



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

1st Standing Committee
on Political and Security-Related Cooperation

Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East

Rapporteur: Mr. George Vella (Malta)

***Report on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East in 2008 [endorsed by consensus
by the 1st Standing Committee at the 3rd Session of the Standing Committees
18 September 2008, St. Julians (Malta)]***

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) represents the institutionalization of parliamentary diplomacy in the Mediterranean: it is the parliamentary dimension of the Mediterranean. The PAM's primary mission is to assert the centrality of the Mediterranean region and to reaffirm the key role of its members in addressing their common interests and shared concerns through a forum that has been specially established for that purpose.

Its uniqueness is represented by the members themselves, as this is the only parliamentary forum whose membership is extended to all the Mediterranean states. The PAM therefore constitutes a unique tool conceived as a special forum where parliamentary representatives of different cultures and religions contribute on an equal footing (with equal voting rights) to the goals of peace, security and socio-economic prosperity.

The detailed work of the Parliamentary Assembly is carried out by three Standing Committees:

- 1st Standing Committee on Political and Security related Cooperation
- 2nd Standing Committee on Economic, Social and Environmental Cooperation – Co-development and Partnership
- 3rd Standing Committee on Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights

Despite the fact that the reasons uniting peoples of the Mediterranean far surpass those dividing them, the Mediterranean as a region continues to suffer from political differences and disputes whose origins date back many centuries. Furthermore, new challenges, such as the effects of globalization, energy, water, international and internal migrations, terrorism, money laundering, organized crime, environmental degradation and human trafficking, are just a few of the common problems that the region is facing and that must be addressed at regional level.

The lack of peace in the Middle East continues to be one of, if not the main problem, threatening the whole process of security, stability and development of the Mediterranean area.

Within the framework of the 1st Standing Committee on Political and Security related Cooperation, on 24 November 2007 the Assembly, as indicated in the Statutes, chose to set up the PAM Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East¹. The Ad Committee's overall objective is to monitor the political situation in the Middle East and to determine the manner in which the Assembly as a whole can contribute towards the resolution of the dispute.

As such, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East's activities concentrate on the following areas:

1. Monitoring & Support of Peace Initiatives

- Act as a **monitoring** forum of all ongoing peace initiatives through the exchange of the latest information. The Rapporteur shall focus the discussion on opportunities and progress of **mediating efforts** in the region. **Ahead** of key initiatives or meetings concerned with the Middle East, the Ad-hoc Committee may choose to contribute by bringing to the attention of the conveners and participants the view and proposals of the PAM. **Following** such initiatives or meetings, the Ad-hoc Committee may express its opinion on the outcome and determine how best the PAM can concretely support them. Besides drawing up Resolutions and Reports, it may issue Communiqués or brief Statements for the consideration of the 1st Committee.

2. Brainstorming Forum for Parliamentary Diplomacy

¹ Resolution C-I/PAM/Final-DR, adopted in accordance with article 21.1 of the PAM Statutes.

- Act as a **brainstorming** forum in support of diplomatic efforts for the region. Consider how individually and collectively as members of the PAM, they may promote lasting peace and conflict resolution. Exchange **best practices** undertaken by individual members or national Assemblies. Make recommendations that add value to measures adopted nationally, building on the **regional dimension of the PAM**.

3. Promoting a Peaceful Civil Society

- Raise awareness, encourage and consider co-operating on constructive initiatives launched by civil society such as NGOs and local communities. Organise joint seminars with civil society which promote mutual understanding and exchanges amongst the peoples and communities of the Middle East.

4. Contributing to Visibility & Dissemination

- To draft Resolutions and Reports for consideration by the 1st Standing Committee and other PAM organs, also available for consultation by the general public².
- To organize a PAM mission to visit the Middle East. The delegation will be composed of the Rapporteur, Deputy Rapporteur and any other member of the Ad-hoc Committee, as the case may be.

Moreover, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East fully supports the efforts of the United Nations in the region to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the various conflicts and to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need³.

² The PAM Secretariat shall ensure that all documents are translated in French, English and Arabic, and that such documents are disseminated to the following actors: The Middle East Peace Quartet, The League of Arab States, The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, The Consultative Council of the Maghreb Arab Union, The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, The WEU Parliamentary Assembly, The NATO Parliamentary Assembly, The Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, The Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States.

³ In accordance with the UN Charter – as is also highlighted in the PAM Statutes - the relations between all countries, including those in the Mediterranean - have to be based on eight fundamental principles: refraining from the threat or use of force; peaceful settlement of international disputes; inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity of States; right of peoples to self-determination and to live in peace in their own territories within internationally recognized and guaranteed frontiers; sovereign equality of States and non-interference in internal affairs; respect for human rights; cooperation between States and performance in good faith of obligations assumed under international law, including questions regarding peace, security and stability, confidence-building measures, arms control and disarmament, respect for international humanitarian law, and the fight against terrorism.

