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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Activities in the framework of the South Programme¹
implemented by
the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
in 2012 - 2017

SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by the Secretariat

¹ *South Programme – joint programme financed by the European Union and the Council of Europe and implemented by the Council of Europe*

Ensuring Sustainable Democratic Governance and Human Rights in the Southern Mediterranean

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



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Implemented
by the Council of Europe

I. Framework of the South Programme and its parliamentary dimension

1. First European co-operation framework with its neighbourhood

Since its creation in 1949, the Council of Europe has developed constant, mainly bilateral, relations with the Governments and the Parliaments of the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. Owing to developments in Tunisia in 2009-2010, spreaded to Egypt, Libya and Syria, known as “Arab Spring”, the fundamental issues of the respect of human rights, the rule of law and democracy were raised in those countries. It is in this context that several countries of the Southern neighbourhood have manifested their interest in strengthening co-operation with the Council of Europe in the fields of its mandate and that both, Council of Europe and European Union, resolved to actively accompanying the democratic changes in these countries, in synergy with the actors in the region.

The South Programme², a joint programme funded by the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) and implemented by the Council of Europe, was launched in 2012 as a first-ever global strategic EU-CoE initiative in the Southern Mediterranean Region and it was open to all countries of the Mediterranean basin, namely: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria³, Tunisia and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

It has developed in three phases, South Programme I in 2012-2014, South Programme II in 2015-2017 and South Programme III in 2018-2020, launched in March 2018 for the new period of three year, with activities planned until the end of 2020.

The South Programme aims at supporting the partner countries of the Southern neighbourhood in the undertaken constitutional process, the development of new legislation and the setting-up and reinforcement of democratic institutions and structures promoting good governance and human rights, using as a reference relevant Council of Europe standards, in order to promote the creation of a common sustainable legal space between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region, sharing the same values.

It was structured around four main components:

1. To enhance efficiency and independence of the judiciary through the judicial reform;
2. To promote good governance through increased prevention of corruption and money laundering;
3. To strengthen and protect human rights, including rights of women and children and prevention of trafficking in human beings;
4. To promote democratic values in the region, building on Council of Europe existing structures such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and existing networks such as those developed by the North-South Centre, the Youth Department, the Pompidou Group, the Venice Commission and the Schools of Political Studies.

The co-operation in the framework of the South Programme is based on a demand-driven approach. Thus, according to the needs as expressed by Morocco⁴, which after a referendum of 2011 undertook constitutional reforms, Tunisia⁵ and later by Jordan⁶, country-specific programmes were developed with those first beneficiary countries aiming at accompanying them in their efforts. To facilitate this co-operation on a regular basis, the Council of Europe Offices were open in Rabat and in Tunis. Although the Palestinian National Authority⁷ was eager to co-operate under this programme, no country-specific programme could be developed thus far.

Besides bilateral activities, co-operation with the Southern neighbourhood is carried out also on a regional level with other partner countries of the region, mentioned before, which aim at promoting and strengthening co-operation between European countries and the countries of the region as well as South-South co-operation, through the exchange of views and share of best practices in the fields of the Council of Europe's mandate such as democracy, rule of law and human rights.

This report will present the fourth component of the programme, implemented by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) between November 2012 and February 2018.

² South Programme was created in 2012, following the decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CM) at its 121st Session on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul, where the proposals made by the Secretary General regarding a Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood was endorsed and the action plans for the implementation of this policy were drawn-up;

³ The co-operation with Syria was suspended in 2011

⁴ See Final Reports on co-operation with Morocco: ODGProg/Inf(2014)15; GR-EXT(2017)12 and policy for 2018-2020: CM(2018)47

⁵ See Final Reports on co-operation with Tunisia: ODGProg/Inf(2014)16; GR-EXT(2017)13 and policy for 2018-2020: CM(2018)48

⁶ See Final Reports on co-operation with Jordan: SP I - ODGProg/Inf(2014)17 and GR-EXT(2017)10

⁷ See 'Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities with Palestine in 2016-2017' - CM(2016)117

2. Parliamentary dimension and the role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

As regards the fourth component of the South Programme, the promotion of democratic values, a special accent was put on the Interparliamentary cooperation and the role of national parliaments of the region in bringing their legislation in line with European and international standards and to ratifying the CoE conventions open to non-member States.

