

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

WORKING GROUP ON THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY (EMUNI)

MINUTES

Of the meeting of 28 November 2012, from 11.00 to 17.30
BRUSSELS

The meeting opened at 11.14 on 28 November 2012, with Mr. Gianni Pittella in chair.

Were present:

Members of the Working Group:

European Parliament: Mr. Gianni PITTELLA (Chair, S&D - IT); Mr. Ivo VAJGL (ALDE - SL); Mrs. Rodi KRATSA TSAGAROPOULOU (EPP - EL); Mrs. Malika BENARAB-ATTOU (Greens/EFA - FR);

EU national parliaments: Mr. Eduardo CABRITA (MP - Portugal); Mr. Gennaro MALGIERI (MP - Italy); Mrs. Tamara VONTA (MP - Slovenia);

Mediterranean Partners: Mr. Ali BECHRIFA (MP - Tunisian national constituent Assembly)

Non-members of the Working Group:

Mr. Milan ZVER (EPP - SL)

Guest speakers: Mr. Laris Gaiser, President of the EMUNI, Dr. Milan Zver, MEP, Culture and Education committee of the European Parliament, Mrs. Claire Herrmann, International Cooperation and Programmes, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, Mr. Jesus-Maria Alquezar Sabadie, Skills and Qualifications Unit, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, Prof. Marcello Scalisi, Executive Director of UNIMED (Mediterranean University Union), Dr. Alfred Horn, Chair of EMUNI Foundation

Chair's introductory statement

Mr. Pittella suggested to postpone the nomination of the vice-president of the Working Group to the next meeting, since no candidatures had been received in due time, despite the previous interest of some Southern partners. The agenda was slightly changed, due to the need of Mr Malgieri to leave the meeting earlier.

1. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting of July 11, 2012

The minutes were adopted.

3. Chair's announcements

Mr. Pittella started by greeting Mrs Rodi Kratsa, which has recently been included in the group.

He underlined that the EMUNI Working group has an exclusively political role, which does not prevent, however, the constant uphold and promotion of the EMUNI activities by the group.

The Chair highlighted then the EMUNI priorities:

- Cooperation and twinnings between Universities from the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean;
- Mobility and exchanges of students, in the framework of cultural and educational programmes of the EU;
- Harmonization or at least coordination of curricula, which should bring, in a longer term, to mutual recognition of higher education diplomas, through the auspices of the Bologna process;

Moreover, he listed the numerous and highly qualified speakers, mentioning the topics they are going to speak about.

Finally, he expressed appreciation for the work of the new management of EMUNI and of its director ad interim, Mr Gaiser, which is facing a number of organizational and financial problems and is committed to overcome them by a consistent, solid and pragmatic approach.

4. Presentation about EMUNI by Mr. Gaiser, President of the EMUNI

Mr Gaiser was nominated by the Slovenian government, which is strongly committed to support EMUNI.

Mr Gaiser started by pointing out that EMUNI is also a network of Universities. There are currently 206 members of the network across the Mediterranean.

Soon the Academic Senate will give its green light for seven new programmes. Six of them financed by the ENPI instrument, and one, Master in Diplomacy and Intercultural dialogue,

prepared by EMUNI itself.

In February 2013 there is going to be the next General Assembly of EMUNI. Mr Gaiser will remain the Acting President at least until then.

Since the new management was appointed, from September 1, 2012, a consolidation of the financial situation was performed and the status of members was re-checked. Almost all the members of the network expressed the wish to remain in the network.

EMUNI will implement, in an independent way, at least one PhD and two Master programmes. One of the two Master programmes will be in the framework of the "ENPI project Master programmes" of the European Commission.

In the past, EMUNI crossed a difficult phase, characterized by delays in reporting and payments, lack of communication, etc. Now the institution is in a better shape. The 2011 report of activities was submitted to the Commission, new time sheets were prepared, new contacts with the experts were started. In short, everything was done in order to re-sane the situation.

Moreover, there has been some financial support from the EMUNI Foundation.

Mr Gaiser subsequently concentrated on the need to extend the ENPI project to a new date, set to the 31st of December 2013. This is needed in order to enable EMUNI to pay the entirety of its financial obligations arising from the project.

