First Meeting of the Executive Coordination Panel

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REPORT

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Saturday 24 November 2007

THE MEDITERRANEAN UNION INITIATIVE, BRIEFING BY H. E. ALAIN LE ROY

The President of the Assembly introduced the French Ambassador, Alain Le Roy, who had been invited to present President Sarkozy’s Mediterranean Union project. The Ambassador referred to the recent geopolitical history of Europe, pointing out that in the last fifteen years, Europe had focused on re-opening its frontiers towards the East, the Balkan States and Turkey, and that during this period, the South of the Mediterranean had been to some extent neglected. Ambassador Le Roy therefore encouraged the States of the Mediterranean to welcome President Sarkozy’s initiative, as Europe at present invested too little of its Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the South of the Mediterranean.

He noted that whilst the USA invested 18-20% of its FDI in Mexico and Latin America, and Japan 20-25% of its FDI to the South Asia-Pacific region, only 2% of the European FDI was directed to the South of the Mediterranean.

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The Ambassador commented on the European need for human resources over the next 20 years, and on the wealth of available labor in the South Mediterranean, but at the same time insisted on the need for economic convergence and development of investment to avoid Europe's needs simply being transformed into a migratory phenomenon.

The Ambassador commented on the fact that Europe has taken 50 years to get to where it is today, and that President Sarkozy’s Mediterranean Union project was even more ambitious given the greater diversity amongst the states of the Mediterranean involved. In this unification project, he still felt that the Barcelona process was a valid organization, but questioned the adequacy of its instruments to achieve its aims. This process still deserved to continue to exist, but its results were not sufficient. President Sarkozy felt that the Mediterranean Union project would be complementary to the Barcelona process, which needed to be given greater impetus than in the past.

As far as membership of President Sarkozy’s project was concerned, it would include all the Mediterranean littoral States. France will be calling a summit meeting on this project in June 2008, to be attended by Heads of States and Governments of the Mediterranean States, during which the question of membership and representation would be further discussed. The project could, for instance, be all-inclusive in relation to membership, but with variable geometry regarding specific issues. For example, the issue of pollution in the Mediterranean would be an all-inclusive issue, whilst security in the East Mediterranean would involve the participation of only certain States.

Accordingly, littoral States of the Mediterranean would be part of an inner or first circle of members, although other non-littoral States with an interest in the Mediterranean would not be excluded from the organization. This system would allow States such as Germany and the United Kingdom to participate. The position of Jordan would have to be discussed too.

As far as the mechanism of the Mediterranean Union Project was concerned, the Ambassador indicated that a permanent secretariat would be established, but that States would meet under the auspices of a G-MED-like structure with a rotating presidency, whose first meeting would take place in mid-June 2008. Initially, legal binding instruments would not be adopted, States would meet to determine the agenda and the priorities of the Project. Littoral States would be asked to designate “sherpas” who would be involved as experts in the negotiation process and determine the agenda from as early as January 2008. The Project is based on the idea of creating agencies to deal with specific Mediterranean issues, such as the establishment of a Mediterranean water agency, an environmental agency, or littoral protection agency. An alternative energy agency could be set up focusing on solar energy and wind energy. Another important area which requires attention was adapting to climate change. In the social sector, education, the Erasmus program, exchange of scientists, teachers, university cooperation etc. would need to be developed. As regards health, attention would be given to the health of women, children, and prevention of epidemics.

The Ambassador also informed the Assembly of the current state of developments emphasizing that consultations were currently taking place with interested parties. He welcomed the warm reception of the Project from Italy, Malta and Tunisia. He also felt that there was common ground with the European Commission, President Barroso, and that the EU would be a member of the Mediterranean Union.

As regards investment in the Mediterranean, the Ambassador supported the creation of a development bank for the Mediterranean, and suggested setting up an agency for initiatives relating to the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

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Further issues for the region were also security and civil protection.

The President then opened the floor to questions from the Assembly.

**Plenary Debate**

There was general consensus about the prospect of the creation of a Mediterranean Union from the members, although it was generally felt that this prospect was not yet mature and needed further reflection. The Assembly also reminded the French Ambassador that the PAM was the first of more than 15 years of work and that it had been created by the will of its members. Mention was made of the fact that the creation of the Mediterranean Union would have to be a real union and not be established for the purposes of serving the European Union’s need for human resources.