That's why the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) joined the South Programme as from 2012 and it has been developing the co-operation with national parliaments of the region for six years now. This interparliamentary, mainly regional, co-operation will be developed again by the PACE for the next three years by implementing the South Programme III. The Parliamentary Project Support Division of the PACE, created in 2012, is responsible for the development of this co-operation programme in close co-operation with the PACE Committees, which bring their expertise in different fields of action of the PACE.

The parliamentary dimension of the South Programme projects is focused on awareness raising among parliamentarians of the region and on promoting the role of national parliaments in strengthening democracy, human rights and anti-discrimination in their countries through the legislative reforms and political dialogue. Another challenge is to strengthen the capacity building and skills of the staff members of national parliaments to support them in assisting the parliamentarians in the definition and adoption of relevant legislation in compliance with the Council of Europe standards.

It is worth reminding that PACE reinforced its relations with the Parliaments of Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian National Council following the adoption in 2008 of Assembly's Resolution 1598 on "Strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries". Since then, delegations from the Parliaments of the South Mediterranean region have been regularly invited to attend plenary sessions of the Assembly.

Moreover, in 2009, PACE established the Partnership for democracy status (Resolution 1680 (2009), an institutional co-operation with parliaments of non-member States in neighbouring regions wishing to benefit from the Assembly's experience in democracy building, the rule of law and human rights, and to participate in the political debate on common challenges that transcend European boundaries. Rule 62 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure sets out the conditions and methods for granting this status, including formal political commitments that the parliament concerned must undertake. Parliaments, Partners for Democracy to the PACE, declares that they share the same values as those upheld by the Council of Europe: "a pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" and that they will reform their national legislation to bring it in line with Council of Europe's standards. Every two years, PACE establishes an evaluation report for each Partner for democracy, summarising its achievements and pointing out the improvements to be accomplished. The Parliament of Morocco was the first institution to get the partnership for democracy Status in June 2011⁸, followed by the Palestinian National Council in October 2011⁹ and the Parliament of Jordan in January 2016¹⁰. In the framework of the monitoring process, PACE was also invited to observe the Parliamentary elections in Morocco in 2012 and 2016 and in Jordan in 2016.

The existing framework of the Partnership for Democracy facilitated the implementation of the South Programme activities of the PACE thanks to the regular contacts with the partner Parliaments, having their regular delegations in Strasbourg, present four times a year, and thanks to their real involvement and political engagement to pursue the reforms' processes in their countries, under the PACE monitoring.

The PACE South Programme, initially planned as country-specific activities with the Parliaments of Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian National Council, then with the Parliament of Jordan, has seen a significant increase in demand for support and cooperation from other neighbour countries of the Southern Mediterranean regions in the Council of Europe's fields of expertise. Therefore, PACE also organised activities on regional level and invited to them Members of Parliaments of other countries of the region, such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Lebanon to discuss common issues.

⁸ Resolution 1818 (2011) Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco

⁹ Resolution 1830 (2011) Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Palestinian National Council

¹⁰ Resolution 2086 (2016) Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Jordan

The South Programme activities of the PACE are based on peer-to-peer parliamentary exchanges of expertise and the share of good practices, between the PACE Members and the parliamentarians of partner countries, but also, more and more, among parliamentarians of the Parliaments of the region. They permitted to develop more in depth parliamentary discussions at national and regional level, targeting common issues for the region and Council of Europe member states, such as the role of representatives' institutions in the political changes, the role of political parties, the election matters, the role of the majority and the opposition, the role of women in political life, migration and refugees' issues or the role of the Diasporas. During these exchanges, the Parliamentarians from the partner countries had the possibility to state their position on several region-sensitive issues, such as the fight against terrorism, the development of ISIS, the war in Syria as well as the different aspects of the migration crises.

As a result, PACE became a platform for an enlarged political dialogue and the centre of an effective regional cooperation among Parliaments in the South Mediterranean region.

The added value of the PACE activities is its recognised expertise in the field of democracy and democratic institutions but also in the fields of expertise of its Committees and of the PACE Members (legal and human rights, social rights, culture and media, migration issues, equality and non-discrimination), which can be shared on a peer-to-peer basis with the Parliamentarians of national parliaments in order to support them in their parliamentary engagement to the process of reforms of national legislations.

II. Different phases of the South Programme implemented by the PACE

The different phases of the South Programme I, II and III aim at supporting the democratic reforms in the Southern Mediterranean region, upon demand from the countries from the region and targeted approach.

