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***Ad Hoc* Committee on the Middle East**

Chairman: Hon. George Vella (Malta)

Middle East Peace Process & events in the Arab World

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This report outlines PAM's efforts in assisting the peoples of the Mediterranean in the political transformations that started in 2011, and are still taking place to date. The first part of this report is dedicated to a brief overview of the political situation in the MENA region, followed by the latest developments in this area. The second part focuses on the Assembly's concrete actions for the peoples of the region.

I. The Regional Context : A year after the Arab Spring

The year 2011 witnessed some of the greatest social and political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa in recent history. Beginning with Tunisia's protests and ousting of Ben Ali in early January, the momentum then spread throughout the region, encompassing Egypt, Yemen, Libya and eventually Syria.

The root causes of the uprisings can be identified in a combination of factors, but they can mainly be attributed to the mal function of the political systems and deteriorating socio-economic conditions experienced by people in the region in the last few years. These factors were indeed a clear signal about the need of change.

With the wind of the Arab Spring spreading all over the Middle East, countries like Bahrain, Yemen and Syria were also affected. Although in the last months the media has focused on the Arab Uprisings in the MENA region, the Israeli-Palestinian issue still requires the utmost attention.

In Tunisia, on January 14, 2011, President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled the country after weeks of mounting anti-government protests. Tunisia's mass popular uprising, dubbed the "Jasmine Revolution," sparked anti-government movements in other countries across the region. Ben Ali's departure was greeted by widespread euphoria within Tunisia. Yet disputes over reform

priorities, economic crisis, labor unrest, tensions between the privileged coastal region and relatively impoverished interior, and lingering insecurity are continuing challenges. The humanitarian and security impact of events in neighboring Libya brings additional difficulties.

Despite the many political and economic hurdles, Tunisia has exhibited a number of factors that support its transitional stage, such as: a relatively small territory, a sizable and well educated middle class, and a long history of encouraging women's socioeconomic freedoms. Nevertheless, Tunisia's transition raises a wide range of questions for the future of the country and the region. These refer to the struggle between reformists and entrenched forces carried over from the former regime; the potential shape of the new political order; the role and influence of Islamism in the government and society; the question of how to reform the security services.

Nonetheless, direct results of the revolts in Tunisia are the adoption of a new constitution and the appointment of a new government, being the result of a well functioning electoral process. In the latest stream of efforts in the reconstruction of Tunisia, a conference calling for justice for victims of Ben Ali regime has opened, the aim being to settle scores before the phase of reconciliation can be launched.

In Egypt, people flooded the streets on January 25th, 2011, demanding more rights, in a condition of great dissatisfaction amongst the population, in particular the youth. The latter were expressing their disappointment at an establishment which was failing to provide them with hope for a better future. These protests were based on a long list of demands, including freedom of speech and the lifting of State of Emergency Laws. Their ultimate demand was the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak, which was initially met with resistance, but soon, the will of the people, symbolized by "Tahrir Square", prevailed.

The process of the political transition is at an advanced phase, as the Parliamentary election has been concluded and the newly elected Egyptian Parliament held its first session on the 23rd of January 2012. The "Freedom and Liberty" party, the Political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, won around 45 % of the seats; nevertheless, they did not reach the majority and still need to form a coalition with other Parties to be able to gain the majority. The Presidential system of Egypt will still prevent the majority party from forming a new Government.

Presidential elections took place in June, making Muhammad Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Egypt's 5th President. A referendum approving amendments in the Constitution has recently taken place, and now Egyptians await the drafting of a new Constitution, and a national referendum should take place soon after to approve it.

However, the situation in Egypt is not so clear cut. The length of the political transition period, the ambiguous role of the Army and above all, the rising power of the Egyptian Islamic Groups, even with their moderate nature compared with other groups in the region, result in a level of uncertainty in the process of democratic transition. Such instability has also had its toll on the economy and the Direct Foreign Investment.

