



CDL-UD-PV(2018)001
Or. fr

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

UNIDEM-SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN PROJECT
3rd MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATORS

Office of the Council of Europe
55, avenue Kleber, Paris

Monday 5 February 2018

MEETING REPORT

Towards a Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean

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The third meeting of the national coordinators of the UniDem Med regional project took place in Paris on 5th February 2018 gathering the coordinators of the Southern Mediterranean, namely from Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine¹ and from Tunisia. (The representatives of Jordan and Mauritania were excused because of their professional commitments). The purpose of the meeting was threefold:

- To discuss the state of play of the UniDem seminars;
- To take stock of the year 2017 namely the results and impact of the three seminars organised respectively in Tunis, Skhirat and Algiers²;
- To draw up decisions regarding the dates, venues and themes of 2018 seminars

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda CDL-UD(2018)001prog was adopted unanimously.

2. UniDem Med: State of play and perspectives

Ms Caroline Martin thanked all the national coordinators on behalf of the Venice Commission and its President, Mr Gianni Buquicchio, for their involvement in the organisation of the three 2017 seminars as well as for the active participation of the national delegations. She recalled in her speech the positive contribution of the UniDem Med project with regard to its main objective, namely to contribute to an ever more efficient administration and good governance in respect of human rights and in the effective application of the law and consolidation of institutions. The UniDem Med campus, which is characterised by a direct exchange of experiences and good practices between experts from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, remains a priority as regards the Venice Commission cooperation activities. The project is driven by demand and based on the request of the partner countries and it supported the public administration reforms in the southern Mediterranean.

Ms Martin also paid tribute to the Ministry of the Reform of the Administration and the Civil Service of the Kingdom of Morocco and the national coordinator, Mr Samir Bouggar, for the level of commitment and for the quality of the partnership launched in 2015 with the Venice Commission. This cooperation has made it possible to organise three UniDem Med seminars in 2017, bringing together nearly 200 senior civil servants from the two shores of the Mediterranean with a view to modernising the public administration and in a spirit of collaboration and sharing of best democratic practices. The success of the previous seminars led logically to the signature in October 2017³ of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Moroccan Ministry of the Reform of the Administration and the Civil Service and the Venice Commission outlining future cooperation in the framework of the UniDem Med project.

Ms Caroline Martin also highlighted the extension of the project with the development of partnerships, namely with the SIGMA project, co-funded by the European Union and implemented by the OECD. Following

¹ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of Council of Europe member States on this issue.

² Performance, Merit and Equality in the Civil Service, 4th UniDem Med, 27-30 March 2017, Tunis, Tunisia
Prevention of Corruption and Promotion of Integrity in the Civil Service: shared experiences, 5th UniDem Med, 25-28 September 2017, Skhirat, Morocco

Women and the Labour Market, 6th UniDem Med, 7-8 November 2017, Algiers, Algeria

³ 112th Plenary Session of the Venice Commission, 6-7 October 2017, Venice, Italy

this cooperation based on complementarity, the President of the Venice Commission, Mr Buquicchio delivered a speech in December 2017 to the SIGMA ministerial conference on the importance of the rule of law for citizens and businesses.

It is also important to highlight that the project has contributed to the development of South-South cooperation and bilateral relations between different national instances and government bodies of Southern Mediterranean partner countries, which has improved the project's impact and sustainability.

3. Results and impact of UniDem Med seminars: discussion

In the follow up discussion, the coordinators highlighted their satisfaction as well as that of the participants as regards the three successful 2017 seminars. For the national coordinator of Tunisia, **Mr Mehrez Hafsi**, the three seminars in 2017 were successful with strong impact and multiplier effect as regards the exchange of good practices between senior civil servants. He underlined the importance for the project to move towards greater sustainability and asked the Secretariat to explore the possibility of creating a network of national coordinators from European countries. He also mentioned the possibility of establishing contacts with training centers as part of diploma courses. The Secretariat took note of these requests, which might be difficult to respond to, given the current budgetary situation of the Council of Europe. At the same time the Venice Commission welcomes any bilateral projects and co-operation activities beyond the project in the field of public administration reform that would come as a result of the UniDem Med seminars.

