 activity report, which is currently being drafted and will be presented to the General Meeting, in order to obtain an initial opinion from the EC.

The EC members asked questions about the method and stressed the value of such a summarizing exercise for the Network and its members, while inviting the Secretariat to try to limit the length of the activity report.

Decision: Continue the work that has been started, according to the format presented, adding a summary of a few lines to the introduction of each chapter.

11. GENDER

Nabia Haddouche presented an overview of gender mainstreaming in the organization and made recommendations for the next 3 years. This information will be supplemented with a gender audit that is currently being carried out by the Secretariat.

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- The separation of the work of the Gender Working Group from the gender mainstreaming process, which was presented at the last EC meeting, was recalled. The arrangements for implementing this separation remain to be defined.
- Some members of the EC are concerned about the gap between the aspirations of the Secretariat and the EC and the reality of gender mainstreaming in the work of the members. In particular, it was recalled that the members have not made much use of the gender kit. Why is this?
- The question regarding the reason for which this gender mainstreaming work is not in line with the work that the members are currently conducting in the filed on the rights of the family and women was brought up. The Network must stay connected with its members' concerns.
- The added value of the concept of gender mainstreaming in advocacy actions, in dealing with accountability issues, was also highlighted. In particular, it makes it possible to integrate issues specific to men.
- The EC discussed how to continue the gender mainstreaming work while remaining close to members' struggles with women's rights and issues of gender/sexual orientation. A pragmatic approach, consisting of working on a few priority topics was advocated by many.

Decision: the EC confirmed the decision to present the gender audit to the General Meeting.

The EC did not, however, decide on how to implement the separation of work on violence against women, led by the Gender Working Group, on the one hand, and the gender mainstreaming work, on the other hand. It could not either decide on the respective weights of these topics in the Network's strategy and work.

12. NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Michel Tubiana led this discussion.

Decision:

Following the draw at the EC meeting, the lists of candidates for the election of the EC and the Presidency will begin with the letter N and will progress in alphabetical order.

13. 2018 – 2021 STRATEGY AND WORK PROGRAM

Marc Schade- Poulsen reported on the results of the member and staff consultation process on the 2018 - 2021 Strategy that took place during the first quarter. It should be noted that more than one third of the members gave feedback on the document, which is considered satisfactory.

Key comments from the staff:

- Editorial quality sometimes insufficient,
- Waiting for a more political document,
- Question on the place of gender mainstreaming in the strategy.

Key comments from members:

- Overall, the document was welcomed
- Several requests to position the issue of the shrinking space for civil society at the heart of the Network's work
- The Network's work is too underdeveloped in Europe; proposal to include more European members in the working groups
- Questions about the work that the Network wishes to carry out on the new topics: justice, discrimination, economic and social rights.
- Question on the connection of the work on the Western Sahara and that on Morocco

Comments and questions from the Executive Committee

- Several EC members agreed that the document was not sufficiently to-the-point and that the description of the Network's work and the political analysis of the regional situation should be removed.
- It was also proposed that certain topics be handled transversally in the strategy: economic and social rights, justice, the defense of human rights activists.
- The EC members then discussed how to tackle the new topics proposed in the strategy (justice, discrimination and economic and social rights): Marc Schade- Poulsen recalled that the organization had the means to finance only one new working group whose topic remains to be defined. The other two topics, not covered by the working group, could be the subject of an annual seminar. The strategy should clearly state that the choices have not yet been finalized, so as not to cause disappointment among the members.

Decision:

The Secretariat sent a shortened and amended version of the Strategy and the Work Programme, for final re-reading to the EC members by 12 April 2018, with a view to sending the finalized version to the members by 24 May 2018.

14. PROGRAMMES OF THE GENERAL MEETING AND THE SEMINAR ON THE SHRINKING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Programme of the General Meeting:

The Secretariat proposed to organize "agoras", which will explain the work of the working groups.

The EC then mainly discussed two points: whether or not to produce a final statement and in what form; and the format of the discussions on the future work programme (plenary session or workshops).

Decisions:

- **After voting, the EC decided that the General Meeting would produce an official statement. The statement will focus on the topic of the shrinking space for civil society. It will result in a press release.**
- **After voting, the EC decided that the discussions on the work programme would be conducted in a plenary session and not in thematic workshops. The discussions will focus on the issues of economic and social rights and discrimination. A further discussion will be held on Sunday afternoon before voting on the programme.**
- **The increase in membership fees will be put to the vote on Sunday afternoon.**
- **The EC would like comments on the strategy received from members to be shared within the network, in a form to be defined (e-mail, website). Prior agreement will need to be requested from the authors of the comments.**

Seminar programme:

The EC shared some ideas for developing the programme: sharing winning strategies to avoid the shrinking of civil society, talking about the criminalization of migrants and their advocates to discuss the refugee issue, etc.

Decision:

The Secretariat organized the finalization of the programme, by exchange of e-mails with the members of the EC who volunteered.

CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING:

If the funding expected in April so allows, a last meeting of the Executive Committee could be held on 12-13 May in Paris.

Michel Tubiana, for whom this was the last meeting as Chair and member of the EC, concluded the meeting by thanking the people from the EC and the Secretariat with whom he worked during his terms of office.