In **Libya**, in February 2011 following the arrest in Benghazi of Fathi Terbil, the human rights lawyer representing some of the Abu Salim prison families, people filled the streets and the revolution took off.

This revolution was met by unprecedented bloodshed as pro-Gaddafi forces attempted to crackdown peaceful demonstrations. As a result of the constant demonstrations, and with the assistance of the International Community, the Gaddafi regime was finally toppled following a lengthy and bloody confrontation.

Since then, Libya under the leadership of a new council has undergone several changes, the major being freedom of association, which now enables political parties to be formed and contest elections.

The country is still going through a challenging transition period, during which a number of crucial issues will have to be addressed, among which national reconciliation, human rights and the building of a new nation in a modern, peaceful and democratic way. At present, the main danger stems from weapons in the hands of private militias, who have refused to hand over the arms used during the revolution. The future of Libya remains unclear, as there are voices for and against a federalist Libya, and this issue is being the cause of persistent turmoil in the country – pushing peace and reconciliation further away.

In **Syria**, it all began when people were asking for more freedoms and protesting poor socio-economic conditions that have been endured for decades by the Syrian population. In response to manifestations, the Syrian authorities reacted with the use of force and to date, over 9,000 people have been reported killed and over 14,000 are detained.

International efforts started off with the Arab League initiative in sending a first Observation Mission to Syria. This however, had soon to be terminated due to escalation of violence. Following worldwide appeals, the United Nations and League of Arab States then appointed Kofi Annan as the Special Envoy to Syria in February, and in its efforts to stop the bloodshed, the International Community repeated appeals to the Syrian government to halt the violence.

This culminated in a ceasefire agreement on the 10th April this year. The six point agreement, negotiated by Kofi Annan, stated that the process to peace should be led by Syrians themselves, it was to be supervised by the UN, and it should be one which respects the freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully.

After the agreement was concluded, the United Nations landed an Observation Mission. Although this was considered at the time as a milestone in the peace process, the ceasefire between rebels and the government was never respected, and the turmoil continues up to the day of writing. In August, the UN Observation Mission in Syria was ended in response to growing violence levels, and Lakhdar Brahimi replaced Kofi Annan as UN envoy to the country.

The **Middle East peace process file** remains a sensitive one. In the latest developments, after

more than a year without any direct talks, delegations from both sides resumed meetings in Amman and Jerusalem, reaffirming their commitment to the peace process. The Middle East Quartet is insisting for further talks with the hope of reaching an agreement no later than the end of the year.

Negotiations were deeply affected by the Security Council's reaction to the Palestinian bid for recognition of statehood based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as a capital, and to date, states in the Security Council, as well as, in the General Assembly of the United Nations remains divided on the issue. The recognition by UNESCO of Palestine is a clear example.

II. PAM's commitment to the demands of the people in the Arab Spring

In the midst of the Arab Spring, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean immediately took action by seeking ways to assist in the needs of the Region. PAM has played an instrumental role, at the regional and international level, in particular in assisting those member states which went through such dramatic changes, and the process aimed at strengthening their democratic institutions. PAM's role was particularly crucial in assisting and facilitating political missions and humanitarian aid to the Libyan people, especially that of the UN system.

In the recent Annual briefing meeting to Ambassadors of all Member States on PAM, held at PAM HQ, on 12 January 2012, PAM Secretary General conveyed a message from President Tarawneh where he expressed his view that the democratic changes in some countries in the South and the economic crisis sweeping the entire Mediterranean region, North and South, were to impose more cooperation and common efforts to face these challenging times.

The Assembly's support was reiterated in a meeting held between the PAM President, PAM Secretary General and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, in Amman earlier this year. In this meeting, Ban Ki-Moon has invited PAM to continue supporting the transition process in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, with whom PAM has kept an open channel of communication and assistance throughout their most difficult times.