In its parliamentary dimension, the South Program provides for the organisation of meetings between parliamentarians from beneficiary countries and Members of the Parliamentary Assembly, representing different member states of the Council of Europe. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate parliamentary-level exchanges on topics of particular interest to the parliamentarians of the South Programme partner countries. The approach favours a share of good practices on the diversity of legislative systems and practices in different European countries and their possible relevance in the political and legal context of the partner countries.

Another axis of this co-operation is the organization of information seminars for officials of the parliaments of the Southern Neighbourhood countries, which aim at providing them with general information on the work, functioning and standards of the European institutions as well as on the specific topics dealt with by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament which are or could be approached by their own Parliaments.

The partner Parliaments discuss with the PACE the prerogatives, objectives and modality of implementation of the parliamentary co-operation for each year, which are then fixed on the basis of a common agreement.

1. South Programme I (2012-2014) “Strengthening democratic reform in the Southern Neighbourhood”

The main beneficiary of the parliamentary component of the first cycle of the South Program was the Parliament of Morocco, which came with concrete proposals of parliamentary co-operation.

Upon request of the Moroccan Parliament, four priorities were identified with the PACE for the period of 2012-2014:

1) Strengthening parliamentary mechanisms (main themes: control of government action, role and prerogatives of the opposition, parliamentary inquiry committees); 2) Parliamentary exchanges on the Moroccan organic laws (main themes: regionalization and local communities, cultural diversity);

3) Parliamentary exchanges on priority themes of the partnership for democracy (the protection of children's rights, the rights of women and the fight against discrimination, the rights of migrants, the protection of the rights of persons in detention, the participation of civil society and young people in democratic life);

4) Capacity building of the Moroccan Parliament officials in the Council of Europe's fields of action.

The "Partner for Democracy status", granted to the parliament of Morocco by the Parliamentary Assembly in June 2011, has provided a particularly relevant framework for enhanced co-operation between the Moroccan Parliament and the Assembly, in areas at the heart of the reforms undertaken by Morocco. Besides, during the implementation period of the first phase, Morocco has conducted the constitutional reform and adopted a new Constitution (in July 2011) strengthening the role of the Parliament and consolidating the separation of powers, followed by the adoption of organic laws. PACE expertise and best practices from other countries were particularly relevant for the Moroccan Parliament in the process of discussion and adoption of these laws.

In 2012¹¹, Parliamentary Assembly organised one country-specific parliamentary seminar on 8 November in Rabat, at the invitation of the Moroccan Parliament, and one seminar for the staff of Moroccan Parliament in Strasbourg on 19-20 December, in the framework of the above-mentioned prerogatives.

The seminar on "*Parliaments' Control of Government Action*" held in **Rabat on 8 November 2012** was organised in cooperation with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. The two main topics "Scrutiny practice through written and oral questions" and "Scrutiny through procedures and boards of inquiry" were presented by an expert from the Venice Commission. The reinforcement of the parliamentary mechanisms in the control of the action of the Government by the Parliaments was also discussed on the basis of various experiences in this field presented by several European countries: Belgium, Spain, France, Portugal, Turkey and United Kingdom.

The cooperation with the Parliament of Morocco has also aimed at enhancing the role and the capacities of the Parliament providing the opportunity to the staff members of the Parliament of Morocco to get an extensive knowledge of Council of Europe work and standards. The two-day *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe* was organised in **Strasbourg on 19-20 December 2012** for the attention of thirty officials of the Parliament of Morocco (fifteen participants from each of the two Chambers). Participants were briefed on the structure, functioning and principles of the Council of Europe and its main bodies: Parliamentary Assembly, European Court of Human Rights and Venice Commission. Emphasis was placed on the activities of the Council of Europe in the countries of the immediate neighbourhood and the South Program. More specific issues through the presentation of concrete cases were also addressed by the representative of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, by the Directorate of Finance or by the Directorate of Political Planning, including schools of Political Studies

In 2013¹², the Parliamentary Assembly pursued its bilateral programme with Moroccan Parliament. It organised one country-specific parliamentary seminar on 15 May in Rabat, at the invitation of the Moroccan Parliament and one capacity building seminar for the staff of Moroccan Parliament on 19-20 June in Brussels. But it also permitted 20 Members of seven countries of the region: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine to participate in the major international event held in Lisbon on 6-8 November: Lisbon Forum and *Regional Conference on political changes in the South Mediterranean and Middle East: the role of representative institutions*.