Mr Gaiser added that the future of EMUNI appears to be good: there is a strong commitment from the Slovenian government, a re-shaping of EMUNI conferences, saving thus some money.

The next step would be to promote the organization of international fora, by which a sort of EMUNI "brand" could be created, increasing thus the possibilities to rise funding by the EMUNI Foundation.

Mrs Benarab Attou asked what are the priorities of EMUNI from the content point of view in this moment. She was also interested what is currently the state of play of the cooperation between EMUNI and the Fez University, an important official project of the UfM. She was also interested in the possible cooperation between EMUNI and the Mediterranean Office for Youth.

Mrs Kratsa expressed gratitude to the Slovenian Government for its commitment towards EMUNI. She added that EMUNI is a pilot project, consequently some indulgency is needed, since everything is new. Nevertheless, it needs to be saved and promoted, looking also at the possible cooperation with the Fez University.

Mr Malgieri said that EMUNI is one of the pillars of the Euro-Mediterranean project and it

has to go on. The University in Fez is very glorious and ancient, therefore it needs attention as well.

Mr Bechrifa asked about the possibility to involve more and better the students from the South shore of the Mediterranean. He asked if there is a possibility to grant the status of "visiting professor" to some researchers, in order to reimburse them the expenses in which they incur during the exchanges.

Mr Cabrera reassured the audience that EMUNI can be sure of the support of the members of the Working group. He wished good luck to Mr Gaiser. He recalled that EMUNI is financed by the Slovenian Government and by the EU institutions and he asked about who are the two persons most responsible for the financing. He asked confirmation about the fact that EMUNI wishes to put up a traditional credit system, with much attention to PhD and Master Programs.

Mrs Hermann added that it is very important that EMUNI deals with and promotes its own program and activities.

Mr Gaiser answered to the previous set of questions. He said EMUNI is facing a short time crisis management, which must be taken "easy", since it is only a temporary situation. EMUNI is a network and a University. Since it is first of all a Slovenian university in Slovenia, it needs that its programs are approved (accredited) by Slovenia. And programs must be developed, since something must be shown, the Slovenian Government cannot finance EMUNI only for its networking activities. So, the first task is to become a real University in Slovenia. The PhD in Criminal Justice will be very useful for the students of the Southern shore as well, since it would help to prepare the future civil servants of the Mediterranean South shore countries. Fez is a good project, which must go on, but in a coordinated way with EMUNI and in the framework of EMUNI philosophy: it could become, for example, the reference point for the Mediterranean South shore, as is EMUNI for the Mediterranean North shore. Moreover, Mr Gaiser thanked Mr Malgieri for his sustain and asked if a letter could be written to the European Commission in which the WG asks for a prolongation of the ENPI project until the end of 2013. Mr Gaiser added that EMUNI strongly needs a stability framework, which can be obtained only through a stable financial stream not only from the Slovenian Government, but also from the EU financing sources, since EU is the ideological mother of the project.

5. EMUNI: a personal perspective by one of the key co-founders of the institution - presentation by Mr Zver, MEP, EP CULT

Mr Zver had a consistent role to play at the creation process of EMUNI. He assured the physical location of the University, when he was the Minister for Education and Sports in

Slovenia. At the time, in 2009, EMUNI was basically the only important European institution in Slovenia. The most consistent financial sustain comes from the Slovenian Government. The purpose of EMUNI has been, since the beginning, a better integration of EU and North Africa on the basis of common study, research and educational programs. Mr Zver remembers that the inauguration of EMUNI was really spectacular. Even in the EP, a lot of MEPs supported the idea and the institution. Unfortunately, nowadays there is a lot less interest in EMUNI. This development is originated by two facts: on one side, the EU will have to reduce its programs, due to the crisis and to the wish of some member States; on the other side, EMUNI did not have a good management. But this does not mean that the project is over, on the contrary: it has to be re-vitalized. It has 206 partner universities; it has wide-spectrum study programs. What needs to be done is to consolidate the financing of the institution, but not only through external funds. EMUNI must instead gradually become financially independent, also by selling its own know-how. A committed and capable management team has to be assured, in order to guarantee the necessary quality to the University. On the Government side, an intergroup for EMUNI was created exactly in order to address these issues. The Slovenian Government continues to remain committed to the project.