On behalf of Lebanon, the national coordinator, **Mr Charbel Sarkis**, thanked the Venice Commission for the excellent level of cooperation and also called for further collaboration between the national coordinators. The exchange of best practices in the framework of the project on themes of E-government and anticorruption were mentioned by the national coordinator as priorities for reform and topics of interest for the UniDem Med Campus.

For the Algerian national coordinator, **Mr Moncef Bedairia**, the Venice Commission responded to all expectations. The Algerian authorities appreciated the fact that their request to organise a UniDem Med seminar in Algiers was accepted and the 6th UniDem Med seminar was held in Algiers on the theme of women and the labour market. The seminar served in particular to explore practical ways to implement the new constitutional provisions and raised great interest among the senior civil servants as well as among the general public with two television programs devoted to the subject of women's rights. Algeria is very interested in the feedback from participants and does not consider diploma courses as a direction that the project should follow because its main target group is the senior civil service whose busy agenda would not allow to participate in such training activities. The Algerian coordinator also regretted the absence of Egypt in the UniDem Med seminars and asked the Secretariat to consider sending the conclusions of the meeting to the Egyptian authorities with a view to their participation in the UniDem Med 2018 seminars.

Ms Nisreen Zghaiar, national Coordinator of the project on behalf of Palestine, also highlighted in her speech the success of the seminars among the senior Palestinian civil service. She suggested that the project should consider exploring in future a series of topics in more detailed way and proposed one of the 2018 seminars to be organised on behalf of Palestine. She proposed to hold the seminar in Jordan to facilitate the visa process. This proposal was well received by the other coordinators. At the same time such a project would require the agreement of the Jordanian Ministry of the Public Sector Development.

Mr Samir Bouggar, national Coordinator on behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco, expressed his thanks to the Secretariat of the Venice Commission, to the other participating partner countries and to their national

coordinators for the efforts to sustain the UniDem project. The outcome has been so far very positive both in terms of content and in terms of organisation and networking. Mr Bouggar highlighted a "UniDem model" of cooperation and welcomed the project's further expansion and collaboration with other sister projects and institutions. At this backdrop, Morocco signed in December 2017 a Memorandum of Understanding with the Venice Commission and wishes to further develop cooperation with the Commission in the framework of the UniDem Med project.

4. UniDem Med 2018 Seminars

With regard to the 2018 seminars, Ms Martin thanked the national coordinators for having proposed in advance the themes for the 2018 seminars. The participants at the meeting also discussed to increase the number of seminars to three per year, while reducing their duration from four to three days respectively. This would give more the opportunity to increase the number of senior officials to participate in the seminars. The Secretariat took note of the discussion and will decide on the number of seminars according to funding possibilities. The meeting also validated the themes of the first two seminars for 2018:

- Improving of the relation between the administration and the citizens (April 2018) (Rabat, Morocco)
- Reconstruction of the senior civil service (September 2018) (Tunis, Tunisia)

A third seminar could be held in Jordan following the invitation of Palestine. The Secretariat will contact the national coordinator of Jordan to discuss this option and will inform accordingly the network of coordinators.

5. Maintenance, extension and sustainability of the UniDem Med network (web, social networks)

A presentation was distributed to the national coordinators explaining the communication tools developed by the Secretariat to sustain the UniDem Med network and increase its outreach. The visibility of the project is growing and has been made mainly through the website of the Venice Commission and various social media including Facebook and Flickr. Participants appreciated the efforts undertaken by the Secretariat to increase the visibility of the project and to communicate the results.

6. Conclusions of the meeting

Ms Martin drew conclusions from the day, welcoming the constructive and collaborative spirit of this 3rd meeting of the national coordinators and closed the meeting.