The Arab Spring and its implications for the future cooperation of the Mediterranean region were also tackled during the 9th Meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers. Also during the "Mediterranean Forum" that followed the 5+5 meeting, PAM Secretary General, who on behalf of the Parliaments of the countries present at the meeting, reiterated PAM's support to initiatives aimed at giving effective and concrete answers to the needs expressed by the Mediterranean peoples, based on PAM's strong belief that the political transformation can only go side by side with equitable and sustainable socio-economic development.

In April, PAM participated in NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Special Mediterranean Group Seminar on democratic transitions in North Africa and the Middle East, held in Marseille, France. In his speech, President Tarawneh insisted in the essential role of parliamentary diplomacy to foster dialogue in the challenging situation posed by the aftermath of the Arab Spring. He also highlighted PAM's role in assisting transitioning countries by helping build peace and bring humanitarian aid to the population, and reiterated PAM's commitment to keep working on the matter.

PAM is indeed dedicated to continue with its efforts to lead, through its parliamentary diplomacy tools, the course of action to substitute injustices with more participation in the democratic life in those countries where the populations have initiated these processes. PAM is also working on building upon its achievements to promote further operational solutions to the aspirations expressed by the peoples following the Arab spring, which are also inspiring the youth in the Western world and all our initiatives have helped strengthen the complementarity of our parliamentary diplomacy with traditional diplomacy, in support to the actions undertaken by the international community, to defend our values and principles.

Accordingly, PAM is dedicating most of its efforts to economic growth in the region, with a specific importance given to the Arab Spring Countries, in order to enhance employment opportunities and to establish a more structured framework to strengthen cooperation and tangible actions in the fields of governance, finance, free trade and particularly support to SMEs and Job Creation.

PAM is also particularly committed to the wider cooperation between the institutional, public and private stakeholders in the processes for economic and financial development, and this year will promote a number of initiatives in favor of employment and job creation, through its standing committees and Panel on External Trade and Investments in the Mediterranean, in order to facilitate the transition processes in those countries where the populations have urged the implementation of more democratic participation.

Consequently, PAM managed, through its ongoing cooperation with the major European Financial institutions to facilitate a number of investments, to make available an amount of 2.5 billion Euros, to finance projects in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, the four pilot countries of the Southern Mediterranean shore. Meeting between PAM Secretary General and Mr. Thomas Mirow, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, took place in London, on 24 January 2012. The PAM - EBRD partnership was referred to as a model initiative.

PAM's support to the people of Tunisia

- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean was following closely the National elections in Tunis that were held on 23 October 2011 to select a National Constituent Assembly. The Assembly has put in place a transitional government and is in the process of drafting a new constitution, ahead of new general elections that are tentatively scheduled to take place in June 2013.
- Thousands of candidates competed for seats in the National Constituent Assembly, and the outcome showed popular support to be primarily focused on a handful of political parties. Harakat al Nahda, a moderate Islamist party, won 41% of the seats, and has formed a governing coalition with two center-left secular parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the Democratic Forum of Labor and Liberties. On December 12, 2011, H.E. Mr. Moncef Marzouki was elected by the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia as the interim president of Tunisia.

- PAM was among the first parliamentary delegations to meet with the new Tunisian authorities, including the President, to assist in the process of the constitutional reform for the country. A kind invitation from H.E. Mustapha Ben Jafar, President of the Constituent Assembly, was extended to PAM President to visit Tunisia. Accordingly, a bilateral meeting was held on 6 September 2012 in Tunis between PAM's Deputy Secretary General and the President of Tunisia's Constituent Assembly. The main aim of the meeting was for the PAM to re-establish formal relations with the Tunisian legislative body after the revolution and recommend the creation of a new Tunisian delegation to PAM so that an official and efficient channel of communication can be established with the new Tunisian institution.

