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Or. Fr.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

UNIDEM-SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN PROJECT
5th MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATORS

Rabat, Morocco

6th February 2020

MEETING REPORT

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The fifth UniDem Med coordination meeting took place in Rabat, on 6th February 2020, in the presence of national coordinators from the southern Mediterranean (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine¹ and Tunisia. The representative of Lebanon was excused.

The purpose of this annual meeting was to take stock of the two 2019 UniDem Med seminars, in Morocco and Jordan respectively, as well as to decide on the themes and host countries of the 2020 UniDem Med seminars.

Welcome words

The Secretary General of the Department of the Reform of the Public Administration and the Civil Service of the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and the Reform of the Administration of Morocco, Mr. Ahmed Laamoumri inaugurates this meeting by stressing the importance of the co-operation between the Ministry and the Venice Commission and the need to continue exchanging experiences between Arab countries in the field of modernisation of the public service through the UniDem Med project.

Ms. Caroline Martin, Division for Co-operation with neighboring countries of the Venice Commission thanks the participants and the coordinators of the UniDem Med project for their unfailing involvement in ensuring the success of the project.

75 high-level civil servants participated in total in the two 2019 seminars in Marrakech and Amman respectively, as well as 10 European experts (Germany, Estonia, Great Britain, Greece, France, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland), 5 Moroccan experts, 4 Palestinian experts and 4 Jordanian experts. Mr. Michael Ingledow, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Rabat also welcomes the participants and informs them of the possibilities of co-operation with other Council of Europe entities and networks (CEPEJ, HELP, etc.).

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda CDL-UD (2020) 001prog is adopted unanimously.

UniDem Med 2019: What results and what impact of the seminars?

Ms. Martin recalls the main objective of the UniDem Med project and its role to support the Southern Mediterranean partner countries in their reforms and to contribute to an ever more efficient administration and good governance in compliance with the international human rights law standards, in the effective application of the law and the consolidation of institutions.

Ms. Martin underlines the vocation of the project which is to support the modernisation of the public administration by exchanging good practices between high-level civil servants from the two shores of the Mediterranean. The two 2019 UniDem Med seminars which were organised respectively in Marrakech and in Amman were a success. The interest in this regional co-operation project launched in September 2015 in Rabat continues to grow because it is based on demand from the participating countries. This also applies to 2019 seminars, the themes of which were in line with the priority areas of public administration reform in the host countries.

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.

The general framework of the Venice Commission activities in 2019 in the southern Mediterranean on the bilateral level includes a project to support the Tunisian independent bodies (PAII-T) with a number of seminars organised in Tunis on various topics such as : diagnosis of the current state of the institutions, budgetary and financial autonomy of the institutions and their communication strategy. As part of this project, the Venice Commission also adopted an opinion on the organic law relating to the Tunisian body for sustainable development and the rights of future generations².

Regarding the regional activities of the Venice Commission in the southern Mediterranean participants are informed about the meeting of Arab-speaking electoral organizations (Jordan, February 2019), and the 7th Intercultural Workshop on Democracy (Strasbourg, October 2019).

More generally, concerning the Commission, Ms. Martin informs the coordinators that Canada joined the Commission in May 2019. The Commission has also adopted a reference text for an institution with which administrations are familiar, namely the Institution of the Ombudsman, by adopting in March 2019 the principles for the protection and promotion of the Ombudsman institution, called “Venice Principles” and which list the 25 legal principles which must prevail in the creation and functioning of the Institution.

The 25 principles constitute the most complete list of principles ever proposed, on the conditions of election or dismissal, the main elements of the Ombudsman mandate, the scope and means of his powers, the essential financial and material guarantees which will make it possible to carry out its functions better and to guarantee the solid independence of the institution. The Principles provide broad powers to the Ombudsman, to name but one Principle 17 will be of primary interest to administrations since the Venice Commission declares that “the Ombudsman must have the legally enforceable right to require officials and authorities that they respond within a reasonable time fixed by the Ombudsman ”. This text was endorsed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which invited governments, parliaments and other competent authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe to take these Principles into account and to ensure their wide dissemination. The Venice Commission will use them when it comes to studying draft laws or reforms concerning the Ombudsmen. An Arabic language version was distributed to participants.

The overall results and the impact of the UniDem Med campus are very positive, and the Venice Commission stands available to bring its expertise beyond the UniDem Med seminars especially in providing legal opinions on draft legislation which is its primary task.

The UniDem Med project is part of the South Programme III, co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe and implemented by the Council of Europe. The South Programme III ends at the end of February 2020 before the planned signature of a new joint programme between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the financial envelope of which should enable the UniDem Med project to continue its existence.

In the round table that follows, the participants present the results and the impact of the project on the national level.

For Mr. Sami Ben Romdhane, UniDem Med coordinator for Tunisia, the topics of the 2019 seminars were in line with the country’s reform agenda. UniDem Med seminars represent a

² [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)013-e)

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platform that helps disseminate Tunisian experience in public administration modernisation. It also allows to collect best practices from other participating countries.

