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Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue on Public Management

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Three years ago, the EGPA decided to set up Euro-Mediterranean dialogues, not only to add to its territorial influence following the Transatlantic and Trans-European Dialogues, but also, and above all, to move within a space, the cradle of our societies, where public administration is seen as one of the basic vehicles of sustainable democracy.

The Mediterranean has a total of 250 million inhabitants, and over the millennia has been the birthplace of great civilisations and, historically, a natural area for communication between peoples, cultures, and nations. A land of contrasts, and sometimes of dangers, it is indisputably a land with every potential which, with the rise of Asia, will be a balancing power centre for the world of tomorrow.

We mustn't be misled, this space which covers some four thousand kilometres, from the Atlantic shore to the Persian Gulf, has, over recent decades, concentrated the highest density of conflicting interests of all kinds. In addition, for more than twenty years, it has been customary to divide the planet into two financial hemispheres, North and South. A place for trade, the Mediterranean is also a frontier between two very different geo-economic spaces. Nowhere else in the world are the contrasts as great as between these European, Eastern, and African shores, in spite of their great proximity to each other, when we look at the history of our cultures, from Rome to Egypt, via Greece, Tunisia, and Algeria...

Several questions arise.

- First of all the question of frontiers. In the Eastern Mediterranean, they are very recent, barely reaching back to the beginning of the 20th century. Our proposal here is not to produce a political analysis, but to say that a scientific dialogue, based on a public administration of quality, should reach beyond frontiers and perhaps even make them easier to cross one day.
- Then there is the matter of the scarcity and uneven distribution of natural resources, often the underlying cause of international financial interests and conflicts. This aspect, especially in the case of water, cannot be looked at in isolation. It must be shared, more especially on the southern bank, but on the north side, as well.
- The question of intra-state conflicts, mostly due to the existence of different ethnic groups, means considering the existence of a lay State, whose need for the structure of a benchmark administration in terms of both ethics and fairness is only too clearly understood.
- Finally, there is the question of development, which touches both territories and the public organisations. In fact, if tensions continue in the Mediterranean, it is also because this is where the gaps in terms of development have widened between the north and south banks of the basin. Today, the South is faced with a population overload which cannot be supported in the context of its economic situation. This imbalance is causing high migratory flows which are difficult to control and are presenting Europe with continuous challenges. In fact, there are major issues at stake. The tensions arising from these imbalances can only be resolved by policies of sharing, in other words cooperation and dialogue in the realms of scientific and technological knowledge, exchanges of people, goods, and capital, in the areas of security and of sustainable development. There can be no democracy or political freedom without economic growth. There can be no democracy without an administration responding to social needs.

The EGPA's Euro-Mediterranean Dialogues therefore want to provide answers to all these questions, by inviting young researchers to come together, regardless of nationality, to share their visions of "good" public management, and this is the objective of our research school which is held before each of our annual conferences.

At the same time, we offer a space for discussion to universities, researchers, and senior officials, as well as to all the leaders of the life of nations, where they can pool their experience, their points of view, and their ideas, to help to improve the public running of these regions.

The far-reaching action engaged with the Euro-Mediterranean partnership since 1995 and the appearance of a Mediterranean Union project attest to the opportunity for dialogue of this nature.

- Our first dialogue, in October 2008, at the Paul Cézanne University Institut de Management Public et de Gouvernance Territoriale¹, in charge of the permanent secretariat of this dialogue alongside our partner, ENA France, made it possible to host in Aix-en-Provence no fewer than one hundred and fifty participants from almost every country on the Mediterranean rim. We chose to throw this dialogue open as widely as possible, looking at public sector reforms, and investigating the decision-making processes, territorial management, and management of public bodies in general.

- Our second dialogue was held in October 2009 in partnership with EMUNI, the first Euro-Mediterranean University, established at Portoroz-Piran in Slovenia. The theme selected was that of local public services and territorial management. Here we kept to the same format, sharing our discussions with some fifteen doctoral students and a hundred participants. This collaboration with EMUNI marked a major step forward in the development of this dialogue due to its connection to a Euro-Mediterranean educational establishment whose object is scientific influence.

- Our third dialogue will be taking place in Tunis in October 2010, with the support of the University of Manouba. The theme will be sustainable development and public action. This will be an opportunity for our first event in a country on the southern side of the Mediterranean to reinforce our discussions on a topic which may appear large, and even fashionable, but which contains problems that are being widely debated on the shores of the Mediterranean in general and in Tunisia in particular.

The ambition of the EGPA is thus to make these meetings a place for pooling the practices, ideas, reflections and analyses prevailing in each of our countries on the Mediterranean rim and to make them a common challenge.

Everyone must be in a position to listen to the experiences and histories of the others, but also their ambitions. In fact, when looking at a less expensive Government, a more transparent Government, a more approachable Government, a Government cooperating more efficiently with local bodies, a Government looking to the future, the question of governance of public action arises and must be adapted at the roots of a nation, its culture, and its history.

We believe in these dialogues and sincerely hope for increased recognition of all the participants who want to see this Euro-Mediterranean space develop harmoniously.

¹ *Institut de Management Public et de Gouvernance Territoriale* - Public Management and Territorial Governance Institute