PAM's initiatives in assisting in the political transition in Egypt

- PAM has followed closely the political changes in Egypt, which was followed by a series of statements in support of the people's demands. Later on in the political transition, the Assembly encouraged the Egyptian people for their important contribution in the electoral process, which started off with the stage of the parliamentary elections in November 2011.
- PAM had created an immediate connection with the newly elected Parliament and Shura Council of Egypt. President Tarawneh was in contact with the Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament, Dr. Saad el Katatny, and the President of the Shura Council, Dr. Ahmed Fahmy, expressing to both of them PAM's full commitment to support the institutional and democratic transition in Egypt and in the region.
- A visit by a high-level delegation to Cairo is to take place in the near future, as agreed during the meeting that took place between Mr. Mohamed Kamel Amr, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and PAM Secretary General, Dr. Piazza, on the margin of the 9th Meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers, in Rome on 20 February 2012.
- Along with PAM's political initiatives, the Assembly is currently striving to tackle the root causes of the poor socio-economic conditions in Egypt recognizing that such factors are the cornerstone of the country's stability, as well as, key to the wellbeing of the people - the latter being a major pillar in the work of the Assembly. In concrete terms, this is being followed through by collaborating with financial entities such as the EBRD in an effort to mobilize funds for the development in Egypt.

PAM's involvement in Libya

- Throughout the Libyan crisis, PAM has expressed support to the UN missions in the country and it was crucial in the facilitation of the UN Envoy mission to Misrata, where PAM assisted in securing a humanitarian corridor.

- In furthering such cooperation, in August 2011, the Libyan representative in Malta, Ambassador Saadun Suayeh, paid a courtesy call on the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, Dr. Sergio Piazzi, following the latest developments in the country. The discussions held focused on the role of PAM in the future of Libya, in assisting the establishment of the new democratic structures and institutions.
- Furthermore, PAM confirmed its readiness in assisting the mobilization of humanitarian aid to the people of Libya. For this purpose, PAM has pledged support through its network of parliamentary diplomacy, as well as, assistance through international organizations, including the UN System. PAM's promises will continue until the Libyan people will have reached and achieved their long term aspirations.
- In collaboration with the IPU, PAM is ready to assist in the efforts to send a mission to Libya in the endeavor of helping the Libyan authorities re-establish a fully functioning parliament. This mission follows a request made to IPU Secretary General Anders B. Johnson by Libyan Foreign Affairs delegates to the IPU Assembly.
- During a recent bilateral meeting, PAM Secretary General and Libya's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation discussed the ways in which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean could assist the Libyan authorities in achieving a full normalization of the social and political situation of the country, as well as the disarmament of the ex-rebel forces. Another issue discussed was that of economic growth, a matter in which PAM could help by encouraging foreign investment in Libya and supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).
- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean is currently in contact with the Libyan General National Congress, elected by popular vote on 7 July 2012 and replacing since 8 August 2012 the National Transitional Council. The PAM will soon arrange a mission to Libya to establish formal relations with the new legislative authority of the country.

PAM's activities in relation to the situation in Syria

Following the meeting held in Jordan between the PAM President, and Secretary General, with the UN Secretary General, PAM confirmed to ensure its readiness to support the UN efforts through its parliamentary diplomacy, entrusted to PAM by its States, of which Syria is founding members. PAM's initiatives in assisting Syria were;

- Coordination between PAM Secretary General with Kofi Annan, Joint Special Envoy of the UN-LAS on the Syrian crisis, to ensure the support of the National Parliament in Damascus in order to keep the door open for dialogue, political, diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives. Furthermore, PAM has also been in constant contact with Russia via the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the same matter.
- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean was among the Regional Organizations invited to participate at the 1st Syria Humanitarian Forum held in Geneva,

on 8 March 2012, under the auspices of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), chaired by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and co-facilitated by the League of Arab States (LAS), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the European Commission Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). PAM addressed the Forum and offered its full support, through its regional parliamentary network, in assisting the humanitarian efforts and political dialogue in Syria, in view of its previous collaboration with the UN System on the occasion of the crisis in Libya during 2011 and also in keeping an open channel of communication and dialogue between international organizations and authorities in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab spring movement.