Mr. Moncef Bedairia, national coordinator for Algeria takes the floor to express the great interest for Algeria to continue sharing experiences between Europe and the southern Mediterranean through the project. Algeria appreciates the Venice Commission's law-based approach to modernising the public service. The 2019 seminars were very useful for Algeria since they discussed the questions of decentralisation and devolution of competencies to the local levels, which are of high priority to the country.

For Ms. Nisrein Sada, national coordinator for Palestine, 2019 was a very successful year for the Palestinian public administration. The experience of networking and collaboration with Jordan in the organisation of the 10th UniDem Med in Amman made it possible to strengthen the impact of the seminar and to develop fruitful bilateral contacts between Palestine and Jordan. The seminar was attended by high-level Palestinian public officials, including the Minister in charge of the civil service to the General Personnel Council, Mr. Mousa Abu Zaid Hasan, the Head of Cabinet of the Council of Ministers and many directors general. For Palestine, co-operation with the Venice Commission has been very useful and UniDem Med has become an "incubator" of ideas for modernising the civil service. Palestine has launched several bilateral partnerships and UniDem Med is strengthening these partnerships as a platform for direct exchanges between senior officials from the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Morocco's national coordinator, Mr. Samir Bouggar, welcomes the growing interest in the project. He also thanks the Venice Commission team in charge of the project which contributed to the success of the 9th UniDem Med which took place in Marrakech and proposes the organisation of another seminar in 2020 outside the Moroccan capital to reach a maximum of local civil servants. In addition, Mr. Bouggar expresses the wish to take stock of the five years of the project's existence and to publish the recommendations / summaries of the seminars organised since the launch of UniDem Med in September 2015.

Ms. Noor Dweiri, national coordinator for Jordan expresses her satisfaction with the results of the 10th UniDem Med, the first seminar organised in the country and in the Mashreq region. Jordan wishes to extend its co-operation with the Venice Commission in the framework of the project with new themes and in accordance with the national reform priorities. To succeed in the ambitious plans to modernise the Jordanian public administration, a strategic vision combined with flexibility is required given the geopolitical situation in the southern Mediterranean.

UniDem Med 2020 seminars

Ms. Martin thanks the national coordinators for having communicated in advance their proposals for the 2020 seminars. In the ensuing discussions, participants presented their national reform priorities. Two general themes emerge for the 2020 UniDem Med seminars based on the national proposals.

- Towards a user-oriented administration
11th UniDem Med, Tangiers, Morocco, 16-18 June 2020

The seminar will debate the questions of quality of public service, means of measuring and rationalising its performance (barometers etc.), the right of access to information, data protection,

the consolidation and digitalisation of administrative services as avenues for reform and bringing the administration closer to the citizens

- Public administration reform: new challenges and new operating methods
12th UniDem Med, Tunis, Tunisia, 19-21 October 2020

This seminar will address the issues of mobility, performance, assessment and management of skills, workforce rationalisation, social dialogue and assessment of government performance.

To extend the scope of the project, the participants raise the question of the possibility of organising train-of-trainers (TOT) event, including online training sessions and increasing the number of national participants in seminars (three participants instead of two at present). This question remains dependent on the resources allocated to the Venice Commission and to the UniDem Med project within the framework of the future South Program IV.

Ms. Martin expresses regret over Egypt's non-participation in UniDem Med seminars. Despite efforts to establish contact with the authorities of the country in charge of administrative reform, the Venice Commission has received no feedback to integrate the country into the project.

Communication and extension of the UniDem Med network

Mr. Hristo Hristov, UniDem Med project manager at the Venice Commission, presents the activities in terms of communication and network extension. The visibility of the project is mainly achieved through the Venice Commission's website and the project's "Facebook" page³, which, with 400 subscribers, recorded an increase of 33% compared to 2019.

The page allows participants to stay informed about the latest news from the seminars and to keep in touch with each other after the seminars.

The participants appreciate the efforts made by the UniDem Med secretariat to improve the visibility of the project and to communicate its results to a wider audience of officials from both shores of the Mediterranean.

Conclusions of the meeting

- The participants reiterate their interest in collaborating with the Venice Commission through the UniDem Med project and express their readiness to develop this co-operation in other areas of common interest based on the needs of partner countries and the expertise of the Venice Commission;
- The national coordinators confirm the methodology of the UniDem Med project which supports the modernisation of the civil service in the southern Mediterranean through direct exchanges between high-level civil servants from Europe and the southern Mediterranean;
- The national coordinators decide to hold two UniDem Med seminars in 2020, in particular:
 - Towards a user-oriented administration, 11th UniDem Med, Tangiers, Morocco, 16-18 June 2020
 - Reform of public administration: new challenges and new operating methods, 12th UniDem Med, Tunis, Tunisia, 19-21 October 2020

³ <https://www.facebook.com/UniDemMed/>