



LES MIDIS DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE

« The programme Euromed Gender Equality – an innovative approach to the Euromed regional cooperation »

Lunch debate organized by the European Movement Belgium and the Medea Institute on Tuesday 12 May 2009, at the EMB. Report : Luce Ricard & Nathalie Janne d'Othée

Speaker : **JUDITH NEISSE**, team leader of the program "Promoting gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Presentation of the speaker by Nathalie Janne d'Othée

Judith Neisse has a great Euromed experience. Indeed from 1994 to 1997, she was an expert at the European Commission (Directorate General, External Affairs), in charge of the creation of a new regional program "Euromed Heritage", aimed at the cooperation in the field of the cultural Heritage between the European Union and its partner of the South and the East of the Mediterranean.

In 1998, she created MEDIANA, a consultancy office specialized in the Community programs relating to formation, equal opportunity, culture, new technologies and international cooperation.

Since 2001 she is also member of the board of SIFRA, a Euro-Mediterranean association for micro-credit. And since 2005 she is also President of the Fund Roberto Cimetta, which grants mobility and funds artists in the Mediterranean.

Judith Neisse also created EMIRA, the Euro-Mediterranean and International Research Association, a Belgian non-profit association which objective is to promote the Euro-Mediterranean culture and the exchanges between the cultural actors of this area.

She is coming today to present the program on which she is working now for the European Commission with TRANSTEC a consultancy firm. This program is called "Promoting gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region" and it offers a original approach on the Euromed cooperation.

Promoting gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region by Judith Neisse

1. Facts about the program

The program takes place in the Euromed regional framework. It includes 36 partners : the 27 European and 9 countries from the South and East Mediterranean (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine). Turkey is not included because it is now an accessing country. The 9 Mediterranean countries are the main beneficiaries from the program. 4.25 million € will be allowed for the implementation of this program. But apart from money other resources are also necessary to be able the reach the objectives fixed.

Objectives :

- To enhance gender equality, which means equal access for men and women to decision making in public and private life;
- To fight gender-based violence (GBV), which is not only the physical violence against women;
- To enhance women's image in the media by training and surveys ;
- *Transversal*: the follow-up of the Istanbul Ministerial Conference on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society".

How do we work? :

- We work exclusively with the governmental entities even if there's no ministries related to gender equality. As this question is depending on other mechanisms, we call it "machinery".
- We are accompanying those entities: by trainings, by giving them information about the situation on gender equality in their country...
- We publish information about what's happening in those countries. And it's interesting to notice that the reality is at the perfect contrary of the stereotypes. Considering some problematic, the situation of woman in some of the MENA countries is much better than the situation of European women.

2. History of the Euromed partnership

In 1995, took place the Declaration of Barcelona which was never signed, and that inaugurated the Euromed partnership. In this declaration only two sentences were dedicated to women. On the twenty-two sectors of possible cooperation between the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area, nothing is mentioned considering women or work on gender.

The innovative elements:

- The multilateral cooperation ;
- The decentralization in the cooperation's mechanisms ;
- The introduction of non-state actors in the partnership.

The Euromed partnership has the advantage to have put together around the table Israel and the Arab countries. Though many critics came from the South because the projects were seen as one shot and were not following the program. The real question was overall the lack of ownership of the Barcelona process by the South partners.

3. History of Gender Equality in the Euromed partnership

From 1995 (Barcelona Declaration) to 2005, no program was focusing on women. The first program took place from 2005 to 2008. Those subjects are embedded in European treaties. There has been a call to include this subject in all community programs, even in the external relations. An argument is that working on gender is a key for democracy. But the counter argument was there was no framework for that kind of project.

The initiative came finally from Belgian organizations. They went to Louis Michel and Laurette Onkelinx to push them to endorse this subject during the Belgian presidency of the EU in 2001.

The real change came under the Finnish presidency in 2006 with the Ministerial Conference on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society” in Istanbul. The conclusions included a declaration, an action plan (which is not a real one but more a political program about how to cooperate) and a follow-up process, that we call now the “Istanbul process”.

This year a ministerial conference is scheduled in Morocco in order to assess the progress made.

To reach the objectives fixed in Istanbul, **the Commission proposed:**

- “Enhancing Euromed Gender Equality” : operation tool ;
- Investing in people gender equality Euromed with civil society to work on Istanbul process.

Monitoring tools:

- Ad hoc committees that gather two times a year to monitor the Istanbul process. In addition, the participants to the Istanbul ministerial conference scheduled a second ministerial conference in Morocco in 2009.
- An inquiry every year to assess with European and Mediterranean partners the progress of the Istanbul process. The answers are analyzed and published by Judith Neisse’s team.
- Euromed partnership that work is now stopped because of the January events in Gaza.

4. Innovative elements of EGEP

- The “Enhancing Gender Equality Program” (EGEP) is the first Euromed Regional program completely dedicated to this issue. Furthermore it is not avoiding problematic issues as Gender Based Violence, negative stereotypes on women, etc.
- The EGEP is also the first program that isn’t a grant giving scheme, but that is giving expertise. It is enhancing mobility of this expertise between the North and the South.
- The EGEP is the first regional program proposing capacity building and accompanying measures.
- It’s an integrated because EU action in the region combines implementation tools for governmental organizations and NGO around the same concern.
- The EGEP is the first program to work with governmental organizations on a regional level which is better concerning the feeling of ownership by the countries of the South and East Mediterranean. When we try to avoid the governments by working only with the civil society it’s not a sign of trust in the capacity of the country’s leaders.
- It’s also an enhancement of international conventions : CEDAW, Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council on women, peace and security ...
- It’s even adding value to international conventions: interim reports to CEDAW, comparing regionally, comparing between the North and the South....

Questions:

- **Are there different cultural approaches to the question?**

Judith Neisse: Relativist approaches can be a problem. In the field, some actors ask us to remain normative and at the same time to consider local specificities to allow a better adaptation and

implementation. Indeed, we cannot be too demanding since it took a long time too to Europe to evolve towards equality between men and women. That is why we work with local experts.

Some local specific issues have to be taken into account. For instance, in Jordan, honor killings are not recognized as gender based violence but as family violence. We have to use influence to make this policy change.

It is a very delicate matter to deal with in the Mediterranean area since Mediterranean countries usually don't like gender based analysis which are considered as too "western".

- **You work a lot on the basis of surveys. To what extent are they reliable?**

Judith Neisse: The importance of surveys is to link to the concept of ownership. We have one interlocutor in each country inside the national machinery. After the interlocutor's survey, workshops are organized to validate the analysis.

- **The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) changes some working methods. In your field, what implication could it have?**

Judith Neisse: The UfM is not a gift for regional programs like ours. Besides, in the UfM's declarations, women and culture are not even mentioned.

Useful links

- Emira : <http://emiraculture.blogspot.com/>
- Sifra : www.sifra.org
- Follow-up of the Istanbul Process by the European Commission : http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/gender_followup_en.htm
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations against Women (UN) : <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

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