



CDL-UD-PV(2019)001
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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

UNIDEM-SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN PROJECT
4th MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATORS
Rabat, Morocco
5th March 2019

MEETING REPORT

Ensuring Sustainable Democratic Governance and Human Rights in the Southern Mediterranean

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



Implemented
by the Council of Europe

The fourth coordination meeting of the UniDem Med project was held in Rabat on 5th of March 2019 in the presence of the national coordinators of the southern Mediterranean, namely from Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine¹ and from Tunisia. The representatives of Lebanon and Mauritania were excused.

The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of the two UniDem Med seminars in 2018 held respectively in Tunisia and Morocco², and to decide on the themes of the 2019 and the countries hosting them.

Welcome words

Mr. Ahmed Laamoumri, Secretary General of the Ministry of the Reform of the Public Administration and the Civil Service of Morocco thanks the Venice Commission and the coordinators for the very positive review of the UniDem Med seminars. The campus represents to him an opportunity of sharing and intellectual union between the participating partner countries and allows a better understanding of tools of the public administration reform. The partnership with the Venice Commission supports the efforts of the Ministry of the Reform of the Administration and Civil Service with regard to organisational and managerial transformation of the civil service of Morocco.

Mr. Jose-Luis Herrero, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Morocco, stresses the importance of the partnership with the European Union which, by financing of this project, exports the model of regional cooperation. UniDem Med project is also in line with the Council of Europe's logic of regional co-operation and its other networks, such as the CEPEJ³ network for example.

Ms Caroline Martin of the Neighbourhood Co-operation Division of the Venice Commission, thanks, on behalf of the Commission, the Kingdom of Morocco, which accepted to host this meeting and has given its full support to the implementation of UniDem Med project since its launch in 2015.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda CDL-UD (2019) 001prog is adopted unanimously.

UniDem Med: Results and impact of seminars

Ms. Martin welcomes the success of the two UniDem seminars held in 2018 in Rabat and Tunis respectively. More than 100 high level public officials attending both seminars whose themes were based on national priorities of public administration modernisation in the southern Mediterranean. This demand-driven approach remains one of the strengths of the project.

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 and European Union member States on this issue.

² Transformation and innovation in the senior civil service: challenges and opportunities

8th UniDem Med, 13-14 November 2018, Tunis, Tunisia

Improving the relationship between administration and citizens: a democratic imperative

7th UniDem Med, 23-26 April 2018, Rabat, Morocco

³ European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice

Ms. Martin praises the positive overall results and the impact of the UniDem Med. Through the 9 seminars organised since the launch of the project in September 2015, more than 400 senior public officials from the southern Mediterranean have participated alongside experts from European countries. Success is also due to the collaboration with various international bodies such as the European Union, which finances the project, and the OECD - SIGMA project. The statistics show the participation of experts from 15 European countries⁴ since September 2015 and a growing number of Southern Mediterranean experts who constitute a pool of valuable expertise on topics of modernisation of the public service. The campus is increasingly a platform for direct exchange of experiences at bilateral and regional levels. These exchanges represent a real added value of the UniDem Med project from a methodological point of view. The Council of Europe, with its 47 member states, and the Venice Commission with its 61 member states, have specific know-how in the field.

To benefit from the expertise of Northern European countries requested by the partner countries, the seminars are held in the three languages, including French, English and Arabic. This represents a significant additional cost that reduces the ability to expand the network by inviting more participants to the seminars.

UniDem Med is part of the South Program III, co-financed by the European Union and the Council of Europe, and has a much smaller budget than under the previous South Program II. This reduced financial envelope does not make it possible to organise more than two seminars per year or to invite more than two participants per national delegation. In view of the repeated request of the national coordinators to increase the number of participants, in the event of additional financial availability, this would be allocated to increase participation.

The drafting of legal opinions being the Commission's body of work, Ms. Martin recalled the Venice Commission's willingness to contribute with its expertise in the drafting of laws that would affect the public administration. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia as members of the Commission are invited to make full use of their membership and to request the legal expertise of the Commission.

Mr. Laamoumri reminds the importance of seminars to accompany ongoing reforms and gives an example with the conflicts of interest and the declaration of assets that could be the subject of a separate UniDem Med seminar. Given that seminars are a platform to protect the interests of the citizens and to respond to their grievances, he proposes to think about involving civil society in debates.

Mr. Laamoumri calls for greater financial commitment from the host country in the organisation of the seminars, while adopting a flexible approach that considers the national contexts and available resources of the host countries and their respective ministries in charge with public service reform.

In the following tour de table the representatives of the participating partner countries present the results and the impact of the project at the national level. The national coordinator of Morocco, Mr. Samir Bouggar, welcomes the growing interest in the project since its launch in September 2015 that allowed the training of senior Moroccan officials in priority areas of public administration reform. He also thanks the entire team of the Venice Commission in charge of the project which contributed to its success in the spirit of collaboration with the Moroccan authorities. To sustain the project's results, Mr. Bouggar

⁴ Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovenia, Switzerland

proposes the organisation of a training-of-trainers session, targeting at first the UniDem Med coordinators.

Ms. Nisreen Zghaiar, national coordinator for Palestine, speaks about Palestine's interest in participating in the project. Palestine has launched several bilateral partnerships and UniDem Med reinforces these partnerships as a platform for direct exchanges between senior public officials from Europe and the southern Mediterranean.