The *Seminar on the popular legislative initiative* held in **Rabat on 15 May 2013**, first provided a presentation to Moroccan parliamentarians of public legislative initiative promotion systems and other instruments at national, regional and local levels as well as experiences of their implementation in Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland. Then, the exchanges focused on a perspective of the diversity of legal frameworks and practices in these countries, and their possible relevance in the Moroccan context.

The *Information Seminar on the European institutions* held in **Brussels on 19-20 June 2013** allowed the twenty-three staff members of the two Chambers of the Parliament of Morocco to get acquainted with the European institutions which have their headquarters in Brussels: the Council of Europe's Liaison Office with the EU and the European Parliament. Moroccan officials heard presentations on the structure and functioning of the European Parliament, the activities of its committees, and in particular its activities for the promotion of parliamentary democracy, and were able to ask questions and have a discussion with officials from different services. They also had the opportunity to meet the Secretariat of the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and a friendship group Morocco - European Union of the European Parliament. In addition they had a working meeting with the communication experts of the Belgian Senate.

The *Lisbon Forum 2013* held in **Lisbon on 6-8 November 2013**¹³ on the theme "*Promoting civil society as a governance actor: perspectives for the South of the Mediterranean*", brought together more than 250 representatives of parliaments, governments, local authorities and civil society from countries in the Southern Mediterranean region, Council of Europe member states, the European Union and representatives

¹¹ PPSD (2013) 10 Compte-rendu des activités réalisées en 2012 avec le Parlement du Maroc dans le cadre du Programme Sud

¹² PPSD (2014) 05 Compte-rendu des activités réalisées en 2013 avec le Parlement du Maroc dans le cadre du Programme Sud

¹³ NSC/Inf (2013) 17 Lisbon Forum 2013, Conclusions

of several international organizations. It focused on the issue of inclusion and participation of civil society - including the participation of women and youth - in democratic governance, now recognized as such in this region, and the establishment of a new and dynamic relationship between the four actors of this governance, gathered at the Forum.

In 2014, Parliamentary Assembly organised another country specific seminar for the Moroccan Parliament in Rabat on 19 June and a more specific information seminar on the Council of Europe for the staff members in charge of different Committees of the Parliament of Morocco, on 11-12 December in Strasbourg.

The seminar on the *Functioning of the parliamentary system: the roles of the opposition and the majority*, held in **Rabat on 19 June 2014**, permitted the discussion between the representatives of the majority and the opposition of different European countries and of the Moroccan Parliament on the rule of the majority in the functioning of the parliamentary system and in dialogue with the opposition as well as the rights and resources needed for the opposition to contribute to the organisation of parliamentary work and to the functioning of a democratic plural parliament.

The *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe* for the staff members of the Moroccan Parliament in charge of different Committees, held in **Strasbourg on 11-12 December 2014**, focused on the presentation of the system of protection of human rights by the European Convention on Human Rights, reinforcement of the independence and of the efficiency of the judiciary system in Morocco and on the promotion of the good governance by a better prevention of the corruption.

Besides the South Programme activities, parliamentary exchanges with the Moroccan Parliament were also organised during this period by the PACE Committees in the framework of their activities. The Committee on Equality and Non Discrimination held a Seminar in Rabat on 30 October 2013 on '*Women participation in political life*'. The Committee on migration, refugees and displaced persons held a Seminar in Rabat on 23-24 October 2014 on '*The new migration policy of Morocco and European experience: new challenges in the integration policies and practices*'.

In the first phase of the South Programme, PACE developed mainly country-specific cooperation with the Parliament of Morocco, in response to its needs as expressed in the prerogatives for 2012-2014. These activities contributed to improve the democratic role of the Moroccan Parliament through drafting and voting of organic laws and to strengthen its parliamentary mechanisms, such as the control of the government or functioning of the parliamentary opposition.

The experience with the Parliament of Morocco became a pilot parliamentary cooperation for the PACE, with the possibility to be adopted for other partner countries at a later stage. On the other hand, the important efforts of the Parliament of Morocco resulted in the implementation of legislative reforms through their new constitution, susceptible to be shared later with the neighbouring countries as an example of good practice.

Following the cooperation with Moroccan Parliament, the Programme has got a significant increase in demand for support and cooperation from other Southern Mediterranean partner countries. Thus, in this cycle, PACE also started to develop regional activities with the Parliaments of six other countries of the region: Parliaments of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the Palestinian National Council.

