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Information note

on the state and development of the
Euro-Arab dialogue

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMITTEES
AND INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

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A. Development of the Euro-Arab Dialogue since 1973

1. The various levels of the Euro-Arab Dialogue account at present for a good deal of the relations between the European Community and the Member States of the Arab League. At the same time, of course, normal diplomatic contacts exist between the governments of the EEC Member States and the Arab League. These contacts will be disregarded in this note whose purpose is to summarize the development of the Euro-Arab Dialogue from its inception up to the present day.
2. The Euro-Arab Dialogue was initiated by the surprising visit by a delegation from a number of Arab countries (Foreign Ministers of Algeria, the Sudan and Tunisia and Ministers of State from the United Arab Emirates) during the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the European Community on 14-15 December 1973 in Copenhagen. It will be recalled that this Conference coincided with the 1973 oil crisis. Representatives of the Arab League asked on that occasion for consultations to begin on the subject of closer cooperation with the Community. The Copenhagen Summit Conference communiqué included the following passage on this point:

'The Heads of State or Government underline the importance which they attach to negotiations on an overall settlement with the oil producing countries; that settlement should comprise broad cooperation for the economic and industrial development of these countries, industrial investments and stable energy supplies to the Member States at reasonable prices'.

3. On 4 March 1974 the then President-in-Office of the EEC Council of Ministers, Mr Scheel, was instructed to open a dialogue with 20 Arab League countries. The Dialogue was to cover the areas of industry, energy, raw materials, scientific and technological matters, cultural exchanges, financial cooperation and occupational training. The first intention was to set up a working party of representatives of both sides in order to prepare a report on the possibilities for a permanent Euro-Arab Dialogue for subsequent adoption by a Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Nine and of the Arab League countries.

The Nine offered long-term cooperation to the Arab countries in particular through the supply of European industrial plant and technical knowhow. This offer was broadly similar to the various bilateral cooperation agreements concluded between the EEC countries and the countries of the eastern bloc.

4. After various preliminary discussions at technical level, Mr Sauvagnargues, the President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers, and Mr Ortoli, President of the European Commission, as the leaders of a Community delegation, formally opened the dialogue with the Arab League in Paris on 31 July 1974. At this opening conference the representatives of the Arab countries declared that the Dialogue was the 'expression of a political willingness to cooperate in every sector'. The Nine did not subscribe to that interpretation at the time and preferred to focus the Dialogue to begin with on economic and technical cooperation. The inaugural conference established a first joint body known as the 'General Commission' which was to prepare the principles and coordination of the Dialogue in conjunction with a smaller study group. Agreement was also reached to the effect that the consultations should not concentrate on the subject of oil but that the topic of energy and that of recycling should be discussed in special working parties.

In November 1974 - a time which coincided with the spectacular appearance of the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Arafat, before the Plenary Assembly of the United Nations - the Arab countries asked for the PLO to be allowed to participate at the very least with observer status in the work of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. The divisions between the Nine which had already become apparent at the votes on UN resolutions on Middle East problems, were confirmed on the subject of PLO participation in the Euro-Arab Dialogue. Because of the lack of agreement delays occurred in the further pursuit of the Euro-Arab Dialogue.

At this early stage it was already apparent that the Arab League had as their long-term objective the politicization of the Euro-Arab Dialogue which they wanted to bring under the aegis of their own foreign policy. That trend has become even clearer during the past four years, as can be seen from the final communiqué issued by meetings of the general commission.

5. The following broad conclusions can be drawn in respect of the initial stages of the Dialogue:

- The European Community attempted to focus the Dialogue on economic and technological cooperation. Its own interests in the sphere of energy supply policy were always present in the background.
- The Arab countries who were well aware of the Community's interest in the energy policy possibilities of the Dialogue, attempted with increasing success to turn the Dialogue into a general political forum at which - with PLO participation - the Israeli Arab conflict was to be discussed, in other words, they attempted to convert the European partners to the Arab position in the conflict.

6. The question of PLO representation which for some time delayed the material commencement of the Dialogue, was settled in 1975 by a compromise formula known as the 'Dublin formula' (after the capital of Ireland which held the presidency of the EEC Council at that time); the compromise was that the European partners and the Arab countries should participate in the Dialogue with single delegations without any official indication of the country of origin. That formula is still used today and has enabled the PLO to delegate its representatives - to some extent incognito - to the various bodies of the Dialogue.

7. In November 1975 the conference of experts from both sides in Abu Dhabi agreed that the first meeting of the General Commission at the level of ambassadors or senior officials should be convened in Luxembourg in the spring of 1976.

8. The European Community's delegation is on each occasion led by a senior official of the Commission (responsible for economic, social and technical matters) and a diplomat from the EEC country holding the presidency of the Council of Ministers (responsible for general political matters going beyond the immediate terms of reference of the Commission).