Given the panoply of good practices that Palestine could share with other partner countries in areas such as digitalisation of services, leadership, and human resources management Ms. Zghaiar expresses the wish of Palestine to host a UniDem seminar in 2019 together with Jordan, given the logistical difficulties of organising a seminar in Palestine. In addition, Ms. Zghaiar welcomed the initiative of Morocco to organise a training-of-trainers session.

Ms. Noor Dweiri, appointed in March 2019 by the Presidency of the Government of Jordan as national coordinator, takes the floor in support of Palestine's request to organise a joint UniDem Med seminar. Ms. Dweiri is willing to contribute to the success of the project in Jordan, where, following the latest government reshuffle, the Ministry of Public Sector Development was dissolved and whose activities were transferred to the Presidency of the Government of Jordan.

For Mr. Sami Ben Romdhane, Director General of the Public Service and UniDem Med coordinator for Tunisia, the topics of the 2018 seminars were in line with the country's reform agenda. He stresses the importance of identifying topics of common interest in line with international trends in the modernisation of public administration. Mr. Ben Romdhane stresses the need to ensure coordination between different bilateral donors to avoid duplication especially considering the major reform of the Tunisian public administration and its five areas of reform adopted in February 2018.

Mr. Moncef Bedairia, national coordinator for Algeria takes the floor to express the great interest for Algeria to continue to share experiences between Europe and the southern Mediterranean through the project. Algeria appreciates the Venice Commission's approach to the modernisation of the civil service based on rights. UniDem Med is attracting interest from the senior Algerian civil service and saw the participation of several ministers at the Algiers seminar in 2017 or the Director of the Algerian civil service, Mr. Bouchemal at the Tunis seminar in 2018.

Mr. Bedairia emphasises the utility and impact of the UniDem Med project. Among the useful experiences that can be implemented by Algeria, Mr. Bedairia mentions the Jordanian experience in the organisation of competitions online, Jordan's centralized complaints management system, as well as the experience of Romania and Portugal in promoting the leadership, excellence and neutrality of the senior civil service.

UniDem Med 2019 Seminars

Ms. Martin thanks the national coordinators for having communicated in advance the proposed themes for the 2019 seminars. In the discussions that follow two general themes seem to cover all the topics proposed by the national coordinators for seminars in 2019.

- Towards a public service closer to citizens: models and good practices (12-14 June 2019, Marrakech, Morocco)

The seminar will deal with the issues of deconcentration, decentralisation, regrouping and digitalisation of the administrative services as ways of reforming and bringing the administration closer to the citizens.

- Leadership and Transparency in the Senior Civil Service (October 2019, Jordan)

This seminar will be jointly organized by Palestine and Jordan and will be held in Amman for logistical reasons.

A training-of-trainers session for the project coordinators could take place before the end of 2019 depending on the available resources of the Venice Commission and the UniDem Med project.

Ms. Martin regrets the non-participation of Egypt in UniDem Med seminars. An official letter was sent on behalf of the Venice Commission to Ms. Ghada Labib, Deputy Minister in charge of Administrative Reform of Egypt, which remained unanswered on the day of the coordination meeting. The support of other coordinators is requested to allow the reintegration of Egypt in the seminars, as was the case at the start of the project in 2015.

Communication, sustainability and extension of the UniDem Med network

Mr. Hristov, project manager in charge of the UniDem Med, takes stock of the progress in terms of communication and network extension. The visibility of the project is steadily increasing, notably through the Venice Commission's website, the ministries of the civil service websites and the various social networks dedicated to the project.

Mr. Hristov presents the UniDem Med network on "Facebook" which has more than 300 subscribers since its launch and on "Flickr" for sharing photos of the seminar. Participants appreciate the efforts made by the UniDem Med secretariat to increase the visibility of the project and to communicate its results to a wider audience of public officials.

Conclusions of the meeting

- The national coordinators confirm the added value of the UniDem Med campus and the co-operation with the Venice Commission, based on the demand of the partner countries, as part of the efforts to modernise the civil service in the southern Mediterranean;

- The partnership with the Venice Commission supports the efforts of the Ministry of Administration and Civil Service Reform of Morocco about the organisational and managerial transformation of the civil service in the country and other southern Mediterranean partner countries;

- The national coordinators endorse the methodological approach of the UniDem Med project which allows a better use of public administration reform tools through direct exchanges between senior officials of southern Mediterranean and Europe;

- The national coordinators decide to hold two UniDem Med seminars in 2019, namely:

- Towards a public service closer to citizens: models and good practices (12-14 June 2019, Marrakech, Morocco)
- Leadership and Transparency in the Senior Civil Service (October 2019, Jordan)

- Training-of-trainers session could be organised before the end of 2019 in case of availability of financial reserves. This first training will target the national coordinators of the UniDem Med project;
- The national coordinators agree on a greater financial commitment of the host country of a seminar according to the available resources of the national organising bodies;
- The national coordinators agree on a possible increase of the participants in case of budget reserves of the project;
- The national coordinators agree on the need for simultaneous interpretation into the three working languages of the seminars (French, English and Arabic) to benefit from the Anglophone expertise in the field of the public service modernisation;