On 28 February 2008, by videoconference from the UN Headquarters in New York, UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Sir John Holmes, briefed the Parliamentary Assembly on his findings of his field visit to the Occupied Territories. He highlighted the growing decalage between the peace process and the increasingly dramatic situation of the civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, pointing out in particular that the Palestinian people were paying the price of collective punishment for the armed activities of the Hamas. Since April, the hospitals in Gaza have had to further limit their services due to frequent power cuts and shortages in fuel, and had to suspend all elective surgical operations. We know that access for humanitarian staff is more difficult than in previous months. Concerning the limited access to humanitarian goods, as well as the daily life of the few Palestinians who still manage to have an economic activity; this is hampered by the “wall”, roadblocks and closures.

On the same day, the US Ambassador to Malta, Ms Molly Bordonaro, briefed the 1st Standing Committee on the US position and commitment with respect to the Annapolis peace process. She stated that for peace to be achieved, both parties needed to respect the Roadmap obligations laid down by the Annapolis process⁴. She felt that a solution to the conflict depended on the two parties involved, and the fact that there has been a resumption of two political leaders sitting down at the negotiation table on a bi-weekly basis after a seven year freeze is a strong political sign.

On the occasion of John Holmes’ parliamentary hearing, the PAM committed to support the UN in their efforts. The members agreed that the situation in Palestine requires an urgent and lasting settlement and the PAM is expected to and must assume a leading role in supporting all peace initiatives. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East wants to show its support to the victims of the situation not only with words but also with tangible acts, and we plan a visit to the region in the coming months.

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East held its first meeting, chaired by Mr. George Vella of the Maltese Delegation, during the meeting of the 1st Standing Committee in Malta, on 29th February.

In line with the decisions taken by the Assembly at its Plenary Session in Malta in November 2007, the PAM Secretary General has in early 2008 contacted the Knesset in order to organize the visit of

⁴ Israel must stop building settlements, including outposts, and blockades in the occupied territories, and Palestine must continue its commitment to eliminate terrorism.

a PAM delegation to Jerusalem and to the OPTs. In the course of the year he also met with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Whbee in Athens and with MP Amira Dotan in Rome. Both of them confirmed their interest in PAM activities and efforts to facilitate the peace process in the Middle East. The Secretary General also received a number of practical suggestions for PAM support to peace initiative from Amb. Oded Eran, Director of the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

The role of PAM in the Middle East and the work of the Ad Hoc Committee were also highlighted at the meeting of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People that took place in Malta on 3-4 June 2008

Mr. Quba'a, Deputy Speaker of the Palestine National Council, speaking as Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, said that it was the intention of the Parliamentary Assembly to reaffirm the key role of its members in addressing their common interests and create an era of peace, security and prosperity for all. A key objective was for the State of Israel and Palestinians to reach a just and lasting peace. The organization hoped to build trust between the parties for that purpose, and stressed that it had great concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular.

On the same occasion, Mr. Vella informed the members that Malta had long held the rapporteurship of the Palestinian Rights Committee and remained deeply engaged in the question. He personally had promoted inter-parliamentary dialogue to move the issue forward. He intended the work of the Committee on the Middle East to be innovative in approach, and that the Committee would take utmost care to remain impartial and not to apportion blame, or engage in empty talk, but would be an action-oriented catalyst for a solution of the problems. He stressed that the Committee could help to mediate, but it was essentially down the parties themselves to compromise and find solutions based on their own commitments.

Mr. Vella also offered some practical advice for the *modus operandi* of the Ad Hoc Committee, which were intended to guide the Committee itself in carrying out a number of imperative actions:

1. Firstly, he suggested that **monitoring** should take place in an objective and impartial manner;
2. As regards **investigative action**, delegations should visit the Middle East, speak to partners and players and have all the facts firsthand, and therefore not be reliant on interpretations from the

media. The Committee could also invite knowledgeable people from civil society, interested parties and academics to enrich the Committee with their opinions and perspectives.

3. Thirdly, as regards the Committee's **action-oriented approach**, he thought any suggestions or recommendations should engage civil society and make people more sensitive to and more aware of what is happening. In this respect, he suggested working on soft issues, such as environmental consequences of occupation, as tackling minor issues could be more constructive than getting involved in the major issues that are already saturated by international initiatives. In this sense, it is important for the Committee to serve as a catalyst for new approaches and generate solutions.

These specific activities, together with a number of broader regional initiatives aimed at civil society and youth, will constitute the action oriented plan of the PAM in 2009 for the Middle East. With reference to a field visit, Mr. Vella, Mr. Quba'a and the Secretary General also received the assurances by Mr. Max Gaylard, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Jerusalem and the OPTs, of his full support and availability to prepare for a PAM mission to the region. To conclude, it is interesting to note that in their final report on the activities of the Committee on Palestine, the United Nations indicated their decision to be closely associated to the future work of PAM and of its Ad Hoc Committee.