Mrs Benarab Attou added that unfortunately, when there was a discussion and voting in the EP for "Erasmus for all", all the amendments related to Euro-Mediterranean area were rejected. She deplored this situation and she asks what would be now the best approach to promote the Euro-Mediterranean dimension? Maybe a big conference? The financing is important, but must be part of a well-defined strategy. She asked what the strategy of EMUNI is.

Mr Horn answered that the strategy is indeed very important; he said that the strategy exists and is the following: first EMUNI has to become well known and rooted in the macro region Friuli - Primorska - Istria. Then, from that solid basis, it has to expand towards the Mediterranean platform. He added that the EMUNI Foundation is a civil society organization, which must, with a creative approach, find means to help EMUNI from the financial point of view.

6. Improving the cooperation between the PA-UfM committee on Culture and EMUNI working group

Mr Malgieri said that EMUNI has an evident cultural and economic value, so it has to be sustained and helped, also concerning the evident problems with Visas. He reported some conclusions of the last PA-UfM Culture committee meeting, in which topics such as linguistic pluralism, translation of books and movies were dealt with. He highlighted the problem of low interest for the Euro-Med dimension by the national Parliaments and hoped to increase this interest by informing them about the existing initiatives. Moreover, he asked for a joint meeting of WG EMUNI and CULT, in which a document should be prepared, to be then put on to approval to the PA-UfM plenary in April. He also sustained a previous observation of Mrs Romero Lopez about a possible cooperation between EMUNI and National Cultural Institutes, as well as a possible connection between EMUNI and the Mediterranean Office for

Youth.

Mrs Kratsa proposed to enlarge a possible future joint meeting also to the Economic committee of PA-UfM. She added that we must not forget other actors, which could become our partners in the Euro-Med relationship, such as, for example, the Arab League. She concluded that it would be important to create synergies between the PA-UfM committees and the EMUNI working group, where appropriate.

Mr Pittella endorsed the proposal for a joint meeting of WG EMUNI with CULT and ECON committees and instructed the Secretariat to arrange all the necessary.

Mr Zver agreed with the proposal of Mr Horn to become, as soon as possible, financially independent.

Mr Gaiser added that he is in daily contact with the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean; all the activities are coordinated and there is an excellent cooperation between the two entities.

7. EMUNI and its added value in the dynamic context of the Arab Spring - presentation by Mr Ivo Vajgl, MEP, Rapporteur for the EMUNI Working group

Ivo Vajgl took over the presidency for some time, due to other important engagements of Mr Pittella. He made a summary of what was said / decided in the morning, pointing out especially the fact that the working group is going to prepare a letter to the European Commission, asking for the extension of the ENPI Programme. Mr Vajgl added that it would be extremely useful to strengthen the ties between the N and the S shore of the Mediterranean by allowing Southern students to come to study to Portorož and by allowing Northern students to go to study to Fez, through the auspices of the well known UfM official project. In this sense EMUNI can be an important added value.

8. Standardization in higher education and participation of southern countries to Bologna process - presentation by Mrs Claire Herrmann, International Cooperation and Programmes, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

Claire Herrmann: she started by explaining that there is a general convergence process towards Bologna on a voluntary basis. It is more appropriate to speak about convergence than about standardization, because the aim is not to standardize everything, the aim is instead to converge on certain, important points in higher education. She highlighted the creation of a Bologna Political Forum, which allows our Mediterranean countries to meet in parallel with

other initiatives. Many partners indeed participate to this forum.