9. This division of responsibility has also been reflected in the final communiqués of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, a fact which creates problems for parliamentary control since it is normally the Commission representative who reports to the responsible committee of the European Parliament but generally indicates that he has no competence in respect of the political part of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. Up to now, however, the representative of the Council or of European political cooperation¹ has not been directly answerable to the committees of Parliament. This situation presents serious problems for the exercise of the European Parliament's controlling function which will have to be dealt with in future. However, this aspect will be disregarded here.

¹ European political cooperation (EPC) is a form of institutionalized cooperation between the EEC Member States primarily in the area of foreign policy - i.e. on all matters which are not discussed within the institutions of the Community because they fall outside the context of the treaties.

10. In a debate held in March 1976 the European Parliament outlined its position on the Euro-Arab Dialogue. The Parliament saw a need for constructive cooperation between the European Community and the Arab world in order to promote the cause of peace in the Middle East. Parliament stressed the hope that negotiations in the areas of the economy, agriculture, industry, technology, energy and culture would soon lead to balanced practical results. It stressed the view that the success of the Dialogue was bound up with a solution of the political problems so that an effective contribution could be made to peace, enabling all the countries of the Middle East - including Israel - to live within secure frontiers recognized by all the parties concerned. In its resolution Parliament also raised the question of the boycott organized by the Arab League and directed against Israel or against Israeli economic undertakings or companies which cooperate with them, and called upon the Council and Commission of the European Community to give undivided attention to this state of affairs which was incompatible with the principle of non-discrimination.

11. This first opinion by Parliament on the Euro-Arab Dialogue reflects a special concern to ensure the balance of the Dialogue. That attitude has been confirmed in a number of debates, and speeches at Question Time with the Council and Foreign Ministers of the EEC (EPC) in recent years. The Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament will shortly be reviewing the development of the Dialogue.

12. Since the first meeting of the General Commission of the Euro-Arab Dialogue on 18-20 May 1976 in Luxembourg, three further meetings have been held: on 10-12 February 1977 in Tunis, 26-28 October 1977 in Brussels and most recently on 9-11 December 1978 in Damascus.

13. This note must necessarily be brief and all the details of developments since 1976 cannot be discussed. However, on the basis of the outcome of the last meeting in Damascus an attempt will be made to stress certain important features of the Dialogue and highlight possibilities for its further development.

B. The state of the Euro-Arab Dialogue since the fourth meeting of the General Commission in December 1978 in Damascus

14. The fourth meeting of the General Commission held on 9-11 December 1978 in Damascus at the end of which a final communiqué was adopted, represents the latest phase of the Euro-Arab Dialogue and reveals, through the progress made, both the strong and weak points of the Dialogue. Although there is a deadlock on possible developments of the Euro-Arab Dialogue it is generally felt that it must evolve towards a new form. The weaknesses of the Dialogue are particularly apparent in the political sphere since, on the one hand, the position of the Nine results from compromises between different policies (certain points of divergence remaining), while, on the other hand, the manifest intention of the Arabs is to derive support from the Dialogue in the arena of the Middle Eastern conflict. The economic, social and cultural aspects of the Euro-Arab Dialogue raise fewer fundamental problems but suffer from the fact that there is no easy passage from theory to practical implementation.

I. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

15. These aspects have been examined by working parties some of which also have specialized sub-groups.

In this context the conclusions of the General Commission have been confined to strengthening existing links and deepening studies already undertaken.

At the level of principles, the General Commission has stressed the important role that must be played by the private structure in the context of the Dialogue and has instructed the working parties to concentrate on regional and overall projects and to give specific attention to the areas of studies and occupational training.

The conclusions of the working parties can be summarized as follows:

Transfer of technology

16. The General Commission has approved the creation of a Euro-Arab Centre for the transfer of technology which should enable technicians to be trained and give access to knowhow of economic value to the region. This project has been prepared by four experts (two from each side) whose terms of reference are defined by an ad hoc group whose two co-chairmen are entitled to take the steps necessary for practical implementation.

Industrialization

17. In the light of the work of the five specialized sub-groups, the General Commission has laid emphasis on the problems of the refinery and petro-chemical industries and on the standardization of procedures for the award of contracts; the general conditions for such contracts have also been studied.

Basic infrastructures

18. The conclusions of the General Commission in this area relate in particular to harbour installations which are vitally important on the coast of Syria and Iraq; urban development projects have also been studied.

Agriculture and rural development

19. This sector is vital to the future of all the Arab countries whose agriculture, at present archaic and altogether inadequate to feed the population, could be developed considerably thanks to technical progress.