2. South Programme II (2015-2017) "Towards Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean"

The second phase of the South Programme has aimed specifically at supporting the constitutional processes in the Southern Mediterranean countries and the development of new legislative frameworks. It also intended to improve the functioning of democratic institutions that protect and promote democracy and human rights and to contribute to the consolidation of a common legal space between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean - based on the conventions of the Council of Europe and other European and international standards. During this second phase the unprecedented migration crisis also obliged the European countries to open a dialogue with the Middle East and Southern Mediterranean countries on this subject of common interest

2015 was then marked mainly by the important regional events on migration issues and a first regional seminar for staff members of three different countries of the region.

An important parliamentary *Regional Conference on North-South Migration Dialogue* was held in **Lagos (Portugal) on 30 - 31 March 2015**, organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe North-South Centre in Lisbon, with the participation of 20 MPs from the above mentioned countries together with PACE Members and NGOs who exchanged on the challenges of the North-South migration, integration of migrants and of diasporas.

A first multilateral *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe* was held in **Strasbourg on 16 and 17 November 2015**, with the participation of about 20 staff members of the Parliament of Jordan, National Assembly of Lebanon and of the Palestinian National Council.

A Regional Conference on “*A comprehensive humanitarian and political response to the migration and refugee crisis in Europe*” was held in **Paris on 16 December 2015**. It pressed again all European actors and parliamentarians of the Middle East and the Southern Mediterranean to discuss the migration issue, trying to find possible short/medium term solutions to the migration crisis.

In 2016, as the “Partner for Democracy status” was granted to the Parliament of Jordan, a relevant framework for enhanced co-operation between the Jordan Parliament and the Assembly was created. The Jordanian Parliament has shown increased interest in cooperation with the PACE in order to get extensive knowledge about Council of Europe structure and standards.

Jordan hosted a *Seminar on parliamentary democracy in Amman* on **30 May 2016**. Members of the Parliament of Jordan exchanged with the PACE Members and experts on the controls exerted by Parliaments, on the basis of different European legal models and practices and their possible relevance to the Jordanian Parliament, on the role of political parties and on the participation of women in political life. A separate meeting of the representatives of Jordan women with the Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the PACE was also organised in the marge of this seminar to discuss the situation of women access to education and to the political life in Jordan.

Parliamentarians from the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East countries were invited once again to the Lisbon Forum 2016, organised by the North-South Centre in the framework of the South Programme II, which was held on 24-25 November 2016 on ‘*Migration and human rights : How to structure effective collective action?*’.

Besides, in 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly observed for the first time the legislative elections in Jordan on 18-21 September and parliamentary elections in Morocco on 7 October, as a part of the monitoring work of the PACE in the framework of the Partnership for Democracy Status.

In 2017 two country-specific information seminars were organised for the staff members of the Parliaments of Jordan and Morocco and one regional conference of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora policies.

Upon the request of the Parliament of Morocco, the Parliament of Italy, in cooperation with the School of Political Sciences of the Florence University, hosted in **Rome on 2-3 March 2017** a *Seminar on the role of the Parliaments in the evaluation of the public policies*, which was an opportunity to share experiences and familiarize the competent staff of the Parliament of Morocco with guidance and tools of analysis of the public policies and parliamentary monitoring.

A *launching Conference on Parliamentary Network on Diaspora policies of the PACE* was held in **Lisbon on 7-8 September 2017**. It brought together members of national parliaments from the host countries and countries of origin of Diasporas concerned by the diaspora issues, as well as leaders of diaspora associations with a view to the setting up of a Parliamentary Network, which will deal on regular basis on diaspora issues.

An *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe* for staff members of the Parliament of Jordan was held in **Strasbourg on 20-22 November 2017**. During this three days event, directors or heads of different parliamentary directorates and services had the occasion to meet their colleagues from different Council of Europe bodies such as PACE, ECtHR, Congress and other Directorates who presented to them their mission and their work on the priorities of the Council of Europe such as Human Rights, Rule of law, Equality and Non-Discrimination.

The last event organized by the PACE, closing the South Programme II phase, was the first international meeting of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies of the PACE on ‘*Which type of integration of migrants can be applied to prevent radicalisation: the role of parliaments and diaspora associations*’, held in **Rabat on 8 February 2018**, at the invitation of Moroccan Parliament.