We can distinguish three types of countries: on one side Maghreb (with the exception of Libya), which is in general more advanced in promoting the three cycle Bologna structure, the Credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS), the Diploma supplement, and in establishing a National Qualifications Framework. On the other side, Libya and Egypt are implementing some of those criteria in a progressive but (so far) continuous way, probably pointing towards future full convergence. The third group of countries (the "Proche Orient") is instead historically closer to the Anglo-Saxon higher education model, thus it only implements some of these reforms. The Quality assurance is implemented by Government dependent bodies or Ministries in roughly all the considered region. Mrs Hermann pointed out that sometimes unfortunately a Diploma is not sufficient to increase employment, even if in the framework of Bologna system. She also informed the audience that the TEMPUS Programme is getting stronger and more diversified; as a matter of fact, in the 2011 call TEMPUS budget was almost tripled, subsequently also the number of financed projects increased. Erasmus for All will give more flexibility in choosing a partner institution by the southern universities, since it works in a more multilateral framework. She concluded by expressing a concern about some alarming signals coming from Tunisia and Egypt, due to their internal political instability: the pace of educational reforms seems to be slowing down.

Debate followed: Mr Vajgl asked information about the financial future of ERASMUS, given the difficult situation in which this program apparently is now. Mrs. Herrmann answered that she is not so informed in general about ERASMUS. Mr Vajgl asked her to bring our message to the Commission in a clear and unequivocal way: we do not want ERASMUS Programme to be in any way cut, re-dimensioned or shortened! Mr Bechrifa added that in Tunisia the pre-diploma students do not have the possibility to make exchanges with the EU. Mrs Herrmann answered that this is not true and that she will be glad to pass, privately, to Mr Bechrifa all the details.

9. Prospects of future financing of EMUNI - presentation by Mr Alfred Horn, Chair of EMUNI Foundation

Mr Horn has a lot of management experience, since he had worked in Afghanistan for 8 years. He told the audience that at the beginning the idea of the Foundation was very limited; its task was just to provide money to the EMUNI University. However, the potential of the Foundation, registered as an independent autonomous body of the civil society, is much bigger. Indeed, the right approach would be to enable it to become strong, to act on its own, within the mandate of EMUNI. The strategy of EMUNI lies above all in the will to create a real University connected to real life. The expected results are:

- Higher professional qualification for students;
- Increased chances to find a decent job;

- Boost for local and micro-regional economy;
- Promotion of intercultural dialogue;

Mr Horn added that it is not enough to keep promoting only ERASMUS standards, there must be more, especially willingness and capacity to listen and to understand our Southern partners. Concerning EMUNI leadership, Mr Horn said that the first criterion every leadership must adopt is that "every cent is accountable". He added that he established some links with Morocco and he imagines that the cooperation with Fez University will run smoothly and without any conflicts. He reminded the role of Turkey, as a bridge between Occident and Orient. He recalled that Mr Erdogan was nominated honorary member of the EMUNI Board. He asked therefore for a bigger involvement of Mr Erdogan in the Euromed activities. He concluded that reform, appointment of fresh people and the improvement of the networking are three essential things EMUNI must now accomplish. All this starting from strong roots in what he defined the "PIF" region (Primorska, Istria, and Friuli).

Mr Pittella returned to the Presidency, thanking Mr Vajgl for the replacement.

10. Distant and life-long learning, Presentation by Mr Jesus-Maria Alquezar Sabadie, Skills and Qualifications Unit, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

Mr Alquezar Sabadie started by saying that he himself was some time ago an ERASMUS student in Trieste! He continued by presenting first of all some population trends in the no EU Mediterranean countries, compared to EU. The trend is more and more towards a very young and growing population, except in the Western Balkans area, where population is actually diminishing. Working age population is expected to grow by almost 30% until 2030. In the UfM countries there is a relatively high level of investment in education, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, which is clearly reflected then in the growth of the literacy rate. There will be an increase in students wanting to go to the University, but the universities will most likely not be able to satisfy the request. Therefore, an approach based on distant learning will be useful and necessary. Now, with digital learning, it is easier than ever to promote this approach. UNESCO declared digital learning technologies in public domain, relating to use and distribution of materials. There are nowadays virtual chat rooms and other devices which help exchanging study teaching material and a constant contact between students and professors. We need computers, electricity and Internet, so, of course, the Commission has priority programmes about how to spread these facilities. There are currently three important EU initiatives in the field: "Europe 2020" with its three interlinked priorities, i.e. smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth; "Rethinking education", promoting transversal skills (creativity, entrepreneurship, problem solving), technology driven skills, stimulating open and flexible learning, and funding education by an effective investment; "Opening up Education" is based on the discovery that there is a disconnection between digital society and "analogical" school. Therefore, it promotes especially Quality standards for OER (operational education resources), validation of informal learning through OER, and an EU dimension / leadership for online education.