- PAM was also present at the 3rd meeting of the Syrian Humanitarian Forum held in Geneva, on 5 June 2012. The goal of the meeting was to mobilize funding for humanitarian purposes and share information about how to expand access to those civilians suffering from wounds, disease or hunger in the wake of the Syrian crisis. PAM expressed its full support to all humanitarian initiatives in the region, as well as those aiming at fostering more participative and democratic governance in transitioning countries.
- Throughout the Arab Spring, PAM maintained a direct link with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, following the meeting of PAM SG with her, on the margins of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly, where they discussed the most appropriate way for PAM to support her Syria action. It was at Ms. Amos' request, that the issues of protection of civilians and humanitarian access have been repeatedly raised by PAM with the Syrian Parliament, as well as, with the Foreign Relations Committee of the Syrian Parliament.
- In connection with the League of Arab States' monitoring mission to Syria, PAM has kept an open channel with LAS high officials. In addition, PAM Secretary General has been coordinating with H.E. Nabil EL Araby, Secretary General of LAS, to, yet again, use PAM willingness and readiness to support the Arab League throughout its efforts to restore peace and security in Syria.
- The Secretary General of PAM has also regularly consulted with Hon. Nabih Berry, the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon, to consolidate Lebanon and PAM efforts related to easing the tensed situation in Syria. It was agreed that a meeting between them is to take place in Beirut prior to the visit to Damascus to support Mr. Annan and Ms. Amos, in order to monitor and facilitate any follow-up to their mission as well as to build on their recommendations. PAM and UN agreed to visit Damascus in the immediate aftermath of the People's Council elections that will take place on 7 May 2012.
- Parallel to PAM's direct initiatives, the Assembly is also collaborating with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the situation in Syria. A series of actions will start off with an IPU Fact-Finding Mission to Syria. This will be an addition to the efforts of the international community in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict there. The mission was in fact one of the key outcomes of a resolution passed at the 126th IPU Assembly.

- In the same thread, discussions between IPU, the Arab League, the UN, PAM and Kofi Annan, the joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy on Syria, are under way. These high-level discussions will work out the modalities of the mission which received full backing from the Syrian parliamentary delegation to Kampala.

PAM's role in the Middle East peace process

- i. The commitment of PAM to the Middle East Peace Process has continued and was highlighted during several events that took place in the recent months. The President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), H.E. Senator Fayez Al-Tarawneh, and Secretary General, Ambassador Sergio Piazzi, met the United Nations Secretary General, H.E. Ban Ki-moon in Amman, on 31 January 2012, on the occasion of the 19th Bureau Meeting of the Assembly.
- ii. The UN and PAM agreed during the meeting that the Assembly will put at the disposal of the UN System its parliamentary diplomacy and confidence building instruments within the regional context, for the benefit of a more coordinated strategy in approaching the necessary actions to facilitate, in all possible ways, the Middle East peace process, interfere with the deteriorating situation in Syria and to sustain the democratic processes and the social and economic development of the peoples in the area.
- iii. On 9 February 2012, President of the PAM, Senator Dr. Fayez Al-Tarawneh, on behalf of the Assembly, expressed his satisfaction on the Fatah-Hamas agreement reached by the Palestinian Authority President H.E. Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas Leader, Kahed Meshaal. Moreover, he asserted the unity of the Palestinian political parties, the line-up of a representative government and the holding of elections in Gaza and the West Bank later this year, will also facilitate the efforts by the International community, inter alias, The Middle East Quartet, to explore further initiatives leading to a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He underlined, also, that PAM will continue to assist and support as required, through its parliamentary diplomacy instruments, all activities that will strengthen stability, security and peace in the region, and is at the disposal of all parties, as a platform for dialogue and solution oriented proposals.
- iv. The 19th Meeting of the PAM Bureau, hosted by the Parliament of Jordan, on 30 January, discussed, in depth, the current development in the Middle East with the participation of two key-figures in the region, namely H.E. Ambassador Robert H. Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and UN Secretary General Envoy to the Quartet, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Nasser Judeh.
- v. In his intervention, Ambassador Serry described the current status of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, and referred to the situation of the region in general, including Syria. He underlined the role of both the UN and the Quartet which are leaving no stone unturned to keep the parties engaged in dialogue and fruitful negotiations. It was agreed