It permitted again an exchange of views between more than 20 MPs from the region and host country and about 10 parliamentarians from the European countries on migration, this time assets as an opportunity for both countries of origin and host countries. Participants and experts reminded that diaspora communities contribute to the development of economic relations and that they can constitute a very useful social and cultural bridge between countries. The rapid increase in migrations has however led to debates on inclusion and discrimination, direct causes of radicalisation and extremism. It was stated that diasporas need to be actively involved in the policy-planning process in host countries and that countries of origin could also promote diaspora involvement, providing them with double nationality or special legal status and facilitating their free movement and economic activity. The works of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora policies will continue in the next phase of this joint programme.

In this second phase of the South Programme, PACE has developed more transversal cooperation with more partner countries and more actors: not only with Members of Parliaments but also representatives from other national authorities, Ministries, as well as regional NGOs. The second phase also brought about the engagement of the Jordanian Parliament in co-operation activities and gave rise to the regional cooperation between the partner countries.

3. Future cooperation, South Program III (2018-2020) “Strengthening democratic reform in the Southern Neighbourhood”

As from March 2018, the new cycle of the South Programme III (2018-2020) “Strengthening democratic reform in the Southern Neighbourhood” has started. It also contains a parliamentary component based on interparliamentary dialogue and co-operation in the Southern neighbourhood region. Parliaments of Morocco, Jordan and the Palestinian National Council were identified as principal target countries for parliamentary co-operation. Yet, participation of other countries, such as Egypt, Libya, Lebanon and especially Tunisia would also be welcomed.

This new PACE co-operation programme will endeavour to consolidate parliamentary democracy in the region, and more specifically, to empower national parliaments and parliamentarians in their pursuit of the reforms of their respective national legislations. These efforts should focus on improving the human rights-based approach and on combatting anti-discrimination, and on furthering gender equality.

This will be achieved through a constant political dialogue and close co-operation with PACE, but also through the reinforcement of the parliamentary mechanisms by which the executive power consults the civil society. These consultation mechanisms should lead to improve the inter-institutional collaboration and the rights of the public at large.

In this third phase of the Programme, PACE will propose more specific themes of co-operation:

First, PACE will continue with the theme of migration, which remains a relevant subject of common interest for both European and Southern Mediterranean countries, and related to its work of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora policies, which will be developed at regional level.

Secondly, activities on anti-discrimination and implementation of a human rights-based approach in the national legislations, including women’s and children’s rights, will be also proposed to the parliamentarians and staff of national parliaments. Parliaments from the region will be guided how to establish and reinforce parliamentary bodies and mechanisms dealing with human rights issues on regular basis.

Finally, the PACE will continue to share its expertise in the field of parliamentary democracy, and this time more specifically on electoral legislation, connected to the issues of free elections, women’s participation in political life and freedom of expression; and legislation on political parties, connected with the issues of plurality of democratic system.

A first Forum on “*Diasporas as partners for development in the globalised world*” was held in Geneva (in the Palace of Nations) on 18 May 2018, in co-operation with the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM).

A second activity of the South Programme III, the “*Regional Conference on women in politics: how to progress towards equality?*” was held in Rabat on 5 July 2018, at the invitation of the Moroccan Parliament.

Those events, as well as the future activities of the South Programme III, will be reported in a new report to be prepared in 2020.

III. Conclusions

The South Programme, the first-ever Joint Programme of the European Organisations with the Southern Mediterranean, has proven to be an effective tool to accompany and consolidate the reforms undertaken by partner countries from the region after 2010, through strengthened regional co-operation in the fields of human rights, rule of law and democracy. It has contributed to the establishment of a common legal area and to making big steps towards a better democratic stability between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

National parliaments play a key role in the effective implementation of international standards at national level and in the protection of human rights in their countries through legislation. Parliaments also ratify international treaties, hold the executive to account, make liaising with national and local institutions and foster the creation of a democratic culture and democratic stability in each country. For these reasons, the co-operation at parliamentary level is essential in the framework of the South Programme and it should be continued.

PACE brings its expertise to the different national parliaments in the South Mediterranean region through the know-how of its Members, national representatives of 47 European countries, and through PACE adopted texts, which constitute a large and important reference as regards the functioning of democratic parliamentary systems and legislative reforms.

During the six years of the implementation of the South Program by the PACE, and according to the allocated budget, PACE organised 13 activities at parliamentary level, mainly regional, with the participation of 273 parliamentarians and 340 other participants, giving a total number of 613 participants (*for more details, see the Annexe*).