The Assembly expressed the view that the most important aspect of establishing any union was the whole process of democratization, and those values could be changed by instilling the yearning for democratic values. To this extent, a set of core values would need to be developed, which all members of any Mediterranean project would need to understand and ascribe to. Reference was made to the need to establish a sort of “politica franca” of core values for the Mediterranean region, and that the greatest need for the Union was to unite peoples’ values and mentalities.

The Assembly agreed with the Ambassador that the future of Europe lays in the Mediterranean and also felt that the economic problems of the Mediterranean region were partly due to the fact that the region had received little compared with Eastern Europe over the last 20 years.

The Assembly also stated that it would be important for any such union to take political stances, and that cooperation in the region could not be based on purely economic motives.

Turkey reassured the Ambassador that it did not interpret President Sarkozy’s project a way of showing it the back door to European Union membership.

The Assembly considered that Middle East security was an issue of utmost urgency for the future stability and prosperity of the Mediterranean region, and that a political stance would need to be taken on this issue. It was also felt that in dealing with this issue, the project should remember the enormous price that had been paid to date in terms of human suffering and loss of lives.

Certain members of the Assembly mentioned that the security of the Mediterranean was also threatened by terrorism, the ramifications of which went far beyond its regional boundaries.

The Assembly also welcomed the intention of the project to deal with immigration, whether legal or illegal, and that this would require financing, the transfer of know-how and achieving better standards of living in the South of the Mediterranean. The members felt that it was necessary to take a united stance on tackling illegal immigration and trafficking of people.

The Assembly appreciated the fact that the Mediterranean Union would be promoting the use of alternative sources of energy, such as solar and wind energy.

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The geographical borders of the project were questioned. What were the limits of a region being considered interested in the Mediterranean? How far would membership be extended to non-littoral European States, Gulf States and African States? Would Israel be invited to be a member? A question was also raised concerning how President Sarkozy’s project would differ from the Barcelona process and how it could contribute to strengthening the process without simply duplicating it.

The Assembly reminded the Ambassador that the Mediterranean States needed to be officially notified of the project. The question was also raised of how the project would be financed and what would be the budget for such an organization.

In answer to the questions and issues raised by the Assembly, the Ambassador made the following replies.

The Ambassador felt that the question of peace process and political issues could also be addressed by the Mediterranean Union. Peace was the main priority in Middle East, but there were also other priorities and processes, including the Barcelona process. The Ambassador referred to the fact that all States were closely following attempts to reach a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestine conflict in Annapolis, but that the Mediterranean Union project did not have the vocation of solving peace in the Middle East.

As far as possible membership was concerned, the Ambassador stated that the “first circle” would include 22 littoral Mediterranean States and Portugal. In addition, observer states would be granted to non-littoral States such as Germany in the case of Europe. These criteria would apply also to States in the South. Other potential observers would be: the Arab League, the European Union, the Maghreb Consultative Council, the Economic Council of the Gulf States, the African Union. Associated membership could also be extended to other States upon invitation by the core group of littoral members.

The Ambassador also confirmed that Israel would be invited to participate, but that according to the principle of variable geometry, it would not necessarily participate in all aspects of the Union.

In relation to the process of democratization, the Ambassador saw the Mediterranean Union as an intergovernmental and executive process, working closely alongside the PAM, whereas the PAM would bring the Parliamentary dimension of the Mediterranean to the intergovernmental process and would serve as a catalyst by suggesting projects and initiatives that would be implemented by the Union. The Secretariat of the Union would have to coordinate closely with that of the PAM to ensure the Parliamentary and the executive bodies of the Mediterranean region remain linked to one another on the model of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.

As regards the organization of the Union, the Ambassador stated that there could be two permanent secretariats: one to liaise with member states and one to shadow the work of other bodies such as the Barcelona process and the European Commission to ensure the coherence of activities and projects. On the question of Turkey and EU membership, the Ambassador categorically stated that France certainly had no intention of allowing Turkey the back door to EU membership by creating the Mediterranean Union Project.

In concluding the discussion, the President thanked the Ambassador for shedding light on the Mediterranean Union project and on behalf of the Assembly confirmed that all its members were in agreement with the Union’s principles.
favor of this proposal, and that they would offer their encouragement and support to the realization of this ambitious initiative.