that more coordination will take place, between PAM and the Quartet, to ensure working on both, the Political and the Parliamentary, levels aiming to create and support the best possible conditions for resuming the direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

- vi. Hon. Judeh, Jordanian Foreign Minister, expressed his satisfaction on the current momentum, stating that there is a calendar, as proposed last October by the Quartet, which is being generally adhered to. He referred to the ongoing contacts, under his presidency, as important explorative talks, which means that dialogue is taking place. With reference to PAM, Hon. Judeh, underlined how important the Assembly is in being instrumental, when talks are blocked, in exercising the necessary political pressure on the Knesset and the Palestinian National Authority to resume negotiations. The fact that at the PAM Bureau the Vice Presidents of the Knesset and of the PNC respectively, participate and discuss directly on their issues, points to the positive role that PAM is playing in the region. PAM reassured Hon. Judah that all efforts should be deployed at creating and supporting the best possible conditions for resuming direct dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians
- vii. PAM Vice President, Senator Francesco Amoruso (Italy), and Secretary General, Amb. Sergio Piazzi, participated at the 9th Meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers, hosted by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Giulio Terzi, in Rome on 20 February 2012. PAM has been invited to participate in its capacity as the leading Mediterranean regional organization of parliamentary diplomacy, which is also entrusted with the parliamentary dimension of the 5+5 Dialogue.
- viii. PAM Vice President, Senator Francesco Amoruso and the Secretary General, also held a series of bilateral meetings with the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, the Spanish Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, as well as with the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy and the Secretary General of the Union for the Arab Maghreb. It was highlighted, throughout the various meetings, the role PAM's parliamentary diplomacy is currently contributing, as a strategic factor, to strengthening Security, stability and democratic transition in the region.

Conclusion:

The years 2011 and 2012 have changed the political landscape of the Mediterranean region beyond recognition, with implications for the entire world. Such transformations were both unheard of, as well as, unpredicted. Now as the region strives to get back on its feet and re-establish stability, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean takes upon itself the challenge to assist in all the needs of the region.

The region is now facing greater security issues, where unstable countries have increased the degree of illegal migration. Insecurity also concerns the economic and social stability of the Mediterranean, where countries like Egypt and Tunisia, have been faced with, reductions in trade, production and tourism. The future of the Arab Spring is still unclear. Notwithstanding

such challenges, these countries must still strive for democracy, which shall fulfil their demands for more freedoms, including freedom of speech, and which guards the fundamental human rights.

Democracies in the region must be reinforced by socio-economic development, lest in the midst of the enthusiasm for political change, we forget that the spark that ignited this revolutionary wave was a young man protesting against a system that was not providing him with resources enough to survive, and today youth unemployment continues to be rife in the region.

The Assembly commends the peoples of the region to be encouraged by their achievements and never lose focus on the main goal which is the full consolidation of democracy, which guards the fundamental human rights and is reinforced by adequate socio-economic conditions.

The path to democracy and prosperity was never an easy one. Challenges and hurdles on the political, social and economical levels have always accompanied all radical changes in the history of mankind. It's with an utmost importance that people of these countries, going through these changes, to be patient and realize that a change as deep as they aim for, and expects to their countries, is a complicated long process that takes time requires scarifies and putting the interest of the whole nation on top of all ideological differences.