These activities were organised by the PACE Parliamentary Project Support Division in close cooperation with the relevant PACE Committees, which brought the expertise of their Members and the reference of their adopted texts to the service of the non-member partners.

In six years, following the co-operation activities implemented by the PACE in 2012-2017 in the framework of the South Programme I and II, the countries of the South Mediterranean region have made considerable efforts towards fulfilling their commitments to the Council of Europe. This resulted in the adoption of a package of legislative acts inspired by European standards and introducing these standards in the national legislation. A number of those countries signed Council of Europe legal instruments, as several Conventions were open to non-members states, or joined Partial agreements. Parliamentarians of the partner countries were also present in discussions at international level on common issues such as role of representative institutions, migration and diaspora policies.

Thanks to PACE activities, the regional co-operation among parliaments has significantly developed and has permitted to create a real parliamentary platform at regional level in the Southern Mediterranean region.

Similarly, a considerable number of staff members of national parliaments of those countries have been trained to better understand Council of Europe standards and policies and to improve their capacity to support their Members of Parliament to prepare new legislation in line with those standards.

However, even if some concrete results could be obtained as regards certain reforms of legislations and restructuring of the Parliaments, PACE recommendations and resolutions on evaluation of the Partnership for Democracy in the respect of the main partner Parliaments: Parliament of Morocco¹⁴, Parliament of Jordan¹⁵ and the Palestinian National Council¹⁶ as well as the not yet ratified Council of Europe Conventions, prove that improvement is still needed and that a follow-up of these parliamentary cooperation activities is essential.

PACE parliamentary co-operation with the partner Parliaments of the countries from the Southern Mediterranean Region will be pursued during the next three years in 2018-2020. It is to be hoped that this new phase of the South Programme at parliamentary level will lead to the effective implementation of legislative reforms in each country and to a more operative regional political dialogue in the region. These reforms are essential to obtain a tangible and sustained impact on the populations and on the democratic stability in the South Mediterranean region.

¹⁴ Resolution 2061 (2015) Evaluation of the Partnership for Democracy in the respect of the Parliament of Morocco

¹⁵ Resolution 2183 (2017) Evaluation of the Partnership for democracy in the respect of the Parliament of Jordan

¹⁶ Resolution 2105 (2016) Evaluation of the Partnership for Democracy in the respect of the Palestinian National Council

Appendix: List of activities and statistics on participation

Date and Venue	Activity	MPs	Other participants
South Programme I 2012 - 2014 (6 activities)			
8 November 2012 Rabat (Morocco)	Seminar on controls exerted by Parliaments on Government's actions	6	11
19-20 December 2012 Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe)	Information seminar on the Council of Europe for staff members of the Moroccan Parliament	0	44
15 May 2013 Rabat (Morocco)	Seminar on popular legislative initiative	40	10
19-20 June 2013 Brussels (Belgium)	Seminar on European Institutions for the staff members of the Moroccan Parliament	0	48
5-8 November 2013 Lisbon (Portugal)	Lisbon Forum 2013 and Regional Conference on the political changes in the South Mediterranean and in the Middle East: the role of representative institutions	61	20
19 June 2014 Rabat (Morocco)	Seminar on the roles of the opposition and the majority	45	9
11-12 December 2014 Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe)	Capacity building seminar for staff members of the Moroccan Parliament	0	32
Total		152	174
TOTAL SP I		326	
South Programme II 2015-2017 (6 activities)			
30-31 March 2015 Lagos (Portugal)	Regional Conference on North-South Migration Dialogue	29	21
16-17 November 2015 Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe)	Information seminar on the Council of Europe for the staff members of the Parliament of Jordan and of the Palestinian National Council	0	40
30 May 2016 Amman (Jordan)	Seminar on parliamentary democracy for the Parliament of Jordan	9	13
2-3 March 2017 Rome (Italy)	<i>Seminar on the role of the Parliaments in the evaluation of the public policies</i> for the staff members of the Parliament of Morocco	22	11
7-8 September 2017 Lisbon (Portugal)	Launching Conference of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies	61	52
20-22 November 2017 Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe)	Training seminar for the senior staff of the Parliament of Jordan	0	29
Total		121	166
TOTAL SP II		287	
Total participation (6 years)		273 MPs	340 Other
		TOTAL	613