Mr Pittella greeted a delegation from the University of Sannio, which came to assist to the works of the working group.

11. Creating synergies and cooperation with other Euromed actors - presentation by Prof. Marcello Scalisi, Executive director of UNIMED (Mediterranean University Union)

Mr Scalisi thanked very much for having been invited to speak in a meeting, which is actually dedicated to a potential "competitor" of Euromed. He started by pointing out that UNIMED (Mediterranean University Union) and EMUNI had a promising start of cooperation at the beginning, but later on unfortunately EMUNI never really used the experience gained by UNIMED.

UNIMED works on the principle that the universities pay for the services UNIMED offers. And this model works! These services aim to strengthen the activities of the universities in the Mediterranean area, by organizing conferences, events, workshops, meetings, and thematic sub-networks in order to bring together professors and researchers working in a certain area. UNIMED has a financial agreement with the European Investment Bank. Some time ago the network launched a petition for the adoption of an ERASMUS Programme specifically tailored for the Mediterranean area. This petition immediately collected 6000 signatures (1000 from Palestine!). This indicates that there is a strong interest for student mobility in the area, which has to be sustained. "Erasmus for all" is open to the Southern Mediterranean students (but in a too limited way), consequently UNIMED will ask the Commission to provide for a high quota of Mediterranean students to be involved. In a recent UNIMED comprehensive Forum, the conclusions of a student workshop, endorsed by the network, were the following:

- to grant at least 10.000 scholarships to the students from the no EU Mediterranean area;
- Visa facilitations for students, professors and researchers, also with the help of a creation of a special database;
- To create a special status for students in the country where they are studying, in order to respect their possible cultural diversities;

Mr Scalisi continued by listing some actions UNIMED recently did; for example the creation, via a Tempus project, in Cairo of an e-learning center in 2006. He added that the EU reacted too late to the Arab Spring, by increasing the budget for the educational programmes too late. However, he added that there are many existing EU instruments, through which there is a good possibility to work, such as ENPI, FP7 and Horizon 2020. And he pointed out, that it would be good to work together in the field of academic cooperation in the tourism sector, which might sustain the creation of new small and medium enterprises. He concluded that UNIMED acquired a very good expertise in networking with the South, mentioning a bilateral cooperation with Morocco and the cooperation in the framework of the Marie Curie Programme for professors and researchers. In October 2013 there is going to be the next

General Assembly of UNIMED.

Mr Bechrifa suggested a tripartite program, with 2 partners from the South and one from the North. He underlined the Visa problem.

Mr Pittella made the following conclusions:

- The working group will write a letter to the Commission in order to sustain EMUNI's pledge to prolong the ENPI Programme;
- The working group will organize the next meeting as a joint meeting together with the Culture and Economic committees of the PA-UfM;
- WG EMUNI will continue to give strong support to EMUNI and its activities; the working group will also give its support to anyone, who engages in creating Mediterranean networks;
- The working group is in favor of a future partnership between EMUNI and the Euro-Mediterranean University in Fez/Morocco (a labeled UfM project), as well as any cooperation between EMUNI and other potential partners, such as UNIMED;
- WG EMUNI encourages the participation of EMUNI to the Mediterranean Youth Forum in Marseille in April 2013, organized by the Anna Lindh Foundation in cooperation with the EP, the EC and the PA - UfM;
- the working group will make pressures on the European Commission in order to grant a special status for students, professors and researchers in order to obtain Visa facilitations,
- the working group will also invite the European Commission to enlarge the scope of "Erasmus for all" program to our Mediterranean partners, by increasing the possibilities for study grants in the area.

12. Any other business

None.

13. Date and place of the next meeting

Tentatively end of January or beginning of February 2013, Brussels.