Financial cooperation

20. This relates essentially to the promotion of multinational investments and the conclusion of guarantee agreements.

Commercial cooperation

21. This sector is closely linked with certain measures under the commercial and cooperation agreements concluded between the Community and the Arab League countries. The General Commission has stressed its desire to work towards the establishment of institutional links in this sector, in particular through conventions and the establishment of a Euro-Arab Centre for commercial cooperation.

Scientific and technological cooperation

22. Three projects have been adopted in conformity with the conclusions put forward by the working parties: Arab polytechnic institute, Arab institute for water resources and desalination, and maritime science studies in the Arab countries.

Social affairs and employment

23. In this sector the work of the General Commission has extended to the living and working conditions of migrant workers and their families who are nationals of the participating countries and resident on their territory.

The General Commission has stressed the need to strengthen the impact of the declaration concerning the living and working conditions of these persons and to arrive at suitable solutions in areas which continue to pose problems. Here again the General Commission has declared itself in favour of a project for the creation of an Arab training centre.

Cultural cooperation

24. The General Commission has instructed the working parties to intensify their efforts to give a maximum impact to the symposium to be held in Hamburg from 19-21 September 1979 on relations between the two civilizations, to develop mutual knowledge of the two civilizations in particular through language studies, the award of scholarships and the development of exchanges.

Various proposals have been made in these areas by the European countries, with particular reference to the transfer of technology. However, it must be noted that apart from certain projects which have been definitively adopted and evaluated, all the conclusions of the Dialogue by the General Commission in the technical sphere deal with the distant future and despite the reticence on the part of the European countries, observers are particularly struck by the attention which the Arab countries focus on the political aspect of the Dialogue.

II POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE DIALOGUE

25. It is important to note that Egypt was not officially represented at the fourth meeting of the General Commission so that the Arab partners present at this meeting were the countries which had already met at the Baghdad Summit to condemn the Camp David agreements.

This explains their refusal of any mention in the political section of the final communiqué issued after the meeting of the General Commission to the Camp David agreements and the subsequent negotiations.

Nevertheless, discussions centred on the Camp David agreements and on the supposed desire of the Nine to agree on the installation of the Palestinian people in Lebanon.

This approach seems particularly open to criticism in the light of the positions expressed in the European Parliament to the effect that Europe must act as a catalyst in the dialogue and in cooperation between Israel and Egypt, involving if possible the other Member States of the Arab League in that cooperation.

This whole problem will have to be discussed in the presence of the negotiators during the forthcoming debates in the European Parliament, and in particular the discussions in its Political Affairs Committee.

26. In addition to the absence of any reference to the Camp David agreements, a hardening of the Arab position will be noted on three points:

- (a) hitherto the two parties had agreed to base their joint declarations on Resolutions 242 and 338 of the Security Council. However, a new resolution, this time by the General Assembly (No. 126 of 27 October 1977) has now been introduced into the discussion; that resolution reads as follows:
- 'notes that all the measures and decisions of this kind taken by Israel in the Palestinian territories and in other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction of efforts to establish a just and lasting peace in the Middle East;
 - strongly deplores the fact that Israel is persisting in the application of these measures and in particular in the creation of colonies on the occupied Arab territories;
 - calls upon Israel to strictly respect its international obligations in conformity with the principles of international law and the provisions of the Geneva Convention relating to the protection of civilians in time of war, of 12 August 1949;
 - calls once again on the Israeli Government, as an occupying power, to cease forthwith from taking all measures whose effects would be to alter the legal status, the geographical character or the democratic composition of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.'

- (b) The Arabs are asking for unconditional recognition of the PLO by the Nine, despite the fact that the PLO is only involved in the dialogue as a result of the Dublin formula which enables all formal recognition to be avoided.
- (c) They are also calling for a meeting of the General Commission at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

The presence of these three items in the final communiqué points to a weakness on the part of the Europeans since Resolution 126 adds nothing to the debate and merely hardens the positions on recognition of the PLO. Recognition of the latter raises no special problems apart from the fact that it remains unacceptable as long as this organization maintains a desire to see the disappearance of the State of Israel as a tenet of its statutes.

In this respect the European negotiators have made an important concession by accepting to refer the matter to their governments.

CONCLUSIONS

27. The fourth meeting of the General Commission of the Euro-Arab dialogue shows that, particularly because of the evolution of the political situation in the Middle East, the dialogue has reached a critical stage, at the political level, whose consequences and duration are difficult to assess.

However, despite the apparent divergencies, there is a real desire on the part of both sides to continue the dialogue; but this can only be done on a new basis.

In this connection the proposal for the dialogue to be continued at ministerial level might seem interesting but this will entail particularly careful preparation and the most specific possible agreement on the topics to be discussed and the directions to be followed. Failure of a ministerial meeting might lead to a particularly serious break in the dialogue. In this connection the European Parliament, particularly at the level of its Political Affairs Committee, must look into possibilities for development of the dialogue and make concrete proposals to that end.





